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SUPERNATURAL AND IRRATIONAL ELEMENTS  
IN THE WORKS OF  
THEODOR FONTANE

Helen E. Chambers

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at the University of Glasgow, 1977.

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Leeds, October 1977.

Helen Chambers

## Note

The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes:

- N - Theodor Fontane, Sämtliche Werke, 24 vols. Ed. Edgar Groß, Kurt Schreinert, Rainer Bachmann, Charlotte Jolles, Jutta Neuendorff-Fürstenau, Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung 1959ff.
- H - Theodor Fontane, Sämtliche Werke. Ed. Walter Keitel and Helmuth Nürnberger, Munich: Hanser Verlag 1962ff.
- FF - Theodor Fontanes Briefe an seine Familie. Ed. K.E.O. Fritsch, 2 vols., Berlin 1905.
- FPS - Briefe Theodor Fontanes. Zweite Sammlung. (An die Freunde) Ed. Otto Pniower and Paul Schlenker, 2 vols., Berlin 1910.
- HD - Heiteres Darüberstehen. Familienbriefe. Neue Folge. Ed. Friedrich Fontane, Berlin 1937.
- FFR - Briefe an Georg Friedlaender. Ed. Kurt Schreinert, Heidelberg 1954.
- IFD - In Freiheit dienen. Briefe von Theodor Fontane. Ed. Friedrich Seebaß, Munich 1956.
- FLL - Theodor Fontane: Leicht zu leben ohne Leichtsinn. Briefe. Ed. Friedrich Seebaß, Berlin 1958.
- FE - Fontanes Briefe, 2 vols. Ed. Gotthard Erler, Berlin and Weimar 1968.
- FP - Theodor Fontane: Briefe, 4 vols. Ed. Kurt Schreinert and Charlotte Jolles, Berlin 1968.
- FH - Briefe an Wilhelm und Hans Hertz. Ed. Kurt Schreinert and Gerhard Hay, Stuttgart 1972.

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## SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis is to examine in the fictional works of Theodor Fontane, the ironic realist, those elements which may be appropriately termed supernatural or irrational. While noting these elements, previous studies have usually singled out individual themes or motifs in selected works. This is an attempt to examine in detail the full range of such irrational material which, at first sight, would seem incongruous and alien in the context of novels celebrated for their representation of social reality.

The central supernatural motifs under consideration are ghosts and fairy-tales; irrational concepts examined include fate and predestination, with the attendant themes of grace, prophecy, premonition and omen, together with the closely allied concepts of superstition and religion, and the motif of the character with elemental affinities.

A more or less chronological approach has been adopted, in order to bring out the progression or development in the employment of the material; although the novels have, on occasion, been arranged in groups (Chapters IV-VII) in order to facilitate a comparative study. The section on the fictional works is preceded by an examination of the Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg and autobiographical works, as possible sources of supernatural and irrational motifs and themes.

The study reveals a complex range of functions performed by the elements under examination, and a degree of progression can be discerned. Broadly speaking, irrational and supernatural material is presented indirectly in the novels, through the perception or utterances of the characters, and the references become more oblique in the later novels. The irrational material can be seen, in many cases, to be fundamental to the structural development of the work in question, and whereas in earlier works the irrationally contrived structure is often obtrusive, in later novels, such as Effi Briest, the integration of these elements with more realistic aspects of motivation and structure is complete. Supernatural elements which appear in Vor dem Sturm (Chapter III) and the crime stories (Chapter IV) as directly experienced phenomena recur in the early social novels (Chapter V) solely in conversational contexts. Supernatural references scarcely figure in the later Berlin novels (Chapter VI), which explore social themes other than marital discord. They re-emerge, however, in Unwiederbringlich and Effi Briest (Chapter VII), where disharmony in marriage is again a central theme. Fairytale imagery, at first invoked to symbolise ideal or alluring feminine qualities, later serves to deny the validity of the idyll in modern life. In Der Stechlin (Chapter VIII), where the majority of irrational and supernatural elements recur in a conciliatory and reflective context, their conventional functions have been largely superseded, but their continued presence confirms that they are essential features of Fontane's expressive diction, and it is in his final novel that the elemental figure finds her most developed and enigmatic form, in Melusine.

The consideration of irrational and supernatural features in the works has resulted in an examination of many of the central themes and distinctive stylistic qualities of Fontane's fictional writing: a fact which clearly indicates the significance of such features as integral, indeed fundamental, aspects of his art.

## INTRODUCTION

With Theodor Fontane the German novel rejoined the broader European tradition of realistic fiction. He abandoned the subjectively conceived 'Bildungsroman', for which Goethe's Wilhelm Meister was the long-standing and venerable model. In its place he created novels of society, for the most part, of contemporary nineteenth-century society. As a member of that society, Fontane was aware of and interested in the social and political reality of the day. Vor dem Sturm and Der Stechlin, his first and last novels, are both concerned with political issues, and between them lies a succession of social novels. Fontane subjected the world around him to constant and minute critical scrutiny:

Ich betrachte das Leben, und besonders das Gesellschaftliche darin, wie ein Theaterstück und folge jeder Scene mit einem künstlerischen Interesse wie von meinem Parquetplatz No.23 aus. Alles spielt mit, alles hat sein Gewicht und seine Bedeutung auch das Kleinste, auch das Aeußerlichste.<sup>1</sup>

He observed social reality carefully and in detail, in order to render a faithful version of it in artistic terms. It is, in large

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1 FFR no.47, 5th July 1886.

measure, for his realistic depiction of the world that he knew that Fontane has gained lasting recognition as a novelist of acute social, political and psychological insight. C. Wandrey describes him as a

wirklichkeits- und gegenwartsfrohe Natur,<sup>2</sup>

and J.P. Stern comments,

Fontane's novels are founded fairly and squarely in the social setting of his time. An ordered, traditionally directed and custom-bound community of human beings with certain common needs and certain common habits in respect of the gratification of those needs.<sup>3</sup>

His particular brand of realism is characterised by a lack of pathos and sentimentality; by irony and humour, which are the product of a sceptical and relative view of the world. Tolerance, common-sense and lucidity typify Fontane's approach to art and life.

Despite his undoubted services to the realist novel, there has been no lack of critical comment to support M. Krammer's assertion:

Er war Realist und Romantiker zugleich.<sup>4</sup>

Fontane himself was ready to admit his respect and sympathy for Romanticism, within the limits of his own definition of it.<sup>5</sup> However it is not the purpose of this study to examine definitions of literary historical categories, and the term 'romantic', as it has been applied

2 C. Wandrey, Theodor Fontane, Munich, 1919, p.154.

3 J.P. Stern, "Effi Briest, Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina. ", in Modern Language Review, 52, 1957, p.363.

4 M. Krammer, Theodor Fontane, Berlin, 1922, p.38, cf. for example T. Mann in Adel des Geistes, Stockholm, 1945, J. Petersen, "Fontanes Altersroman" in Euphorion 29, 1928, p.63, H-H. Reuter, Fontane, Munich, 1968, p.539.

5 Cf. for example, N XXII/2, p.638, N XVII, p.408, N XXI/1, p.359ff.



to Fontane's works, seems to have been used fairly loosely, to embrace elements in the novels which are not susceptible of rational analysis; elements which belong beyond the bounds of conventional realism.

Certain commentators have recognised the fact that supernatural and irrational phenomena held a life-long fascination for Fontane, and that his work bears witness to this, to a greater or lesser extent, from beginning to end. E. Aegerter observes in 1922,

Das Geheimnisvolle, Spukhafte, Doppeldeutige zieht ihn an.<sup>6</sup>

M. Krammer, in the same year, attributes to Fontane's combination of objectivity and creative imagination in his approach to phenomena an

Intuitive(r) Schau der tieferen Gesetze des Lebens<sup>7</sup>,

that is, insight into life which is founded on a non-rational approach. K. Peters is more explicit in his assertion:

Doch spielt das Irrationale immer eine wesentliche Rolle bei ihm.<sup>8</sup>

and H.E. Greter, in his recent study, underlines the all-pervasive presence of irrational elements in Fontane's work,

Eine auffällig hohe Wertung alles Gemüthhaft-Innerlichen, die das Eigentliche und das Wesentliche nicht im Rational-Gesetzmässigen, sondern im individuellen Empfindungsbereich des Irrational-Menschlichen sieht,

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6 E. Aegerter, Theodor Fontane und der französische Naturalismus, Heidelberg, 1922, p.28, cf. K. Peters, Theodor Fontane und der Roman des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, Emsdetten, 1932, p.10: "Es ist das Geheimnisvolle und Spukhafte, das ihn anzieht."

7 Op.cit., p.V.

8 Op.cit., p.52.

bestimmt im gleichen Mass Fontanes Dichtung, Literaturkritik und Kunsttheorie. Dabei ist in allen Bereichen eine Ambivalenz zwischen Intellekt und Herz, zwischen Gesetz und Empfindung festzustellen.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to these few general formulations, attention has been drawn frequently to certain particular irrational aspects of Fontane's works, above all to his treatment of the theme of fate and predestination. Some critics have placed emphasis on this material as it appears in the earlier fictional works.<sup>10</sup> Early critics, such as F. Servaes<sup>11</sup> and G. Krickler<sup>12</sup> have commented on it in passing, in general terms, while later studies have examined the theme of fate in greater detail, either in individual works,<sup>13</sup> or in a more general way as it occurs in several, or all, of Fontane's novels.<sup>14</sup>

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- 9 H.E. Greter, Fontanes Poetik, Bern/Frankfurt, 1973, p.139.
- 10 Cf. for example, P. Schlenther's Introduction to Fontane's Gesammelte Werke, Berlin, 1919, p.XLII, and D. Sommer's study, "Prädestination und soziale Determination im Werke Theodor Fontanes" in Theodor Fontanes Werk in unserer Zeit, Potsdam, 1966, which considers Vor dem Sturm, L'Adultera and Schach von Wuthenow.
- 11 F. Servaes, Theodor Fontane. Die Dichtung, Berlin, 1900, p.40, "Auch hier (wo er in simpler Prosa und mit breiter romanhafter Ausführung als Erzählkünstler vor uns hintritt) begegnen wir einer dunklen geheimen Schicksalsmacht, die über den Menschen kommt und ihn ohne seinen Willen führt - er weiß nicht wohin?"
- 12 G. Krickler, Theodor Fontane. Von seiner Art und epischen Technik, Berlin, 1912, p.32, "Von diesem Gedanken sind alle Fontaneschen Romane durchzogen. Das Glück wie das Unglück kommen naturnotwendig in stiller Vorherbestimmung über die Menschen."
- 13 Cf. D. Weber, "Effi Briest 'Auch wie ein Schicksal.' Über den Andeutungsstil bei Fontane." in Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts, 1966, pp.457-475, in H. Strech, Theodor Fontane: Synthese von alt und neu, Berlin, 1970, and D.C. Riechel, "Effi Briest and the Calendar of Fate" in Germanic Review XLVIII, 1973, pp.189-211.
- 14 E. Braun, Symbol and Portent in Theodor Fontane's Works, Diss. Wisconsin, 1960, H. Schlaffer, "Das Schicksalsmodell in Fontanes Romanwerk" in Germanisch-romanische Monatschrift 16, Heft 4, 1966, pp.392-409, and in K. Richter, Resignation. Eine Studie zum Werk Theodor Fontanes, Stuttgart, 1966.

In many cases a consideration of Fontane's treatment of the theme of fate has led to an analysis of his technique of 'Andeutung' or 'Vorausdeutung', of suggesting or foreshadowing the course of events in a novel before they take place.<sup>15</sup> This foreshadowing of events is frequently achieved by means of supernatural or irrational motifs. Such critical observations over the years make it clear, that despite Fontane's realistic and sceptical approach to the world, there are important aspects, thematic and artistic, in his works which seem to challenge the superficially acceptable view of Fontane as a realistic novelist whose prime concern was with the social and political issues of his day.

The purpose of this study is to examine in detail the full range of irrational and supernatural elements to be found in Fontane's novels, and to consider by what means and to what end such apparently discordant material has been integrated into his works. The range of irrational aspects under consideration includes the central concept of fate or predestination, with its related themes of chance, grace, prophecy, premonition and omen, together with the closely allied concepts of religion and superstition. Further irrational features, of a psychological nature, are furnished by the elemental affinities of many of Fontane's characters, and by the insanity of a few. The supernatural elements in the novels which will be examined usually take the form of fairytale or ghost motifs.

The study is designed to trace the nature and development of the role of supernatural elements in the fictional works, and to this end the novels have been examined more or less chronologically. They have, however, been arranged in groups, which are intended to

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15 Cf. D. Weber, *op.cit.*, W. Wagner, Die Technik der Vorausdeutung in Fontanes "Vor dem Sturm", Marbach, 1966, H-C. Sasse, Theodor Fontane. An Introduction to the Novels and Novellen, Oxford, 1968, p.26f, H. Strech, *op.cit.*, p.107, D.C. Riechel, *op.cit.*

facilitate a comparative study. At the outset, in an attempt to trace the origins of irrational and supernatural material in the novels, relevant aspects of the Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg, the poems and autobiographical works have also been subjected to scrutiny.

## II

Sources and Origins of Supernatural and Irrational Material

Many early manifestations of supernatural and irrational material are to be found in Meine Kinderjahre (1893) and Von Zwanzig bis Dreißig (1896), Fontane's autobiography for the years 1819-1849, in his earlier ballads and poems (written in the 1840s and 1850s), in Jenseit des Tweed (1859) and in the Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg (1862-1882). Although it would be unwise to adduce these as undisputable sources of irrational themes and motifs in the novels, they do provide evidence of Fontane's early interest in such material and reveal his attitude to it at a formative stage of his literary development.

Irrespective of where Fontane's lifelong interest in supernatural phenomena and legend began, there can be no doubt that, once kindled, it was fanned by his experience, literary and actual, of the culture and traditions of Great Britain, particularly of Scotland. His reading of Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry and Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border in 1848 inspired him to rework some of the material for himself, and to compose new ballads on related traditional and legendary themes. His visit to Scotland in 1858, recorded in Jenseit des Tweed - Briefe und Bilder aus Schottland,

provided his imagination with a rich store of legend and lore, tales of superstition and ghostly apparitions, which in turn prompted him to adopt a similarly imaginative approach to the creation of a record of his subsequent "Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg".

That he viewed the composition of this account of the locality not only as a process of historical and geographical documentation, but also as a creative and imaginative activity becomes clear from the irrational terms in which he referred to it. There are strong Romantic undertones, echoes of Novalis, in comments such as:

Der Zweck meines Buches ist, nach dieser Seite hin anregend und belebend zu wirken und die 'Lokalität' wie das [!] Prinzessin im Märchen zu erlösen. Abwechselnd stand meine Aufgabe darin, zu der Unbekannten, völlig im Wald Versteckten vorzudringen oder die vor aller Augen Daliegende aus ihrem Bann, ihrem Zauberschlaf zu befreien.<sup>1</sup>

Before embarking on the Wanderungen he laments the absence of a divining rod to make the apparently barren earth yield up its hidden or forgotten life.<sup>2</sup> There is a need for a writer who, like the water diviner, has a mysterious gift, enabling him to lay bare the rich secrets of the region to others. After the first two volumes of the Wanderungen had appeared, he reviewed his achievement in comparable style:

Die zwei Bände, die bis jetzt erschienen sind, lassen das, worauf es mir ankommt, erst erraten: die Belebung des Lokalen, die Poetisierung des Geschehenen, so daß (ganz wie es am Rhein, in der Schweiz, in Schottland und an vielen Orten ist) in Zukunft jeder Märker, wenn er einen märkischen Orts- oder Geschlechtsnamen hört, sofort ein bestimmtes Bild mit diesem Namen verknüpft, was jetzt gar nicht oder doch

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1 FH no.66, 31st October 1861.

2 "Es fehlt östlich von der Elbe noch durchaus die Wünschelrute, die den Boden berührt und die Gestalten erstehen macht." Th. Fontane in the Preußische Zeitung, 13th July 1859.

nur in einer prosaisch-häßlichen Weise der Fall ist.<sup>3</sup>

At this relatively early stage in his literary career Fontane is already using fairytale imagery and the antithesis of poetry and prose to express his own view of the writer's role. This is key imagery which is to recur frequently in his works.<sup>4</sup> Here the imagery conveys the idea that the writer's function is to appeal to the reader in a non-rational way. He uses his special powers of imagination and expression to transfigure reality; that is, to present it in a more potent or more perfectly crystallised form than that in which it appears to the unpractised eye of the layman. Empirical experience is, as it were, magically reinforced, intensified by the second forming, the process of literary recreation, into a more telling, more lasting aesthetic experience.<sup>5</sup> This idea of poetic transfiguration was thus not confined to Fontane's later fictional writing but already influenced his selection and presentation of material in his travel journals.

A considerable proportion of the material with which Fontane was concerned in the Wanderungen and in earlier compositions such as his ballads and Jenseit des Tweed is legendary. His interest, personal

3 Brief an Ernst von Pfuel, 18th January 1864, in W. Migge, Stationen seines Werkes, Munich, 1969, p.101.

4 Cf. below chap.II, p.44ff.chap.VI, p.137ff. chap.VIII, p.231f.

5 Cf. Fontane's theoretical, as opposed to metaphorical, formulations of the same ideas, for example in a letter to his wife, 24th June 1881, commenting on Turgenev's over-documentary style in his later works: "Ich bewundere die scharfe Beobachtung und das hohe Maß phrasenloser, alle Kinkerlitzchen verschmähender Kunst, aber eigentlich langweilt es mich, weil es im Gegensatz zu dem theils wirklich poetischen, theils wenigstens poetisch sein wollenden Jäger-Geschichten so grenzenlos prosaisch, so ganz unverklärt die Dinge wiedergibt. Ohne diese Verklärung gibt es aber keine eigentliche Kunst." - FP I, no.87, or again: "Er (der Realismus) ist die Widerspiegelung alles wirklichen Lebens, aller wahren Kräfte und Interessen im Elemente der Kunst..... Der Realismus will nicht die bloße Sinnenwelt und nichts als diese; er will am allerwenigsten das bloß Handgreifliche, aber er will das Wahre." N XXI/1, p.13.

and professional, in folklore - particularly the lore of the Mark Brandenburg - remained with him throughout his life. He enquired into and read widely in the field. In 1863 in a review of W. Schwartz's study, Der heutige Volksglaube und das alte Heidentum; mit Bezug auf Norddeutschland, besonders die Mark Brandenburg und Mecklenburg, he wrote of the continuing importance of such beliefs:

Das alte Heidentum ist in der Tat nicht absolut tot; es lebt in vielen abergläubischen Sitten und Gebräuchen unseres Volkes fort.<sup>6</sup>

In 1882 Fontane himself was working on a piece to be entitled, "Sagen und Sitten in Mark Brandenburg und ihre Beziehungen zur alt-deutschen Göttersage". It was never completed, but a fairly detailed plan is extant which includes instructions to himself with regard to background reading.<sup>7</sup> Indeed Fontane amassed a well-thumbed collection of volumes on the subject, as a letter to his wife on 18th July 1887 makes clear:

Wenn Du kommst, bitte ich Dich folgendes mitzubringen:  
Handtmanns märkische Sagen (liegt, glaub ich, auf dem Fensterbrett)  
Haases Sagen der Grafschaft Ruppin  
 (stehen in meinem Bücherschrank da, wo alle großen und kleinen märk. Bücher in einer Reihe stehen, in der Hälfte nach rechts hin neben anderen märk. Sagenbüchern.,<sup>8</sup>

His knowledge of English and Scottish literature and history together with his detailed and extensive knowledge of the Mark led him to the conclusion that the nordic races shared a common body of legendary material, which could be observed in slightly varied forms in the folk traditions of different areas within the wider region of Northern Europe:

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6 N XVIII, p.610.

7 Ibid. p.461ff.

8 FP I, no.193.



die nordischen Völker scheinen sich die Gestalten ihres Schreckens nach einem verwandten Bedürfnis und unter ähnlichen Eindrücken zurecht gemacht zu haben, aber wir finden doch bei vielem Gleichen mancherlei Nuancen und Abweichungen.<sup>9</sup>

The legends Fontane recounts conform to a relatively restricted range of patterns. Often they are centred on aristocratic or ecclesiastical figures, that is, on milieux which in the past represented centres of authority and power and were areas of mystification as far as the ordinary people were concerned. Popular tradition frequently endows the local overlord with superhuman attributes. Otto Christoph von Sparr is preserved in the folk memory flying high above the rooftops in his magic cloak.<sup>10</sup> According to the Tamsel fishermen Hans Adam von Schöning stormed a Turkish stronghold with the aid of firs which he turned into tree-high pikemen,<sup>11</sup> while Markgraf Hans von Küstrin, whose continued presence is demonstrated by the warm hollow found daily in his bed, makes himself useful in spectral form by nudging sundry intruders off the battlements.<sup>12</sup> As in the last two of these cases, legend often shows that supernatural powers afford protection to the community, and the retelling of such tales gives the local people a sense of security and common identity.

Many legends have less comfortable implications. They warn against foolhardy irreverence. Disrespect for the devil and supernatural powers is just as perilous as blasphemy against God. The legend of Nikolaus Barfus<sup>13</sup> is an object lesson on the unwisdom of

9 N XVII, p.252.

10 N X, p.325: "Wie Derfflinger in Gusow und der alte Sparr in Prenden, so lebt Schöning in Tamsel als ein 'Zauberer' fort."

11 Ibid. p.417.

12 Ibid. p.258f.

13 Ibid. p.368f.

'speaking of the Devil' - a theme which, in metaphorical form, appears frequently in Fontane's novels.<sup>14</sup> Just as Nikolaus Barfus' defiance of supernatural powers marked the beginning of the decline of the family, so too did Geist von Beeren's disrespect for the little people's talisman bring disaster on his house.<sup>15</sup> Disrespect for God and his Sabbath makes an end of Rotmützeken who spent Sunday cavorting with the little people, and of two men on a raft at Gröben who are struck by the lightning they have defied.<sup>16</sup> It is perilous too to meddle with the inscrutable powers of fate by trying to see into the future. The girl in the poem "Silvester-nacht"<sup>17</sup> seeks knowledge of her future husband and finds death - a cautionary tale which points forward to Fontane's many pronouncements on the dangers of "rechnen" and "Glück bereden".<sup>18</sup>

Rotmützeken finds death but no peace in the grave, and unquiet spirits in many forms haunt Fontane's poems and travel journals, and later flit discreetly into the novels.<sup>19</sup> The ghost of the last Uchtenhagen,<sup>20</sup> a boy taken before his time, haunts the old church windows, appearing in the disturbing red glow which, with diabolical connotations, accompanies many such apparitions.<sup>21</sup> In the church at Seedorf on midsummer night Kuno Hartwig III issues from the grave annually to be joined by the rest of the defunct Quitzows.<sup>22</sup>

14 Cf. below chap.VI, p. 146f.

15 N XII, p.275.

16 N X, p.35; N XII, p.356.

17 N XX, p.174.

18 Cf. below chap.VI, p. 146.

19 Cf. below, chap.VI, p. 163.

20 N X, p.90.

21 Cf. below chap.III, p. 59.

22 N XIII, p.93.

Unburied Frenchmen<sup>23</sup> and habitless monks<sup>24</sup> have stalked the night until fittingly laid to rest. There are many female figures too in the ranks of these tormented shades. In the Tempelberger Kirche Frau Anna Lucretia von Gölnitz, geboren von Götze, made her presence felt until she was finally transferred to her own family vault.<sup>25</sup> "Gräfin" Bischofswerder finds no such rest but is doomed by her attachment to worldly goods to haunt her former property.<sup>26</sup> An unexplained Black Lady haunts the Knesebeck house at Karwe,<sup>27</sup> and in Jenseit des Tweed two of the three "Spukhäuser" discussed are haunted by female ghosts. One of them haunts the house because she is troubled by her own guilt.<sup>28</sup> The other reappeared because of a crime committed against her: Lord Ravendale's daughter, murdered in cold blood and her house burnt about her, appeared amid flames once more to utter a curse. Fontane finds the image of a female figure encircled by flames particularly striking, and draws attention to its common currency in folk tradition:

Ein besonderer Reiz dieser Erzählung und ihr charakteristisches Unterscheidungszeichen liegt in der Erscheinung der Frauengestalt in den Flammen; im übrigen erinnert diesselbe lebhaft an jene, wenn ich nicht irre, von Henrik Steffens herrührende, später von Schelling in Terzinen wiedererzählte Geschichte, die unter dem Namen 'Die letzten Worte des Pfarrers zu Drottning' bei uns bekannt geworden ist. Die Hauptzüge sind in beiden Erzählungen dieselben, nur Lokalität und Farbe weichen ab.<sup>29</sup>

It is an image to which he is to return for the climax of Grete Minde.

23 N X, p.391f, XI p.279.

24 N XI, p.37.

25 N X, p.391, cf. the legend of Katharina von Gollnitz in Vor dem Sturm, N I, p.534.

26 N XI, p.280.

27 N IX, p.30, cf. the Black Lady at Guse in Vor dem Sturm, N I, p.488.

28 N XVII, p.253.

29 Ibid. p.256.

The most common, almost proverbial, of all female ghosts is the White Lady. She is discussed in various contexts. There is for example the "Weißes Fräulein" who haunts Kloster Lehnin, looking in vain for her lost love, a monk.<sup>30</sup> Fontane sought in verse to capture the essence of the alluring Prussian White Lady, whom he referred to as Wangeline von Burgsdorf. Two versions of a poem about her, dating from 1853, are extant.<sup>31</sup> After writing the first of these Fontane communicated to Storm the degree of his involvement with the subject matter:

'Hemmingstedt' und die verunglückte 'Wangeline' pack ich bei. Nie hab' ich ein Gedicht mühsamer und liebevoller behandelt als diese letztgenannte Ballade. Es sollte was Vaterländisches werden und die konfusen Sagen über den Gegenstand zu etwas Engem und Dichterischem abklären, aber meine Bemühungen sind an der Sprödigkeit des Stoffes gescheitert. Die Arbeit, glaub' ich, ist nicht talentlos, aber verfehlt.<sup>32</sup>

The poem, telling of love and death, intertwining the themes of guilt and eroticism, is firmly rooted in its Prussian background. The White Lady is doomed to walk as a warning to the Hohenzollerns of imminent danger. Fontane returns to the material in Vor dem Sturm, where he also mentions the Lehnin apparition,<sup>33</sup> and the motif re-emerges in Frau Jenny Treibel<sup>34</sup> and Effi Briest,<sup>35</sup> although on these occasions scepticism is to the fore.

It seems clear from Fontane's letter to Storm and from his repeated treatment of the subject that it appealed to his imagination.

30 N XI, p.71.

31 N XX, p.202, p.469.

32 FPS I, p.110, 27th March 1854.

33 Cf. below chap.III, p.63f.

34 Cf. below chap.VI, p.163.

35 Cf. below chap.VII, p.193.

One could argue that the figure of the White Lady and her counterpart, the female apparition in the flames, are typical balladesque motifs, stark ciphers, white and red suggesting death and life, sorrow and passion, guilt and retribution. Such figures as these, while embracing these connotations, surely also take on additional significance in the world of Fontane's creative imagination. The white and glowing ladies of ballad and legend are sisters, in a way prototypes, for the female characters who subsequently people his fictional world. Fontane was drawn again and again to portray women as his central characters, particularly unhappy women. The 'schuldigungsunschuldige' figure of Wangeline, succumbing to passion ("Es brennt mein Blut und es schwindelt mein Sinn."<sup>36</sup>) in the arms of her lover, fails to warn Prince Emil of his mortal danger and is condemned to eternal vigilance without respite. She prefigures such characters as Melanie in L'Adultera, Franziska in Graf Petöfy and Effi in Effi Briest. They too are unable to resist natural feelings which overcome them in moments of vulnerability. As a result they incur guilt, for which a price is exacted, but it is guilt for which they are not ultimately responsible. They have simply acquiesced inevitably in a law of nature. The contrasting image of the fiery figure anticipates others of Fontane's female characters: elemental creatures such as Ebba in Unwiederbringlich and Grete in Grete Minde, whose passionate, destructive, but again not evil qualities Fontane expresses through images of fire.

The legends and folklore which Fontane records in more or less unembellished form in his travel journals and ballads are concerned with enduring aspects of human nature and the human condition. Telling of greed, arrogance, blasphemy, guilt and sorrow, they are on

the whole cautionary tales. They warn of the disaster that results from offending against an order set above the individual, be that order human or divine. Some of the legends are lighter in tone, but even these treat of man's relationship to an order beyond him, over which he has no control. The naive legendary material of Fontane's early writing can therefore be seen to have provided him with prototypes for characters and situations in the novels. The universal human dilemmas which appear enshrined in folklore in his early writings re-emerge later in the transmuted and subtly refined form of the nineteenth-century novel.

In these early writings there is already clear evidence of Fontane's recognition of the existence of fate in some form.

Formulations such as:

Aber es war anders bestimmt.<sup>37</sup>,

Indessen der Himmel hatte es anders beschlossen.<sup>38</sup>,

and ...etwas von Schicksals Tücke spielte doch auch mit hinein."<sup>39</sup>

bear witness to the workings of an unpredictable and uncontrollable force of destiny directing people's lives along lines which they would not have chosen for themselves. It seems too that this force is not arbitrary, it is rather the manifestation of a higher order, an order which is symbolised for instance in the image of the heavenly order of the stars, when Fontane records the personal disaster that overtook Friedrich August Ludwig von der Marwitz:

Aber trübe Sterne waren über Schloß Friedersdorf  
aufgegangen und der Tod trennte nach kaum Jahres-

37 N XII, p.250.

38 N X, p.214.

39 N XIV, p.181.

frist ein Band, das die innigste gegenseitige  
Neigung geschlossen hatte.<sup>40</sup>

This image is used in modified form by Marwitz' fictional counterpart, Bernd von Vitzewitz, in Vor dem Sturm.<sup>41</sup> He says of his wife, who likewise died young:

Über deiner Mutter Kindheit haben helle Sterne  
gestanden.

The existence of such an order is also strongly suggested by the fact that accurate prophecies have been made. To the specially gifted the workings of destiny can be predicted and are therefore following a preordained pattern. Fontane discusses the whole question of prophecy with regard to the prediction of the fall of the House of Hohenzollern which was made in 1300 by a monk at Kloster Lehnin.<sup>42</sup>

This again is irrational material which is absorbed into Vor dem Sturm.

To the careful empirical observer too the workings of fate may reveal themselves, as one of Fontane's friends has pointed out to him:

'Sehen Sie, Freund, auch in den Zufällen und Unglücksfällen waltet ein Gesetz. So verfolg' ich beispielsweise die Theaterbrände. Alle fünfzehn Jahre brennt ein großes Theater ab. Nicht öfter, aber auch nicht weniger oft.'<sup>43</sup>

Fontane accepts this analysis, and indeed in a rather different connection he records his own observation of the workings of a determining force, one which governed his father's life:

Denn bis zu seiner letzten Stunde verharrte er in  
Liebe und Verehrung zu der Frau, die unglücklich

40 N X, p.207.

41 N I, p.91, and cf. below chap.III, p.55f.

42 N XI, p.72ff.

43 N XII, p.212.

zu machen sein Schicksal war.<sup>44</sup>

The precise nature of fate, of the force determining the length and quality of man's life is not made clear. In the case of Fontane's parents he sees their temperamental incompatibility - in itself a non-rational factor - as the source of inescapable torment. His father, on the other hand, sees his life as having been governed by circumstances:

'Die Verhältnisse machen den Menschen.'<sup>45</sup>

Although the force itself remains obscure its effects are clear enough, and an adequate demonstration of its existence.

That the force itself remains hidden and mysterious is, according to Fontane, as it should be. In the poem, "Die Frage bleibt" he expresses the futility of trying to discover the ultimate purpose of life:

Wie's dich auch aufzuhorchen treibt,  
Das Dunkel, das Rätsel, die Frage bleibt.<sup>46</sup>

Or again, considering a Christian explanation of man's condition, Fontane concludes:

...'Man kann es nicht wissen'  
Und gesegnet, daß man nicht alles weiß,  
Daß Wunder und Rätsel bleiben;  
Nicht unten liegt der höchste Preis,  
Nach oben muß es treiben.<sup>47</sup>

His description of the Humboldt graveyard suggests the same view of the unseen springs of man's existence and of the fate that awaits him:

44 N XIV, p.51.

45 Ibid. p.166.

46 N XX, p.43.

47 Ibid. p.634f.



Im Herzen dessen, der diesen Friedhof schuf, war eine unbestimmte Hoffnung lebendig, aber kein bestimmter siegesgewisser Glaube. Ein Geist der Liebe und Humanität schwebt über dem Ganzen, aber nirgends eine Hindeutung auf das Kreuz, nirgends der Ausdruck eines unerschütterlichen Vertrauens .....

Nur Schloß Tegel hat ein drittes Element in seinen Mauern beherbergt, jenen Geist, der, gleich weit entfernt von Orthodoxie wie von Frivolität, sich inmitten der klassischen Antike langsam aber sicher auszubilden pflegt, und lächelnd über die Kämpfe beider Extreme, das Diesseits genießt und auf das rätselvolle Jenseits hofft.<sup>48</sup>

A passage such as this demonstrates luminously the extent to which the Wanderungen are, in places, as much accounts of the landscape of Fontane's mind and heart as of geographical and historical reality.

In addition to more general statements acknowledging the existence of a force of destiny, the early writings record many specific occasions on which manifestations of the workings of fate have actually been perceived, in the form of signs and omens. Drawing on his own personal experience Fontane refers to a number of occasions on which he has had intimations of what was to come. These premonitions, more often than not, are of favourable turns of fortune; as the following formulations indicate:

Ich nehme es als eine gute Vorbedeutung ...,<sup>49</sup>

In mir war wohl die Vorahnung eines großen Ereignisses ...,<sup>50</sup>

... und [ich] rechnete mir abergläubisch heraus, daß dieser Zwischenfall eine gute Vorbedeutung für mich sei.<sup>51</sup>

He was familiar with the idea of good omens from a very early age, as

48 N XI, p.165.

49 N XII, p.237.

50 N XV, p.10f.

51 Ibid. p.129f.

his account of the removal to Swinemünde in 1827 demonstrates.

Almost the first sight that met the seven-year-old Theodor's gaze in his new home town was that of a brand new coffin gleaming in the evening sun outside the carpenter's house. He pointed it out hesitantly to his father:

... aber mein Vater wollte von Angst und schlechter Bedeutung nichts wissen und sagte: 'Sei nicht so dumm. Das ist das Beste, was uns passieren kann. Das ist, wie wenn einem ein Karren mit einem toten Pferd darauf begegnet, und das hier ist noch besser. Das tote Pferd bedeutet immer bloß Geld, aber ein Sarg bedeutet Glück überhaupt. Und bei allem Respekt vor Geld, Glück ist noch besser. Glück ist alles. Wir werden also hier Glück haben.' ... Übrigens hatte mein Vater ganz recht prophezeit. Es ging uns gut hier, und was mitunter anders aussah, daran war das Glück nicht schuld, das tat, umgekehrt sein Möglichstes für uns.<sup>52</sup>

The incident is reinforced for the child by a repetition of the scene nearer home, where the roles are differently allotted.

Fontane's father, on asking about the origins of an ancient wheel in the loft of his new home, is told in the same reassuring tones he has used to his son that it is the wheel that broke a local murderer.

His guide, Ehm, imparts the information and concludes:

'Und he wull ja woll, dat et em Glück in't Huus bringen sall.' Mein Vater, der dabei seiner am Tage vorher zugunsten des Scharfrichterkarrens gehaltenen Rede gedenken mochte, war von dem, was Ehm jetzt sagte, wenig angenehm berührt und meinte, zuviel Glück sei auch nicht gut.<sup>53</sup>

The irony of the situation probably only served to imprint it more strongly on the child's imagination.

Fontane was familiar with good omens from personal experience as

52 N XIV, p.32.

53 Ibid, p.37.

a child and a young man, and he also came across them in his study of history. In Jenseit des Tweed he interprets the escape to safety of James VI, who as an infant was lowered down Edinburgh Castle Rock in a basket, as a sign that he was destined to survive.<sup>54</sup> On his Spreeland Wanderungen he learns of the bell at Pieskow which, according to prophecy, would be a sign of good fortune for the Löschebrand family:

Und die Prophezeiung hielt auch Wort.<sup>55</sup>

In this case it is not a question of Fontane's perception or interpretation of a sign and, unlike the good omens drawn from his own early experience, the Löschebrand bell's function is double-edged. Its pealing denotes good fortune, but its subsequent silence heralds doom.

The vast majority of the omens and signs with which Fontane becomes acquainted in his pursuit of history and legend are harbingers of ill fortune and death. In later life he expressed an awareness of this discrepancy between the way in which he was naturally inclined to view the world and the way in which he was in the end forced to see and accept it:

Meiner Natur nach bin ich Optimist; aber ich habe zwei Augen im Kopf, und meine Erfahrungen haben schließlich meine Neigungen korrigiert.<sup>56</sup>

This awareness arose in part from his own experience of life, but must surely have been contributed to by his close study of the lives of historical figures which formed such a central part of his work in

54 N XVII, p.225.

55 N XII, p.39.

56 An Clara Stockhausen, 27th December 1878, FE I, p.470.

the poems and the travel journals. Between 1846 and 1859 much of Fontane's writing was based on British history and legend in which the motif of the prophetic dream or ghostly apparition prefiguring death was common. The poems, "Von der schönen Rosamunde"<sup>57</sup> (1847), "Johanna Gray"<sup>58</sup> (1852), "Maria und Bothwell"<sup>59</sup> (1851), "Cromwells letzte Nacht"<sup>60</sup> (1846) and "Percys Tod"<sup>61</sup> (1851) all include such ominous material, as do, James Monmouth, historische Erzählung (1853)<sup>62</sup> and Jenseit des Tweed (1859)<sup>63</sup>. Similar motifs emerge in a Prussian context in the Wanderungen: Katte's doom was to be read in the look in his eye;<sup>64</sup> more conventionally, Christian Friedrich Pfuel saw death foreshadowed by a spectre of himself composing his last will and testament;<sup>65</sup> Friedrich I, in true Hohenzollern style, saw the "weiße Frau" and died;<sup>66</sup> Konrad von Quitzow, unwilling performer of a Dance of Death, was duly overtaken by his fate on the following day and the fortunes of the Quitzows went with him;<sup>67</sup> and the poet, Freiherr von Canitz' death was prophesied according to the old superstition that a cuckoo's call intimates the number of years left to a man.<sup>68</sup>

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57 N XX, p.117.

58 Ibid. p.126.

59 Ibid. p.135.

60 Ibid. p.150.

61 Ibid. p.324.

62 H V, p.556 & p.563.

63 N XVII, p.231 & p.275, James IV is warned by ghostly apparitions on the eve of Flodden.

64 N X, p.293.

65 Ibid. p.439.

66 N XI, p.141, also cf. above p.14. The fact that what he actually saw was not a ghost, but his own mad wife did not diminish the impact of the ominous apparition.

67 N XIII, p.36f.

68 N XII, p.184, "Das einförmige Rufen des Kuckucks klang lauter und näher jetzt und Canitz richtete sich auf, als wollt' er die Rufe zählen. Da schwieg der Kuckuck. Ein wehmütiges Lächeln um-

Such intimations belong not solely to the realm of history or legend. For Fontane they can still occur in the present, even if they now come in less colourful or fanciful form. Fontane records that his own father had a premonition of death on the last occasion that his son visited him:

'Nun lebe wohl, und laß dich noch mal sehen.' Er sagte das mit bewegter Stimme, denn er hatte die Vorahnung, daß dies der Abschied sei.<sup>69</sup>

The question as to why Fontane has a preponderance of ill omens to record in his writings, and why the good ones are largely confined to his own early life, may in part be explained by his own words on the subject in his letter to Clara Stockhausen:<sup>70</sup> the dispassionate observer will conclude that in life a happy end is the exception rather than the rule, and therefore experience teaches that a pessimistic outlook is more realistic than an optimistic one. Consequently, if there are signs and omens of what is to come, there are bound to be more negative indications than positive ones. If the question is viewed in a historical perspective, however, it is clear that it is in the nature of history to embrace and record many deaths, and in considering the whole lifespan of historical figures attention becomes focused on their death in a way that is not, and cannot be, the case if one is contemplating people's lives in the present. In addition, good fortune is a much less precise commodity than the ultimate ill fortune of death. Good fortune is transient and subject to qualification by a myriad of relativising factors. Death is final and uncompromising. It is therefore only natural that

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68 (Contd.) spielte seine Lippen; dann schritt er durch die Gänge des Parks in das Herrenhaus und seine Stille zurück." Fontane employs the motif of the cuckoo as a prophet of death in his novels, cf. below chap.V p.112, chap.VII, p.177.

69 N XIV, p.168.

70 Cf. above, p.21.

there should be fewer signs pointing to imminent benign workings of fate than to impending death, which is, in a sense, after birth, the most significant and often least predictable event to overtake man.

There is, however, a counterbalance to the weight of ill fortune that fate has in store for man. The mysterious powers beyond man's comprehension mete out not only death and destruction, they also dispense grace. This is a rare occurrence, but all the more precious for its rarity. The experience of grace, of the inexplicable beneficence of fortune, was deeply felt by Fontane. It is a theme to which he constantly returns in his works and his letters:

... das Schicksal haßt es, daß der Mensch irgendwas vorausbestimmt, er muß immer zuwartend sein, immer den Moment als eine Gnade empfangen, aber ihn nicht als selbstverständlich, als 'vorausbezahlt' beanspruchen. Das Schicksal, wenn es einem die Hand bietet, verlangt auch, daß man einschlägt und nicht noch lange vornehm und anspruchsvoll oder schwächlich und pedantisch zögert.<sup>71</sup>

Two poems bear witness to the same conviction:

Das Glück kein Reiter wird's erjagen,  
Es ist nicht dort, es ist nicht hier;  
Lern' überwinden, lern' entsagen;  
Und ungeahnt erblüht es dir.<sup>72</sup>

and, Glaub nicht, du könnt'st es doch erklimmen  
Und Woll'n sei höchste Kraft und Pflicht,  
Was ist, ist durch Vorherbestimmen -  
Man hat es oder hat es nicht.<sup>73</sup>

Comments in Meine Kinderjahre show how conscious Fontane was as a child that his happiness hung in the balance and that without succour and protection from fortune he would be lost. In Chapter 15, "Wie wir

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71 FFR no.35, 2nd March 1886.

72 N XX, p.23.

73 Ibid. p.54.

draußen spielten, an Strom und Sand", Fontane recounts how he emerged unscathed from many playful, but often reckless encounters with the formidable elements of fire and water. He attributes his avoidance of injury to the good agency of his guardian angel. He constructed faulty explosive devices and escaped unharmed:

... wir aber kamen immer heil davon. Der Engel half.<sup>74</sup>

He narrowly escaped drowning amid treacherous sand banks:

Glücklich bin ich jederzeit herausgekommen. Aber nicht durch mich. Kraft und Hilfe kamen woanders her.<sup>75</sup>

He maintains that this benign force watched over him for the first eleven years of his life,<sup>76</sup> and he attributes the fortunate rescue of a friend from drowning to an equally irrational protective force. On this occasion he actually discards the rational explanation in favour of the irrational:

Vielleicht war er auch aus natürlicher Beanlagung ein sogenannter 'Wassertreter' oder hatte, was schließlich noch wahrscheinlicher, das bekannte Glück der Illegitimen.<sup>77</sup>

A further childhood experience is recorded with a richness of detail that clearly communicates the vividness of the memory some sixty years after the event. Fontane recalls the time spent in perilous suspension, building up momentum on an ancient, rickety swing:

Schöner aber als alles das war, für mich wenigstens, eine zwischen zwei Holzpfeilern angebrachte, ziemlich auffällige Schaukel. Der quer Überliegende Balken

74 N XIV, p.149.

75 Ibid. p.151.

76 Ibid. p.148.

77 Ibid. p.156.

hing schon an morsch zu werden, und die Haken an denen das Gestell hing, saßen nicht allzu fest mehr. Und doch konnt ich gerade von dieser Stelle nicht los und setzte meine Ehre darin, durch abwechselnd tiefes Kniebeugen und elastisches Wiederemporschnellen die Schaukel derartig in Gang zu bringen, daß sie mit ihren senkrechten Seitenbalken zuletzt in eine fast horizontale Lage kam. Dabei quietschten die rostigen Haken, und alles drohte zusammen zu brechen. Aber das gerade war die Lust, denn es erfüllte mich mit dem wonnigen und allein das Leben bedeutenden Gefühle: Dich trägt dein Glück.<sup>78</sup>

The child Fontane was clearly aware of forces beyond rational physical laws, which were governing his fate. The experience on the swing was to him a confirmation of the existence of such mysterious forces and of their at least momentary beneficence. In thus tempting providence to destroy or preserve him he clearly found exhilaration, an acutely intense experience of the dynamic nature of existence, a kind of liberation from the conventional laws governing life and a brief escape into a realm where common sense and mundane reality have lost their dominion, where physical exertion and physical danger liberate the spirit.<sup>79</sup>

This key experience from Fontane's early childhood, still lambent in his memory in his old age, is relived for him in the novels by Effi Briest and by Ebba Rosenberg. Shortly before her marriage to Instetten, Effi, in conversation with her mother, contrasts Instetten's idea of what will give her pleasure with her own:

'Er will mir ja schon Schmuck schenken in Venedig. Er hat keine Ahnung davon, daß ich mir nichts aus Schmuck mache. Ich klettre lieber und schaukle mich lieber, und am liebsten immer in der Furcht, daß es irgendwo reißen oder brechen und ich niederstürzen könnte. Den Kopf wird es ja nicht gleich kosten.'<sup>80</sup>

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78 Ibid. p.42.

79 Cf. below, chap.VIII, p.240f.

80 N VII, p.194f.



Instetten chooses dead ornament, the conventional trappings of society; she chooses the unbridled excitement of dynamic existence and risk. Later she escapes briefly from her dull, stifling marriage and spends six happy weeks in childhood pursuits at Hohen-Cremmen:

Am liebsten hatte sie aber wie früher auf dem durch die Luft fliegenden Schaukelbrett gestanden, und in dem Gefühle: 'jetzt stürz ich', etwas eigentümlich prickelndes, einen Schauer süßer Gefahr empfunden.<sup>81</sup>

She experiences the same thrill when she is driven along the water's edge at Kessin in a sledge with no straps to hold her in:

'Ich kann die Schutzleder nicht leiden; sie haben so was Prosaisches. Und dann, wenn ich hinausflöge, mir wär es recht, am liebsten gleich in die Brandung.'<sup>82</sup>

The likelihood of this happening is enhanced by the fact that she is actually leaning over to the left, out of the sledge: that is, like the child Fontane on the swing, she is testing physical laws to their limits. Similarly, as a child in Hohen-Cremmen, she suggests that four of them go on the swing at once:

'... reißen wird es ja wohl nicht.'<sup>83</sup>

Again the rational laws of reality are to be put to the test, and behind Effi's calm assurance that the swing will stand the strain is the consciousness that of course it may not, and that awareness is a source of exhilaration. Ebba, in Unwiederbringlich, indulges, in comparable style, a desire to find excitement and liberation by testing the physical world to its limits. Taking the hapless Holk

81 Ibid. p.269.

82 Ibid. p.304.

83 Ibid. p.178.

with her, she skates out towards the open sea.<sup>84</sup> Fontane thus expresses through these two female characters a significant aspect of his own experience. The novelist famed for his restraint and discretion, for subtle nuance and muted style perceives as a fundamental experience in life the unrestrained desire for excitement and danger, the rejection of common sense and responsibility, the total abandonment of the self to the inscrutable powers of fortune. An integral feature of this recklessness is the consciousness of and desire for grace; almost for the assurance that breaking the rules and invoking providence is a positive action. The positive response from fortune is a stimulating manifestation of the existence and potency of such powers beyond man as make his own attempts at ruling his destiny seem petty and laughable:

Schall und Dunst:/:  
Ist dies Dasein ohne Göttergunst;<sup>85</sup>

Another area of experience which Fontane has transferred from himself to many of his female characters is a sensitivity to atmospheric influences,<sup>86</sup> a spontaneous tendency to respond imaginatively to his environment. Repeatedly on his travels in the Mark, and earlier in Scotland, he perceives more in his surroundings than meets the eye.<sup>87</sup> The landscape takes on supernatural overtones

84 N V, p.167.

85 N XX, p.558.

86 Cf. below, chap.VII, p.197.

87 Jutta Fürstenau in her illuminating study, Fontane und die märkische Heimat, Berlin, 1941, sees Fontane's experience of the Mark Brandenburg as seminal in awakening him to a personal perception of the intimate relationship between natural surroundings and local legend, and of the continued almost palpable life of these legends: p.92, "Da draußen im märkischen Land gewinnen die Gestalten des Volkes, seine Sagen und Geschichten für ihn Leben und Atem, werden ihm innerlich künstlerisch zu eigen; der heiße Mittag mit seinen Lauten schenkt ihm das Erleben der Sagen von versunkenen Städten und klingenden Glocken, aus dem plötzlich einsetzenden und rasch anschwellenden Rauschen des Windes in den  
(Continued)

for him as he reacts both to its mysterious or magical appearance and to the influence of his knowledge of its legendary associations:

Das Heidemoor von Forres, drauf die Hexen dem Macbeth mit ihrem verführerischen 'hail Macbeth, who shall be king' erschienen, liegt fünf Meilen östlich von Inverneß, am Meerbusen des Moray entlang. Wer in einem Dampfboote die Fahrt nach Aberdeen macht, kann, wenn er abends Inverneß verließ, um Mitternacht rechts hinüberlugen nach der Hexenheide und einen Einblick in die unheimlich-gespenstische Welt, wo Moornebel und Mondlicht ihre Gestalten brauen.<sup>88</sup>

He is similarly affected nearer home by the Sparren-Land, again by a combination of the physical presence of the landscape and the mental associations he carries with him:

Und wer an der Biesenthaler Wassermühle den kleinen Fluß passiert, oder an einem Herbstabende, bei fallendem Nebel, an dem Tramperpark und seinen Burgtrümmern vorüberkommt, der fühlt wohl, daß ihm sein Weg in Gegenden geführt hat, wo es nicht wundernehmen darf, daß alte Volkssagen noch lebendig sind und weiter wachsen und schaffen.<sup>89</sup>

Time and again Fontane responds with a shudder to features of the natural and historical landscape in the Mark. An unpleasant sensation runs down his spine, an involuntary betrayal of apprehension. His visits to the Oderland and Spreeland find him particularly susceptible to such influences. These intimations of a supernatural

87 (Contd.) Baumkronen, dem Heulen und Brausen vorwinterlicher Stürme überkommt ihn ein gefühlhaftes Begreifen der wilden Jagd und anderer Vorstellungen alten Totenglaubens, aus dem herbstlichen Gewoge der Heide steigt ihm das Verständnis auf für die Spukgestalten volkhafter Phantasie." This awareness however had already been awakened in Fontane in the course of his visit to Scotland, and his experience in the Mark Brandenburg simply broadened and deepened his perception.

88 N XVII, p.338. Macbeth's witches seem to have appealed to Fontane's taste for supernatural manifestations of fate. He returns to the motif in his poem, "Die Brück' am Tay", N XX, p.165, and is reminded of them by three weird women he happens on, on his visit to the Müggelberge, N XII, p.104.

89 N X, p.426.

dimension are often associated with mists and grey November skies. Küstrin - "Etwas finster Unheimliches ist um ihn her" - remains in his memory "unter einem ewigen Novemberhimmel".<sup>90</sup> The Teupitzsee and Kienbaum, the village on the heath, affect him similarly: under misty, grey November skies a feeling of unease and wonder is evoked in him.<sup>91</sup> Edinburgh Castle, shrouded in twilight mists, takes on a magical aura for him.<sup>92</sup> Other natural phenomena also beckon Fontane into supernatural realms. The darkened forest beyond Prenden, filled with the sound and the unseen movement of the wind causes him to start involuntarily and look round, half amused, half fearful, for Sparren's ghost.<sup>93</sup> Even in broad daylight, under the midday sun near Etzin he is not proof against the weird croaking of the frogs. The power of the obvious, natural explanation of the sounds to still his apprehension is eclipsed by the strength of his irrational response:

Wir lauschen auf, aber es bangt uns mehr und mehr vor dem unheimlich einschmeichelnden Getöse, und rasch aufspringend, marschieren wir rüstig weiter in die brennende Mittagsstille hinein, dankbar gegen den jetzt wieder entgegenkommenden Wind, der uns das Gesicht kühlt und die verfolgenden Unkenstimmen mit in unsern Rücken nimmt.<sup>94</sup>

The tales of the sinking tombstone in Heckelberg church<sup>95</sup> and of the sunken town in the Schermützelsee<sup>96</sup> both affect Fontane physically. He is uneasy at the thought of these uncanny phenomena.

90 Ibid. p.249.

91 N XII, p.291, p.243f; in both these cases, as often elsewhere, Fontane uses the formulation, "ein Gefühl beschleicht mich/dich."

92 N XVII, p.199.

93 N X, p.420.

94 N XI, p.330.

95 N X, p.421, Fontane re-used the motif of the sinking tombstone in Vor dem Sturm, cf. below, chap.III, p.53.

96 N X, p.96.

On other occasions the mysterious localities cause him to conjure up in retrospect the appropriate apparitions in his mind. Schloß Kossenblatt appears to him in flames once more;<sup>97</sup> leaving Marquardt at twilight, shivering in the evening breeze he re-invokes the ghost of "Gräfin" von Bischofswerder.<sup>98</sup> His impression of Karwe, the Knesebeck house,<sup>99</sup> and of the Betsaal at Spiegelberg<sup>100</sup> both suggest to him strongly that ghostly apparitions are at home there. His reaction is based purely on the atmosphere of these places, and his impression is vivid enough for him to see fit to record it as part of the reality of the locality that he is bent on depicting.

Another place that exudes a disquieting supernatural aura for Fontane is the Belvedere at Charlottenburg:

Etwas Unheimliches ist drumher, das nicht abzutun ist. Was ist es? Ist es, weil es ein Spukhaus war, weil Gespenster hier umgingen?  
Nein, denn man spielte hier nur Gespenst.  
Aber fast scheint es, als ob ein doppeltes Grauen eben daraus erwuchs, daß die Geister, die hier auftraten, nur ein Schein, eine Lüge waren.<sup>101</sup>

This was one of the venues used by Friedrich Wilhelm II for his séances. Here and in General von Bischofswerder's grotto at Marquardt spirits of the dead were summoned up for the king. Fontane was fascinated by this atypically mystical episode in Prussian history. He returned to it on numerous occasions, and his attitude to the subject is ambivalent. In his account of Marquardt<sup>102</sup> he records at

97 Ibid. p.390.

98 N XI, p.286f.

99 N IX, p.28.

100 Ibid. p.394f.

101 N XI, p.177, cf. also p.175 for a detailed account of a séance there.

102 Ibid. p.264f.

length what village tradition maintains about the king's spiritualist sessions there, adding the factual detail that the grotto has double walls, well suited to accommodate simulated spirits. Despite this, and his reference to "Schein" and "Lüge" at Belvedere he by no means dismisses the possibility that spirits were successfully invoked:

Dennoch gibt es Personen, die den ganzen Schatz  
Marquardter Volkssage einfach für Fabel erklären.  
Ich kann diesen Personen nicht beistimmen.<sup>103</sup>

and in his chapter on Groß-Rietz he does not unequivocally take the side of the sceptics, who credit Wöllner, another of Friedrich Wilhelm's spiritualists, with nothing more than "Hokuspokus".<sup>104</sup> The whole subject of Friedrich Wilhelm and his séances, genuine or false, appealed to Fontane's imagination and he incorporated it subsequently into Schach von Wuthenow,<sup>105</sup> Irrungen Wirungen<sup>106</sup> and Effi Briest.<sup>107</sup>

Some of the most telling occasions on which Fontane's susceptibility to supernatural and irrational influences is revealed are not recorded in the Wanderungen at all but in Meine Kinderjahre and Von Zwanzig bis Dreißig. In 1826 the family moved into a large flat in Neuruppin which was in the same building as a slaughter house. Fontane, more sensitive in this respect than the rest of the family, was unpleasantly affected by this circumstance and by the blood-filled gutter in the yard. One particular day remained clearly in his memory in later life: paralysed with horror at first at the sight of a squealing pig being held down in the yard, he then ran off at great

103 Ibid. p.265.

104 N XI, p.42.

105 Cf. below, chap.V, p.108, and N II, p.366f.

106 Cf. below, chap.VI, p.163f, and N III, p.229.

107 N VII, p.348.

speed. Explaining himself later to the family, he discovered that a mound on which he had stopped to rest was the gallows hill. He had rushed unwittingly from one scene of violence and death to take refuge on another.<sup>108</sup> This macabre coincidence filled the sensitive, imaginative child with horror.<sup>109</sup>

From about the same time dates another vividly recalled experience, only this time the intimations of mysterious, perhaps fateful forces caused him shivers of delight, not of horror. He recalls how he was given permission to travel at night in an open carriage with his father, and that at that time he welcomed any opportunity of an uncanny experience:

Ich horchte hoch auf, beglückt in meiner kleinen Seele, die schon damals nach allem, was einen etwas aparten und das nächtlich Schauerliche streifenden Charakter hatte, begierig verlangte.<sup>110</sup>

What affected him particularly on the journey and filled him with a unique feeling of rapture was the sight of the stars:

In raschem Trabe ging es über Altruppin auf Kremmen zu, und lange bevor wir dieses, das ungefähr halber Weg war, erreicht hatten, zogen die Sterne herauf und wurden immer heller und blitzender. Entzückt sah ich die Pracht, und kein Schlaf kam in meine Augen. Ich bin nie wieder so gefahren; mir war, als reisten wir in den Himmel.<sup>111</sup>

He perceived the stars on this occasion not as natural phenomena, but as magical, supernatural bodies which seemed to open up to him a path into transcendental spheres, releasing him from the everyday world of

108 N XIV, p.23.

109 He experienced a similar feeling of nameless horror nine years later, when an eccentric aristocratic neighbour had his son layed out in an open coffin in the hallway of their block of flats. This in itself was enough to rob Fontane of his appetite for the day, and his horror was compounded - "Ich konnte das Grauen nicht los werden" - when a drunken tenant blundered into the coffin at night and tipped it and its contents on to the floor, N XV, p.114

110 N XIV, p.26

111 Ibid.

finite time and space. Something of these magical, transcendental connotations are carried over into the star motif in Vor dem Sturm.<sup>112</sup>

Fontane's arrival at his new home in Swinemünde in 1827 once more provided stimulation for his imagination and sensitivity to atmosphere. On the first night that he spends there the moon shines in through the windows and he is struck by the eerie atmosphere in the house.<sup>113</sup> His sixth sense has not deceived him, as he discovers from the servants that the place is said to be haunted. From the attics come sounds of activity, of trunks and boxes being opened and shut. His father attributes the disturbance to cats, but the servants say that it is old Geißler, a previous owner, inspecting his property. This account of the uncanny first impression made on him by the house and of its haunted upper storey clearly points forward to Effi Briest's experience of Instetten's house in Kessin.

Fontane's attitude to Geißler's ghost is ambivalent. He views it with a mixture of fear and fascination. Despite his apprehension, he feels a curious compulsion to sit between the cupboard and stove, on the spot where Geißler was said to have died. This kind of ambiguity is typical of Fontane's response to supernatural phenomena and irrational influences. He is at once attracted and repelled by them, filled with a mixture of fear and delight. In his poem "Gewitter", written in 1840 - again an expression of his youthful experience - he tells of reading Dante's Inferno,

Mit banger Wonn' und wonnereichem Zagen.

The antithesis expresses the contradictory nature of his reaction. The poem is remarkable when viewed in the light of his future

112 Cf. below, chap.III, p.55f.

113 N XIV, p.34f.



stylistic development. Extravagant formulations convey the highly emotional reaction, the spiritual turmoil called forth by the world of Dante's shades. Fontane responds violently, both physically and emotionally to the evocative power of the poetry. Lines such as:

Erlag ich meiner Phantasie Gewalten,  
Die siegestrunken immer mehr verwildert,

or: Die Geister alle ...

.....  
Von denen trunkenen Sinnes, ich gelesen<sup>114</sup>

convey an intensity of feeling foreign to his later works.

Although this intensity of perception and response may have faded in later life, there is clear evidence that in the years when Fontane was working on the Wanderungen his susceptibility to the influence of irrational phenomena persisted, and there is no doubt that he endowed many of the characters in his novels, particularly the female ones, with a similar sensitivity. Some of the most significant experiences of this type date back to his early childhood, to a time in most people's lives when an imperfect understanding of mundane reality results in an unrestrainedly imaginative approach to the world. At the same time there is evidence to suggest that in much later life too Fontane retained, in some degree, his imaginative approach to phenomena. In a letter to his wife in 1883, he tells her of his involuntary, but appropriately negative response to a picturesque house in the woods. He had already styled it a "verwünschtes Schloß,"<sup>115</sup> and the ensuing family catastrophe there justifies this title:

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114 N XX, p.373f.

115 This motif is incorporated into Cécile, cf. below, chap.V, p.101.

Wie viel Schreckliches muß in dem 'Märchenhaus' vorausgegangen sein! Wenn ich etwas ganz in Rosen und Vergißmeinnicht liegen sehe, wird mir schon immer angst und bange.<sup>116</sup>

Throughout his life irrational responses can be seen to have played an important part in his perception of the world, and consequently, in turn, in the fictional world that he created.

There was no lack of stimulus for Fontane's imagination both in his early surroundings at Swinemünde and in the Mark Brandenburg as a whole, as the many legends and folk traditions associated with local historical figures make clear. There is however a further significant area of legendary material which exists independently of the local personages to which many superstitions become attached. A whole complex of folk traditions is centred on a number of the Mark lakes. Legend has become inextricably associated with natural phenomena which exist undeniably in the world of objective reality. Fontane gives a lengthy geological explanation of the formation of the lakes,<sup>117</sup> but it is not what is known about them that is of interest, it is their unplumbed depths and unpredictable moods which are a fertile source of legend.

The Stechlinsee is typical: when Fontane visits it he is struck by its impassiveness, its inscrutable silence which nonetheless seems to conceal an urge to communicate secrets locked in its depths:

Da lag er vor uns, ... geheimnisvoll, einem Stummen gleich, den es zu sprechen drängt. Aber die ungelöste Zunge weigert ihm den Dienst, und was er sagen will bleibt ungesagt.<sup>118</sup>

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116 FP I, no.116, 23rd June 1883.

117 N X, p.97.

118 N IX, p.316.

It has this air of enforced silence in common with the Teupitzsee whose magic lies in,

Jenes Schweigen, das etwas verschweigt.<sup>119</sup>

and there is a whole group of so-called 'Teufelsseen', among them der kleine Tornow, which share this characteristic stillness. Their air of mystery is intensified by their physical appearance:

Das Wasser ist schwarz, dunkle Baumgruppen schließen es ein, breite Teichrosenblätter bilden einen Uferkranz und die Oberfläche bleibt spiegelglatt, auch wenn der Wind durch den Wald zieht. Es ist als hätten diese dunklen Wasser einen besonderen Zug in die Tiefe und als stünden sie fester und unbeweglicher da, als andere.<sup>120</sup>

The sinister blackness of the water can be explained by the depth of the lake and by the dark trees which cut out the light, and its unruffled surface is probably due to the fact that it is doubly sheltered by trees and steep sloping banks. Folk tradition, however, is proof against such rational explanations. The Stechlinsee is not always so pacific. At times its waters become wildly agitated, spouting into the air in unexplained sympathy with earthquakes elsewhere in the world. For this reason, and because its sporadic turbulence claims the unwary as victims it is held in awe, as is the Müggelsee, "tief, finster und tückisch".<sup>121</sup>

The lakes, with their eerie atmosphere, their seemingly spell-bound stillness, are favourite haunts for ghosts of all kinds, but particularly for enchanted princesses. The kleine Tornowsee's dark waters yield up a spectral princess on midsummer night,<sup>122</sup> as does

119 N XII, p.244.

120 N X, p.100.

121 N XI, p.370.

122 N X, p.100.

the Teufelssee,<sup>123</sup> while another of the sisterhood waters her golden horses nightly on the shores of the Müggelsee.<sup>124</sup>

The Teufelssee princess emerges from a sunken castle in the depths of the lake and, according to legend, many of the lakes have swallowed up human dwellings in their waters. The town of Alt-Buckow is now at the bottom of the Schermützelsee,<sup>125</sup> apparently as the result of an earthslip. The so-called "Blumenthal" is rich in legends of lost towns and one of the manifestations which has nurtured these beliefs is the sound of bells rising from the depths:

Wer um die Mittagsstunde hier vorüberzieht, der  
hört aus Schlucht und See herauf ein Klingen und  
Läuten, und wer gar nachts des Weges kommt, wenn  
der Mond im ersten Viertel steht, der hat über  
Stille nicht zu klagen, denn seltsame Stimmen,  
Rufen und Lachen ziehen neben ihm her.<sup>126</sup>

Fontane happens on an explanation for the bells when, near Etzin at midday, he hears the curiously resonant croaking of the frogs, and there are doubtless comparable natural explanations for the other eerie sounds that emanate from lake and gorge after dark.<sup>127</sup>

To the "Blumenthal" Fontane attributes, "Etwas von dem Zauber Vinetas",<sup>128</sup> and of all these legendary sunken towns Vineta is the archetype. The supposed site of the town lies off the island of Usedom near Swinemünde. Fontane was familiar with the legend from a very early age, indeed as a small child he had already passed over

123 N XII, p.104.

124 Ibid. p.110.

125 N X, p.96f.

126 Ibid. p.359.

127 Cf. Ellernklipp where Fontane uses the motif of a ghostly voice calling from a ravine.

128 N X, p.359.

the spot in a boat.<sup>129</sup> The idea of Vineta, of human beings existing in a different, mysteriously silent element has a strong imaginative appeal, as does the idea of the now turbulent and murderous, now glassy and impassive lakes. Fontane expresses the magical appeal of these lakes in an early poem, "Der Wettersee"<sup>130</sup> (1844), and in "Damentoast" (1863) he invokes "Vinetas Glocken" as part of his ideal balladesque landscape.<sup>131</sup> The most fruitful of the mysterious Mark lakes for his creative writing was the Stechlinsee, the central symbol in his last novel, Der Stechlin.<sup>132</sup> He also had plans to use the Vineta motif in Die Likedeeler,<sup>133</sup> and actually did incorporate it into Graf Petöfy<sup>134</sup> and into Effi Briest. Effi mentions the sunken town as an object of romantic longing to her in her shackled and prosaic life at Kessin, and Crampas takes up the allusion, using it as part of his subtle seductive approach to her through her imaginative sensibility.<sup>135</sup>

Despite the abundance of irrational and supernatural material to be found in Fontane's early writings attention has been drawn repeatedly to his rational and realistic approach to his subject matter in this phase of his creative activity. H. Roch comments on the Wanderungen,

... das ist kein romantisches Wandern wie bei Eichendorff und seinem Taugenichts, ohne Mandolinenklang und Marmorbilder, die bei Mondschein zum Leben erwachen. In der Mark erwachen nachts höchstens die Frösche. Bei Fontane geht

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129 N XIV, p.129

130 N XX, p.91.

131 Ibid. p.557.

132 Cf. below, chap.VIII, p.247ff.

133 H V, p.907.

134 N II, p.61.

135 N VII, p.286.

alles bürgerlicher und realer zu.<sup>136</sup>

This observation supports J. Fürstenau's assertion,

Nur selten vermag Fontane aus seiner eigenen Verstandesklarheit und Bewußtheit heraus in uns die Sphäre zum Klingen zu bringen, in der die zweifelnde Vernunft schweigt und der Glaube beginnt. Bisweilen läßt er märkische Sagen aus dem Atmosphärischen der Stimmung erwachsen, um dann das Trugbild mit einer Handbewegung zu zerteilen.<sup>137</sup>

G. Rodger comments in similar vein on the ballads:

Fontane's healthy, 'realistic' type of romanticism therefore conceived ballad themes less in terms of love or the supernatural than in terms of history.<sup>138</sup>

There is in fact considerable evidence to suggest that Fontane's attitude to the whole area of supernatural lore and legend was sceptical. A letter to his sister betrays an almost cynical attitude to the material he sought to assemble for the Wanderungen:

Daß die ganze Leistungskraft von Dreetz-Sieversdorf-Koeritz auf einen einzigen totgeschlagenen Franzosen hinausläßt, ist freilich wenig, doch soll man Gott für alles danken und so meinetwegen auch für diesen 'stillen, ruhigen Leichnam'. Sieh aber doch nach, ob Du nicht noch etwas Begleitendes resp. Erklärendes herausdrücken kannst; die einfache Tatsache ist doch zu mager. Wahr braucht es nicht zu sein, der 'Volksmund' hat das Vorrecht zu lügen, soviel er will, es heißt dann 'Sage' und wird von den Gelehrten oder Käuzen meines Schlages mit höchstem Respekt behandelt. Trommle also in Dreetz noch ein paar Menschen zusammen: einen Schäferknecht, der sich absteigend entwickelt hat, eine weise Frau, einen wahrsagenden Imbécile, einer davon wird doch wohl zum Donnerwetter so viel Erfindungskraft haben, um herauszukriegen warum dieser arme Franzose eigentlich totgeschlagen worden ist. Ich selbst

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136 H. Roch, Fontane. Berlin und das 19. Jahrhundert, Berlin, 1962, p.133.

137 J. Fürstenau, op.cit., p.145.

138 G. Rodger, "Fontane's Conception of the Folk Ballad", Modern Language Review 53, 1958, p.49f.

kann und darf nichts erfinden, einmal weil es gegen das 'historische Gewissen' ist ...<sup>139</sup>

His appeal to his sister is for some juicy morsel of local gossip or superstition whose fictional nature he is quite ready to accept. All that seems to interest him on this occasion is that he finds something that will please his readers. In a letter written on the following day, his interest in the subject matter itself seems more genuine and betrays perhaps a degree of regret at his cynicism in the previous letter. He is still concerned above all however to find something "Pikantes".<sup>140</sup>

Elsewhere, in the Wanderungen themselves, there is evidence of his sceptical attitude to the legends he hears on his travels. He is well aware of the natural human tendency to embroider on the truth about historical figures and incidents,

Es ist sehr interessant zu verfolgen, in welcher Art und nach welchen Gesetzen das Volk sich seine Helden ausstaffiert. Es verföhrt dabei lediglich nach einem ihm inwohnenden romantischen Bedürfnis und ist gegen nichts gleichgültiger als gegen den wirklichen historischen Sachverhalt.<sup>141</sup>

His account of the early history of the Quitzows is followed by the comment:

Das waren zurückliegende, gelegentlich auch wohl mit Sagenhaftem ausgeschmückte Vorgänge...<sup>142</sup>

and the story of the 'Krautentochter' is likewise embellished and retold with,

139 Quoted by H.-H. Reuter in Fontane I, Berlin, 1968, p.363.

140 Ibid.

141 N X, p.418.

142 N XIII, p.11.

allerlei Zusätzen aus eigener erregter Phantasie.<sup>143</sup>

On several occasions Fontane uses his superior historical knowledge to dispel the credence afforded to local legends. An examination of the chronology of events relating to the Sparren-Glocke proves conclusively that it could not, as tradition has it, have been booty from Sparr's Turkish campaign.<sup>144</sup> Fontane prefaces his chapter entitled, "Zwei 'heimlich Enthauptete'" ironically:

Geschichten von 'Enthaupteten' wie wir sie vorstehend in dem Falkenreher Kapitel erzählt, am liebsten aber von 'heimlich Enthaupteten', haben hierzulande immer eine Rolle gespielt und sich neben den 'weißen Frauen' und 'vergifteten Apfelsinen' in unseren Volkssagen erhalten,<sup>145</sup>

before going on to refute both legends by demonstrating how they in fact arose. With a comparable combination of good humour and unwillingness to be enveloped in the ambiguous mists of superstition he disputes local claims about the magical healing powers of the Spree,<sup>146</sup> and about the unpropitious nature of encounters with ancient crones.<sup>147</sup> He also uncompromisingly refutes the legend that Hans Kohlhaas' wife is buried at Stolpe.<sup>148</sup>

His scepticism extends to a critical appraisal not only of other people's superstitious beliefs but also, on occasion, of his own. Looking into the mysterious depths of the Schermützelsee, he does perceive what appear to be the remains of the legendary submerged village, but he is self-critical enough to admit,

143 Ibid. p.204.

144 N X, p.423.

145 N XI, p.346.

146 N XII, p.15.

147 Ibid. p.31.

148 N XIII, p.390.



Ich sah es auch wirklich, aber mit dem Bewußtsein, daß es Täuschung sei.<sup>149</sup>

Another attempted excursion beyond mundane reality has an even more prosaic end. Fontane recounts with self-irony how his ambitions to be put on guard duty at Charlottenburg after dark were fulfilled, but his hopes of then catching a glimpse of the 'White Lady' proved vain, and because of the draughty location,

Die Folge davon, war prosaischerweise, daß ich statt mit der 'Weißen Frau' mit einer drei Tage später sich einstellenden dicken Backe abschloß.<sup>150</sup>

There are other occasions in the Wanderungen when Fontane, the rational historian, supplants Fontane, the imaginative writer; where he pauses to discourse with scholarly precision on the origins of irrational material he has unearthed. The reader is given, for example, the benefit of his researches into the geological origins of the mysterious Mark lakes.<sup>151</sup> In considering the Lehnin prophecy Fontane's approach is again rational and objective: having given a detailed account of the recorded versions of the prophecy he goes on to consider its more recent historical and political implications.<sup>152</sup> An entire chapter is devoted to analysing the historical causes for the proliferation of secret societies in the eighteenth century. Fontane sees the blossoming of mysticism and psuedo-mysticism at this period primarily in political terms:

das Wesen der Sache lag darin, Macht zu äußern in einer Zeit, wo das Individuum machtlos war.<sup>153</sup>

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149 N X, p.97.

150 N XV, p.144.

151 N X, p.97.

152 N XI, p.72ff.

153 Ibid. p.287ff.

He furnishes factual explanations of the various methods which the societies employed to simulate spiritual manifestations,<sup>154</sup> and goes on to give an account of the life of Johann Georg Schrepfer, one of the spiritualists involved, because he is a typical 'Zeiterscheinung' of the period.<sup>155</sup> On a smaller, less obtrusive scale, other rational explanations of apparently supernatural phenomena are inserted from time to time. Legends of 'die wilde Jagd' and the Witches' Sabbath may have arisen from the weird, unearthly sounds issuing from herds of wild boar on summer nights,<sup>156</sup> just as the uncanny croaking of frogs may have been the basis for Vineta legends.<sup>157</sup> These natural explanations of supernatural phenomena correspond to Wilhelm Schwartz's view of the origins of myth and legend.<sup>158</sup>

At times in his explanations of apparently irrational phenomena Fontane appears quite naturally and willingly to adopt a rational, sceptical approach. His desire for knowledge and clarity takes precedence. At other times, it seems as if he is forced to take a sceptical view in spite of himself. He is pulled back, against his will, into the world of prosaic reality. He expresses this duality in terms of the antithesis between poetry and prose.<sup>159</sup> His expectations of Fahrland have been coloured by the romantic terms of Schmidt von Werneuchen's poem, and the reality he finds there comes as a disappointment to him:

Dieser Schilderung nach mußten wir eine Wolfsschlucht  
oder irgendeine Lieblingsstätte des wilden Jägers  
erwarten, aber eine mit Kropfweiden bepflanzte  
Niederung, die im Sommer den Charakter einer Wiese,

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154 Ibid. p.292f.

155 Ibid. p.294f.

156 N X, p.365.

157 N XI, p.330.

158 Cf. W. Schwartz: Der heutige Volksglaube und das alte Heidentum, Berlin, 1850.

159 Cf. above, chap.II, p.9, note 4.

im Herbst und Frühjahr den eines Luches hat, war alles, was sich unserem Auge bot. Prosaische Tristheit anstelle poetischer Gruslichkeit.<sup>160</sup>

On his visit to Kleist's grave too any poetical atmosphere is swiftly dispelled. He arrives there at the same time as a typical petit-bourgeois family party from the suburbs. The daughter's aspiring suitor seeks to make capital out of the situation by referring to Das Käthchen von Heilbronn in an attempt to flatter the object of his affections:

Er begann mit Heinrich von Kleists Käthchen, das alle sonderbarerweise kannten, und gebrauchte dabei den Ausdruck 'holdseliges Geschöpf'. Aber darin versah er es durchaus und Anna, die das Prinzip der 'Erziehung von Anfang an' aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach von der Mutter adoptiert hatte, replizierte scharf: 'Ich weiß nicht, Herr Behm, was Sie so nennen. Ich find' es bloß unnatürlich, immer so nachlaufen und sich alles gefallen lassen. Und es verdirbt bloß die Männer, die schon nichts taugen.'<sup>161</sup>

The world of romantic poetry is dismissed without ceremony, in highly prosaic terms. The same mentality is reflected for Fontane in the milieu itself in which such people live. He records at length, and with aversion, the pure functionality and total lack of aesthetic appeal in Wedding. The detail,

Man will keine Schwalbe am Sims- sie bringen Ungeziefer<sup>162</sup>

exemplifies the sterile, petit-bourgeois approach to life. The swallow,<sup>163</sup> the sign of grace, the bringer of good fortune has been banned. Life has been reduced to strictly prosaic dimensions, no

160 N XI, p.207

161 N XIII, p.387.

162 N XI, p.153.

163 Cf. below, chap.IV, p.93f.

transfiguration or escape from "Nützlichkeit und Nüchternheit" is possible. Man has even gone so far as to tamper with nature and in the case of the Jordansee, originally one of the mysterious 'Teufelsseen', its magic, its uncanny atmosphere has been destroyed by man's attempts to clean it up and impose his prosaic order on it.<sup>164</sup> To describe his departure from one of Prince Friedrich Karl's brilliant soirées at Dreilinden Fontane employs not the poetry/prose motif, but the analogous antithesis of fairytale and reality.<sup>165</sup>

Aufbruch und Abschied folgten und ehe noch die Festeslichter in Dreilinden erloschen waren, blitzten auch schon wieder die Signal- und Bahnlichter auf, die die streng und eisern gezogene Linie der Realität uns zeigend, uns zugleich zurückbegleiteten aus dem Märchen in die Wirklichkeit.<sup>166</sup>

A common factor in all these instances of the denial of an irrational or poetical dimension (except in the Fahrland episode) is that this rejection is brought about by the victory of the modern, metropolitan and industrialised world over older values. A new social class, the bourgeoisie, has grown up in the city and has developed a mentality of its own, orientated towards materialistic values and a narrow, inflexible sense of propriety. The old leisured, cultured world of Prussian royalty, as exemplified by the Prince's soirées is threatened by industrial reality, seen just outside the walls of Schloß Dreilinden in the form of the railway.

As is so often the case with Fontane however, it would be wrong

164 N X, p.100: "Der schönste See derart im nördlichen Deutschland war vielleicht der Jordansee auf der Insel Wollin. Still, dunkel, einsam, von Kiefern eingeschlossen, lag er da... Guter Wille und wenig Geschmack haben dies kostbare Stück Natur zerstört. Die Baumstümpfe sind fort und die Nymphäen auch. Statt ihrer ist ein Kahn da, der nun über die glatte, prosaisch gewordene Fläche hingleitet, als wär' es ein See wie jeder andere."

165 Cf. above, chap.II, p.9.

166 N XIII, p.348

to see his judgment of the effects of industrialisation on the old world in black and white terms. He in fact welcomed the new and vital impulse given to building in the city as a result of the prosperity which industry brought. He writes enthusiastically of modern industrial architecture in the Oranienburger Vorstadt, where good taste and aesthetic considerations have not been ignored as they have in Wedding, so that here it is not simply a question of the outlook of a particular social class. Wedding is seen by Fontane to typify all that is bad in the traditional Mark mentality. He waxes lyrical about the royal iron works and the factory chimneys of Egels and Borsig, for they are the products of imagination as well as necessity, and he compares Wedding very unfavourably with the newer suburb.<sup>167</sup> Fontane is not opposed to the new industrial face of Berlin as such, but is unpleasantly affected by such aspects of it as force a prosaic approach to life into the foreground. In the face of the bourgeois invasion he is reluctantly constrained on occasion to reject and deny the other world of poetry and the imagination. Irrational and supernatural forces are superseded by the demands of mundane reality in a new social and economic order.

In his poem, "Die Brück'am Tay",<sup>168</sup> Fontane attempts to reconcile

167 N XI, p.152f, "Der sogenannte 'Wedding' beginnt und an die Stelle der Fülle, des Reichtums, des Unternehmungsgelüsts treten die Bilder jener prosaischen Dürftigkeit, wie sie dem märkischen Sande ursprünglich eigen sind. Kunst, Wissenschaft, Bildung haben in diesem armen Land einen schwereren Kampf gegen die widerstrebende Natur zu führen gehabt, als vielleicht irgendwo anders, und in gesteigerter Dankbarkeit gedenkt man jener Reihenfolge organisatorischer Fürsten, die seit anderthalb Jahrhunderten Land und Leute umgeschaffen, den Sumpf und den Sand in ein Fruchmland verwandelt und die Rohheit und den Ungeschmack zur Sitte und Bildung herangezogen haben."

168 N XX, p.165.

the two worlds.<sup>169</sup> The Tay Railway Bridge disaster of 1879 is brought about in the poem by the evil spells of Macbeth's witches. Supernatural spirits punish man for attempting to defy the elements by means of modern technology. Fontane grafts a familiar motif from folk tradition on to the account of an accident which was in fact caused by faulty workmanship on the bridge. Vengeance is wrought on man for his presumptuousness in daring to pit his wits against the elements. The central section of the poem, by its breathless rhythm, effectively conveys the realistic side of the situation: the train rushing along at first and then struggling against the storm to reach its destination. Onomatopoeic lines, such as:

Ein fester Kessel ein doppelter Dampf  
Die bleiben Sieger in solchem Kampf

happily combine the diction of the worlds of modern technology and of the traditional ballad. The introductory and concluding sections, where the witches speak, are less convincing. Apart from the incantatory line,

Tand, Tand  
Ist das Gebilde von Menschenhand,

the witches' words sound artificial, and their presence seems altogether superfluous. Fate in a less tangible and recognisable form might have been more acceptable. It is nevertheless interesting that Fontane made this not entirely disastrous attempt to reconcile the two worlds of the supernatural past and the scientific present. It is significant too

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169 In 1895 also Fontane was planning a further attempt to reconcile these two worlds, in his projected novel "Die Likedeeler", the story of pirates (fifteenth century communists) whose aim was to redistribute wealth more equitably, cf. his account of the novel in a letter to Hertz, 16th March 1895, FH no.542: "Er weicht aber doch ganz davon [ von allem..., was ich bis her geschrieben habe ] ab, indem er eine Aussöhnung sein soll zwischen meinem ältesten und romantischsten Balladenstil und meiner modernsten und realistischsten Romanschreiberei."

that he saw fit to set the attempt in the wilds of Scotland, in a landscape which inhabitants of the continent readily associated with ghosts and supernatural phenomena. To write such a poem about the newly opened Stadtbahn in the modern, metropolitan surroundings of Berlin would have demanded a far greater, probably impossibly great, leap of imagination from the reader.

Fontane's scepticism therefore, his rational approach to irrational and supernatural phenomena, which emerges at intervals in the course of the Wanderungen is partly dictated by his own inclinations as an amateur historian and thorough researcher into his material, and partly by the undeniable inroads which the modern world was making into the traditional landscape of the Mark. To be weighed against this peck of scepticism, however, there is approaching a bushel of acceptance of the irrational material. Fontane was interested in legend and folklore, not simply as material for scientific dissection and refutation. He acknowledges its worth and its existence in its own right on several occasions:

die Sage hat immer recht, selbst dann noch, wenn sie  
unrecht hätte.<sup>170</sup>

or again,

Aber das mangelnde historische Fundament soll uns  
nicht undankbar machen gegen die Sage selbst, die,  
sie sei jung oder alt, verwirrend oder die rechten  
Wege führend, um ihrer selbst willen ihre Be-  
rechtigung hat.<sup>171</sup>

Even in the case of the highly improbable Sparr legend Fontane mitigates his sceptical comment and leaves his options open:

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170 N XVII, p.416.

171 N X, p.77.

'Ich glaub' es auch nicht, aber man kann doch nicht wissen.'<sup>172</sup>

He recognises man's lack of competence to pass final judgment in such matters.

Fontane's early writing, his travel journals and poems and his later autobiographical works which refer to the early period of his life provide a many-faceted record of his experience of and attitude to irrational and supernatural material from an early age. Much of the local legendary material of the Wanderungen was almost immediately reworked and incorporated into his first novel, Vor dem Sturm. An examination of this early evidence indicates clearly also that many irrational motifs in the later novels can be traced back to Fontane's formative years. Not only the irrational material itself is familiar to him from an early age, but it is also clear that he was inclined to formulate some of his most significant ideas and experiences in irrational terms. The ironic realist, who was to observe the workings of the society in which he lived with a clear and sceptical gaze, was from the outset deeply aware of the existence of forces and phenomena whose influences man could neither analyse nor deny.



## III

Vor dem Sturm

In his first novel, Vor dem Sturm, Fontane uses irrational and supernatural elements to an extent seldom repeated in his later works. Edgar Groß speaks of the "Fontanesche' Atmosphäre voll Naturerleben, Sagen, Aberglauben und Spuk"<sup>1</sup> which permeates the work. This insistence on forces and phenomena beyond the control of man is one of the main strengths of the novel although, when excessive, it also constitutes one of its weaknesses. The supernatural, however, functions on several levels. It does not merely create an atmosphere and provide local colour, it also serves on a cosmic level to suggest an order beyond man which rules his fate, and on a purely human level to develop characterisation as Fontane portrays the differing attitudes of his characters to the irrational phenomena that confront them.

Fontane's intention in writing Vor dem Sturm was to present an accurate picture of the people of the Mark Brandenburg at the period preceding the national uprising of 1813.<sup>2</sup> He was aiming at a complete

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1 N I, p.643.

2 Ibid.: "Ohne Mord und Brand und große Leidenschaftsgeschichten hab ich mir einfach vorgesetzt eine Anzahl märkischer (d.h. deutsch-wendischer, denn hierin liegt ihre Eigentümlichkeit)

picture that would embrace all social classes. His presentation of the common people with their superstitions and their love of spine-chilling tales suggests a world in which the supernatural is not only widely accepted as part of everyday life but is indeed welcomed and encouraged as a source of interest and excitement. The local girls at their spinning wheels are "voll Spuk- und Gespensterbedürfnis"<sup>3</sup> and are delighted to dwell on Marie's peculiarities and see her as a fairy child. In the same way Hoppenmarieken is styled 'witch'.<sup>4</sup> Popular superstition is strong and provides a source of genuine concern and fear, as is seen, for example, in the parallel cases of the two Kubalke sisters. Maline is afraid of 'der alte Matthias',<sup>5</sup> the resident ghost at Hohen-Vietz, and Eve believes in the 'schwarze Frau' that haunts her mistress's home at Guse.<sup>6</sup> These instances of superstition are presented sympathetically and provide local colour. Fontane however allows himself to poke fun at local superstition when he reports, tongue in cheek, on Kümmeritz:

Kümmeritz, der wenigstens einen Teil seines wendischen Aberglaubens bei den Soldaten gelassen hatte, schmunzelte vor sich hin und sagte dann: 'Sahnepott, keine Dummheiten. Immer räsönabel. Wer toj ist, ist tot. Spuken kann er; aber sterben muß er.'<sup>7</sup>

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- 2 (Contd.) Figuren aus dem Winter 1812 und 1813 vorzuführen, Figuren wie sie sich damals fanden und im wesentlichen auch noch jetzt finden. Es war mir nicht um Konflikte zu tun, sondern um Schilderungen davon, wie das große Fühlen, das damals geboren wurde, die verschiedenartigsten Menschen vorfand, und wie es auf sie wirkte. Es ist das Eintreten einer großen Idee, eines großen Moments in an und für sich sehr einfachen Lebenskreisen."
- 3 Ibid. p.67.
- 4 Ibid. p.56.
- 5 Ibid. p.222.
- 6 Ibid. p.488.
- 7 Ibid. p.50.

In his exploitation of the popular taste for the supernatural Fontane finds ample opportunity to exercise his skill as a storyteller. In the course of Vor dem Sturm he recounts numerous anecdotes similar in type to those recorded in his Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg. The traditional history of Matthias von Vitzewitz,<sup>8</sup> the legend of the 'Türkenglocke'<sup>9</sup> and the story of the miracle-working statue of Mary<sup>10</sup> are among these. The tendency of the populace to mythologise is strongly emphasised at the end of the short anecdote about the sinking tombstone in the Hohen-Vietz church. Fontane describes the phenomenon in sober realistic terms but ends with the comment,

Das Volk sagte: 'Da liegt der alte Matthias; der geht immer tiefer'<sup>11</sup>,

giving expression to the less rational approach of the community. Thus the fates of the more important characters in the novel are worked out against a background rich in popular superstition and supernatural beliefs.

Supernatural and irrational elements in Vor dem Sturm serve to a large extent to provide it, loose and rambling in form as it often is, with a measure of structural solidity.<sup>12</sup> They have three main functions in the structure of the novel. Firstly a framework is provided by the carefully engineered progressive fulfilment of the enigmatic prophecy found at the end of the second chapter:

8 Ibid. p.18.

9 Ibid. p.32.

10 Ibid. p.174.

11 Ibid. p.34.

12 Cf. A. Bosshart, Theodor Fontanes historischer Roman, Winterthur, 1957, p.40: "Durch Träume, Ahnungen und Gesichte wird übrigens nicht zuletzt die lockere Komposition des Ganzen vordeutend und zurückweisend auf eigentümlich schwerelose Weise zusammengehalten."

Und eine Prinzessin kommt ins Haus,  
 Da löscht ein Feuer den Blutfleck aus,  
 Der auseinander getane Stamm  
 Wird wieder eins, wächst wieder zusamm'  
 Und wieder von seinem alten Sitz  
 Blickt in den Morgen Haus Vitzewitz.<sup>13</sup>

This prophecy is associated in the end with the star leitmotif which has its origin in the line,

Und kann auf Sternen gehen.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, in addition to the fulfilment of this particular prophecy there are numerous references to fate and to signs, omens and portents which foreshadow future action and, whether fulfilled or not, they provide a sense of overall pattern and order in the universe of the novel. Finally, the reiteration of specific supernatural themes in different contexts serves to link individual episodes to each other, and provides a unity of tone.

The theme of the fulfilment of the prophetic Hohen-Vietz rhyme can often be traced in its development through Lewin's dreams. From the beginning of the novel Lewin is depicted as a romantic dreamer<sup>15</sup> and it is appropriate that it should be through the irrational, mysterious medium of dreams that his fate is gradually revealed to him and to the reader. His affinity with the dream world is underlined when Kathinka says she would create him interpreter of dreams at court.<sup>16</sup> This in turn suggests an affinity between him and Marie:

Sie [Marie] sah in die Welt wie in einen Traum  
 und schritt traumhaft darin umher.<sup>17</sup>

13 N I, p.19.

14 Ibid. p.9.

15 Ibid. p.415.

16 Ibid. p.406.

17 Ibid. p.71.

The Hohen-Vietz rhyme is first quoted at the end of the second chapter,<sup>18</sup> where it appears as a piece of local superstition with no obvious bearing on reality. By the end of Chapter 45 half of its prediction has come to pass. Fire has destroyed the chapel haunted by the repentant fratricide, Matthias. At this point Berndt von Vitzewitz voices explicitly the sentiment that there may be more to popular superstition than meets the eye:

Auch in ihm, von weither herangeweht, liegen Keime  
der Offenbarung.<sup>19</sup>

The expectation that the other half of the prophecy will come true is thus aroused. Berndt's utterance foreshadows the future development of the novel. The course of events indicated by the rhyme leads to the implicit fulfilment of the prophecy at the beginning of Chapter 78 where,

das Natürliche, das von Uranfang an Bestimmte hatte  
sich vollzogen.<sup>20</sup>

It is explicitly acknowledged as fulfilled in Chapter 81 where Marie marries Lewin, bringing fresh blood into the family.

To enrich and complement this simple structural basis Fontane develops the secondary complex of the star leitmotif which connects more and more closely the two people who are finally to be united. The motif has its origin in the last line of a verse Lewin reads on a gravestone in Bohlsdorf:

Und kann auf Sternen gehen.<sup>21</sup>

18 Ibid. p.19.

19 Ibid. p.363.

20 Ibid. p.609.

21 Ibid. p.9.

This line catches his imagination. Fontane underlines this fact too explicitly:

die letzte Zeile namentlich hatte einen tiefen Eindruck auf ihn gemacht, von dem er sich keine Rechenschaft geben konnte.

From this point on stars are frequently referred to in connection with Lewin's life as an aspiring lover. From an early stage<sup>22</sup> they are a link with Marie too, for as a child performer she had gold stars on her costume. Stars throughout symbolise an ideal of natural order and happiness, verging at times on a kind of divine grace. This idea is conveyed for example where Berndt comments to Lewin:

Über deiner Mutter Kindheit haben helle Sterne gestanden.<sup>23</sup>

The line that has so impressed Lewin lies dormant in his subconscious mind until it is recalled by various crises in his emotional life. At the end of Chapter 36<sup>24</sup> Lewin, "träumerisch", muses on the events of New Year's Day. He is torn by conflicting feelings of love and despair aroused by Kathinka. His desire for her is acute. Then he looks at the shimmering stars, remembers the magic line, and his passion for Kathinka fades. This is a first faint indication, that already in his subconscious mind Lewin is harbouring the remedy for his hopeless love. It is again when Lewin is emotionally upset by Kathinka, that the next link in the chain is forged.<sup>25</sup> This time Lewin has not just been musing, but has had a dream in which Marie, in a dress covered with stars, was marrying a young version of Graf Drosselstein. Enlarging on the dream in his letter to Renate, Lewin

22 Ibid. p.67.

23 Ibid. p.29.

24 Ibid. p.267.

25 Ibid. p.428.

also refers to Marie in the terms of the prophetic rhyme as a "Prinzessin".<sup>26</sup> The next reference to the gravestone verse comes in a context very closely connected with Marie.<sup>27</sup> When Lewin has recovered sufficiently to leave Bohlsdorf he first visits the inscribed gravestone and then immediately afterwards reads a letter from Marie in which she refers to the line, saying when she speaks it,

Mir ist dann immer, als wüchse ich und könnte fliegen.<sup>28</sup>

This strong emotional response corresponds closely to Lewin's and he repeats Marie's formulation as he rides home under benign and propitious stars, "die immer heller funkelten".<sup>29</sup> The final link in the chain leading to Lewin's realisation of his true feelings is provided again at a time of emotional stress, as Lewin, awaiting sentence, sleeps in his cell.<sup>30</sup> Before he falls asleep the sight of the stars reminds him of the line,

Und kann auf Sternen gehen.

He has a dream which gradually reveals him as bridegroom and Marie as bride. Thus the star motif has been exploited and leads Lewin to recognise the truth.

It can be argued that Fontane's attempt to impose a regular structure on his novel is forced and artificial, and that the themes which he has chosen to build on smack unhappily of romantic sentimentality. Allusions to and associations with the two verses are

26 Ibid. p.429.

27 Ibid. p.462.

28 Ibid. p.463.

29 Ibid. p.466.

30 Ibid. p.598.

completely absent from large sections of the book, for example in the digression on "Kastalia", and also during the action proper, the attack on Frankfurt and the thieving episodes. The systems of leit-motifs are thus not as fully integrated into the fabric of the work as they might be. On the other hand the choice of motifs with irrational, magical overtones is appropriate considering the important part played by the supernatural in the work. Fontane's relative lack of success may be attributed to lack of experience in controlling a medium over which in later works, such as Effi Briest, he had attained mastery.

In a less systematic way Fontane contrives to bind the action together by references to fate and omens. Even the title of the novel directs the reader's attention towards the future, endowing prophecy and portent with added significance. Many of the characters see what they take to be signs of imminent disaster. These phenomena are viewed with varying degrees of seriousness according to the context. In many cases they prove to be true pointers to the future. Renate, for example, when she tries to imagine a wedding procession, can see it only in black.<sup>31</sup> This foreshadows Tubal's death, which is also anticipated on two other occasions. Hirschfeldt's remark:

wer wankt und schwankt, wer unzuverlässig und unstedt  
ist, wer Gelöbnisse bricht, mit einem Worte, wer  
nicht Treue hält, der ist des Todes<sup>32</sup>

can clearly be applied to Tubal. Marie's fear for him<sup>33</sup> is equally prophetic. Hansen-Grell, the romantic poet, has clear premonitions of his own death.<sup>34</sup> The lead-pouring at New Year,<sup>35</sup> when Kathinka pours

31 Ibid. p.448.

32 Ibid. p.552.

33 Ibid. p.563.

34 Ibid. p.552.

35 Ibid. p.267.



an incomplete bridal wreath foretells the future accurately.

Prophecies of war and destruction are numerous. They occur in an historical context in the anecdote about the King of Sweden,<sup>36</sup> and in contemporary setting in the account of the red glow in the Schloßhof,<sup>37</sup> and of the Alt-Landsberger mowers' ominous activities.<sup>38</sup> Signs point not only to unpleasant events, but also, although less frequently, and only towards the end of the novel, to future happiness.

Leist remarks, on meeting a wedding party as he leaves Lewin recovering, " - das bedeutet Glück".<sup>39</sup> Hirschfeldt sees breaking ice as "ein gutes Zeichen",<sup>40</sup> and Maline, at the end of the novel, prevents Hansen-Grells's gravestone from being hidden saying, "das bedeutet Glück".<sup>41</sup> All these omens, later fulfilled, lend the events an air of inevitability. The characters' fates appear to be predetermined and not susceptible to human influence. This is particularly true of Tubal and Kathinka who seem predestined by heredity to bring unhappiness on themselves and others. Renate asserts about the Ladalinski family,

Es ist ein dunkles Haus, und was sie selbst nicht haben, das können sie niemand geben: Licht und Glück. Es war immer ihr Schicksal Liebe zu wecken, aber nicht Vertrauen.<sup>42</sup>

Marie too sees herself as indebted to fate and is concerned not to show ingratitude towards it.<sup>43</sup> In the end she finds her true destiny by fulfilling the verse prophecy. The aura of predestination that

36 Ibid. p.44.

37 Ibid. p.43.

38 Ibid. p.52.

39 Ibid. p.459.

40 Ibid. p.635.

41 Ibid. p.636

42 Ibid. p.487.

43 Ibid. p.246.

surrounds all the characters is strongest around Othegraven in whose case Fontane refers to the subject explicitly.<sup>44</sup> Othegraven resigns himself to his lot completely:

Und so werd ich denn lieblos durch dieses Leben gehen; denn nur die Seite des Daseins, die mir fehlt, hat Reiz für mich und zieht mich an. Und so ist mein Los beschlossen.<sup>45</sup>

He believes it to be foreordained and immutable.

In spite of this accentuated, reiterated theme of predestination, and the resultant impression that fate has an ineluctable grip on proceedings, Fontane's attitude to the various signs and omens which he presents to enforce this idea is by no means unambiguous. On two occasions he refers explicitly to the dubious nature of omens. His account of Renate's birth illustrates the unreliability of signs:

Es war im Mai 1795, ein Frühlingsregen sprühte, und das Zeichen des Bundes zwischen Gott und den Menschen, ein Regenbogen, stand verheißungsvoll über dem alten Hause. Aber die Verheißung, wenn sie dem Kinde gelten mochte, galt nicht dem Vater. Ein Allerschmerzliches blieb auch ihm, wie so vielen seiner Ahnen, unerspart.<sup>46</sup>

The second instance cited is that of the Lehnin prophecy. Lewin describes its content,

- alles sehr dunkel und unbestimmt, so daß man, wie so oft, bei einigem guten Willen auch gerade das Gegenteil herauslesen kann.<sup>47</sup>

Other signs are called into question by the irony with which they are presented. This is true of the account of the red glow in the Schloßhof supposedly prophesying war. Tante Schlorlemmer is sarcastic in

44 Ibid. p.242.

45 Ibid. p.247.

46 Ibid. p.24.

47 Ibid. p.427.

her reaction to it,

'Ein leichtes Prophezeien' --- 'Wir hatten Krieg  
in diesem Jahre und werden ihn mit in das Neue  
hinübernehmen.'

Lewin too treats these "Zeichen und Wunder" lightly, speaking scornfully of newspaper sensationalism.<sup>48</sup> Although Fontane builds up a considerable complex of omens and fateful signs, only once does he allow himself to endorse this pattern explicitly. On all other occasions he maintains his distance from these phenomena by presenting them indirectly as perceived through the mind of one of his characters, and by framing the experience in tentative terms. For example, Lewin asks himself about the beam of light before dawn,

'Soll es mir ein Zeichen sein?'<sup>49</sup>

At Ladalinski's reception it is only through the medium of Lewin's consciousness that the sign is admitted:

Es schien ihm alles ein Zeichen.<sup>50</sup>

Berndt also asks himself, after the unsuccessful attack on Frankfurt,

'Soll es mir ein Zeichen sein?'

and on considering the situation decides that he has seen it in over-dramatic terms. He concludes, rejecting highflown ideas of signs from above,

'-- es wird gewesen sein, wie es immer war und  
immer ist, ein bißchen gut ein bißchen böse.  
Arme kleine Menschennatur!'<sup>51</sup>

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48 Ibid. p.43.

49 Ibid. p.599.

50 Ibid. p.322.

51 Ibid. p.581.

Where the portent is not experienced by one of the characters, it is introduced in an indefinite, non-committal way, as for instance in the reference to the sledge sent to rescue Lewin:

Sie traten deshalb an den einspännigen Schlitten heran, den Bamme kurzweg, und vielleicht auch vorahnend, als 'Sargschlitten' bezeichnet hatte.<sup>52</sup>

There is only one occasion when Fontane is drawn from his uncommitted position. It is when he completes the development of the love theme between Marie and Lewin. Here he explicitly endorses the idea that an irresistible force has been directing the destinies of the characters:

Denn es war nur gekommen, was kommen sollte; das Natürliche, das von Uranfang an Bestimmte hatte sich vollzogen.<sup>53</sup>

It is clear throughout the novel that Fontane is presenting a world where predestination plays its part and there is an order superior to man's individual intentions, and it is unfortunate that Fontane feels compelled to make this direct statement, as if to ensure that the reader has grasped what is going on. It almost seems to be an attempt to explain and justify all the earlier references to fate and omens, as if they were not sufficiently telling in themselves, or as if he fears that he has detracted from their impact by not presenting them more positively.

Fontane's third linking technique involving supernatural themes can be observed in his treatment of motifs such as the White Lady or the Major's pew. Reiterated reference to the same or similar supernatural phenomena provides links between different sections of the

52 Ibid. p.606.

53 Ibid. p.609.

novel and also contributes to the general atmosphere. In some cases even the repetition of short phrases, such as, "wie eine Erscheinung",<sup>54</sup> is indicative of the supernatural bias which Fontane has put on the world of his work. He maintains,

Das Buch ist der Ausdruck einer bestimmten Welt-  
und Lebensanschauung<sup>55</sup>,

and it is through the use of similes such as the above, as well as through references to irrational phenomena, that Fontane indicates the attitudes which his characters have to the world about them, their superstition and ready acceptance of the existence of phenomena beyond their rational comprehension. The first, albeit fleeting, reference to the White Lady is in Chapter 34<sup>56</sup> where Kathinka, greatly impressed by a portrait of Wangeline von Burgsdorff<sup>57</sup> at Hohen-Ziesar, asks Berndt about it. His explanation is cut short and the subject is dropped until Lewin gives an account of another White Lady, during a visit to Lehnin.<sup>58</sup> The White Lady of the portrait is again mentioned briefly in Chapter 65<sup>59</sup> and the full story is finally told and discussed extensively in Chapter 66.<sup>60</sup> The White Lady is connected in each of these cases with the theme of love, usually unhappy love, and thus reflects the situation between the young Ladalinskis and the young Vitzewitzes. Fontane also uses the subject humorously. Lewin's account of the White Lady at Lehnin is witty, and the pedantic

54 Ibid. p.160, p.162, p.45.

55 FH no.280, 24th November 1878.

56 N I, p.233.

57 Fontane uses the alternative spelling 'Wangeline von Burgsdorf' in the title of his fragmentary poem. N XX, p.202.

58 N I, p.415f.

59 Ibid. p.513f.

60 Ibid. p.518f.

seriousness of the discussion of the authenticity of Wangeline's claims to be "der historisch beglaubigte Ursprung der 'weißen Frau'" is comical.

Although the voluntary death of the Itzenplitz Regiment's Major is a simple historical fact, it takes on supernatural connotations in the minds of the people, who view the place where it occurred with superstition and irrational fear. The story of the 'Majorstuhl' is first related in Chapter 5,<sup>61</sup> succinctly and with no other comment than:

Die Bank hatte einen Blutfleck seitdem, jeder mied die Stelle.

Here it appears as a piece of local history. In the second reference<sup>62</sup> to it the story takes on political significance. In a letter to Lewin inciting rebellion, Berndt quotes it as an illustration of Prussian spirit and patriotism. In Chapter 68 an exceedingly brief reminder of the 'Majorstuhl' again has political significance. It is a Sunday on the eve of the attack on Frankfurt, the church is crowded for the reading of an official proclamation on war and peace.

Nur der Majorstuhl dicht vor dem Altar war leer, wie immer.<sup>63</sup>

This single sentence is a subtle reminder of Prussia's earlier defeat. At a time when the general mood is one of excited optimism, it sounds a warning note, boding ill for the future. The two later references to the Major's pew occur in contexts which give them personal significance for individual characters, not political importance for

61 Ibid. p.33.

62 Ibid. p.398.

63 Ibid. p.529.

the historical plot. In both cases<sup>64</sup> they throw light on the subject of will power. In the first instance<sup>65</sup> Renate uses the example of Marie sitting in the dreaded pew to express her confidence in her friend's strength of will. In the second instance,<sup>66</sup> where Graf Ladalinski visits his son's coffin, the Major's abandonment of the will to live can be seen as parallel to a similar attitude in both Tubal and his father, although the motives of the Poles and Prussian are very different. The motifs of the White Lady and the Major's pew are only two of a number of supernaturally coloured themes which perform a linking function in the narrative. Other motifs, such as that of fire, and of Katharina von Gollmitz's tomb function similarly; they provide connections forward and backward in the novel, and thus tighten its structure.

The supernatural atmosphere of the novel is partly due to Fontane's creation of an aura of magic and mystery around two of the main characters, Marie Kniehase and Hoppenmarieken. Marie is depicted from her first appearance as someone out of the ordinary. We first see her, "wie eine Erscheinung",<sup>67</sup> silhouetted against the fire at Hohen-Vietz, deeply moved by an account of supernatural occurrences in the King of Sweden's palace. She is referred to repeatedly as "Zauberkind" and "Fee".<sup>68</sup> Lewin calls her his "Goldsternprinzessin".<sup>69</sup> Her affinity with elemental forces is indicated by her reaction to snowflakes<sup>70</sup> and to fire.<sup>71</sup> Everyone who knows

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64 Ibid. p.549, p.620.

65 Ibid. p.549.

66 Ibid. p.620.

67 Ibid. p.45.

68 Ibid. p.66, p.67, p.429, p.558.

69 Ibid. p.630.

70 Ibid. p.67.

71 Ibid. p.361.

her recognizes in her the "Zauber des Geheimnisvollen."<sup>72</sup> It is not just a quality attributed to her because of the exotic guise in which she first appeared in the village. It is an enduring and inherent part of her character:

Das Fremde und Geheimnisvolle, das sie von Anfang an gehabt hatte, blieb ihr, aber niemand wunderte sich mehr darüber.<sup>73</sup>

Her magical qualities are universally considered to be harmless and positive. Pastor Seidentopf voices the general opinion,

Sie wird ihm (Kniehase) Segen bringen, wie die Schwalben am Sims.<sup>74</sup>

Hoppenmarieken's mysterious characteristics, real or imagined, are of a totally different kind:

Man hielt sie für einen Mischling von Zwerg und Hexe.<sup>75</sup>

She is frequently referred to in supernatural terms as a "Kobold", "ein unheimliches Wesen";<sup>76</sup> at her funeral she is even compared to a "Märchenprinzessin".<sup>77</sup> Renate refers to her "Teufelskünste".<sup>78</sup> Lewin, allowing his imagination free rein, declares that she is a Wendic idol come to life. She will never die for "sie sei nur Spuk".<sup>79</sup> In spite of all these expressions of belief in her supernatural powers there is little real evidence in the text to suggest that they are based on

72 Ibid. p.67.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid. p.66.

75 Ibid. p.56.

76 Ibid. p.102.

77 Ibid. p.627.

78 Ibid. p.361.

79 Ibid. p.56.



more than figments of the local people's overactive imaginations. Turgany's horses shy away from her,<sup>80</sup> but this can be explained by the fact that she "sehr zu Unzeit, mit ihrem Hakenstock salutiert hatte." She professes to tell fortunes by cards but the validity of this is called in question by the suggestion that she used a mirror to help her in this activity.<sup>81</sup> The only truly inexplicable feat which she performs is her magical extinguishing of the Hohen-Vietz fire.<sup>82</sup> This action prevents the reader from dismissing the rest that is said about her as pure superstition. On the whole however Fontane, after building Hoppenmarieken up, half playfully, as a diabolical emanation from supernatural spheres, deflates this idea by explaining her behaviour in rational terms. For colourful effect he includes in the narrative the fact that she was said to have sat on her own grave for three nights after burial, but seems to question the validity of the story by indicating that it is hearsay.<sup>83</sup> The bird that sits on Hoppenmarieken's coffin may be taken at first to be a parallel phenomenon to the bird that was said to guard Marie once as a child.<sup>84</sup> This first impression is ironically weakened however when the bird's attentiveness is explained by the presence of wheat in the corpse's hand. In spite of her eminently human characteristics of greed, cunning and self interest, Hoppenmarieken yet retains an air of mystery which contributes to the general impression that the irrational has a well established place in the village life of the Mark Brandenburg.

The supernatural also provides a means of characterisation. In

80 Ibid. p.102.

81 Ibid. p.57.

82 Ibid. p.362.

83 Ibid. p.630.

84 Ibid. p.67.

Vor dem Sturm Fontane repeatedly faces his characters with irrational phenomena, and by revealing their varying attitudes to these he indicates their different outlooks on life. He thus builds up a picture rich in nuance of the Mark Brandenburg people at the time of the action. Lewin is depicted throughout as a romantic dreamer<sup>85</sup> whose mind is particularly receptive as far as irrational phenomena are concerned. The poetic, imaginative side of his nature is clearly revealed by his attitude to Hoppenmarieken:

Er liebte scherzhaft über sie zu phantasieren<sup>86</sup>,

and he invents all kinds of supernatural explanations of her existence. He is unreservedly superstitious, believing whole-heartedly in the ghost of old Matthias,<sup>87</sup> and in the Swedish king's vision;<sup>88</sup> he also sees the fact that his volume of Herder falls open at a poem on "falsche Liebe" as an ill omen.<sup>89</sup> This last incident can be easily explained by the fact that he had had the book open at the same page earlier in the day. Lewin prefers to view it as a portent, for his romantically coloured outlook makes the world seem full of signs to him.<sup>90</sup> He has a superstitious fear too of tempting providence, for example by writing about Matthias' ghost,<sup>91</sup> or by speaking to Marie about their happiness.<sup>92</sup> This fear of "Glück bereden" or "Glück berufen", is common to many characters throughout Fontane's works. It

85 Ibid. p.329, "Er las viel und stand ganz in den Anschauungen der romantischen Schule."

86 Ibid. p.56.

87 Ibid. p.224.

88 Ibid. p.45.

89 Ibid. p.384.

90 Ibid. p.322, p.599.

91 Ibid. p.363.

92 Ibid. p.630.

betrays in the characters a realistic mixture of primitive superstition and well-founded scepticism about the predictability of the course of human events.

Renate, although similar to her brother in character and temperament, does not accept the supernatural without reservation as he does. More orientated towards Christianity than Romanticism, she would prefer not to believe in ghosts and repeatedly asks Tante Schorlemmer to convince her of their non-existence. Renate believes in them in spite of herself. She acknowledges the existence of Matthias' ghost<sup>93</sup> and of the Black Lady at Guse,<sup>94</sup> and has a superstitious dread of seeing or dreaming about her dead aunt.<sup>95</sup> To reconcile herself to her involuntary, ingrained beliefs, she finds comfort in an idealistic view of inexplicable phenomena which she has found in a book.<sup>96</sup> The theoretical concept of ghosts as envoys from a purified, transcendental sphere appeals to her, but it is clear that it impresses her so deeply, not because it is true, but because it is a comforting idea which she would like to believe. Her whole attitude to the supernatural betrays uncertainty and fear in the face of forces beyond her ken. The romantic Lewin on the other hand readily accepts them as a normal part of life.

Berndt von Vitzewitz, born and bred in the Mark, unhesitatingly accepts the family ghost<sup>97</sup> and admits the existence of supernatural powers, as is seen when the first half of the prophecy is fulfilled.<sup>98</sup>

93 Ibid. p.224.

94 Ibid. p.488.

95 Ibid. p.447.

96 Ibid. p.224.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid. p.363.

He is, however, less naïve and wholehearted in his acceptance of signs from providence than his son. He is honest enough with himself to recognize that the outcome of the attack on Frankfurt is not a sign from above but the natural result of action prompted by confused human motives.<sup>99</sup>

Marie is shown to be less influenced by superstition and fear of the supernatural than the Vitzewitz family. Renate attributes to her the will-power to sit in the Major's pew.<sup>100</sup> She shares Lewin's superstitious fear of talking about their happiness,<sup>101</sup> and is deeply impressed by the King of Sweden's vision,<sup>102</sup> but apart from that there is little mention of her attitude to the supernatural. She is amply characterised through the remarks of others and belongs in any case rather on the side of the supernatural phenomena than on that of those affected by them.

Tante Amelie and Bamme are both characters who, lacking any orthodox religious belief, fall back on superstitious beliefs to provide them with a concept of order in the world. The ideas motivating Tante Amelie's actions are set out humorously in the account of her removal:

Am 31. Dezember zog sie, abergläubisch und tageswählerisch wie sie war, in die neuen Räume ein, den Silvestertag jedes Jahres, aus allerhand heidnisch-philosophischen Gründen, in denen sich Tiefsinn und Unsinn paarte, zu den ausgesprochenen Glückstagen zählend.<sup>103</sup>

Appropriately, she dies, as she has lived, by superstition. She

99 Ibid. p.581.

100 Ibid. p.549.

101 Ibid. p.630.

102 Ibid. p.45.

103 Ibid. p.124.

dies of fright at the sight of her own reflection which she mistakes for the ominous "Schwarze Frau".<sup>104</sup> Bamme is similarly superstitious and declares to Hirschfeldt the importance of this kind of belief to him:

'Sie sind abergläubisch, General.' 'Ja, das bin ich, Hirschfeldt, und ich habe meine Freude daran. Nehmen Sie mir das bißchen Aberglauben, so habe ich gar nichts und falle zusammen. Übrigens geht es den meisten Menschen so, und wem es nicht so geht, desto schlimmer. Sehen Sie die Schorlemmer. Die hat keinen Aberglauben. Aber was kommt dabei heraus? Eine Nußschale Weisheit und ein Scheffel Langeweile.'<sup>105</sup>

Tante Schorlemmer is the only character who resolutely denies the existence and validity of all the ghosts, visions and signs which the others claim to have experienced.<sup>106</sup> She is, however, revealed to be lacking in perception. Her blind faith shuts her eyes to the supernatural aspects of reality which are manifest to the other characters. With pedestrian common sense, she dismisses ghosts as figments of the imagination. On occasion, the reader is even tempted to believe her. Her attitude can be refreshing, but on the whole she is gently ridiculed for her firm beliefs which verge on prejudice; her inaccurate predictions about the future invalidate her claims to be a reliable authority. Renate expresses her own reservations,

'Ach, liebe Schorlemmer' --- 'es ist mit euch Herrnhutern ein eigen Ding. Ihr seid fromm, aber prophetisch seid ihr nicht.'<sup>107</sup>

In spite of her profession of strong Christian beliefs her manner of

104 Ibid. p.488.

105 Ibid. p.604.

106 Ibid. p.224, p.488, p.45.

107 Ibid. p.505.

practising them borders on the superstitious at times. Her recital of Christian verses and maxims in times of trouble bears a distinct resemblance to the superstitious practice of touching wood to ward off evil. This curious mixture of religion and superstition is seen more clearly in the cases of Seidentopf and Miekley. Seidentopf sees a special crucifix which he has been given primarily in pagan terms, as a talisman. It is only as an afterthought, and with an apparent effort, that Fontane translates this description of what it is to him into the Christian terms more appropriate to his calling:

Er sah es für nichts Geringeres als einen Talisman,  
oder, um christlicher zu sprechen, als einen segenspendenden Hort seines Hauses an.<sup>108</sup>

He is even more explicit in the case of Miekley,

der sich trotz seines Luthertums einen starken  
Glauben an Spuk- und Gespenstergeschichten bewahrt hatte.<sup>109</sup>

Tubal and Kathinka, being of Polish origin, are not steeped in the superstitious traditions of the Mark Brandenburg to the same extent as the other characters. On the whole they regard supernatural phenomena with indifference or mockery. Kathinka, mocking Lewin's attitude, asks him,

'Siehst du Gespenster?'<sup>110</sup>

When Tubal is locked in Hohen-Vietz church with Marie he displays no interest in her account of Katharina von Gollnitz's disturbed spirit, he is intent on living for the moment.<sup>111</sup> Both brother and sister

108 Ibid. p.92.

109 Ibid. p.52.

110 Ibid. p.393.

111 Ibid. p.534.

however do acknowledge the power of a fate beyond their control which is shaping their lives. Kathinka sees the force of destiny working on her through predetermining heredity:

'Wir erben alles: erst das Blut und dann die Schuld.  
Ich war immer meiner Mutter Kind. Nun bin ich es  
ganz.'<sup>112</sup>

Tubal too considers his family to be predestined to follow its unhappy course:

'Es fehlt uns etwas in den Herzen der Menschen, das  
ist unser Verhängnis.'<sup>113</sup>

The important functions of the supernatural in Vor dem Sturm have been examined. In some respects, however, Fontane has overindulged his taste for irrational phenomena. According to V.J. Günther,

--- diese Zeichen, das Erscheinen von Geistern, das gespenstische Leuchten in verlassenen Sälen und andere verwandte Phänomene, sind allzusehr auf der Ebene des Schauerromans angesiedelt. Darin findet sich noch ein Nachklang der Trivialromantik (etwa in den Blutflecken auf der Kirchbank u.s.w.).<sup>114</sup>

Gravestones and coffins feature in the novel to an extent scarcely justified purely by the strength of local superstition. The characters spend a disproportionate amount of their time in churches, often in the company of corpses, or at least in contemplation of tombs in an atmosphere of high emotion. At the end of Chapter 7<sup>115</sup> Sahnepott describes the scene in the church at Haselberg where the French crucify a corpse's mummified remains. There are elements of humour in this account, provided by Sahnepott's naïve earnestness,

112 Ibid. p.426.

113 Ibid. p.510.

114 V.G. Günther, Das Symbol im Erzählerischen Werk Fontanes, Bonn, 1967, p.32.

115 N I, p.53.

which rescue it from falling into the category of "Trivialromantik". In Chapter 42 Lewin visits Johanna Susemihl's grave at the convent church.<sup>116</sup> At the end of the following Chapter Hirschfeldt evokes the scene of his visit to his dead brother in the church at Plaa.<sup>117</sup> In Chapter 79 Graf Ladalinski visits his son's corpse in the church at Hohen-Vietz.<sup>118</sup> This Chapter is headed, "Wie bei Plaa", to point out that these are parallel situations. The Countesses Seherr-Thoß and Zierotin are gripped with fear on being left in Lehnin church alone.<sup>119</sup> Marie and Tubal, locked in Hohen-Vietz church, spend the time examining tombstones.<sup>120</sup> Although each of these episodes may be justifiable in itself, especially those involving Hirschfeldt and Ladalinski, the cumulative effect gives the novel a morbid bias which is alien to its true spirit and intention. References to Bamme's necrophilia<sup>121</sup> might be expected to increase this bias, but in this case Fontane has combatted the danger of morbidity with humour. For example, at the dinner party in Chapter 22 Bamme brings up the subject only in order to relate a witty anecdote.

There are some anti-romantic elements in the novel, passages where Fontane deliberately uses romantic convention only to discredit it subsequently, and observe it mockingly with the eye of the rational realist. This is the case when Bamme takes a superstitious dislike to a serving boy in an inn because he has a strange white mark in one eye and looks "unheimlich".<sup>122</sup> Berndt laughs at Bamme and explains the phenomenon in a practical, down to earth way:<sup>123</sup>

116 Ibid. p.327.

117 Ibid. p.351.

118 Ibid. p.620.

119 Ibid. p.413.

120 Ibid. p.527.

121 Ibid. p.133, p.148, p.626.

122 Ibid. p.545.

123 Ibid. p.548.



the boy is the smith's son, and a spark has damaged his eye. Although there is some justification for Günther's criticism that there is an excess of romantic, supernatural symbolism, there are nonetheless strong traces of what Groß refers to as Fontane's "Entwicklung vom romantischen Schein zum Wirklichkeitssinn."<sup>124</sup> Whilst employing manifestly romantic conventions Fontane at the same time tends to distance himself from them subsequently, and regard them with gentle irony. He avoids going too far in this respect in Vor dem Sturm however, as its structure is dependent on the working out of a prophecy with strong supernatural connotations.

Although there are considerable sections of the novel, especially those concerned with literature and with political action, where the supernatural has little significance, and the attempt to unify the rambling structure of the work through a set of irrational and supernatural themes is rather forced and only partially successful, Fontane has, however, used supernatural elements effectively to endow Vor dem Sturm with a unique and compelling atmosphere. This atmosphere derives from Fontane's curiously ambivalent attitude to his supernatural subject matter. On the one hand he fills his novel with reference to and anecdotes about irrational phenomena but on the other hand he constantly dissociates himself from this matter, presents it at second hand, through the mouths and eyes of his characters, or treats it with gentle irony. The varying attitudes of the characters to these phenomena is indicative of the ambiguity of reality as seen and represented by Fontane. His organisation of supernatural themes into patterns to bind the work together and provide its eighty-two chapters with an ordered and aesthetically satisfactory form shows his first experimentation in a technique which he was to refine in his later works. V.J. Günther recognises the importance of Vor dem Sturm

as an early work, but an early work of promise:

Ist in diesem ersten Roman Fontanes im Gegensatz zu den späteren Romanen vielleicht noch allzuviel romantische Märchensymbolik zu spüren, so ist in der Technik der aufeinander bezogenen Verweise schon<sup>125</sup> durchaus die spätere Gestaltungsweise zu bemerken.

It provides an interesting early manifestation of Fontane's technique of incorporating into his works a complex of cross-references, of suggestive detail pointing to the future action, a technique which is one of the most typical features of his subsequent novels.

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125 V.J. Günther, *op.cit.*, p.31.

## IV

The Crime Stories

Fontane's four crime stories, Grete Minde, Ellernklipp, Unterm Birnbaum, and Quitt were written within the span of just over a decade, (1880-91), that is during the first half of his twenty years of creative writing as a novelist (1878-98). Although Schach von Wuthenow and Irrungen Wirungen were also written during this earlier period, the main body of Fontane's most notable writing as a social novelist (Unwiederbringlich, Frau Jenny Treibel, Effi Briest, Stechlin) was not produced until after the completion of Quitt, his final and least successful crime story.

These four works are not crime stories in the conventional, modern sense. In them attention is focused not on discovering the identity of the criminal, but on an examination of his motives, and of his reactions to his own guilt. They are psychological studies of four individuals who are forced into crime by temperament and circumstances. This concern with the individual personality robs the social and historical settings of the significance usually assigned to them in Fontane's novels. The individual is not in conflict with specific social or historical forces, but, in the first instance, with his private and personal circumstances, and in a wider sense with

an implacable 'Ordnung' or 'Gesetz' that is beyond man's control. This order exacts retribution without reference to any specific man-instituted legal or social system. Fontane is concerned in his crime stories, more explicitly and unambiguously than elsewhere, with a fixed order and law to which man is subject. This order or fate is the most important irrational and supernatural element in the stories, but by no means the only one. The crime story is not the natural milieu for ghosts. Supernatural elements are not normally welcome in this literary sub-genre where facts are all-important. Fontane, however, has not excluded them from his four works. Ghosts, superstition, fate, and irrationality in the form of madness all have their place and functions in the stories.

Fontane's own attitude to ghosts, as indicated in his correspondence and by the remarks of some of his characters, is ambiguous. His confession:

Mit Gespenstern, Hunden und Truthähnen hab' ich noch  
bis diesen Tag nicht gerne was zu tun<sup>1</sup>

reflects one aspect of his attitude. He has a strong suspicion that ghosts do exist and are not to be taken too lightly. On the other hand when Mutter Jeschke, echoing Tante Schorlemmer's down to earth views, says of ghosts:

wihr sich jrult, för den is et wat, un wihr sich  
nich jrult, für den is et nix<sup>2</sup>,

one is tempted to accept this rational, psychological approach as Fontane's own, especially as it so closely resembles the sentiments of Sir Walter Scott, with whose attitudes Fontane had great sympathy:

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1 IFD, p.39, an Henriette v. Merckel, 12th December 1856.

2 N III, p.398.

I cannot say that I am a believer in the return of departed spirits, but I heartily regret the days when I did entertain that very interesting opinion. The great moral argument against their existence is that, in proportion as incredulity on this point increases, instances of supernatural appearances decrease, and in other words, ghosts are only seen when they are believed. But whether reconcileable to the understanding or not, they are most interesting to the imagination.<sup>3</sup>

It is probably Fontane's own ambivalent attitude to spirits that makes the varying attitudes of his characters seem plausible. In Ellernklipp the existence of ghosts is freely admitted and accepted. on the night that Baltzer Bocholt is to shoot himself on Ellernklipp he at first thinks that the call of 'Vater' from the depths to which he has hurled his son is merely a product of his own guilty conscience.

Baltzer lächelte vor sich hin und wußte nun, was er wissen wollte, daß es eine Sinnestäuschung gewesen und daß es nicht unten in dem Elsbruch, sondern in ihm selber gerufen habe.<sup>4</sup>

Moments later, however, he is robbed of this rational explanation, for Sägemüller, acting as an independent witness, has heard it too:

'Na hür ick't----Et röppt.'

This confirms the assertion, "et spöckt upp Ellernklipp", made earlier<sup>5</sup> by people unaware of Baltzer's guilt. This acceptance of the existence of ghosts within the context of the story is elucidated in advance by the words of the non-conformist mystic, Melcher Harms. He equates them with the presence of evil in the world. They are manifestations of the dark powers, just as miracles are manifestations of God's goodness:

'An die lichten Heerscharen, da glauben sie, die Klugen und Selbstgerechten aber an die finsternen

3 Letter to Miss Wagner, 7th February 1828, printed in The Nineteenth Century, Vol.XXXVII, no.216, 1895.

4 N II, p.261.

5 Ibid. p.258.

Heerscharen, da glauben sie nicht. Und sind doch so sicher da wie die lichten. Und tun beide, was über die Natur geht, über die Natur, soweit wir sie verstehen. Und tun es die guten Engel, heißt es Wunder, und tun es die bösen Engel, so heißt es Spuk.<sup>6</sup>

Mutter Jeschke's attitude is similar:

Alles was in der Welt wirkte, war Sympathie, Besprechung, Spuk, aber dieser Spuk hatte doch zwei Quellen, und der weiße Spuk war stärker als der schwarze.<sup>7</sup>

In Ellernklipp both Hilde and Baltzer Bocholt deny the existence of ghosts.<sup>8</sup> Hilde through faith and pureness of heart, Baltzer, from suppressed feelings of guilt and fear. Their existence however is not to be denied, for the ghostly voice on Ellernklipp is insistent, and is not silenced until the evil of murder has been expiated. Thus in Ellernklipp the ghost of Martin is the instrument of retribution.<sup>9</sup> Martin's ghost functions in the plot as the direct cause of Baltzer Bocholt's suicide and as the medium of the execution of justice.

The ghost, or supposed ghost, in Unterm Birnbaum has a similar mechanical function in the plot. It is the servant boy Ede's fear of ghosts in the cellar<sup>10</sup> that produces Hratscheck's resolve to dig up his victim, in case suspicion is aroused again and there is a further investigation. Whilst digging up Szulski, Hratscheck meets his death - justice is done to the murderer. In Unterm Birnbaum, in contrast to Ellernklipp, there is no underlying acceptance by characters or

6 Ibid. p.212.

7 N III, p.370.

8 N II, p.211, p.239.

9 V.J. Günther, op.cit., p.45, speaks of Fontane's Nemesis symbols in Ellernklipp among other works, drawing attention especially to moon symbolism. Martin's ghost is another aspect of this Nemesis symbolism.

10 N III, p.342, p.395.

author of the existence of ghosts. The phenomenon is dealt with much more realistically. Ede, the only character who wholeheartedly believes in them, is portrayed as a simpleton. Mutter Jeschke's words, already quoted,<sup>11</sup> indicate the attitude the author seeks to put across in this work of psychological realism.

In Quitt there are no ghosts as such, but both L'Hermite and Lehnert are subject to visions, irrational phenomena which Fontane here explains, in the way he rejected in Ellernklipp, as manifestations of a guilty conscience. They both have visions of their respective victims, and Lehnert equates L'Hermite's experience with his own:

Das ist der, der bei L'Hermite ins Fenster sah.<sup>12</sup>

He declares them to be hallucinations produced by the murderers' feelings of guilt,

Sinnestäuschung? Nein. Gewissen.<sup>13</sup>

The realistic psychological explanation is preferred here. In Quitt Fontane also treats, in a more realistic fashion, the motif from Ellernklipp of a victim's cry for help. In Ellernklipp Martin's ghost calls from the ravine, in Quitt it is the voice of the not yet dead forester that craves assistance from his murderer. In the later work potentially supernatural themes are treated in a more realistic and rational manner.

Superstition is much in evidence in these four works - inevitably so, as this basic human impulse has its roots more often than not in guilt and fear, sentiments which haunt the murderer. Hratscheck in

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11 Ibid. p.398.

12 N VI, p.142.

13 Ibid. p.201.

Unterm Birnbaum is particularly subject to superstitious practices in which he more than half believes. At the beginning of the second chapter he appears obsessed with the lottery. He keeps his ticket on a special stand on his work desk:

Es [das Viertellos] stand hier auf einem Ständerchen, ganz nach Art eines Fetisch, zu dem er nicht müde wurde respektvoll und beinah mit Andacht aufzublicken.<sup>14</sup>

At this early stage in the story Fontane underlines Hratscheck's superstitious inclinations, describing him as,

der beständig zwischen Aber- und Unglauben hin und her schwankende Hratscheck,<sup>15</sup>

and reveals the basic weakness of this character who wants to cheat providence and order by acquiring money which he does not deserve, but who, for all his planning and taking of calculated risks, is subject to ridiculous superstitious impulses. Fontane depicts this paradoxical attitude with humour:

Und so blieb denn das Los auf dem Ständer, und erst als die Ziehung vorüber war, zerriß es Hratscheck und streute die Schnitzel in den Wind. Er war aber auch jetzt noch, all seinem spöttischüberlegenen Gerede zum Trotz so schwach und abergläubisch, daß er den Schnitzeln in ihrem Flug nachsah, und als er wahrnahm, daß einige die Straße hinauf bis an die Kirche geweht wurden und dort erst niederfielen, war er in seinem Gemüte beruhigt und sagte: 'Das bringt Glück'.<sup>16</sup>

Fontane clearly establishes superstition as an aspect of Hratscheck's attitude to life. He attributes magical properties to the number seven.<sup>17</sup> He respects his dead wife's wishes,

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14 N III, p.32. This kind of substitution of superstition for religion has already been noted in the cases of Bamme and Tante Amelie in Vor dem Sturm.

15 Ibid. p.322.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid. p.322, p.331.



weil er das seiner Frau gegebene Versprechen gern zu halten wünschte, schon aus abergläubischer Furcht.<sup>18</sup>

As his consciousness of his guilt and his fear of discovery increase, in his attempts to ward off discovery he becomes more deeply involved in a way of life ruled by superstition. This is largely due to his fear and mistrust of Mutter Jeschke, which is partly rational, as she may have witnessed part of his crime, and partly irrational, as she is reputedly a witch. He suspects her of having special understanding of providence which he is trying to cheat:

Er wiederholte sich jedes ihrer Worte: 'Wenn een's Glück hebben soll. Na, se hebben't joa, Hratscheck. Awers bereden Se't nich.' War es Neid, oder wußte sie's besser? Hatte sie doch vielleicht mit ihrem Hokuspokus ihm in die Karten geguckt?<sup>19</sup>

Mutter Jeschke is a similar figure to Hoppenmarieken in Vor dem Sturm, but in Mutter Jeschke's case there is even less foundation for the belief that she is a witch. In his more rational moments, even Hratscheck admits that there is little reason to believe it.<sup>20</sup> Her main function is to serve as a constant reminder to Hratscheck of his guilt and the possibility of his being unmasked as a murderer. It is her explicit question that leads to Ede's avowal that the cellar is haunted,<sup>21</sup> which in turn leads to Hratscheck's death. In spite of his defiance of Mutter Jeschke and her uncanny insinuations, Hratscheck, in his superstitious weakness, is subject to her influence. In Chapter 18 he dismisses her recipe of fern spores as the key to invisibility as "Altweiberschwatz".<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, in the next

18 Ibid. p.386.

19 Ibid. p.324.

20 Ibid. p.325.

21 Ibid. p.392.

22 Ibid. p.397.

chapter, he has swung to the opposite extreme and, pandering to his superstitious weakness, seeks out a huge bush of ferns. The reader has been prepared for this irrational action in advance. Before the murder ever takes place Hratscheck is shown vacillating and full of doubts on the subject of Mutter Jeschke's real powers and the authenticity of her recipes for invisibility:

Er glaubte nichts davon und auch wieder alles, und wenn er, seiner sonstigen Entschlossenheit unerachtet, schon vorher eine Furcht vor der alten Hexe gehabt hatte, so nach dem Gespräch über das sich Unsichtbarmachen noch viel mehr.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, before the crime has been committed, Mutter Jeschke is associated with Hratscheck in the context of his fear, which stems from his guilty conscience at the thought of his prospective crime. The ineffectiveness of the ferns does not really surprise him, and provokes from him remarks which show clearly that he feels no remorse for his deed. His consciousness of guilt takes the form purely of fear of discovery.<sup>24</sup> Mutter Jeschke, exerting pressure on the murderer through fear and superstition, is the instrument by which Hratscheck is forced into revealing his own guilt. Fontane has made Hratscheck a psychologically plausible figure by depicting him as motivated by both rational and irrational impulses. He is a well-rounded character for a work of such limited length. His vacillating weakness is revealed in his superstitious leanings, and it is with satisfaction that the reader witnesses retribution overtaking the cunning gambler, whose attempts to cheat fortune are finally thwarted by a combination of credible realistic circumstances, from which neither his rational calculations, nor his irrational superstition have been able to save him.

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23 N III, p.323f.

24 Ibid. p.402.

Some of the secondary figures also suffer from similar irrational beliefs. Mutter Jeschke herself sees coffins before people's doors and makes remarks such as: "Man soll nichts bereden"<sup>25</sup> and Ede fears ghosts.<sup>26</sup> In Unterm Birnbaum in general, however, there is less emphasis on superstition as part of everyday village life than there was in Vor dem Sturm.

The character in Ellernklipp most closely connected with superstition is Melcher Harms, who, in his mysticism, cherishes a curious mixture of religious and superstitious beliefs arising from a strong belief in the devil as well as in God. His superstitious beliefs about the 'Heidenstein'<sup>27</sup> prove true, and provide a second pointer to Martin's death.<sup>28</sup> Baltzer Bocholt declares himself to be superstitious,<sup>29</sup> but the only further indication of this, apart from his acknowledgement of Martin's ghost, is his wish to win something at the fair for his dying child.<sup>30</sup> Fontane has perhaps minimised this aspect of Baltzer's personality because in him he wished to present a powerful, down to earth character:

... mein Heidereiter aber erhebt die Prätention,  
ein so faßbarer Kerl zu sein, wie nur je über die  
Heide gegangen ist.<sup>31</sup>

Superstition is acknowledged also in Quitt. It is discussed by Kaulbars and Toby at some length<sup>32</sup> and the impression with which the

25 Ibid. p.323.

26 Ibid. p.392, p.395, p.404.

27 N II, p.216.

28 The first is provided by the wrecking of the ship 'Martin', Ibid. p.181.

29 Ibid. p.220.

30 Ibid. p.257.

31 IFD An Alf. Friedmann, 19th February 1882, p.75.

32 N VI, p.179.

reader is left is that it may well have some validity. However, when Lehnert resorts to superstitious practices in the early part of the work, drawing lots to see whether he should kill Opitz or not, he does so in bad faith.<sup>33</sup> He has already decided what he wants to do and is merely trying to fabricate an excuse for his action. In Quitt once more there is a variation on the theme of the mixture of religious and superstitious belief. In this case it serves to endow the awe-inspiring and over serious Obadja with a trait of more ordinary human weakness. A sympathetic sidelight is cast on his normally unbending character when he decides to exclude L'Hermite from the search party for Lehnert:

Von L'Hermites Begleitung war all die Zeit über mit keinem Wort die Rede gewesen, was in einer Art abergläubischer Vorstellung von Seiten Obadjas seinen Grund hatte.<sup>34</sup>

Grete Minde is remarkably free from supernatural and irrational elements. This is especially surprising as it is the story of fire-raising in a small town in the seventeenth century. It would seem to be particularly susceptible to colouring from local legend and superstition. In fact, the only element of this kind in the tale is the Lorenzwald Sage.<sup>35</sup> In the legend the Lorenzwald is associated with protection and security. When it is referred to later, in the context of real life, Grete regards it with almost superstitious fear and distaste; it becomes an image for darkness, evil and alienation.<sup>36</sup> There are two reasons for the surprising lack of local colour which might have involved the supernatural. Firstly, Grete Minde is very short. Fontane concentrates exclusively on the main storyline. The

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33 Ibid. p.69.

34 Ibid. p.211.

35 N III, p.28.

36 Ibid. p.57.

simple structure which he has chosen does not admit of digressions or excursions into detailed 'Milieuschilderung'. Secondly, what Fontane does in the story is to present the reader with a closely observed psychological study of how one individual character is driven to mass murder. It is significant that in this story alone of the four, the crime is perpetrated only at the very end. The author's chief concern has been to lay bare the reaction of the individual to adverse pressures. P. Demetz goes so far as to class Grete Minde as a closely observed study of a pathological case.<sup>37</sup> Certainly Grete Minde has some features in common with Zola's Thérèse Raquin, which the author openly proclaimed to be a pathological study of the mentality of a murderer. In both works the reader is prevented from becoming involved with, or more than superficially sympathetic towards the main character. This is because both central figures are subjected to a cold rational gaze by the author, who places himself and the reader at a distance from the characters to observe them accurately. Fontane concentrates on presenting the reader with the facts which, arranged in a logical order, explain the crime, and the introduction of extraneous supernatural elements would have weakened the intended impression of logical inevitability explained in terms of psychological causality. Almost everything in the story moreover is seen from Grete's point of view, and she is primarily concerned with matters far from supernatural, - with human relationships and her social and financial rights.

One aspect of irrationality to be found in three of the crime stories and nowhere else in Fontane's works is temporary insanity, as observed in the murderers in Grete Minde, Ellernklipp, and Quitt. That the irrational should appear in this guise is understandable, in

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37 P. Demetz, Formen des Realismus. Theodor Fontane, Munich, 1964, p.97.

stories intended as works of psychological realism dealing with human beings in extreme situations. Grete has been driven to madness by hereditary defects in her character, accentuated by her unfortunate circumstances:

Und als sie den Platz hinter sich hatte, richtete sie sich auf, wie von einem wirr-phantastischen Hoheitsgefühl ergriffen. ... und jener starr-unheimliche Zug war wieder da, der über die Trübungen ihrer Seele keinen Zweifel ließ. Es war ihr mehr auferlegt worden, als sie tragen konnte, und das Zeichen, von dem die Domina gesprochen, heute hätt es jeder gesehen.<sup>38</sup>

Grete succumbs to insanity completely, killing herself and others. In the case of Baltzer Bocholt and Lehnert Menz however, it is only in a moment of temporary loss of mental equilibrium that murder is committed;

Aber der Alte schäumte; 'Der Teufel ist dein Vater!' und außer sich über die seinen Stolz demütigende Lage, darin er sich erblicken mußte, stieß er mit aller Gewalt gegen die Knie des Sohnes.<sup>39</sup>

"Das Feuer, das ihn verzehrt hatte"<sup>40</sup> is a reference to the acute state of jealousy which combined with pride to push Baltzer Bocholt beyond the bounds of rational behaviour. Lehnert's mental imbalance in Quitt results from his own pride and his obsessive hatred of Opitz. In order to commit murder he works himself up into an abnormal state of resentment and aggressiveness,<sup>41</sup> an unnatural state of emotion from which, as in Baltzer's case, only murder brings relief. Lehnert's temporary loss of identity with his sane self is underlined by the words used to describe him disguised for murder:

38 N III, p.87.

39 N II, p.237.

40 Ibid.

41 N VI, pp.68-71.

Das alles gab ein Bild, das in nichts mehr an den Lehnert erinnerte, der vor einer Viertelstunde noch schwankend und unsicher auf der Bank am Quell gesessen hatte.<sup>42</sup>

Gradscheck's crime, unlike these others, is not prompted by emotion, but is carefully calculated and premeditated. He is a murderer of a more rational cast than the other three.

Irrationality in the form of madness in Fontane's work is confined to his crime stories.<sup>43</sup> They are the only works in which such extreme, unbalanced, one might almost say, uncivilised, behaviour as murder is presented. Fontane, in his great social novels, is usually concerned with depicting unsensational happenings and characters confined within the bounds of normal human behaviour. Madness places man beyond the pale of society and is therefore a subject that does not particularly interest Fontane.

The final irrational and supernatural element to be considered with reference to Fontane's crime stories is the concept of fate revealed in them. Here, more clearly and unambiguously than in any of his other works, Fontane shows man's fate to be determined by an order beyond his control, which is inexorable and largely inscrutable. He portrays a relentless system of guilt and retribution with only the faintest suggestion of the possibility of occasional and inexplicable grace from above. Fontane's attitude to fate in these four stories is summed up by Melcher Harms' words:

Ewig und unwandelbar ist das Gesetz.<sup>44</sup>

42. Ibid. p.70.

43. The only exception is 'die Triglauff' in Der Stechlin, cf. below chap.VIII, p.225.

44. N II, p.216, p.269.

Strech rightly comments on the similarity of outlook between this and the world of the Old Testament:

In den frühen ... Kriminalgeschichten waltet ein unerbittlich-alttestamentarisches Schuld-Sühne Gesetz.<sup>45</sup>

In Grete Minde, Grete herself admits the existence of an order of transgression and punishment:

'Denn sieh, ich habe nur an mich gedacht; das war es; da liegt meine Schuld. Es kommt alles von Gott, auch das Unrecht, das man uns antut und wir müssen es tragen lernen.'<sup>46</sup>

In Ellernklipp Fontane emerges from behind the mask of objective narrative to comment on the action and underline the theme of pre-determined order:

Alles war Zufall gewesen, wenn es einen Zufall gibt.<sup>47</sup>

Melcher Harms' comment on Hilde's fate could equally well be applied to Grete Minde's:

Ihr Blut ist ihr Los, und den Jungen reißt sie mit hinein.<sup>48</sup>

There is close correspondence of motif too between Ellernklipp and Unterm Birnbaum. Grissel's comment in Ellernklipp,

45 H. Strech, Theodor Fontane: Synthese von Alt und Neu, Berlin, 1970, p.104. The probable source of Fontane's strong leaning towards this concept of order is to be found in his mother's early influence, which is revealed in Fontane's account of her attitude to the execution of a local murderer: "Einige befreundete Damen begleiteten meine Mutter, die merkwürdig ruhig war; sie fand alles was vorging nur in der Ordnung, Aug um Auge, Zahn um Zahn, und ließ den Damen, die mit bei uns eingetreten waren, ein Glas Portwein reichen. Dann sprach sie von ganz anderen Dingen, sie wollte falsche Sentimentalität nicht aufkommen lassen und hatte recht wie immer." N XIV, p.102.

46 N III, p.68.

47 N II, p.252.

48 Ibid. p.216.



'ist auch noch so fein gesponnen, muß doch alles an die Sonnen.'<sup>49</sup>

is echoed almost word for word at the end of Unterm Birnbaum.<sup>50</sup>

In a letter to Friedlaender, Fontane makes explicit the concept of order that Unterm Birnbaum is intended to illustrate:

Daß keine schöne, herzerquickliche Gestalt darin ist, wer dies auch gesagt haben mag, ist richtig und keine üble Bemerkung, das Schöne, Trostreiche, Erhebende schreitet aber gestaltlos durch die Geschichte hin und ist einfach das gepredigte Evangelium von der Gerechtigkeit Gottes, von der Ordnung in seiner Welt. Ja, das steht so fest, daß die Predigt sogar einen humoristischen Anstrich gewinnen konnte.<sup>51</sup>

It is the atheist L'Hermite who declares a belief in the existence of fate in Quitt:

'... es gibt ein Fatum. Und weil es ein Fatum gibt, geht alles seinen Gang, dunkel und rätselvoll, und nur mitunter blitzt ein Licht auf und läßt uns gerade soviel sehen, um dem Ewigen und Rätselhaften, oder wie sonst Ihr's nennen wollt, seine Launen und Gesetze abzulauschen.'<sup>52</sup>

This applies equally to the other three stories. In Quitt Fontane sacrifices a due concern for character and milieu in his overriding desire to present baldly and uncompromisingly the workings of an order which unremittingly exacts a punishment precisely equivalent to the crime. Sasse's comment highlights the limitations of such an approach:

Fontane's so often repeated all-pervading concept of social and moral order to which the individual must submit is here transformed into a lifeless inexorable

49 Ibid. p.219.

50 N III, p.407.

51 FFR no.32, 16th November 1885.

52 N VI, p.200.

law of the retribution of fate from which there can be no escape.<sup>53</sup>

Another aspect of fate, touched on in L'Hermite's words, is its unpredictability and mysteriousness to the individuals who are subject to it. Although the broad principle of guilt and retribution is clear to the reader, those who are subject to it try to manipulate it and interfere with it to mould their destinies to their own advantage. This attempt is pointless, since they are already in the grip of an inexorable force, which will destroy the individual to preserve the order intact. The whole of Unterm Birnbaum is concerned with Hratscheck's futile attempts to change his lot by calculation and cunning. His wicked and dishonest machinations to obtain prosperity only serve to advance the process by which fate ultimately destroys him. Similarly in Quitt, all Lehnert's attempts to expiate his crime, by living a new and better life in the New World, prove fruitless. In his correspondence Fontane time and again refers to the unpredictability of fate, and the futility of making calculations about the future:

- je älter ich werde, je tiefer empfinde ich, alles ist Glück und Gnade, das Kleine so gut wie das Große. ... aber das ist richtig, daß wir nichts in unserer Hand haben und daß wir von Minute zu Minute von einer Räthselmacht abhängig sind, die uns streichelt oder schlägt. Daher ist das mir Widerstrebendste und Aengstigendste das Vorsehungspielenwollen so vieler Leute. Gott läßt sich nicht hineinpfuschen.<sup>54</sup>

The positive side of this assertion of the unpredictability of fate lies in its affirmation of the possibility of grace. The word occurs at intervals in Fontane's writings, without any specifically religious meaning, but as the term applied to the protection,

53 H-C. Sasse, op.cit., p.90f.

54 FP I, no.180, 19th July 1886, cf. IFD p.114f.: An seine Frau, 15th August 1878, An seine Tochter Martha, 2nd January 1887, An Theo, 12th August 1895.

which is just as inevitable as the destruction, that fate may confer on certain individuals. It is a word with almost magical significance, and those to whom it applies are set mysteriously apart from their fellows.<sup>55</sup> Brinkmann's interpretation of the term suggests its salient connotations:

Und gelegentlich fällt auch das Wort 'Gnade', das sich, wenn es einen Sinn haben soll, nicht vollkommen von gewissen religiösen Vorstellungen trennen läßt, und Fontane will das auch nicht. Aber gerade dieser Begriff besagt für ihn nicht nur Gabe aus höherer Hand, sondern vor allem auch das ganz Unberechenbare und Unaussprechliche, das in seinem Walten an nichts, an keine Institution, keine 'Symbola', keine Taten und Menschen gebunden ist.<sup>56</sup>

In Grete Minde grace is referred to by the Catholic nuns of Arendsee. They are not a narrow doctrine-bound sect. Their willingness to bury Valtin, a wandering player, is indicative of their tolerance and humanity as contrasted with the narrowminded attitude of the local Protestant preacher, Roggenstroh. Thus the idea of grace, as propounded by them, should not be interpreted in any restricted, purely religious sense:

Ilse trat bis dicht an das Grab und betete: 'Unsre Schuld ist groß, unser Recht ist klein, die Gnade Gottes tut es allein.' Und alle Nonnen wiederholten leise vor sich hin: 'Und die Gnade Gottes tut es allein.'<sup>57</sup>

The swallows in Grete Minde, as elsewhere in Fontane's writings, are associated with the idea of grace. At the very beginning of the story there is what seems to be only a passing reference to the swallows' nests in Grete's father's house.<sup>58</sup> Fontane returns to them

55 E.g. Marie Kniehase in Vor dem Sturm.

56 R. Brinkmann, Theodor Fontane. Über die Verbindlichkeit des Unverbindlichen, Munich, 1967, p.160.

57 N III, p.74.

58 Ibid. p.7.

however at the end, where their disappearance from the house is symbolic of the withdrawal of fortune's favour, or God's blessing from a house where love and hospitality have also been cast out.<sup>59</sup> Fontane had already used the image of swallows as a sign of grace in Vor dem Sturm: Pastor Seidentopf observes there about Marie:

'Sie wird ihm Segen bringen wie die Schwalben am Sims.'<sup>60</sup>

Fontane makes the same association in a letter too:

Was entscheidet, ist doch immer die Gnade Gottes. Und diese Gnade Gottes, sie geht ihre eigenen Wege. Es bindet sie keine Regel, sie ist sich selber Gesetz. Sie baut wie die Schwalben an allerlei Häusern, an guten und schlechten, und wenn sie an den schlechten Häusern baut, so sind es keine schlechten Häuser mehr. Ein neues Leben hat Einzug gehalten.<sup>61</sup>

The same attitude to grace is suggested by the countess in Ellernklipp:

ob nicht die Gnade mächtiger und unwandelbarer ist als das Gesetz<sup>62</sup>,

but such grace is not bestowed upon Baltzer Bocholt in the story.

Grace is likewise referred to but withheld in Quitt. Obadja is reported as saying:

Was aber wichtiger sei: wenn sich ihm [Obadja] das erfülle, was er von ganzem Herzen hoffe, so werde Camille L'Hermite dermaleinst auch an anderer Stelle nicht vergessen sein. Schon die Wege des Lebens seien wunderbar, aber am wunderbarsten seien die Gnadenwege. Wer die Gnade habe, der mühe sich umsonst, sie zu verscherzen.<sup>63</sup>

59 Ibid. p.80.

60 N I, p.66.

61 IFD p.12.

62 N II, p.247.

63 N VI, p.187.

In these three works, where fate inexorably overtakes and strikes down the guilty, Fontane has mitigated his view of a relentless force by affirming the possibility of grace - grace which is bestowed, however, according to motives inscrutable to man, who in his ignorance and shortsightedness is unable to comprehend or foresee the workings of this seemingly irrational and supernatural force which determines the course of his life.

Fontane's intention in the crime stories of illustrating clearly a well defined concept of fate gives rise to certain problems. One of these is pointed out by Demetz:

Die Wiederkehr des Gleichen in Schuld und Sühne deutet auf einen unmenschlichen Fatalismus, der sogleich (hier liegt das Problem) mit der rationalen und humanen Welt der Fontaneschen Kriminalgeschichte in unlösbaren Konflikt gerät. Der strukturelle Kreis sichert die wünschenswerte ästhetische Kontur, schafft aber zugleich eine ideologische Bürde, der sich der Erzähler nicht mehr zu entledigen vermag.<sup>64</sup>

The problem is particularly acute in Quitt, where Fontane on the one hand is concerned with creating psychologically realistic figures, such as Lehnert and Opitz, but on the other hand is carefully engineering Lehnert's destruction by a rationally incomprehensible force which makes the coincidental circumstances of Lehnert's death appear improbable from a rational point of view. The story takes on the aspect of a mathematical theorem in which all the passages devoted to realistic characterisation of ordinary human beings seem incongruous, and almost irrelevant. In Unterm Birnbaum, however, Fontane has been much more successful in uniting the two aspects of the work discreetly and plausibly. Fate overtakes Hratscheck not by a huge coincidence, but because the innkeeper brings about his own death by accident, in circumstances which have been credibly motivated

by his own fear of discovery. Retribution for him stems directly from his crime, traces of which he is trying to conceal when he dies. For Lehnert it comes like a bolt from the blue when he is engaged in a humanitarian attempt to save a friend's life. The reader has been prepared for it only in an artificial and theoretical fashion by L'Hermite's set speech on fate.<sup>65</sup> A similar dichotomy is present in Grete Minde and Ellernklipp but in the case of these two it is the psychological interest that gains the upper hand:

Die prägnante Fassung des Schicksalsbegriffs, die Fontane in diesen Erzählungen vorschwebt - Verstoß gegen das Gesetz, der die Menschen zum Untergang<sup>66</sup> führt - weicht einem komplizierten Seelenbefund.

Here as in other works, it is the two women figures, Grete and Hilde, that tend to monopolise Fontane's attention. In Ellernklipp attention is often diverted from the murderer and his crime to consideration of Hilde. She shares characteristics with some of Fontane's most successful female creations, and she is clearly a character who appeals to him:

Ebenso hab ich in Hilde, und zwar bis in die kleinsten Details gehend, ein vornehm- bleichsüchtig- languissantes Menschenkind und den halb rätselhaften Zauber eines solchen schildern wollen.<sup>67</sup>

In his crime stories Fontane's dual aim of psychological realism and the revelation of the workings of a fate beyond man has resulted in a certain unevenness and lack of balance where these two conflicting themes are insufficiently fused. It is in Unterm Birnbaum that the two elements are most successfully integrated, while in Quitt the themes appear to be almost incompatible.

65 N VI, p.200.

66 R. Brinkmann, op.cit., p.67.

67 IFD, p.75, An Alfred Friedmann, 19th February 1882.

In modern crime stories facts and rational explanations are usually all-important. Realism and reasoning are essential to make the extreme, abnormal behaviour of the criminal seem plausible. On the whole such irrational and supernatural elements as there are in Fontane's four crime stories are compatible with psychological realism. Superstition is shown to be a basic human impulse; it is a sentiment rooted in guilt and fear and it is therefore natural that a murderer should be subject to it. Fontane's depiction of irrationality in the form of madness is also quite natural in works dealing with the unbalanced minds of murderers. References to ghosts too, which play a decisive part in the plots of two of the stories, are on the whole deprived of their full supernatural force. The spirits exist as the products of fearful or guilty consciences. This is not true in Ellernklipp, however, where they are emanations of the inexorable order or fate to which man is subject in these works. This concept of a fate beyond man's control, inscrutably determining his path, is the most significant irrational and supernatural element in the stories. Fontane has already suggested such a view of the world order in Vor dem Sturm, on the whole implicitly by reference to portents and signs. He gives explicit and unambiguous expression to it, and clearly illustrates its workings in his four tales of crime and retribution. It is the overriding importance of an irrational force in these stories of psychological realism which disturbs the reader, by threatening the integrity of the works. They are nevertheless successful and satisfying in many respects: Grete Minde because of its strange, removed, almost unreal atmosphere created by viewing the world through the consciousness of a disturbed mind; Ellernklipp because of the vivid, realistic depiction of the two main characters; and Unterm Birnbaum because of the humour and realism with which the rascally Hradtscheck is presented. Quitt is

the least successful of the four. This may well be partly due to the fact that Fontane tries to portray an American milieu, which is unfamiliar to him. The sections of the story which are set in Germany are indeed more acceptable, but his handling of the role of fate is still a significant weakness.



### Early Social Novels

Fontane's four earliest social novels<sup>1</sup> are L'Adultera (1882), Schach von Wuthenow (1883), Graf Petöfy (1884) and Cécile (1887). In these short works he experiments, with varying degrees of success, with the themes and techniques which he handles with confidence and mastery in later novels. Irrational and supernatural elements again have their part to play in the structure and thematic development of the novels. The irrational in the form of religion, and more specifically of the Roman Catholic religion, is important in all four works. The theme of predestination and of an order beyond man's control, observed in Vor dem Sturm and the crime stories, appears here with significantly changed emphasis. The "geheimnisvollen Gewalten des Lebens"<sup>2</sup> depicted in these works do not exist in a sphere above or beyond man, but are seen at work within a purely social context. Attention is focused on man, not only as an individual, but also as a social being.

Supernatural beings, ghosts, witches and fairies, feature only in

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1 Fontane uses the terms 'novel' and 'Novelle' indiscriminately of his works. I have elected to refer to them (with the exception of the crime stories) as 'novels' throughout.

2 N II, p.391.

conversation, and not as directly observed phenomena as they did in Vor dem Sturm and the crime stories. The references to them however occur frequently at crucial points in the novels and serve to highlight and develop important themes. The motif of the "Märchen", or of the heroine possessed of fairytale, magical qualities, already observed in Vor dem Sturm with reference to Marie Kniehase, recurs in these four early social novels. In L'Adultera, the least technically polished of the four, Fontane tries to make Melanie appear to be endowed with special bewitching qualities. He does this by means of direct, unsubtle statements associating her with these characteristics:

Melanie lebte wie die Prinzeß im Märchen,<sup>3</sup>  
'Caparoux. --- Das ist ein Märchenname.'<sup>4</sup>

The whole question of enchanting and bewitching, and the difference between them, is considered at length by Van der Straaten.<sup>5</sup> What is ostensibly a discussion about the comparative artistic merits of Titian, Murillo and Wagner is in fact a rather clumsily camouflaged treatment of the theme of erotic love and woman's power to bewitch, including a reminder about the painting "L'Adultera". By all this Fontane presumably intended to foreshadow the future action and comment on its causes. Van der Straaten's lack of social polish and tact in conversation may account in some measure for the lack of subtlety of this passage, but Fontane's careful spelling out to the reader of the issues involved is tiresome, and an indication of the lack of refinement in his style in this early work.

In Cécile there is a marked improvement in the handling of similar motifs. Cécile's strangeness and distinctive fairytale

3 N IV, p.9.

4 Ibid. p.36.

5 Ibid. pp.28-30.

characteristics are conveyed, on the whole, indirectly. She is made to appear mysterious to the reader by the simple but effective device of concealing her origins and past history until the later stages of the novel.<sup>6</sup> Earlier in the work Fontane hints at them in a disguised way and thus lends to her actions and reactions an air of mystery. There is only one direct reference to her magical qualities, and that is in Eva Lewinski's letter about her childhood. This is not a direct comment by the author:

'Verwöhntes Kind, aber träumerisch und märchenhaft, so daß jeder, der sie sah, sie für eine Fee in Trauer halten mußte.'<sup>7</sup>

The description bears out what the reader has already observed in Cécile, and is not placed as direct characterisation at the beginning of the novel as was the case in L'Adultera. The fairytale motif is also associated with Cécile when Gordon takes her and St. Arnaud past a picturesque house:

'Wie zauberhaft', sagte sie. 'Das ist ja das 'verwünschte Schloß' im Märchen. Und so still und lauschig. Wirkt es nicht als wohne der Friede darin oder, was dasselbe sagt: das Glück.'<sup>8</sup>

Gordon's shattering of this illusion, with the information that the seeming idyll has been the scene of tragedy, foreshadows the course of events, perhaps rather unsubtly. Cécile and St. Arnaud's reactions to his remarks, however, increase the reader's curiosity about their mysterious past.

The dark side of the fairytale world is featured in witch and ghost motifs, the more sinister aspects of which will be examined later. There are frequent references to the 'Hexentanzplatz',<sup>9</sup> a local

6 Ibid. p.253ff.

7 Ibid. p.254.

8 Ibid. p.143.

9 Ibid. p.133f, p.150, p.187, p.215f.

beauty spot near Thale, and this motif functions in different, inter-related ways throughout the novel. It does, of course, provide authentic local colour. Fontane describes here places with which he was very familiar. This is, however, the least important of its functions. In Gordon's witty and lighthearted conversation with Rosa about witches and bewitchment the true significance of the motif is revealed. Rosa asks Gordon of his visions of witches: "Hübsch oder häßlich?" and warns,

'Nehmen Sie sich in acht, Herr von Gordon. In Ihrem Hexenspuk spukt etwas vor. Das sind die inneren Stimmen.'<sup>10</sup>

The ensuing exchange further expands the theme of woman's dangerous charms. This conversation and the issues it raises are clearly relevant to Gordon and Cécile. In its witty, spirited tone it is much more acceptable comment on events future and past than Gordon's serious and ominously pointed remarks about "das 'verwunschene Schloß'".

In Schach von Wuthenow the heroine is an unusual figure, whose youthful beauty has been destroyed by smallpox, but who has faced the experience with strength of character and a charitable disposition. Schach, momentarily overcome by her strange charm and influenced by royal opinion, attributes to her too the quality which Melanie and Cécile share:

'Alles ist Märchen und Wunder an Ihnen.'<sup>11</sup>

Victoire is associated with supernatural powers on two other occasions. Firstly when Frau von Carayon traces back her daughter's family tree:

'--- da waren wir mit einem Königshause versippt und verschwägert, mit den Lusignans, aus deren großem

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10 Ibid. p.150.

11 N II, p.328.

Hause die schöne Melusine kam, unglücklichen,  
aber Gott sei Dank unprosaischen Angedenkens.'<sup>12</sup>;

secondly when Schach, enthusiastically discussing his prospective honeymoon journey across the sea to Sicily, speaks of the "stumme Sirene"<sup>13</sup> which entices men to their doom. It is only later that the reader realises the full significance of this conversation. In both cases the mermaid symbol represents Victoire who has, unwittingly, lured Schach to destruction. The second image of the "silent siren", seemingly a contradiction in terms, is particularly apt, for Victoire has, as it were, seduced Schach by her charming unattractiveness, by her disfigured beauty. The mermaid symbolism may seem unexpected in a realistic work where the predominant forces depicted are social and historical, and yet Fontane has integrated it plausibly and effectively into the novel.<sup>14</sup> The overtones of strange, irresistible charm associated with mermaids are appropriate to Victoire, but the choice of symbol also underlines with unpleasant irony the difference between Victoire's situation and that of the traditional mermaid. It is really Schach who has seduced her, and it is his weakness rather than the strength of her charm that brings about his death.

In Graf Petöfy the fairytale motif is employed in a different way. Franziska, recounting her adventure in a storm-tossed boat and her subsequent rescue, hides her confusion and feelings of guilt about her relationship with Graf Egon by turning the report into a kind of fairytale. By framing it in fanciful terms she creates a distance between her account and the facts, which is acceptable to her listeners:

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12 Ibid. p.362.

13 Ibid. p.377.

14 Cf. Brinkmann, op.cit, p.58, "Fontane ist auch da, wo er von Stil- und Ideentraditionen der Romantik zehrt, ein realistisch ernüchterter Romantiker. Nicht die Wirklichkeit soll poetisch werden, sondern das Menschliche in der Alltagswirklichkeit, in der Breite geschichtlicher Wirklichkeit entdeckt und sichtbar gemacht werden."

--- so blieb vieles in ihrem Vortrage dunkel und lückenhaft und gewann erst wieder Leben und Unbefangenheit, als sie mit gewohnter Vorliebe für die Kleinmalerei zur Schilderung des Fährhauses und seiner Insassen übergang. Alle Geschichten ihrer Kindertage seien ihr in demselben Augenblick wieder lebendig geworden, wo sie sich beim Erwachen aus ihrer Ohnmacht in dem aus Feldstein und Rasenstücken aufgebauten Fahrhause mitsamt der alten Fährhaushexe vorgefunden habe. Wirklich, alles sei halb Märchen, halb Walter Scott gewesen.<sup>15</sup>

The use of the subjunctive demanded by the reported speech also strikes the reader's ear in a way that suggests that what is being related is at one remove from the truth.

Ghosts and unpleasant irrational phenomena have their part to play in three of the four early social novels. In Graf Petöfy they are associated with feelings of unease and guilt in the characters. From the time when it is first talked of to Franziska, Schloß Arpa is associated with "Grusel",<sup>16</sup> because of an old pictorial story she has seen as a child at a village fair. This is a first indication of Franziska's attitude to her husband's home. When she arrives there as his young bride, her uneasiness about her situation and the step she has taken is expressed in similar terms. She is really voicing fears about the disturbance in her own spirit when she asks Hannah if the peace of Schloß Arpa is not broken by tormented spirits. In the end she recognises that her fears stem from feelings of guilt and unease:

'Ein gutes Gewissen,' sagte sie. 'Warum bang ich mich? Ich war doch sonst nicht so furchtsam.'<sup>17</sup>

At this point in the novel she has not yet been unfaithful to her husband but her talk of ghosts betrays the fact that she already has a

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15 N II, p.145.

16 Ibid. p.21.

17 Ibid. p.81.

faintly guilty conscience, presumably because of thoughts which she has entertained. The reader is given an indication of her potential guilt. She has been reassured in her fear of ghosts by Hannah, and the following morning, using the subject as a topic for gay chatter to her husband, she is again assured that there is nothing in the castle itself, nor its history, to justify the existence of disturbed spirits. Ghosts are once more associated by Graf Petöfy with the idea of guilt, but:

'--- die Petöfys haben der Gespensterwelt nicht genug zu Gefallen getan und sich viel zu sehr als prosaisch ordentliche Leute geriert.'<sup>18</sup>

These assurances underline the fact that the unease lies purely in Franziska herself. Ghosts are not presented here as an objective phenomenon; the fear of them reveals a subjective mental state. This is even more clearly the case when Egon, having caused Franziska to be unfaithful, goes walking in the estate and thinks he is being followed by ghostly footsteps:

Erst nach einer Weile nahm er wahr, daß es der Widerhall seiner eigenen Schritte gewesen, was er unheimlich und gespenstisch neben und hinter sich gehabt hatte.<sup>19</sup>

It is his own conscience that is haunting him.

In Cécile the sinister aspect of the supernatural world is suggested by references to the Hexentanzplatz, which is twice associated with the motif of a train. The second occasion provides an elaboration of the original motif at an important point in the development of the relationship between Gordon, Cécile and St. Arnaud. The first occasion is during a walk to the Lichtenberg when Cécile and

18 Ibid. p.83.

19 Ibid. p.149.

St. Arnaud have stopped to rest:

--- und nun dampfte der Zug auf wenig hundert Schritt an dem Lichtenberg vorüber.

'Er geht nach Berlin', sagte St. Arnaud. 'Willst du mit?'  
'Nein, nein.'

Und nun sahen beide wieder der Wagenreihe nach und horchten auf das Echo, das das Geräassel und Geklapper in den Bergen wachrief und fast so klang, als ob immer neue Züge vom Hexentanzplatz her herunterkämen.<sup>20</sup>

The strange effect caused by the echo from the Hexentanzplatz gives the train a supernatural aura. It is associated with mysterious circumstances which remain obscure to the reader. He does not yet understand the full significance of St. Arnaud's question or of Cécile's answer, but is made conscious of emotional currents running beneath the surface of the unexplained words. This impression is strengthened by the description of the echo's uncanny effect. The train has been established as an important motif at the beginning of the novel<sup>21</sup> where, as in the Lichtenberg episode, it is associated with escape. At the beginning, however, it is devoid of any supernatural connotations. When the motif recurs in the course of the return journey from Altenbrak, the train, rushing through the darkness, has become like a thing possessed by supernatural forces and dark powers:

Unten im Tal, von Quedlinburg und der Teufelsmauer her, kam im selben Augenblick klappernd und rasselnd der letzte Zug heran, und das Mondlicht durchleuchtete die weiße Rauchwolke, während vorn zwei Feueraugen blitzten und die Funken der Maschine weit hin ins Feld flogen.

'Die wilde Jagd', sagte St. Arnaud und nahm die Tete, während Gordon und Cécile folgten.<sup>22</sup>

St. Arnaud himself has verbally created the atmosphere appropriate to this view of the phenomenon. He has tormented his sensitive wife by lingering on the way home through the darkened woods, and has under-

20 N IV, p.187.

21 Ibid. p.129.

22 Ibid. p.215f.



lined the eeriness of the surroundings by speaking of ghosts and suggesting a trip to the Hexentanzplatz. It is at this point that St. Arnaud is first seen as an inadequate husband, and Cécile receives sympathy and comfort from Gordon. Their grouping as they continue the journey is significant. The careering train suggests the passion, confusion and emotion that have been aroused in Cécile and Gordon - passion which for the moment is concealed beneath the decorous surface of social propriety, but which is to exceed these bounds later in the work. The supernatural overtones of the motif suggest the uncontrollable nature of the forces at work.

It is a ghost story that leads to the discussion of Knights Templar at an important point in Schach von Wuthenow.<sup>23</sup> In the course of this discussion Victoire's feelings for Schach become clear, and his ambiguous attitude to her is revealed. The discussion of the Templars, an order founded as an élite to protect the holy places in Jerusalem which fell into corrupt practices, acts as a comment on the Regiment Gendarmes to which Schach belongs, and which has undergone a similar decline in its values. The story of the old knight's troubled spirit also raises the question of honouring the dead and honourable death which is relevant to Schach's future suicide. The subject of ghosts is again broached in the chapter "In Wuthenow am See", where Schach has retired to consider his course of action. He is driven out of doors by a horde of huge moths whose confused, aimless fluttering mirrors his state of mind. Mutter Kreepschen however asks him:

'Wat wihr denn los? Hätt et wedder spökt?'<sup>24</sup>

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23 N II, pp.301-3.

24 Ibid. p.355.

and this provides a second image for Schach's state of mind. The old peasant woman thinks that man can be tormented by spirits from another world. Schach is indeed haunted, but his torment comes from his own thoughts within himself. Another, seemingly insignificant, passing reference to the spirits of the dead is made by Frau von Carayon's guide on her visit to General von Köckritz:

Er wußte von jedem Dorf und Lustschloß, an dem man vorüberkam, zu berichten, am meisten von Marquardt, aus dessen Parke, zu wenigstens vorübergehendem Interesse der Frau von Carayon, jenes Gartenhäuschen hervorschimerte, darin unter Zutun und Anleitung des Generals von Bischofswerder dem 'dicken Könige' (wie sich der immer konfidentieller werdende Cicerone jetzt ohne weiteres ausdrückte) die Geister erschienen waren.<sup>25</sup>

This apparently harmless chatter has direct relevance to the historical theme of the novel. The king referred to is Friedrich Wilhelm II, who was an unworthy successor to Frederick the Great. He symbolises the decline in values that has taken place and continues into the present of the novel and the reign of his son. Friedrich Wilhelm II's weakness has already been indicated by the reference to his mistress.<sup>26</sup> He was easily dominated by unsatisfactory favourites who shared in his pseudo-mysticism. His dabbling in spiritualism is an indication of a decadent desire for titillation by something out of the ordinary. This corruption of values at the level of royalty is what the Prussia in which Schach lives has inherited. It is therefore not surprising that his moral priorities are confused. The sensible, down to earth counterblast to these three references to ghosts, with their unnatural and unhealthy connotations, is provided by the radical Bülow:

'Wer Gespenster wirklich ignoriert, der arbeitet an ihrer Ausrottung. Und dadurch an Ausrottung einer

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25 Ibid. p.366f.

26 Ibid. p.366.

wahren Epidemie ----, 27

Although ghosts, fairies, witches and spirits no longer actually walk the pages in these early social novels, they are used repeatedly in conversation or in a figurative sense because of their evocative connotations. It is at moments of heightened tension in the novels that these phenomena are invoked. Fontane's use of such references is far more varied and flexible than in earlier works. Each motif functions primarily in its own context to provide relevant, but discreet, comment on some aspect of the situation. They are no longer invoked as signs of some supernatural sphere enclosing or even controlling the social one.

The irrational theme of superstition, although slight in Schach von Wuthenow, runs strongly through the other three novels. In Schach von Wuthenow Fontane gently mocks characters who betray superstitious leanings. He treats the subject with humour and irony:

'Ich finde doch' sagte Tante Marguerite, die, je schrecklicher sie sich vor Gespenstern fürchtete, desto lebhafter ihr Vorhandensein bestritt, 'ich finde doch, die Regierung sollte mehr gegen den Aberglauben tun.' Und dabei wandte sie sich ängstlich von dem unheimlichen Steinbild ab und ging mit Frau von Carayon, die was Gespensterfurcht anging, mit dem Tantchen wetteifern konnte, wieder dem Ausgange zu.<sup>28</sup>

This small humorous incident is important in that it leaves Schach and Victoire alone together for the conversation which serves as significant characterisation of them both. A similar minor, but telling, incident involving Tante Marguerite's superstition occurs at the wedding. She recalls the day of the first incident,<sup>29</sup> claiming that the bunch of violets that Victoire let fall beside a child's

27 Ibid. p.316.

28 Ibid. p.301.

29 Ibid. p.379.

grave had been a sign of their future relationship. Fontane mocks the muddle-headed old lady who is avid for information and gossip, but confuses any factual knowledge she has. At the same time the occurrence has more claim than she can know to be regarded as a sign. Superstition is used here humorously to provide dramatic irony. There is an ironic contrast between the actual relevance of the remark and the speaker's total ignorance of its true bearing on the situation. A child's grave, which would seem totally inappropriate as an omen for a wedding, does in fact incorporate the ideas of birth, child's illness and death all of which are closely connected with this particular wedding. Superstition also provides humour and local colour in the exchange between Schach and his old servant when he returns to the backwoods of Wuthenow, where peasant superstition obtains:

'Awers ick wußt' et joa, as de Poggen hüt Oabend mit ehr Gequoak nich to Enn' koam künn'n. 'Jei, jei, Mutter, seggt ick, 'dat bedüt wat.' Awers as de Fruenslüd' sinn! Wat seggt se, 'Regen bedüt et. Un dat's man gaud. Denn uns' Tüffeln bruken't'.<sup>30</sup>

In a few words Fontane characterises a simple way of life, whose chief preoccupations are the weather and potatoes; a way of life to which Schach's marriage would condemn him.

In contrast to the secondary function of superstition in Schach von Wuthenow, in L'Adultera Van der Straaten's superstition and a rather artificially imposed sense of predestination virtually carry the plot. His insistence on his superstitious fears about the future<sup>31</sup> results in the reader being neither surprised, nor particularly sympathetic, when disaster finally comes to him. Fontane's attempts,

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30 Ibid. p.350.

31 N IV, p.14, p.76, p.88.

by references to his superstition, to make events seem inevitable and foreordained are lacking in subtlety. They will be examined more closely with reference to the theme of fate and predestination in this work.

In Cécile, both the heroine and Gordon betray superstitious inclinations. In Cécile's case there is little reason for the reader to accept as signs what she, in her desire for a secure and happy future, designates as such. She is constantly looking for signs to reassure her. She is first seen in a train, escaping from her old life:

Niemand sprach, und nur die Gardine mit dem eingemusterten M.H.E. flatterte lustig im Winde. Cécile starrte darauf hin, als ob sie den Tiefsinn dieser Zeichen erraten wolle ---<sup>32</sup>

This is the first indication of that aspect of her temperament which makes her feel the need to interpret a windfall of rose petals<sup>33</sup> and a cloud of yellow butterflies<sup>34</sup> as good omens for herself. In these cases it is Cécile herself who gives the phenomena meaning, by interpreting them as signs. The same is true of her prophetic vision of Gordon:

'Wir gingen --- und plauderten und bückten uns und pflückten Blumen, bis mich plötzlich ein glühroter Schein blendete. Und als ich auf sah, sah ich, daß es die nieder gehende Sonne war, deren Glut durch eine drüben am anderen Ufer stehende Blutbuche fiel. Und in der Glut stand Gordon und war wie davon übergossen. Und sehen Sie, das ist das Bild, von dem ich fühle, daß es mir eine Vorbedeutung war und wenn nicht eine Vorbedeutung, so doch zum mindesten eine Warnung.'<sup>35</sup>

32 Ibid. p.130.

33 Ibid. p.175.

34 Ibid. p.188.

35 Ibid. p.234.

What is important is not the phenomenon itself, but Cécile's reaction to it. The episode is not presented directly and objectively at the time of its occurrence, but only through her subjective account after she has reflected on it.

Die Natur spricht nicht mehr unmittelbar, das Rot des Abends ist nicht schon an sich selbst Bild der Leidenschaft Gordons; das wird es erst durch Céciles deutende Empfindung und ihre verbale Reflexion.<sup>36</sup>

Superstition is not ironised in Cécile as it was in Schach von Wuthenow, indeed Fontane accepts it explicitly in the incident involving the cuckoo,

--- denn jeder ist abergläubisch.<sup>37</sup>

Gordon's belief in signs is also presented as quite acceptable, for example when he sees his orders to leave almost as acts of providence:

'Ohne den Brief wäre mir das Telegramm ein Greuel gewesen, jetzt ist es mir ein Fingerzeig, wie damals der Befehl, der mich aus Thale wegrief.'<sup>38</sup>

These superstitious utterances are designed, as was the case in L'Adultera, to contribute to the structure of the novel and increase the sense of inevitability of the catastrophe. Although their inclusion is justified as a means of characterisation, especially in the case of Cécile who is "träumerisch"<sup>39</sup> and likes to create a kind of phantasy world for herself, they are artificial and superfluous when viewed as structural elements:

Es ist bezeichnend für das Mittel, mit dem er die ästhetische Einheit hier zu bewältigen versucht, die

36 H. Ohl, Bild und Wirklichkeit, Heidelberg, 1968, p.214.

37 N IV p.189. Cf. above, chap.II, p.22f.

38 N IV, p.265.

39 Ibid. p.254.

'ründere Rundung' zu erreichen sich bemüht: vor allem nämlich mit einer forcierten Leitmotivtechnik und einer zum Teil allzu aufdringlichen Symbolik. Auch Cécile krankt noch daran. Die Technik wirkt künstlich und überzogen, und man glaubt nicht recht jenen Omina des Schicksals, die als geheimnisvoll vorbestimmt ahnen lassen sollen, was so plausibel und folgerichtig nach natürlichen Gesetzen der Seele und der Welt abläuft.<sup>40</sup>

Franziska and Graf Petöfy are both strongly influenced by superstition. Their attitude to irrational phenomena is both serious and lighthearted. Such phenomena are subjects for gay conversational exchanges but also for serious reflection. The underlying seriousness of Franziska's attitude is made clear when she refuses to patronise a fortune teller:

'Unser ganzes Leben ist eine Kette von Gnaden, aber als der Gnaden größte bedünkt mich doch die, daß wir nicht wissen und nicht wissen sollen, was der nächste Morgen uns bringt. Und weil wir's nicht wissen sollen, sollen wir's auch nicht wissen wollen.'

'Auch nicht einmal im Scherz, im Spiel?'  
'Auch nicht einmal im Spiel. Denn es ist ein Spiel mit Dingen, die nicht zum Spielen da sind. --- Es gibt der tückischen Mächte genug, und ihre listig lauernernde Feindschaft auch noch durch Spiel und Spott herausfordern zu wollen, tut nie gut und ist der Anfang vom Ende.'<sup>41</sup>

Both Graf Petöfy and Franziska are explicitly labelled as superstitious.<sup>42</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Fontane has once more, as in Vor dem Sturm and to a lesser extent L'Adultera, built up his novel on a series of irrational motifs in the form of signs and superstitious beliefs. The motif of dreams and their significance runs through the novel in a desultory, undeveloped way. The main recurrent motif is that of the bell. When it first occurs, two bells are heralding

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40 Brinkmann, op.cit., p.71, on L'Adultera.

41 N II, p.46.

42 Ibid. p.54, p.27, p.151.

Franziska's arrival at Schloß Arpa.<sup>43</sup> They suddenly stop and then only one rings out. This occurrence is explained later, but not until the motif has been further endowed with special significance for Franziska. It represents for her, happiness, and her uncomplicated and untroubled youth:

'--- Ach, Hannah, es bleibt dabei, das waren doch unsere besten Tage, wie wir noch mit dem Kirchenschlüssel in den Turm gingen und an dem Glockenseil zogen und den Abend einläuteten.'<sup>44</sup>

The fact that one of the bells welcoming her has cracked thus takes on added significance when it is discussed immediately afterwards.<sup>45</sup> Franziska sees the event as an ill omen, draws attention to it specifically, and asserts her superstitious fears to Hannah,

'Es gibt eben Zeichen und Träume.'<sup>46</sup>

She adopts a more rational attitude when returning from an enjoyable tour of the estate with her uneasiness about moving in somewhat allayed.<sup>47</sup> At the end of the novel Fontane vindicates Franziska's original attitude. When all is in order, when Franziska has accepted the consequences of her action and decided to find reconciliation to her fate by devoting herself to Catholicism and her duties as Gräfin Petöfy the bells too are in order again.

Endlich schloß die Feier, alles kehrte zu seinem Tagewerk zurück, und nur die Glocken oben klangen noch über Land und See hin. Es waren aber wieder zwei, die geläutet wurden.<sup>48</sup>

Before the end of the novel and the final reconciliation, the bell

43 Ibid. p.77.

44 Ibid. p.88.

45 Ibid. p.88f.

46 Ibid. p.89.

47 Ibid. p.90f.

48 Ibid. p.166.



motif has occurred in a very different and disturbing context. This time it is the steamer bell whose sound together with its "Feuerauge" has excited Franziska,<sup>49</sup> and has come as if as an answer to her longing and dissatisfaction, crystallised a moment earlier by her reading of Rousseau's Confessions. In this instance the motif heralds Graf Egon's arrival, and establishes the atmosphere in which Franziska's transgression takes place. The development of the bell motif particularly with reference to the bells of Schloß Arpa is rather contrived and obvious.<sup>50</sup>

Fontane, however, does not let the credibility of omens and signs go unchallenged. Graf Egon's interpretation of his finding a late rose as a sign of possible future happiness<sup>51</sup> is not a true omen as the broken bell is. It belongs to the same category as Cécile's butterflies and rose petals. Egon sees the rose as a sign, because that is what he would like it to be. Graf Petöfy indulges his own superstition in matters that concern himself; for example, when he finds Franziska's old window obscured by mist.<sup>52</sup> In matters in which he is less subjectively involved, he adopts a more rational attitude. He mocks his sister's mystical interpretation of a priest's drowning and provides a practical explanation:

'Judith hat eine Neigung' warf hier der Graf ein, 'an den einfachsten Erklärungen vorüberzugehen und immer nach wenigstens einem Geheimnis zu suchen, wenn es ein Wunder nicht sein kann. Das Fährboot kenterte, weil es überladen und der Fährmann be-

49 Ibid. p.120.

50 Sasse, op.cit., p.50, on Graf Petöfy: "This presentiment of impending tragedy, reinforced from the very first chapter by foreshadowing hints somewhat too obtrusive at times is further strengthened by the sombre and solitary atmosphere of the castle on the shores of the Arpasee."

51 N II, p.148.

52 Ibid. p.162.

trunken war. C'est tout.<sup>53</sup>

There is a similar contrast of reaction to a single event when the brother and sister hear of Egon and Franziska's rescue:

Der Graf, als er gelesen, gab den Zettel an Judith. Diese war in äußerster Erregung, sah in allem nur Wunder und Gebetserhörung und versprach, eine Kirchenschenkung zu machen, während ihr Bruder das Rettungswunder auf die zwei Bootsleute schob und sich dahin entschied, es diesen zugute kommen zu lassen.<sup>54</sup>

The belief in the supernatural is further countered by the attitude of Hannah, a staunch Lutheran.<sup>55</sup> She is a parallel figure to Tante Schorlemmer in Vor dem Sturm. Hannah's words have more authority, as she has not been depicted as a figure of fun as Tante Schorlemmer was. Thus, although superstition has the upper hand and goes unquestioned throughout most of the novel, Fontane does provide some commonsense opposition to it. The balance is nonetheless too heavily weighted in favour of rather ineptly presented irrationality.

The theme of superstition is closely bound up with that of predestination. The second chapter of L'Adultera, where Van der Straaten gives voice to his superstitious fears about the future, is fraught with heavily underlined references to predestination. The first comes from Melanie examining the painting:

'Es ist so viel Unschuld in ihrer Schuld ----- und alles wie vorherbestimmt.'<sup>56</sup>

This is followed by pointed fatalistic remarks from Van der Straaten culminating in:

53 Ibid. p.123.

54 Ibid. p.144.

55 Ibid. p.81.

56 N IV, p.13.

'Es kommt was kommen soll.'

and Melanie's repetition of,

'--- Und vorherbestimmt, sagt ich. Prädestiniert! ---',<sup>57</sup>

This introduction leaves the reader in little doubt as to the course of future events. Having driven home his point with hammer blows, Fontane tries to weaken the impact of the conversation by devoting the first paragraph of Chapter 3 to an interpretation of the preceding discussion - an interpretation designed to lessen the force of the original statements. Having, at the outset, explicitly established the theme of predestination, in the light of which Fontane intends events to be seen, he contents himself with only a few more passing references to keep it fresh in the reader's mind:

Er [Van der Straaten] stand in der abergläubischen Furcht, in seinem Glücke von einem vernichtenden Schläge bedroht zu sein ---<sup>58</sup>

and, 'Es gibt ein Sprichwort 'Gottes Mühlen mahlen langsam', und sieh, als ich noch ein kleiner Junge war, hört ich's oft von unserer alten Kindermuhme, und mir wurde immer so bang dabei. Es war wohl eine Vorahnung.'<sup>59</sup>

In Fontane's eagerness to justify and explain the course of events - a course which arises naturally out of the characters and their situation - he over-embellishes the novel with references to a fate beyond man, which is irrelevant to the true situation.<sup>60</sup> The determining forces in the novel do not consist in an ineluctable destiny divorced from the everyday world, but in the basic incompatibility of two of the characters, Melanie and Van der Straaten, and the circumstance that a more suitable

57 Ibid. p.14f.

58 Ibid. p.76.

59 Ibid. p.88.

60 As a prime illustration of this weakness in the work Wandrey picks out chapter 8, "die prachtvolle Landpartie nach der Stralauer

partner for Melanie appears on the scene. In spite of having established a strong thread of predestination in the work, Fontane makes mock of society's facile attempts to interpret events with reference to an abstract order beyond the characters themselves:

Man kümmerte sich wieder um sie, ließ sie gesellschaftlich wieder aufleben, und selbst solche, die bei dem Zusammenbrechen der Rubehnschen Finanzherrlichkeit nur Schadenfreude gehabt und je nach ihrer klassischen oder christlichen Bildung und Beanlagung von 'Nemesis' oder 'Finger Gottes' gesprochen hatten, bequerten sich jetzt, sich mit dem hübschen Paare zu versöhnen, ----- Eine kleine Zahl Esoterischer aber führte den ganzen Fall auf die Wahlverwandtschaften zurück<sup>61</sup> - Das Naturgesetzliche habe wieder mal gesiegt.

Here again, as was the case with his attitude to superstition in Graf Petöfy, Fontane displays the flexibility of his point of view. He is not given to subscribing wholeheartedly to any single theory, and prefers, having presented the reader with contradictory ideas, to reserve judgement.<sup>62</sup>

In Graf Petöfy the thread of predestination is more carefully woven into the plot than in L'Adultera. The references to it are more discreet and the theme is conveyed rather more subtly by means of motifs, such as the bell and other omens. The handling of the theme

60 (Contd.) Wiese, auf der die Ereignisse sich so natürlich entwickeln, wird durch ähnliche Drücker und Hinweise, daß etwas passieren, daß dieser Ausflug wichtige Folgen nach sich ziehen werde, ankündigend abgeschwächt, vorweggenommene Interpretationen, die stören, deren es nicht bedarf, ja die die ganz falsche Meinung aufkommen lassen, es handle sich hier um etwas wie eine Schicksalsnovelle." op.cit., p.175.

61 N IV, p.121f.

62 Strech speaks of the "Neigung Fontanes zum Prädestinationsgedanken ----- [aber] er hat für ihn keineswegs das Gewicht eines immer gültigen Prinzips" and quotes Fontane, FF I, p.231: "Das Leben hat mich gelehrt, daß alles auf die Menschen ankommt, nicht auf die sogenannten Verhältnisse. Die Menschen, in 99 Fällen von 100, machen diese. Auch wenn sie sich ungünstig gestalten, werden sie durch das, was wir in uns haben, doch schließlich besiegt." Strech, op.cit., p.108.

here has much in common with its treatment in Vor dem Sturm. The star motif is again employed, to represent the forces of destiny and providence:

'Gute Sterne haben bisher über meinem [Franziskas] Leben auf Schloß Arpa gestanden'<sup>63</sup>

and, --- als Egon jetzt unwillkürlich dem wenigstens anscheinend aus der Höhe niedersteigenden Tone nach oben hin folgte, sah er, daß die Sterne wieder da waren. Aber sie standen jetzt an einem wunderbar durchglühten Himmel und ihr Licht, das eine Stunde vorher noch so still und friedlich auf die Welt herabgeblickt hatte, sah jetzt auf sie nieder, als ob es Unheil und Untergang bedeute.<sup>64</sup>

Graf Petöfy's interpretation of the incident involving some mice which, having been flooded out, are preyed upon by crows,<sup>65</sup> is one of the most direct references to predestination in this novel. The treatment of predestination in the work, although on the whole less obtrusively handled than in L'Adultera is nonetheless a regression in the development of Fontane's technique and attitude to reality. He is still trying to impress on the reader the existence of some supernatural force determining man's life, when the actual forces in the novel by which the course of the action is conditioned are predominantly social and psychological. Fontane has recognised this fact quite clearly in Schach von Wuthenow, whose social and historical context is precisely defined. He appears to have been less able to view Graf Petöfy, with its less familiar and well defined social and geographical context, in this light, and has evidently felt the need to order the development of the novel according to some additional fixed principle.

Cécile, despite references to omens, is comparatively free from

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63 N II, p.110.

64 Ibid. p.142.

65 Ibid. p.163.

the artificially imposed idea of transcendental forces governing man's destiny. The course of events is indeed inevitably determined, but less by supernatural powers than by irrational, unbidable forces inherent in the personalities of the characters and the society in which they live. In a letter to Paul Schlenther Fontane explains his intentions in writing Cécile:

--- Cécile ist doch mehr als eine Alltagsgeschichte, die liebevoll und mit einem gewissen Aufwand von Kunst erzählt ist. Wenigstens will die Geschichte noch etwas mehr sein; sie setzt sich erstens vor, einen Charakter zu zeichnen, der --- noch nicht gezeichnet ist, und will zweitens den Satz illustrieren, 'wer mal 'drinsitzt', gleichviel mit oder ohne Schuld, kommt nicht wieder heraus.'<sup>66</sup>

This intention is effectively realised on the whole. Any references to a supernatural power are made by the characters themselves, and are more indicative of their own attitudes than of the view of the situation that the author is presenting. Klothilde writes of "unglückseligen Gestirnen",<sup>67</sup> but this is more a figurative way of referring to Cécile's unfortunate early environment than an assertion of the existence of destiny. Gordon's words:

'Eine gnädige Hand muß uns bewahren, von Tag zu Tag, ---'<sup>68</sup>

expresses a sentiment close to Fontane's heart, but the implication is not of any specific religious or transcendental beliefs, but merely of a vague awareness of some kind of grace beyond man's control. The subject is not pursued in this novel, and the true nature of predestination as revealed by Cécile's situation is summed up in another utterance by Gordon:

66 FE II, 2nd June 1887.

67 N IV, p.253.

68 Ibid. p.218.

'Arme Cécile! Sie hat sich dies Leben nicht ausgesucht, sie war darin geboren ---'<sup>69</sup>

In the light of this, and of the turn that events inevitably take, Rosa's optimistic assertion about providence -

'Der Himmel legt einem nicht mehr auf als man tragen kann.'<sup>70</sup> -

takes on overtones of tragic irony. Cécile undergoes, in the context of polite society, and as a result of its demands, a similar experience to that which drove Grete Minde beyond the bounds of society -

Es war ihr mehr auferlegt worden, als sie tragen konnte.<sup>71</sup>

In Schach von Wuthenow Fontane similarly creates the impression that man's lot is predetermined by social and environmental factors over which he has little control:

'Es liegt alles vorgezeichnet in uns, und was Ursach' scheint, ist meist schon wieder Wirkung und Folge!'<sup>72</sup>

The only choice that man has is whether to conform to the existing social conventions, or to defy them, and in so doing take upon himself the inevitable consequences of this defiance. This choice is the subject of all four of the early novels, as it is of the majority of Fontane's later works. In three out of the four there is explicit reference to this idea of the inescapable and therefore 'natural' results entailed by a course of action defiant of society's rules. In L'Adultera, where Fontane makes the choice against convention appear comparatively painless and successful, Melanie refuses to enter into

69 Ibid. p.255.

70 Ibid. p.200.

71 N III, p.87.

72 N II, p.292.

a situation of compromise, asserting:

'Es hat eben alles seine natürliche Konsequenz.'<sup>73</sup>

Franziska, at the end of Graf Petöfy, accepts the consequences of her action and appeals to Hannah:

'--- du bist so gescheit und mußt einsehen, daß alles sein Gesetz und seine natürliche Folge hat.'<sup>74</sup>

and Schach too is forced in the end to recognise the inescapable implications of what he has done:

Schach, der inzwischen Gelegenheit gefunden hatte, sich wieder zu sammeln, erwiderte, 'daß er wohl wisse, wie jegliches Ding im Leben seine natürliche Konsequenz habe.'<sup>75</sup>

The poignancy of the characters' plights and their suffering is intensified by their awareness of their own dilemma.<sup>76</sup> Cécile and Gordon are likewise called upon to face up to the 'natural' consequences of her situation and his action, but they do not attain to clarity of vision on this point until the end of the work. Throughout the novel they try to convince themselves that a happy ending is possible. The fact that there is no explicit reference to the 'natural' results of the situation is indicative of unwillingness or inability on their part to face up to uncompromising social reality.

In the crime stories Fontane presents a system in which man's fate takes the form of retribution inexorably following upon crime.

73 N IV, p.90.

74 N II, p.167.

75 Ibid. p.341.

76 Cf. Strech, op.cit., p.25: "Die Konsequenzen sind fatal deshalb, weil der prädestinationsgläubige Fontane offenbar keinen Ausweg aus einer so und nicht anders tragischen Ausgangslage wie in Effi Briest sieht, auch dann und besonders nicht, wenn die Beteiligten sich über die Lage der Dinge im klaren sind wie z.B. in Graf Petöfy."



In the social novels however it is a question of guilt followed by punishment - guilt, not in an absolute moral sense, but as defined by social norms.<sup>77</sup> In the social novels the forces to which man is subject are irrational inasmuch as they have no basis in a logically worked out, rational order, but arise from society's often arbitrary and wrong-headed notions of accepted moral standards and codes of behaviour. These forces do not smack of the supernatural, as in the crime stories; they are not cloaked in an aura of inscrutable mystery but they are less rational and more arbitrary in the selection of victims. The order which holds sway in the social novels is the more disturbing because it is in a way closer to man himself. It has its origins in his own ideas and actions, but it nonetheless is beyond the control of the individual and has him at its mercy. The illusion of man's freedom of choice makes the actual power of the determining forces seem the greater. The contrast between apparent freedom and actual subjection is portrayed by Fontane with ironic and disabused realism. It is in Schach von Wuthenow that this aspect of man's fate is most clearly and effectively represented. Comments such as,

Armer Schach! Es war anders in den Sternen geschrieben.<sup>78</sup>

and, --- so gewiß es absichtslos gesagt worden war, so gewiß war es doch auch aus einer dunklen Ahnung heraus gesprochen worden.<sup>79</sup>

indicate Fontane's intention of establishing the existence of some kind of undefined forces of predestination in the novel. On the whole however he concentrates on more personal aspects of the determining

77 Cf. FE I, 15th May 1878, an Mathilde von Rohr: "--- es kommt auf zweierlei an; auf die Charaktere und auf ein poetisch zu mutmaßendes Verhältnis von Schuld und Strafe."

78 N II, p.345.

79 Ibid. p.303.

forces, by examining the psychology and motives of the characters. Schach, in a moment of honesty with himself, recognises that he, to a large extent, bears the responsibility for his own fate:

'Alle Schuld liegt bei dir. Deine Schuld ist dein Schicksal.'<sup>80</sup>

Fontane also writes in a letter to his daughter:

Mitunter drängt sich mir die Frage auf, ob Gott wirklich die Menschen quält und ob sie's nicht blos selber sind, die sich das Leben so schwer machen.<sup>81</sup>

Thus his attitude to fate is ambiguous.<sup>82</sup> He is unwilling to place responsibility either squarely on the shoulders of the 'Gods' or of the victims. In his most successful works, such as Schach von Wuthenow, he is content to place the situation before the reader in all its complexity and allow him to decide for himself where the responsibility lies. However complex and ambiguous the factors involved, the one unambiguous aspect of the situation that Fontane presents is the inevitability with which the consequences of man's action will overtake him. For all his attempted rationalisations, man cannot choose to ignore or escape from the often irrational forces which determine his lot.

Reversion or conversion to the Roman Catholic faith occurs fre-

80 Ibid. p.344.

81 FP II, an Mete, 5th May 1883.

82 Strech, op.cit., p.107, "Der Autor, der zu einem wenn auch lückenhaften und undogmatischen Prädestinationsglauben neigt - er identifiziert sich nicht mit ihm, nicht einmal sehr häufig mit seinem eigenen Urteil - ein solcher Autor wird kaum nach dem Selbstwert von Aktionen fragen, dramatische Auseinandersetzungen entgegengesetzter Willensvorgänge verfolgen wollen. Er wird vor allem nach Motiven und Bedingungen forschen und forschen müssen, er wird zu deuten und zu klären versuchen, soweit ihm dies die für ihn zuletzt unerforschliche Vorbestimmung erlaubt. Diese Klärung, und tastende Deutung geschieht vorzugsweise im Dialog."

quently in Fontane's earlier works. It has been seen in the case of Tubal and Kathinka Ladalinski (Vor dem Sturm), and of Frau Hratscheck (Unterm Birnbaum). In L'Adultera, although there is no actual conversion, the Roman Catholic church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice figures on two significant occasions in the novel's development. In the coffee house where Melanie is sitting with her husband and Rubehn the difference between her own and her husband's degree of culture is suggested by her correction of his version of the church's name.<sup>83</sup> Van der Straaten's reply to this reveals an awareness of his inferiority, which he tries to dismiss, but to which he actually draws attention, by blusteringly minimising the importance of his error. This small incident in Rubehn's presence suggests the underlying friction in the couple's relationship and indicates some of the grounds for its dissolution. The second occasion is when Melanie, expecting Rubehn's child, is dangerously ill. She is in Venice, and on hearing the bells of della Salute she takes them as a sign; the turning point in her illness has come.<sup>84</sup> This reminder of her previous relationship with her husband at the time of her recovery and the birth of Rubehn's child symbolises her redemption, that is her absolution from guilt towards Van der Straaten. The birth of the child to her new husband is heralded by the bells, and the new relationship is, as it were, sanctified. Roman Catholicism plays a similar and even more clearly defined role in Schach von Wuthenow where Victoire attributes the survival of Schach's child to her prayers at a Roman Catholic altar in Italy.<sup>85</sup> Here as in L'Adultera the associations of expiation of guilt and divine forgiveness are evoked.<sup>86</sup>

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83 N IV, p.51f.

84 Ibid. p.98.

85 N II, p.387f.

86 Demetz, op.cit., p.162, "--- auch sie [Victoire], wie Scotts schuldig-unschuldige Effie Deans und Fontanes Franziska Franz (Graf Petöfy) oder Hilde (Ellernklipp) sucht ihre Zuflucht an  
(Continued)

Cécile turns to Catholicism in the hour of death as Frau Hratscheck (Unterm Birnbaum) and Tubal (Vor dem Sturm) have done before her:

'Jede Kirche hat reiche Gaben --- die aber darin ich geboren und großgezogen wurde, macht uns das Sterben leichter und bettet uns sanfter.'<sup>87</sup>

Franziska decides to expiate her guilt by devoting herself to her duties as Gräfin Petöfy and to the Catholic church.<sup>88</sup> This decision is closely connected with the motif of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which accompanies Franziska throughout the section of the novel dealing with her life at Schloß Arpa. Franziska's seeking refuge in Catholicism has been compared by Demetz<sup>89</sup> and Groß<sup>90</sup> to Hilde's in Ellernklipp. Although the case is similar it is through Protestantism, not Catholicism, that Hilde finds reconciliation to her lot.

Sasse observes of Fontane,

Although he occasionally speaks of the 'große Rätselmacht' behind the façade of life, although he betrays time and time again profound sympathy and admiration for a coherent metaphysical and philosophical system such as Catholicism, his own attitude is one of questioning scepticism in regard to absolute infallible values and criteria combined at the same time with a longing for metaphysical, indeed religious certainty.<sup>91</sup>

86 (Contd.) einem römisch-katholischen Altar; fast ist es, als ob sie Balzacs Verdacht bestätige, daß den büßenden Magdalenen die ästhetisch reizvollere Intimität des Katholischen eher anstehe als die Strenge des Protestantismus."

87 N IV, p.284, cf. Sasse, op.cit., p.78 note 13, who quotes Fontane: "'Es gibt Lagen, wo der Protestantismus versagt und der Katholizismus das Herz weicher bettet.'" and cf. James Monmouth, (H V, p.539), "Es stirbt sich leichter im Schoß von Rom."

88 N II, p.167.

89 Demetz, op.cit., p.162.

90 N II, p.397.

91 Sasse, op.cit., p.173.

Fontane writes so frequently of conversion to Catholicism, not because he ever contemplated it himself, but because its associations of reconciliation and order appealed to his aesthetic sense. In each of the instances cited, the character's turning to Catholicism is associated with ideas of expiation of guilt and absolution from transgression. Fontane found it a convenient way of tidying up the loose ends of his earlier novels and of, at the same time, introducing a conciliatory note into otherwise bleak situations. Roman Catholicism with its doctrine of absolution from sin seemed particularly suitable for Fontane's purpose in novels whose main theme was guilt and punishment. In his later works he abandoned this rather suspect panacea for life's problems.<sup>92</sup> The reversion to Catholicism in death, depicted in Vor dem Sturm, Unterm Birnbaum and Cécile is psychologically credible, but the other cases of conversion are less convincing, and seem to provide an aesthetically satisfactory rather than a psychologically realistic solution to the problem.

Three of the early social novels, Cécile, Graf Petöfy and L'Adultera, may be regarded as tentative forerunners of Effi Briest. They all explore the theme of the unfaithfulness (potential or actual) of a young wife to her much older husband. Fontane experiments for the first time in Cécile and Graf Petöfy with several of the irrational and supernatural elements which are prominent features of Effi Briest. Cécile, like Effi, a childlike figure in her outlook,<sup>93</sup>

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92 The motif does recur however in Effi Briest, where it is employed to illuminate Effi's state of mind: "Effi war fest protestantisch erzogen und würde sehr erschrocken gewesen sein, wenn man an und in ihr was Katholisches entdeckt hätte; trotzdem glaubte sie, daß der Katholizismus uns gegen solche Dinge 'wie da oben' besser schütze." N VII, p.266f.

93 N IV, p.167: "Und er [Gordon] empfand dabei deutlich, daß was immer auch auf ihrer Seele lastete, die Seele, die diese Last trage, trotz alledem eine Kinderseele sei."

is tormented by her unsympathetic husband just as Effi is by Instetten. St. Arnaud heartlessly, and with seeming satisfaction at her discomfiture, frightens her by evoking ghosts and witches on their ride home from Altenbrak.<sup>94</sup> Instetten is similarly inconsiderate when he, apparently deliberately, fails to reassure Effi about the Chinaman. It is in the course of the return home from Altenbrak that Cécile is first seen allied to Gordon against her husband. This occurs, as in Effi Briest, in a context where the sensitive young wife, made uneasy by supernatural phenomena, finds understanding in the words of another man. Gordon, in the face of St. Arnaud's scorn, supports Cécile in her reaction to the eerie blackbird that crosses their path.<sup>95</sup> Crampas similarly supports Effi in her fears about the Chinaman, although his motives are less altruistic.

Franziska's reaction on arrival at Schloß Arpa foreshadows Effi's reaction to the house in Kessin. Both new homes fill the brides with uneasiness, expressed as a fear of ghosts.<sup>96</sup> Franziska on her first night in Schloß Arpa is frightened by a strange sound which turns out to have a perfectly simple, practical cause:

Als bald bemerkte sie, daß es ein weit vorgebauter Balkon sei, dessen vom Winde gerütteltes Gitterwerk solchen unheimlichen Ton gab.<sup>97</sup>

Effi is similarly troubled on her first night in Kessin by a strange noise. A practical explanation for the uncanny swishing sound is provided. It is said to be caused by long curtains moving in the wind.<sup>98</sup> In this case, however, the explanation is not totally

94 Ibid. p.215.

95 Ibid. p.213.

96 N II, p.81, VII, p.205, p.207, p.254.

97 N II, p.81.

98 N VII, p.212.

convincing, and an element of fearful doubt remains in Effi's mind. Both young women are troubled by their marriages. They are both sensitive and apprehensive, but at the same time subject to boredom. Fontane conveys their mingled fear of, and desire for, something out of the ordinary, to add some interest and point to their lives, by portraying their vague, uneasy belief in the supernatural. A further irrational element which occurs in Graf Petöfy, and is reiterated in Effi Briest, is the confusion of the workings of a guilty conscience with supernatural phenomena. What Graf Egon at first takes to be ghostly footsteps following him turns out to be the echo of his own steps, coloured and turned into something menacing by his conscience.<sup>99</sup> Effi herself recognises in a hallucination of someone peering over her shoulder the workings of her conscience:

'Ich weiß schon, was es ist; es war nicht der',  
und sie wies mit dem Finger nach dem Spukzimmer  
oben. 'Es war was anderes --- mein Gewissen ---',<sup>100</sup>

Thus Fontane has already experimented in his early works with several of the supernatural elements that he is to use in Effi Briest. In the earlier social novels their use is generally sporadic and disconnected, but by the time he comes to write Effi Briest, he has acquired the technical skill to weave them into an intricate pattern whose individual motifs are interdependent. Groß compares the Virgin Mary motif (Graf Petöfy) to the Chinaman motif (Effi Briest).<sup>101</sup> If this is a valid comparison, it only serves to underline heavily the advances that Fontane made in handling such supernatural material in the eleven years that elapsed between the writing of Graf Petöfy and Effi Briest.

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99 N II, p.149.

100 N VII, p.315.

101 N II, p.397.

Of the early social novels Schach von Wuthenow is clearly the most successful, and outshines many of Fontane's subsequent works. This success can be attributed primarily to Fontane's careful selection of telling incident and significant conversational pieces. By restricting himself to a minimum of revealing scenes, Fontane has skilfully conveyed the quintessence of a period through the situation of a very small social group. Demetz's harsh judgment of the other early social novels is largely justified;

Nach der Vollendung des Schach von Wuthenow (1883) sinkt die Arbeit Fontanes für Jahre in die Niederungen der gängigen Belletristik.<sup>102</sup>

Graf Petöfy (1884) und Cécile (1887) vertrauen der ererbten, aber leblosen Methodik des Gesellschaftsromanes ohne sie durch kühne Einsicht oder artistische Energie zu straffen.<sup>103</sup>

In the early novels, apart from Schach von Wuthenow, Fontane's lack of confidence in his portrayal of convincing social and psychological situations causes him to fall back on his old method of referring to signs and omens to lend the development of the novel inevitability. Although he does not always endorse these signs himself, but presents them as projections of the characters' desires, they are nonetheless frequently unconvincing or superfluous. The supernatural phenomena in these early works, actual or imagined, however, are to find an echo in his later works where he handles similar motifs with an accomplishment that endows them with a poetic intensity generally lacking in his first social novels. Initially he transfers to novels of social and psychological realism the irrational and supernatural stock in trade from earlier creations such as Vor dem Sturm and the crime stories. This material, insufficiently reworked at first, tends to disturb the balance

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102 Demetz, op.cit., p.164.

103 Ibid. p.165.



of the narrative, and it is not until it has been modified and remoulded in the later novels that such unevenness disappears.

## VI

Later Berlin Novels

The group of novels which is of least direct interest from the point of view of this study is comprised of Irrungen Wirungen (1887), Stine (1890), the sketch, Mathilde Möhring (1891), Frau Jenny Treibel (1892) and Die Poggenpuhls (1896). These are Fontane's mature novels dealing with different levels of Berlin society. All five are works of social realism, tending at times towards naturalism. They are set in the relatively young metropolis of Berlin, which lacks the ingrained superstitious and supernatural traditions that flourish in the countryside and villages in other works. In addition, in these mature works, Fontane has abandoned the practice, seen in the early social novels, of utilising irrational elements as artificially imposed structural props. For all these reasons supernatural and irrational elements are less in evidence in the later Berlin novels. Although their role has diminished significance, and familiar motifs have in many cases been considerably adapted, they are nonetheless present and worthy of consideration.

The supernatural 'Märchen' motif and connected images, already observed in earlier works, recur, significantly changed, in the Berlin novels. In Vor dem Sturm the motif was connected above all with Marie,

as a correlative for the distinctive and superior qualities which set her apart from the other characters. In the early social novels, Fontane often expressed the ensnaring charms of his heroines by means of fairytale imagery. In Cécile and Grete Minde however there are suggestions of the connotations that the motif is to acquire in later works. In Grete Minde part of its function is to evoke the idea of attempted escape into an illusory idyll,<sup>1</sup> and in Cécile the "verwünschte Schloß" incident functions as a warning against idyllic fantasies which do not correspond to reality. In the context of the later Berlin novels, fairytale imagery is not employed to represent supernatural qualities or forces, but to symbolise the unreal and unrealisable in the social context of the characters. It suggests one side of the dialogue carried on in the novels between the uncompromising demands of social reality and the characters', usually suppressed and always doomed, dreams of an ideal existence.

Lene's resolute renunciation of any illusory dreams of future happiness with Botho (Irrungen Wirungen) is mirrored by the repeated deliberate invalidation of any fairytale motifs which appear in the work. This process can be observed from the very beginning of the novel.<sup>2</sup> Frau Dörr suggests that Lene, whose parentage is unknown,

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1 Cf. Richter, op.cit., p.73: (of Grete Minde), "Züge des Märchenhaften scheinen das Unbeschwerte einer glücklichen Welt zu verbürgen. (III, 56,7) Sie sind assoziativ auf Märchenvorstellungen bezogen, denen sich im Bewußtsein Gretes wie Valtins der Fluchtgedanke zuvor immer wieder verband." and W. Müller-Seidel, Theodor Fontane. Soziale Romankunst in Deutschland, Stuttgart, 1975, p.73, "Denn im Grunde werden die Märchenmotive vom Erzähler der Grete Minde nur benutzt, um die Unmöglichkeit des Märchens zu 'beweisen'. Die Erzählung endet nicht im Märchenglück, sondern mit Katastrophe und Tod. Der Ausgang entspricht der Struktur des Antimärchens, wie man solche Schlüsse bezeichnet hat."

2 Cf. I. Mittenzwei, Die Sprache als Thema: Untersuchungen zu Fontanes Gesellschaftsromanen, Berlin and Zurich, 1970, p.97: "Zwar ist es, um genau zu sein, nicht die erste Seite allein, sondern der Beginn des ersten in Verbindung mit dem Beginn des zweiten Kapitels, die hier diese Funktion [presentation in nuce of subject] übernehmen, aber dafür hat das darin umrissene Strukturmodell auch zwei Seiten: es enthält Idyll und Ironie, Illusion  
(Continued)

might be a princess. This, if true, would mean that marriage between her and Botho was a possibility. Fontane does not allow this hope of a happy end to be entertained for a moment. Reality immediately suppresses illusion:

'---- un vielleicht is es eine Prinzessin oder so was.'  
Frau Nimptsch schüttelte bei dieser Vermutung den Kopf ----<sup>3</sup>

Similarly the suggestion of a fairytale setting complete with "Schloß" is soon contradicted and the prosaic reality of Lene's surroundings is put in its place:

Ja dies 'Schloß'! In der Dämmerung hätte es bei seinen Umrissen wirklich für etwas derartiges gelten können, heute aber, in unerbittlich heller Beleuchtung daliegend, sah man nur zu deutlich, daß der ganze bis hoch hinauf mit gotischen Fenstern bemalte Bau nichts als ein jämmerlicher Holzkasten war ----<sup>4</sup>

On another occasion the sentimental Frau Dörr's curiosity gives rise to the following exchange with Botho:

'Aber neugierig bin ich doch, was der Herr Baron mitgebracht haben.'

'Nun, da will ich nicht lange warten lassen, sonst denkt meine liebe Frau Dörr am Ende, daß es ein goldener Pantoffel ist oder sonst was aus dem Märchen.'

Und dabei gab er Lenen eine Tüte, daraus, wenn nicht alles täuschte, das gefranste Papier einiger Knallbonbons hervorguckte.<sup>5</sup>

Behind the gentle humour of this conversation lies a serious refusal to play the part of a fairytale prince, for Botho and Lene are too painfully conscious of reality to indulge in any such fantasy. The temptation to avoid the issue and entertain thoughts of a happy

2 (Contd.) und Nüchternheit, Schein und Sein, den Vorbehalt des Anführungszeichens und das rechte Wort."

3 N III, p.97.

4 Ibid. p.98.

5 Ibid. p.109.

ending between himself and Lene is strong however. As he considers the dilemma in his own mind Botho uses the word "Zauber"<sup>6</sup> of the forces which draw him towards the impossible, but ideal, solution of marriage with Lene.<sup>7</sup> In this instance again the "magic" of the ideal solution is almost immediately rejected in favour of order,

'Denn Ordnung ist viel und mitunter alles.'<sup>8</sup>

The confrontation between the ephemeral, unreal world of Botho's and Lene's happiness, and that of undesirable social reality occurs before the reader's eyes at Hankels Ablage. The transience of the situation is brought out in Botho's conversation with the innkeeper. Botho remarks on the quietness of the idyllic retreat, choosing a supernatural image:

'Und dann und wann ziehn ein paar große Spreekähne vorüber, aber alle sind einander gleich oder sehen sich wenigstens ähnlich. Und eigentlich ist jeder wie ein Gespensterschiff. Eine wahre Totenstille.'  
'Gewiß,' sagte der Wirt. 'Aber doch alles nur, solange es dauert.'<sup>9</sup>

The innkeeper's words are borne out by events, for the idyllic peace of a world which can exist only fleetingly, and in the minds of the couple, is disrupted by the intrusion of the "real" world in the shape of Botho's society friends with their mistresses. In Irrungen Wirungen the main characters' disabused attitude towards the possibility of happiness together is reflected and expressed by the immediate rejection and contradiction of supernatural motifs representing an unrealisable ideal.

6 Ibid. p.170,

7 Cf. L.O. Fry, "The Unreal in Fontane's Novels", Germanic Review 37 1966, p.106: "One of the dominant themes in Fontane, that of unfulfilled love and resignation, is often developed by means of the unreal."

8 N III, p.171

9 Ibid. p.151.

In Stine and Die Poggenpuhls also, the fairytale is symbolic of an unattainable fantasy world. Stine argues the case of common sense, against Waldemar's unrealistic proposal, in the following terms:

'Ja, Waldemar, so ist es; und daß du so was gewollt hast, das macht nun ein rasches Ende. Vor Jahren, ich war noch ein Kind, hab ich mal ein Feenstück gesehen, in dem zwei Menschen glücklich waren; aber ihr Glück, so hatte die Fee gesagt, würde für immer hin sein, wenn ein bestimmtes Wort gesprochen oder ein bestimmter Name genannt werde. Siehst du, so war es auch mit uns. Jetzt hast du das Wort gesprochen ---'10

By speaking, Waldemar has, as it were, broken the spell of their ephemeral happiness. By wishing to confer permanence on it he has destroyed it. Society cannot sanction the idyll once it has been brought to its notice. The fairy story terminology seems almost ludicrously inappropriate in the context of the couple concerned. Both are average, rather dull products of their social situation, and any association of them with magical spells only underlines the unviability of the situation which the spell represents. In Die Poggenpuhls it is Therese who clings to an unreal vision of the world in which she lives. Forgetting the family's impoverished circumstances, she inclines towards delusions of grandeur. Her mother scolds her for her unrealistic attitude, using the familiar "Märchen" motif, which Fontane, with a fine sense of the incongruous, juxtaposes to reality in the shape of a railway ticket office:

'Ja, Therese, du denkst immer, ein Livreedienner wird dir eine Kasette bringen mit der Aufschrift "dem tapferen Hause Poggenpuhl", aber das sind alles Märchengeschichten, und der Mann am Schalter, der die Fahrkarten verkauft, ist eine unerbittliche Wirklichkeit.'11

Leo's attitude is similar to his sister's in some respects, although

10 Ibid. p.300.

11 N IV, p.298.

he explicitly admits that he is fully conscious of it. His half-humorous admission to a belief in the impossible and non-existent has serious undertones. He uses the image not of a fairytale, but of an irrational phenomenon, a mirage, to represent the fond but necessary hopes that keep one in a positive frame of mind in the face of uncompromising reality:

'Wer was hat, nun ja, der kann das Leben so nehmen, wie's wirklich ist, der kann es sein, was sie jetzt einen Realisten nennen, wer aber nichts hat, wer immer in einer Wüste Sahara lebt, der kann ohne Fata Morgana mit Palmen und Odalisken und all dergleichen gar nicht existieren. Fata Morgana, sag ich. Wenn es dann, wenn man näher kommt, auch nichts ist, so hat man doch eine Stunde lang gelebt und gehofft und hat wieder Courage gekriegt und watet gemütlich weiter durch den Sand. Und so sind denn die Bilder, die so trügerisch und unwirklich vor uns gaukeln, doch eigentlich ein Glück.'<sup>12</sup>

In Frau Jenny Treibel a similar dialogue takes place between the actual social reality and an ideal, fantasy world that exists only in the sentimental imagination of Frau Jenny and Leopold. The two opposing sides of this dialogue are not only represented, as in the novels considered above, by fairytale and reality, but also by the terms 'poetry' and 'prose'. The theme is the same. Reality is victorious in the confrontation. Frau Jenny leaves much to be desired as a champion of poetry, but Professor Schmidt contributes more reliable support to its cause. The ironic tone of the novel is established at the beginning of the first chapter. Frau Jenny is introduced, corpulent and well-to-do, and details of her early days as a shop assistant are deftly inserted, so that the reader is at once aware of the materialistic, bourgeois milieu to which she belongs. Her first reference to poetry is prompted by a wave of nostalgia at revisiting Professor Schmidt, her former suitor's house. In her

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12 Ibid. p.307.

remarks the duality between her sentimental, pseudo-poetic preoccupations and her basically materialistic attitude is brought out humorously. Her poetical aspirations contrast sharply with a parenthetical remark about her poetry book's new, fashionable binding:

'Und ein paar Gedichte waren an mich gerichtet, die hab ich mir aufgehoben bis diesen Tag, und wenn mir schwer ums Herz ist, dann nehme ich das kleine Buch, das ursprünglich einen blauen Deckel hatte - jetzt habe ich es in grünen Maroquin binden lassen - , und setze mich ans Fenster und sehe auf unsern Garten und weine mich still aus ---'13

She elaborates on the theme with the conviction of a confirmed sentimentalist:

'--- und wenn mir nicht der Himmel, dem ich dafür danke, das Herz für das Poetische gegeben hätte, was, wenn es mal in einem lebt, nicht wieder auszurotten ist, so hätte ich nichts gelernt und wüßte nichts. Aber, Gott sei Dank, ich habe mich an Gedichten herangebildet, und wenn man viele davon auswendig weiß, so weiß man doch manches. Und daß es so ist, sieh, das verdanke ich nächst Gott, der es in meine Seele pflanzte, deinem Vater. Der hat das Blümlein großgezogen, das sonst drüben in dem Ladengeschäft unter all den prosaischen Menschen - und du glaubst gar nicht, wie prosaische Menschen es gibt - verkümmert wäre ---'14

This is all highly ironic in view of the fact that she has rejected the poetical Schmidt's suit to marry Kommerzienrat Treibel for his money. Nonetheless, she is seen again at the dinner table, arguing vehemently with Vogelsang, that the Golden Age of poetry is not dead, that it can survive even in the face of prosaic materialism.<sup>15</sup> Frau Jenny is presented on one more occasion, prompted by the mischievous Professor Schmidt, as the advocate of an "ideal" existence. This time the word "Märchen" is used to express the same sentimental fantasy that she has earlier termed "das Poetische". Very shortly after

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13 N VII, p.10.

14 Ibid. p.11.

15 Ibid. p.27.



agreeing,

'Alles große Glück ist ein Märchen.'<sup>16</sup>

however, Frau Jenny is surprised into showing her true colours,

---plötzlich aus dem sentimental Schwärmerischen in den Ton ausgesprochenster Wirklichkeit verfallend.<sup>17</sup>

When faced soon afterwards with her son's romantic proposal to marry the penniless daughter of her "poetic" friend she totally rejects the unreal world of poetic dreams and fancy, and takes positive, mercenary action to prevent the socially and financially unsuitable match. She is successful, and, as always in Fontane's novels, prosaic social reality triumphs. The dialogue between poetry and prose in the novel is ironically manipulated by Fontane, for, having established Frau Jenny as the verbal supporter of poetic ideals, he forces her to reveal her truly prosaic attitude, by assailing her son with the very sentimental fantasy which Jenny claims to endorse.<sup>18</sup>

Although prosaic reality is victorious, there are a few other words spoken, more convincingly, if less eloquently, in favour of the ideal rather than the actual situation. These remarks, made by Professor Schmidt, suggest another system of values than those which Frau Treibel acts on or propounds. On one occasion he asserts,

'Das Poetische- vorausgesetzt, daß man etwas anderes darunter versteht als meine Freundin Jenny Treibel - das Poetische hat immer recht; es wächst weit über

16 Ibid. p.106.

17 Ibid. p.107.

18 Cf. Mittenzwei, op.cit., p.153: "Mit der Phrase 'Alles große Glück ist ein Märchen' umgarnen Vater und Tochter Schmidt Mutter und Sohn Treibel auf der Landpartie. Während aber der Dialog der Älteren im Unverbindlichen bleibt und nur erneut die Sentimentalität Jennys mit der Ironie Schmidts konfrontiert, schickt sich Corinna an, aus dieser sentimental Redensartlichkeit realistische Konsequenzen zu ziehen, die Verlobung mit Leopold zu provozieren und der Rätin ein solches 'Märchen' großen Glückes tatsächlich vor Augen zu führen."

das Historische hinaus ---, <sup>19</sup>

This is very much the opinion of Fontane himself. It is not a plea for the world of unreal fantasy, but for the poetic realism of which Fontane was such a masterful exponent. Towards the end of the novel, referring to Marcell's attitude, he again cites a concept of higher ideals which stands in direct contrast to Jenny's confused notions:

'Sieh, das ist das, was man das Höhere nennt, das wirklich Ideale, nicht das von meiner Freundin Jenny.'<sup>20</sup>

At the very end of the novel, however, Fontane allows himself to be ironical even with Schmidt, and makes him, under the influence of drink at Corinna's wedding, utter a sentiment worthy of Jenny:

'Alle echte Lyrik hat was Geheimnisvolles.'<sup>21</sup>

In Mathilde Möhring also, the conflict between prosaic reality and the desire to realise a fantasy is won by reality. Hugo, ineffectual and dreamy, is taken in hand by the practical, calculating Thilde. Nonetheless he dreams of a different life, one unacceptable to society. He expresses this longing, not by means of the terms poetry or "Märchen", but by the motif of the "Tochter der Luft",<sup>22</sup>

'Es ist sonderbar, daß mir alles Praktische so sehr widerstreitet. Man kann es eine Schwäche nennen, aber vielleicht ist es auch eine Stärke. Wenn ich solche schöne Person durch die Luft fliegen sehe, bin ich ganz benommen und eigentlich beinah glücklich! Ich hätte doch wohl auch so was werden müssen. Ausübender Künstler oder Luftschiffer oder irgend etwas recht Phantastisches.'<sup>23</sup>

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19 N VII, p.62.

20 Ibid. p.158.

21 Ibid. p.166.

22 N VI, p.270.

23 Ibid. p.269.

He is to be allowed by Thilde to visit a performance of the trapeze artist when he has passed his examination, but, as Demetz puts it,

Nur will es sein Los, daß ihm die Trapezkünstlerin wie ein Traum entschwindet. Als Bergmann [sic] die Prüfung endlich besteht, ist ja 'die Tochter der Luft ----- wohl nicht mehr da'; damit hat auch für ihn das Zeitalter der Prosa, des Berufs und der Zählung in Familie und Staat begonnen.<sup>24</sup>

The Berlin novels are designed to expose the inescapable reality of social demands and circumstances. In them, Fontane has chosen the irrational motifs of the "Märchen", Fata Morgana, poetry, or the related image of the trapeze artist to reveal the characters' hopeless aspirations to escape from the conventions by which they are bound.<sup>25</sup>

A fairly strong thread of belief in the existence of fate in some form runs through these novels, as through all of Fontane's works. It is revealed in part by the characters' attitudes to superstition. Although the role of superstition is diminished, the characters nevertheless experience forebodings and have recourse to proverbial utterances as did their predecessors in earlier works.

Fontane uses proverbs in different ways. He uses them, for instance, to characterise those who employ them. When Waldemar expresses a longing for early death, Stine cites a proverb to comfort him contradict him, and also to lead the conversation back on to an acceptable plane:

24 Demetz, *op.cit.*, p.212.

25 Cf. Fry, *op.cit.*, p.115, "An unmistakable undercurrent of irony and pessimism runs through his [Fontane's] works: irony and pessimism towards a social and spiritual order which binds and destroys the spirit of those passionate and exuberant individuals who end in resignation and unrealistic yearning for a non-existent life." This is true not only of the more "passionate and exuberant" individuals, but also of duller, average characters such as Waldemar (Stine) and Hugo (Mathilde Möhring).

Stine verstand ihn wohl und bat ihn, als er das sagte, nicht so zu sprechen. Er müsse doppelt hoffen; denn wer vom Tode gerettet sei, der lebe lange.<sup>26</sup>

This is said out of sympathy for Waldemar and a desire to cheer him. It reveals Stine's kind heart and consideration for others. The addition,

So sage das Sprichwort, und die Sprichwörter hätten immer recht<sup>27</sup>

however, suggests, in its insistence, that she does not really believe it herself but is referring to the authority of proverbs in an effort to convince both Waldemar and herself. His reaction,

Er lächelte bei diesen Worten und lenkte dann auch seinerseits wieder zu heiteren Dingen über<sup>28</sup>,

suggests that he appreciates her concern for him, and it is this that makes him smile and change the subject, to avoid distressing her. This small episode also reveals one function of the proverb in human conversation. It deals in a superficial, but seemingly authoritative way with serious human situations. It provides a bridge by which conversation can be restored to an everyday plane, and by which the deeper issues of life and death may be avoided. These issues are for Stine, who is very conscious of social convention, beyond the limits of the acceptable relationship between herself and Waldemar; a relationship which can only consist of "plaudern".<sup>29</sup> Her awareness of what may be said between them and what is inadmissible, has already been observed in connection with Waldemar's proposal of marriage.<sup>30</sup>

26 N III, p.271.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid. p.269.

30 Cf. above, chap.VI, p.136.

Herr Nottebohm, the Poggenpuhls' landlord, is characterised by his speech at the beginning of the novel. His use of the proverb, '--- das ist Handgeld und bringt Glück,'<sup>31</sup> strengthens the delineation of him as a typical Berliner, inclined to sentimentality, but at the same time aware of material considerations. Frau Dörr (Irrungen Wurrungen) is another characteristic Berliner, whose sentimental leanings and indiscreet interest in affairs of the heart are typified when she points out with delight the proverbial significance of Lene's bleeding finger:

'Das tut nicht weh, Lene, das kenn ich; das is, wie wenn sich 'ne Braut in'n Finger sticht.'<sup>32</sup>

The situation is not really appropriate to the superstition,<sup>33</sup> which only applies to the pricking of fingers with needles, and in any case Lene is only too conscious of the fact that she is not, and never will be, Botho's bride. Frau Dörr's remark reveals her well-meaning tactlessness and lack of reflection, and her habit of talking in well-worn phrases and clichés. Its inappropriateness underlines the fact that Lene's situation lies outside the fixed social conventions to which Frau Dörr's inflexible range of expression refers.

Some superstitious and proverbial utterances have more far-reaching significance. They do not serve merely to characterise the speakers but have wider implications with regard to the particular fate of the characters and to man's condition in general. The distinction is drawn by Lene herself, in Irrungen Wurrungen. Botho asks her for a hair to tie together some flowers:

31 N IV, p.287.

32 N III, p.110.

33 Bächtold-Stäubli, Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens, Berlin and Leipzig, 1927, I, p.1524, "Zerbrechen beim Nähen viele Nadeln, so wird das Mädchen Braut, noch ehe das Kleid abgetragen ist."

'Nein' sagte sie bestimmt.

'Nein? warum nicht? warum nein?'

'Weil das Sprichwort sagt: "Haar bindet". Und wenn ich es um den Strauß binde, so bist du mitgebunden.'

'Ach, das ist Aberglauben. Das sagt Frau Dörr.'

'Nein, die alte Frau sagte es. Und was die mir von Jugend auf sagte, auch wenn es wie Aberglauben aussah, das war immer richtig.'<sup>34</sup>

She differentiates between the facile, often inappropriate clichés of Frau Dörr and the true wisdom of Frau Nimptsch.<sup>35</sup> The superstition which Fontane chooses to symbolise the indissoluble bond between Botho and Lene is deep-rooted in central European folk tradition.<sup>36</sup> Lene is closer than Botho to these traditions, coming from a humble background. Lacking education, she has had to rely largely on her adopted mother for her beliefs and attitude to life. Such traditional beliefs are less familiar to the educated and socially sophisticated Botho, but he is not long in recognising the force of the proverb. At first he seems swayed mainly by Lene's attitude:

Er versuchte zu lachen, aber der Ernst, mit dem sie das Gespräch geführt und die letzten Worte gesprochen hatte war doch nicht ohne Eindruck auf ihn geblieben.<sup>37</sup>

Three years later however, when he recalls the episode, it is made clear that he felt himself to be in the grip of some irrational force of destiny:

34 N III, p.147.

35 E. Braun recognises this distinction also, Symbol and Portent in Theodor Fontane's Works, Diss. Wisconsin, 1960, p.57f: "The best known symbol of destiny in this novel is probably the strand of hair with which - on Botho's insistence and against her own better judgement - Lene ties the flowers she has picked ----- Fontane to judge from the development of the novel, did not consider this superstition. Proverbs, in his novels, are sometimes used as axioms, as wisdom which is passed on and inherited, in contrast to knowledge acquired through learning -----"

36 Bächtold-Stäubli, op.cit., III, p.1279: "Ein Haar fesselt stärker als die stärkste Eisenschnur' berichten russische und altnordische Märchen."

37 N III, p.148.

'Sie sagte damals, daß ein Haar zu fest binde, darum weigerte sie sich und wollt es nicht. Und ich? Warum bestand ich darauf? Ja es gibt solche rätselhaften Kräfte, solche Sympathien aus Himmel oder Hölle, und nun bin ich gebunden und kann nicht los.'<sup>38</sup>

After he has destroyed the outward token of his attachment, he still feels the power over him that binds him to the long absent Lene.

The proverb is first invoked at a turning point in the novel, at a time when their happiness together is about to end. Lene's words underline this,

'--- als wir über die Wiese gingen und plauderten und ich dir den Strauß pflückte, das war unser letztes Glück und unsere letzte schöne Stunde.'<sup>39</sup>

The proverb symbolises the inescapable, irrational force which binds them together at a time when they are about to be parted. Botho's deliberate insistence on using the hair indicates that part of him wants to be bound inseparably to Lene, even although external circumstances are so painful and hopeless. When he throws the flowers into the fire still tied together, it is not entirely clear whether his superstitious fear is of being bound more closely by touching the hair, or, on the contrary, of breaking the spell by untying it. Although Botho's feeling for Lene and his unwillingness to be freed from it are perfectly plausible from the point of view of psychological realism, Fontane's use of the proverb to symbolise the link between them adds a further dimension to the purely psychological aspect of the situation. Through the fulfilment of the ancient proverb, the characters seem to be caught in a pattern of fate which is beyond their control and inescapable. The proverb raises their dilemma from a purely personal or social level to a general human plane. The

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38 Ibid. p.214.

39 Ibid. p.166.

couple are in the grip of an order affecting all humanity and not just one social class or another. Although the suggestions of fate and predestination are comparatively muted in Irrungen Wirungen, they are nevertheless present, and cannot be explained away in purely psychological terms.

In addition to the above proverbs, which Fontane only employs in a unique situation in his works, there are two proverbial sayings very close to his heart which recur frequently in his writings. They both express a superstitious fear of tempting providence. The first, expressed in various ways, always involves the idea of "Glück bereden", and the second of "den Teufel an die Wand malen". Many of Fontane's characters suffer from these more or less irrational fears. The first saying has already been observed in Vor dem Sturm,<sup>40</sup> Unterm Birnbaum<sup>41</sup> and Quitt,<sup>42</sup> and the second in L'Adultera,<sup>43</sup> and Graf Petöfy.<sup>44</sup> They are both time-honoured superstitions in Germany.<sup>45</sup> The two sayings sometimes appear in conjunction with each other. When this happens, it reinforces the idea of an indifferent or hostile fate, ready to take up any temptation put in its way. In Irrungen Wirungen, at the height of their happiness,

[Lene] war abergläubisch und wollte das Glück nicht bereden,<sup>46</sup>

and Botho, challenging fate as he did in the case of the hair, voices

40 N I, p.630.

41 N III, p.323.

42 N VI, p.29.

43 N IV, p.14.

44 N II, p.112.

45 Cf. Bächtold-Stäubli, op.cit., III, p.862: "Es ist gefährlich, sich vermessen seines Glückes zu rühmen."

46 N III, p.156.



the possibility that their paradise may soon be invaded, adding,

'--- und vielleicht hab ich mit meinen Worten den Teufel schon an die Wand gemalt.'<sup>47</sup>

At this point he does not take the superstitions as seriously as Lene, whose attitude is soon vindicated. Her superstition in this case, however, has a rational basis, as she knows that inevitably their relationship will soon be terminated, owing to external circumstances. These proverbs thus are a means of expression for the characters' psychologically motivated fears. At the same time, by their suggestion of supernatural powers, they convey the individual's helplessness in his struggle against forces he can neither control nor fully comprehend. The two sayings recur in conjunction with one another in Mathilde Möhring,<sup>48</sup> and although Thilde's mother's fears are not fulfilled immediately, and Thilde is allowed a few months' grace, fate overtakes her in the end. Although she scorns her mother's superstition on this occasion, she has displayed a similar reaction to an unpredictable situation earlier in the work. Speaking of the possibility of Hugo's falling seriously ill, she says,

'Wenn man drüber red't, dann beruft man's.'<sup>49</sup>

Stine uses a similar turn of phrase,

'Freilich man soll sich seines Glückes nicht rühmen, schon um's nicht zu berufen. Aber es ist wahr, ich bin glücklich.'<sup>50</sup>

shortly before her happiness is troubled by Waldemar's proposal and his suicide. In Frau Jenny Treibel Jenny and Corinna, both strong-

47 Ibid.

48 N VI, p.279.

49 Ibid. p.249.

50 N III, p.264.

willed characters, who try to shape their own fate and other people's, are warned against tempting providence by the saying, "den Teufel an die Wand malen".<sup>51</sup>

The repeated use of these two proverbs underlines the fact, of which Fontane was convinced, that happiness is fleeting, and man's fate is unpredictable. The element of superstitious fear betrayed by them conveys the characters' strong sense of an inscrutable destiny shaping their paths. This sense of fate has been observed in other works, and it is interesting to note that it is still undeniably present, although to a lesser degree, in these novels where the forces depicted are predominantly psychological and social. The characters' superstitious fear of "Glück bereden" is revealed to be futile, as their fate will overtake them, no matter what precautionary measures they take. Their awareness of the ironic workings of fate cannot protect them from it.

As in the other novels, some of the characters experience signs and omens. In this group of novels they are sometimes indicative of the individual's state of mind rather than of a supernatural order. This tendency has already been noted in Cécile. In Irrungen Wirungen Lene has a dream which foreshadows her separation from Botho. She does not see this as an omen however, but in her usual clear-sighted way attributes the dream to her fears for the future and not the future happenings to her dream:

'Aber warum hab ich es geträumt? Weil es mir den ganzen Tag vor der Seele steht. Mein Traum war nur, was mir mein Herz eingab.'<sup>52</sup>

She does take as a sign, however, the sight of a girl washing pans at

51 N VII, p.76, p.116.

52 N III, p.166.

Hankels Ablage:

'Weißt du, Botho, das ist kein Zufall, daß sie da kniet; sie kniet da für mich, und ich fühle deutlich, daß es mir ein Zeichen ist und eine Fügung.'<sup>53</sup>

The incident is a sign to Lene inasmuch as it suddenly crystallises in her mind the realisation that she belongs where the girl is, and that her relationship with Botho must end. Through Lene's own interpretation, the scene assumes added significance for the reader.<sup>54</sup> Her reaction to it at once reveals what she is thinking. Botho's clear recognition of his position and his attitude to it are likewise prompted by an apparently insignificant episode which he construes as an omen.<sup>55</sup> A bluebottle's irritating, irrepressible buzzing comes to symbolise for him the constant nagging awareness of the unpleasant decision he must make. He experiences a further sign shortly afterwards, when, still considering the problem in his mind, he is taken by his horse to Hinckeldey's grave.<sup>56</sup> Botho draws his own lesson from this occurrence:

'Daß das Herkommen unser Tun bestimmt. Wer ihm gehorcht, kann zugrunde gehen, aber er geht besser zugrunde als der, der ihm widerspricht.'<sup>57</sup>

53 Ibid. p.157.

54 Cf. Ohl, op.cit., p.217: "--- die symbolischen Bilder und Situationen in seinen Romanen tragen ihren Sinn potentiell in sich, er aktualisiert sich aber erst im antwortenden Reflex der Romangestalten. Und indem diese den latenten Sinn der Bilder in einer konkreten Situation aussprechen, gewinnen sie zugleich Klarheit über sich selbst."

55 Cf. Richter, op.cit., p.15f: "Der vordergründige Anlaß - die Belästigung durch eine Fliege - aus dem sich Botho in Irrungen Wirrungen zur Resignation bekennt (III,166), behält für sich gesehen freilich den Charakter der Nebensächlichkeit. Aber wie Botho die Fliegen als die 'Unglücksboten' erscheinen, so begegnet die kleine Begebenheit im Umkreis der entscheidenden Wende des Geschehens und wird über das Nebensächliche hinaus zur zeichenhaften Spiegelung der Antwort, zu der sich Botho im Konflikt mit der Gesellschaft bereit findet."

56 N III, p.170.

57 Ibid. p.171.

This is another instance of a character endowing an occurrence with ominous significance. This one strengthens Botho in his already clearly, though reluctantly, formed resolution. In these last three contexts it is not clear to what extent the "signs" should be regarded in a psychological way as stimulants to Botho's and Lene's process of recognition of the true situation, or in a more objective way as omens of their destiny. There is certainly an element of both about them.

The premonitions to which Waldemar is subject in Stine, however, are almost exclusively a reflection of his own frame of mind. As he goes to seek his uncle's approval of his marriage to Stine, the series of locked gates through which he has to pass,

--- erschien ihm wie eine Mahnung, 'es lieber nicht versuchen zu wollen'.<sup>58</sup>

Again, he has premonitions of death as he leaves an open air restaurant which he frequented before visiting Stine:

Er konnte sich nicht losreißen von dem allen und prägte sich's ein, als ob er ein bestimmtes Gefühl habe, daß er's nicht wiedersehen werde.<sup>59</sup>

Stine herself,

--- hatte das bestimmte Gefühl, daß ihr nur Schweres und Schmerzliches aus dieser Bekanntschaft erwachsen werde.<sup>60</sup>

These premonitions are less well-chosen and more forced and limited in their scope than those in Irrungen Wirrungen. They suggest Waldemar's and Stine's mental states without implying the working of a force of

58 N III, p.284.

59 Ibid. p.298.

60 Ibid. p.267.

destiny beyond them.

In Mathilde Möhring the only suggestion of omens is at the New Year when the family indulges in "Bleigießen",<sup>61</sup> which is not taken particularly seriously by anyone present; and when Thilde's mother laments,

'Und so fängt nu das neue Jahr an, ----- so mit Zank und Streit und mit in-die-Zelten-Gehen'<sup>62</sup>

this ominous remark is not of any further import, other than as a means of characterisation of Thilde's nervous, querulous mother. Frau Jenny Treibel, also, is virtually free from references to signs and omens, apart from Frau Schmolke's dream about Corinna's wedding.<sup>63</sup> This is partly because the main personages, Jenny and Corinna, are down to earth characters with no time for that kind of thing,<sup>64</sup> and also because the plot is so slight that there is little call for omens to forecast the action. The same is true in Die Poggenpuhls where the only two references to signs are made in mildly humorous contexts. Leo writes,

'Es geschehen nämlich immer noch Zeichen und Wunder'<sup>65</sup>

in an ironical letter describing how he acquired the fare home. Fontane likewise treats with humour old Herr Bartenstein's cryptic remark about Sophie's painting of Sodom and Gomorrha:

'Das ist eine Mahnung', hatte er sich damals gegen Manon geäußert, ohne übrigens anzudeuten, wen er dadurch gemahnt sehen wollte.<sup>66</sup>

61 N VI, p.265.

62 Ibid. p.268.

63 N VII, p.152.

64 Corinna declares, N VII, p.110, "'Denn vor allem, was so mystisch und hypnotisch und geisterseherig ist, haben gesunde Menschen bloß ein Grauen.'"

65 N IV, p.296.

66 Ibid. p.353.

Premonitions and signs are infrequent in the Berlin novels and have little part to play in them, except in Irrungen Wirrunen where their role is significant in the development of the particular situation and of the theme of fate. Fontane no longer falls back, as in earlier social novels, on signs and omens as an artificial means of imposing an air of inevitability on the action.

The question of fate and predestination has already been touched on in the examination of proverbs and signs in the novels. This theme requires closer consideration. A strong thread of predestination has been traced through Fontane's earlier works. The form of order in the later novels, although it differs in degree from the stern, clearly-defined system of guilt and retribution at work in the crime stories, is nonetheless related to it. The question now arises as to the extent to which the characters' fates are determined by social factors, and the extent to which they are ruled by a mysterious force of destiny superior to social conditions. Irrungen Wirrunen is particularly rich in ambiguities in this respect. The case for social determination is strong. Botho realises that he is in an impossible position as far as the pursuit of happiness with Lene is concerned. His social background has fitted him for nothing other than marriage to someone of his own social class who has money.<sup>67</sup> His actions are determined by social forces over which he has no control, even although they are at variance with his feelings and rational inclinations towards the "'Einfachheit, Wahrheit, Natürlichkeit'"<sup>68</sup> which Lene embodies. Botho analyses the problem in two parallel cases, which reflect his plight. Speaking of the forces to which Hinckeldey has succumbed, he stresses that they are irrational, but at the same time irresistible:

67 N III, p.169.

68 Ibid. p.170.

'Und eine Stunde später war er in den Tod gegangen.  
Und warum? Einer Adelsvorstellung, einer Standes-  
marotte zuliebe, die mächtiger war als alle Vernunft ---',<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, when warning his comrade Rexin against a socially unacceptable marriage, he uses the phrase, already familiar from L'Adultera and Schach von Wuthenow,<sup>70</sup>

'Denn alles hat seine natürliche Konsequenz ---'.<sup>71</sup>

In both these cases Botho is clearly speaking of the social determination to which he himself is subject. Fontane also seems to be somewhat sceptical about the idea of fate when he describes the wreath seller as,

Das schwarzgekleidete Fräulein, das --- in seiner Gesamthaltung (selbst die Schere fehlte nicht) etwas ridikül Parzenhaftes hatte ---.<sup>72</sup>

The suggestion of fate has however been made, and the attitude of Lene and Frau Nimptsch to what befalls them is expressed in terms that imply predestination rather than social determinism. The strand of hair, as a symbol of destiny, has already been considered, as has Lene's attitude to signs. She also remarks:

'--- es geschieht nur was muß.'

and, 'Ich habe dich von Herzen liebgehabt, das war mein Schicksal.'<sup>73</sup>

and Frau Nimptsch asserts,

69 Ibid. p.171.

70 Cf. above, chap.V, p.122.

71 N III, p.222.

72 Ibid. p.209.

73 Ibid. p.174.

'--- die [guten Grundsätze] kommen vom lieben Gott.  
Und der eine hat sie, und der andere hat sie nicht.<sup>74</sup>  
Ich glaube nicht recht ans Lernen und Erziehen ---'<sup>74</sup>

Gideon Franke also supports the idea of predestination:

'Ja, der Mensch soll die Gebote halten --- und wer das eine nicht hält, der kann immer noch was taugen, wer aber das andere nicht hält --- der taugt nichts und ist verworfen von Anfang an, und steht außerhalb der Gnade.'<sup>75</sup>

Even Botho subscribes to a certain extent to this belief in predestination. His remark,

'Die Türken sind die klügsten Leute '<sup>76</sup>,

indicates a leaning towards fatalism. He views the Hinckeldey's grave episode as a sign<sup>77</sup> and the strand of hair has made him conscious of the existence of higher powers. This dual view of the causes of the inevitable course of events is not self-contradictory. Both concepts, that of predestination and that of social determinism, are basic to Fontane's view of the world. Man, in his pursuit of happiness, is at the mercy of both these forces. In Irrungen Wirungen the social forces are, at least superficially, dominant,<sup>78</sup> but the other element

74 Ibid. p.195f.

75 Ibid. p.205.

76 Ibid. p.166.

77 Ibid, p.170, cf. Richter, op.cit., p.27: "In allen aufgewiesenen Schichten aber erweist sich die Resignation etwa Bothos oder Stines als gesellschaftlich motiviert. Fast scheint es, als meine sie nach dieser Seite hin eine Unterwerfung nur eben unter den Anspruch der Gesellschaft. Doch wenn Botho es als 'Zeichen' ansieht (III, 170), daß ihn das seinem eigenen Willen Überlassene Pferd gerade vor das Denkmal von Hinckeldey geführt hat, so setzt dies die Vorstellung einer höheren Fügung voraus."

78 Cf. W. Killy, "Fontanes Irrungen Wirungen" in Wirklichkeit und Kunstcharakter, Munich, 1963, p.206, "Zugleich ist der bei Goethe [in den Wahlverwandschaften] noch an das Übernatürliche grenzende Raum des Geschehens auf eine bürgerliche Enge reduziert. Die sozialen Gebote, welche der himmlischen oder höllischen Sympathie zum Trotz die Vereinigung der Liebenden unmöglich machen, sind ein Ausdruck gegenwärtig geltender Konventionen."



is undeniably present, although discreetly suggested, and so closely associated with the idea of social determinism that at times it is difficult and inappropriate to separate the two frames of reference.<sup>79</sup>

In all the other Berlin novels there are intimations both of predestination and of social determinism. In Stine it is Witwe Pittelkow who voices the inexorable demands of social convention:

'Un ich sage dir, von so was, wie du mit dem Grafen vorhast oder der Graf mit dir, von so was is noch nie was Gutes gekommen. Es hat nu mal jeder seinen Platz, und daran kannst du nichts ändern. ---- und [die Grafen] sind anders aufgepöppelt wie wir, und können aus ihrer Haut nicht 'raus.'<sup>80</sup>

The same note of predetermination is heard in Hugo Großman's reflection (Mathilde Möhring):

'Schließlich ist man, was man ist ----'<sup>81</sup>

and in Frau Schmolke's observation about Leopold (Frau Jenny Treibel):

'--- er hat sich ja nich selber gemacht, un der Mensch is am Ende wie er is.'<sup>82</sup>

Leopold realises,

'Die Menschen, die Verhältnisse, das alles ist es nicht; es liegt an mir.'<sup>83</sup>

79 Cf. Richter, op.cit., p.30: "In den Gesellschaftsromanen wird die Konfrontation des Menschen mit der Gesellschaft zumeist nur an wenigen Stellen von Hinweisen auf eine übergreifende Macht überwölbt. Gerade Bothos Formulierung der Resignation verbindet beide Bereiche. Sie spricht von einer Ergebung im Sinne der Türken. Damit wird auf den mohammedanischen Fatalismus angespielt, dem schlechterdings alles als vorherbestimmt galt. ---- Zugleich wird deutlich, daß den Anspielungen, gerade weil sie in eine Umgebung so betont gesellschaftlicher Motivierung gestellt sind, eine weitgehend nur metaphorische Funktion zukommt, die in die gesellschaftliche Situation zurückweist."

80 N III, p.274.

81 N VI, p.269.

82 N VII, p.159

83 Ibid. p.87.

This is true to the extent that Leopold's misfortune lies in the fact that he has not been born with a sufficiently strong character to withstand years of conditioning by his domineering mother. At this early stage in the novel, he makes the incorrect assumption that, since it is his own fault that he is fighting a losing battle, he should be able to rectify matters by exercising his free will. The course of events demonstrates that his attempt to resist determining forces is futile. The above statements refer to the forces of social and hereditary determinism, but there are also a few direct references to the power of predestination. Sophie Poggenpuhl quotes the motto:

"Sorg, aber Sorge nicht zu viel, es kommt doch wie's Gott haben will."<sup>84</sup>

and Stine maintains:

'--- ich habe noch nichts zum Glück ausschlagen sehen, worauf von Anfang an kein Segen lag.'<sup>85</sup>

In Frau Jenny Treibel, where the tone is highly ironical, Fontane on the whole skims over the question of fate and predestination, only referring to it humorously in passing. It is in this work that he asserts the value of,

--- den denkbar höchsten Standpunkt, den der Selbstironie<sup>86</sup>,

and in Frau Jenny Treibel he is perhaps poking fun at his own tendency to refer to the powers of fate, by doing so here in ludicrous contexts. Treibel pronounces,

Man muß zufrieden sein mit dem durch Schicksals-  
beschluß Gegebenen, wie meine Freundin Felgentreu

84 N IV, p.342.

85 N III, p.302.

86 N VII, p.51.

soeben versichert hat.<sup>87</sup>

The irony lies in the fact that Frau Felgentreu, who has just counselled contentment with one's lot, is exceedingly wealthy. Krola's use of the term fate is humorous, and occurs in an incongruously trivial context:

'Aber so wie er [Metzner] eine Prise frische Luft wittert, ist es mit ihm vorbei. Dann faßt ihn das Schicksal mit rasender Gewalt, und er muß jodeln --.'<sup>88</sup>

The invocation of the gods in connection with Corinna is also gently ironical -

'Aber die Götter haben es milder mit ihr vor ---.'<sup>89</sup>

- as it is only a question of her defeat by Frau Jenny.

The final motif to be considered with reference to the theme of providence and predestination is that of "Berechnung", of calculation in the attempt to outwit fate. Such attempts, according to Fontane, are inevitably doomed:

Wer rechnet, ist immer in Gefahr, sich zu verrechnen.<sup>90</sup>  
Die einfache dumme Kuh trifft immer das richtige Gras

or again:

Es ist, als ob die Götter unser nach eigenem Plan zu-  
recht gelegtes Glück nicht wollen, sie werfen uns dann  
und wann eine süße Frucht in den Schoß und haben nichts  
dagegen (im Gegentheil) daß sie uns schmeckt, aber so  
wie wir das Glück zwingen oder auch nur mit Hilfe von  
Baedeker uns etappenmäßig ausrechnen wollen, in  
Innsbruck dies Glück und in Verona das und in Venedig  
ein stupendes drittes in einer Gondel oder Nicht-

87 Ibid. p.99.

88 Ibid. p.104.

89 Ibid. p.155.

90 FPS II, no.335, 14th January 1895.

Gondel - so darf man sicher sein, daß alles kläglich scheitert.<sup>91</sup>

This motif is present in many of Fontane's works. It has already been examined with reference to Hratscheck in Unterm Birnbaum. Mathilde Möhring is another character whose calculations are thwarted in the long run, by the death of the husband she has trained so well. She is shown calculating about Hugo long before she actually catches him:

Thilde beschäftigte sich mit seiner Haltung während des ganzen Abends und dieser nächtlichen Kneiperei, die ganz jenseits ihrer Berechnungen lag ---<sup>92</sup>

Even her mother sees the danger inherent in her attitude, and tries to warn her:

'Ach Thilde, du rechnest immer alles, aber du kannst auch falsch rechnen.'  
'Kann ich. Aber du sollst sehen, ich rechne richtig.'<sup>93</sup>

For a time Thilde is right,

--- denn alles kam genau so, wie Thilde vorausgesagt hatte ---<sup>94</sup>,

But at the end of the sketch she looks back and recognises the failure of her calculations. She asserts nonetheless that she will not change her attitude radically as it is determined by heredity.<sup>95</sup>

The motif appears in Die Poggenpuhls in a more positive light, and it is typical of Fontane, even in cases where he has made such unequivocal statements on a subject as those quoted above, that he should record somewhere else in his writings the other side of the coin, a modified approach to the same problem:

91 FFR no.106, 24th October 1888.

92 N VI, p.245f.

93 Ibid. p.249.

94 Ibid. p.281.

95 Ibid. p.304.

Sämtliche Poggenpuhls - die Mutter freilich weniger - besaßen die schöne Gabe, nie zu klagen, waren lebensklug und rechneten gut, ohne daß sich bei diesem Rechnen etwas störend Berechnendes gezeigt hätte.<sup>96</sup>

There is also an amusing exchange about calculating foresight between Leo and his mother.<sup>97</sup> This, of course, does not invalidate Fontane's basic thesis that man is at the mercy of irrational forces whose workings are unpredictable.

These then are the most significant supernatural themes and irrational devices present in Fontane's later Berlin novels. It only remains to consider a number of irrational and supernatural motifs which occur, often apparently fortuitously, in these works. Although they are not related to any other irrational symbolism in the particular works in which they occur, they are frequently echoes of motifs in other works. They are not, however, out of place or incongruous; on the contrary, they have clearly become so ingrained a part of Fontane's creative vocabulary that he can and does integrate them with ease into diverse contexts. For Fontane and the reader these motifs have connotations whose full richness can be appreciated only through an extensive acquaintance with his writings.

In Irrungen Wirungen the star motif appears on one occasion,

96 N IV, p.289f.

97 Ibid. p.304f: "'Sich zu Wunder und Gnade so zu stellen, als ob alles so sein müßte, das verdrießt den, der all die Gnade gibt, und er versagt sie zuletzt. Was Gott von uns verlangt, daß ist nicht bloß so hinnehmen und dafür danken - und oft oberflächlich genug -, er will auch, daß wir uns die Gnadenschaft verdienen oder wenigstens uns ihrer würdig zeigen und immer im Auge haben, nicht was so vielleicht durch Wunderwege geschehen kann, sondern was nach Vernunft und Rechnung und Wahrscheinlichkeit geschehen muß. Und auf solchem Rechnen steht dann ein Segen.'  
'Ach Mama, ich rechne ja immerzu.'  
'Ja du rechnest immerzu, freilich, aber du rechnest nachher statt vorher.'"

when Lene and Botho are about to part:

Und nun schwieg sie [Lene] wieder und sah hinauf  
auf die blaß am Himmel heraufziehenden Sterne. ---  
'--- ich wäre gerne da. Da hätt ich Ruh.'<sup>98</sup>

Lene makes it clear that she is not entertaining suicidal thoughts, but the motif expresses her desire to escape to a peaceful sphere, far beyond the human one where she is troubled by her own feelings and petty social conventions. The star motif has already been employed in Graf Petöfy,<sup>99</sup> Schach von Wuthenow<sup>100</sup> and Cécile<sup>101</sup> where it is connected with the idea of fate, and above all in Vor dem Sturm where it symbolises divine grace and an ideal of natural and happy existence. All of these associations are appropriate in Irrungen Wirrungen and were probably present in Fontane's mind when he used the motif again in this instance. They are implicit in the context although only lightly hinted at.

The swallow motif which occurs in the same novel is less clear in its implications, especially as Fontane attributes to swallows associations which differ to some extent from those bestowed by popular superstition.<sup>102</sup> The reference to swallows occurs on the last page of Irrungen Wirrungen:

Den anderen Morgen saßen Rienäcker und Käthe beim Frühstück, diesmal in Bothos Arbeitszimmer, dessen beide Fenster, um Luft und Licht einzulassen, weit offen standen. Rings um den Hof her nistende Schwalben flogen zwitscherned vorüber, und Botho, der ihnen allmorgendlich einige Krumen hinzustreuen pflegte, griff eben wieder zu gleichem Zweck nach dem Frühstückskorb, als ihm das ausgelassene Lachen

98 N III, p.173.

99 N II, p.110, p.142.

100 Ibid. p.345.

101 N IV, p.253.

102 Fontane's use of the motif coincides with superstition to the extent that both regard swallows as a sign of good fortune or grace. Cf. above, chap.IV, p.94. Bächtold-Stäubli, op.cit., VII, p.391, on superstition, also asserts however: "Wenn um das Haus die Schwalben fliegen, wird bald ein Mädchen darin Braut;"

seiner seit fünf Minuten schon in ihre Lieblingszeitung vertieften jungen Frau Veranlassung gab den Korb wieder hinzustellen.<sup>103</sup>

The swallow as a symbol of good fortune or grace<sup>104</sup> seems to have little relevance to the scene, except that Botho can be considered comparatively fortunate, because the marriage he has entered into, on renouncing Lene, has proved to be reasonably happy. The true implications of the swallows in this context are revealed by a similar scene in Cécile:

In die Stille, die herrschte, mischte sich, außer dem Rauschen der Bode, nur noch ein fernes Stampfen und Klappern und ganz in der Nähe das Zwitschern einiger Schwalben, die, im Zickzack vorüberschießend, auf eine vor dem Balkon gelegene Parkwiese zuflogen. ----- [St. Arnaud spricht] 'Der Blick ist schön, und man sieht meilenweit in die Ferne.' [Cécile spricht] 'Bis Berlin? Aber nein darin irr ich, das ist nicht möglich. Berlin muß weiter sein; fünfzehn Meilen oder noch mehr. Ah, sahst du die zwei Schwalben? Es war als haschten sie sich und spielten miteinander. Vielleicht sind es Geschwister oder vielleicht ein Pärchen.'  
'Oder beides. Die Schwalben nehmen es nicht so genau. Sie sind nicht so offiziell in diesen Dingen.'  
Es lag etwas Bitteres in diesem Ton. Aber diese Bitterkeit schien sich nicht gegen die Dame zu richten, denn ihr Auge blieb ruhig ---.<sup>105</sup>

The swallows here represent a simple, natural way of life, untrammelled by social conventions and official interference in questions of form, which is the cause of St. Arnaud's bitterness. He compares in his mind the swallows' freedom with his own situation in life; for he, as is later revealed, has been forced to resign his commission after a duel over an insult to Cécile. The regiment considered her an unsuitable

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102 (Contd.) denn über jeder Braut, sie mag sein, wo sie will, fliegen die Schwalben." - Fontane disregards or was not aware of this part of the superstition.

103 N III, p.232.

104 Cf. Grete Minde, N III, p.80 and Vor dem Sturm, N I, p.66.

105 N IV, p.133f.

wife for St. Arnaud, because she was a former courtesan. The two novels were written in the same year (1887) and it is reasonable to assume that in Irrungen Wirungen as in Cécile the main connotations of the swallows are a natural way of life<sup>106</sup> and freedom from social strictures.

In Stine the familiar motifs of funeral procession,<sup>107</sup> graveyard<sup>108</sup> and bells<sup>109</sup> appear; one or other or all three of which are to be found in almost all the novels (a notable exception is the more light-hearted Frau Jenny Treibel). They are appropriate to and reinforce the rather morbid atmosphere surrounding Waldemar in Stine. Another recurrent irrational motif is that of the infallible instinct of animals in their judgment of human beings; a ladybird settling on Waldemar's hand<sup>110</sup> is a parallel phenomenon to the dog's acceptance of Grete Minde,<sup>111</sup> and to Tante Josephine's cat's reaction to Sophie Poggenpuhl.<sup>112</sup> Similarly Rollo accepts Roswitha in Effi Briest.<sup>113</sup>

Die Poggenpuhls also harbours two of Fontane's favourite irrational motifs. Friederike's suggestion that Major Balthasar von Poggenpuhl

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106 Both M. Tau, Der assoziative Faktor in der Landschafts- und Ortsdarstellung Theodor Fontanes, Oldenbourg, 1928, p.19, and Fürstenau, op.cit., p.147 make the unqualified statement that swallows mean freedom in Fontane's work. This is true, as has been indicated, in the cases of Irrungen Wirungen and Cécile, although Fontane has a specific type of freedom in mind, freedom from social conventions. In other novels there are different associations, those of grace and fortune.

107 N III, p.242.

108 Ibid. p.268.

109 Ibid. p.309.

110 Ibid. p.304.

111 Ibid. p.72.

112 N IV, p.347.

113 N VII, p.264.



'--- vielleicht seine Ruhe nicht hätte'<sup>114</sup>,

is a variation of the motif of tormented spirits of the dead, already seen in Vor dem Sturm,<sup>115</sup> Ellernklipp<sup>116</sup> and Unterm Birnbaum,<sup>117</sup> and to be employed again through the Chinaman motif in Effi Briest.

Manon's remark,

'---daß manchem Namen etwas wie eine mystische Macht innewohnt'<sup>118</sup>,

echoes Bammé's superstitious, "'Nomen et Omen'" in Vor dem Sturm.<sup>119</sup>

In Frau Jenny Treibel Fontane introduces three of his well-loved supernatural motifs, in an ironic way. The mention of "Wendengötter",<sup>120</sup> "weiße Frau"<sup>121</sup> and "schöne Melusine"<sup>122</sup> is only made to underline their absence, and their incongruity in the context of the Treibels' materialistic, bourgeois milieu. Fontane humorously reveals that the two latter are seen by the Treibels purely as family status symbols. They reduce even the supernatural to material and social terms.

There is a further case of change of emphasis on a familiar motif in Irrungen Wirungen. Here the spirits called up for Friedrich Wilhelm II - already referred to in Schach von Wuthenow<sup>123</sup> - are once more a topic of conversation.<sup>124</sup> The associations brought out in this instance are different. The motif here suggests the impossibility of

114 N IV, p.295.

115 N I, p.534f, p.33.

116 N II, p.258.

117 N III, p.395.

118 N IV, p.347.

119 N I, p.539.

120 N VII, p.25.

121 Ibid. p.74.

122 Ibid. p.131.

123 N II, p.367, cf. above chap.V, p.108.

124 N III, p.229.

freeing one's heart from a socially unsuitable attachment.

The recurrence of these motifs throughout Fontane's works indicates that they appealed to him personally as poetically expressive. They appealed to his interest in the natural and supernatural, in the historical and the irrational. They remain motifs rather than symbols, however, as the varying contexts in which they appear call forth associations which can differ considerably, both in tone and in kind. They suggest rather than denote.

Irrungen Wirungen (1887) marks the beginning of Fontane's most successful creative period as a novelist:

In Irrungen Wirungen findet er jene Kraft wieder, die den Schach bildete; und obgleich Stine bekannte Motive wiederholt und leider sehr sentimentalisiert, beweisen beide Romane die neuerliche Sammlung der schriftstellerischen Energien.<sup>125</sup>

In the later Berlin novels Fontane uses already familiar irrational themes and images with a skill and discretion generally lacking in his earlier works. He has mastered the art of integrating them subtly into works of social realism, instead of imposing them more or less artificially, or overemphasising them unnaturally. Supernatural imagery is, however, restrained in these most naturalistic of Fontane's works, whose metropolitan milieu is a less happy context for it than the windswept, sea-lashed northern settings of Unwiederbringlich and Effi Briest or the solitary rural surroundings in Der Stechlin.

## VII

Unwiederbringlich and Effi Briest

The reasons for considering Unwiederbringlich and Effi Briest together are obvious. They have a common theme. Each examines the deteriorating relationship between a husband and wife. In both novels the incompatibility of the partners leads to adultery and the heroine's death, although such a stark statement of the narrative content bears little relation to the subtlety and discretion of Fontane's presentation. Both novels have northern settings, and the natural surroundings in both reflect and influence the inner action. However the parallels between the works for the purposes of this study are less immediately apparent. The supernatural element in Effi Briest is striking, whereas in Unwiederbringlich there is little that can be appropriately classed in this category at all. A study of the nature and function of other irrational elements in the two novels, however, once more reveals common ground. The concept of fate, associated with social and psychological determination, is an irrational theme common to both works, as are religion and imagination, although the weight of emphasis on these various elements is not the same in the two novels.

In both works, the characters themselves express an awareness of the existence of irrational forces directing their fates. For some

of them this awareness is more acute and well defined than for others. To all of them it is an aspect of reality which they neither can nor do subject to rational analysis. It remains "ein geheimnisvolles Etwas, ein rätselvolles Fatum".<sup>1</sup> Its determining power in their lives is undeniable but nebulous in its nature and extent. The reader is made aware of irrational forces at work in the novels not only through the characters' perception and articulation of their presence. Fontane on occasion suggests their existence more directly from his authorial standpoint, although in instances of this kind the references are frequently implicit. He is reluctant to show his hand as he did in earlier novels.<sup>2</sup> He generally prefers to leave the reader to draw his own conclusions from the characters' reactions and from the course of events. An initial consideration of the perception of irrational forces expressed by the characters may then be supplemented firstly by examining further intimations of such forces which Fontane provides, independently of his characters' perceptions, and finally by a detailed examination of the specifically supernatural elements in the two novels.

Effi and Holk are spontaneous creatures of impulse and instinct. They might be expected to be susceptible to irrational influences, and to be associated with irrational motifs. They are both essentially childlike and unreflecting figures. They lack the more prosaic virtues of strength of character and a sense of moral responsibility and of social reality which their spouses display.

Of the four principal characters in the novels the unstable and easily influenced Holk is the one who betrays the least awareness of the supernatural or the irrational. He laughs at Christine for having

1 Aegerter, op.cit., p.45.

2 E.g. Vor dem Sturm and Quitt.

superstitious forebodings about the future.<sup>3</sup> He is however, at least sporadically, subject to superstitious beliefs himself. Asta relates how her father insisted on calling her dead brother "Adam",

'weil er gehört hatte, daß Kinder, die so heißen, nie sterben'.<sup>4</sup>

This detail is interesting in more than one respect. It is revealing as far as Holk's character is concerned. The formulation "weil er gehört hatte" and not "weil er glaubte" shows him acting, typically, not as a result of profound reflection or belief, but allowing himself to be influenced by something he has heard and accepted without much serious consideration. Elsewhere Christine accuses him of taking over other people's political opinions without thinking enough about them for himself.<sup>5</sup>

The detail of the child's name also serves to illustrate one of Fontane's recurrent themes.<sup>6</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the attempt to manipulate or cheat fate proves futile. Holk himself, on other occasions, does express a belief in the existence of some force of destiny which it is indeed vain to oppose:

'Erziehung und immer wieder Erziehung. Offen gestanden, ich für meine Person, glaube nicht an die Wichtigkeit all dieser Geschichten. Erziehung! Auch da ist das Beste Vorherbestimmung, Gnade. In diesem Stück, so gut lutherisch ich sonst bin, stehe ich zu Calvin. Und falls Calvin dich verdrießt ----- so laß mich dir einfach das alte Sprichwort sagen: "Wie man in die Wiege gelegt wird, so wird man auch in den Sarg gelegt".'<sup>7</sup>

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3 N V, p.6f.

4 Ibid. p.45.

5 Ibid. p.23.

6 Cf. above, chap.VI, p.157f.

7 N V, p.35. Cf. N III, p.195f, and above, chap.VI, p.154.

It would be wrong to assume that these words represent anything like Holk's definitive opinion, either on education, or on predestination. His remarks are motivated partly by his own desire to keep his children at home, and partly by his impulse to contradict, or at least assail his wife's certainty on the subject. Strong or fixed beliefs on any subject are totally uncharacteristic of Holk.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, on the rare occasions when he does express a belief in something that is not a matter of fact, or susceptible of rational proof, he may justifiably be accused of bad faith. Holk interprets his and Ebba's rescue from the flames as a sign from Providence:

'eine höhere Hand hat es so gefügt'.<sup>9</sup>

Trying to convince himself of the justification for his own intentions, he finds it more comfortable to renounce the responsibility for his proposed actions and attribute the course of events to the workings of destiny. He silences his conscience by adopting a deterministic view of life. His words,

'Ein Zufall, wenn es einen Zufall gibt. Aber es gibt keinen Zufall'.<sup>10</sup>

are highly Fontanesque, but in this context they take on an ambiguous colouring. Fontane would indeed have us believe that there is no such thing as chance,<sup>11</sup> but ironically he seems to discredit this idea by the context in which he places it. He points out, at least, the dangers of adopting a deterministic view of life. Such a view can too easily become an excuse for moral irresponsibility.

8 Cf. for example Ebba's character analysis of him as "unklar und halb", N V, p.117.

9 Ibid. p.182.

10 Ibid.

11 Cf. for example H V, p.512: "Einen Zufall gibt es nicht" is the last line of a poem in Geschwisterliebe.

Fontane does suggest in this same passage however that there is a sense in which Holk's actions are determined. It is not a question of the sudden intervention of Providence to show Holk that he is on the right path, and thus relieve him from exercising his free will and moral judgment independently. Fontane indicates rather that the course of action is inevitable owing to Holk's state of mind:

Ja, das alles würde er gesehen haben, wenn er sich wie ein Draußenstehender hätte beobachten können; aber das war ihm nicht gegeben, und so schwamm er denn im Strome falscher Beweisführungen dahin, Träumen nachhängend und sein Gewissen einlullend.<sup>12</sup>

Owing to psychological forces beyond his control, Holk has forfeited his free will - if he ever had one. He is unable to view the situation objectively and rationally from the outside. His imagination and his emotions have got the better of his sense of reality. His personality, his psychological make-up, here determine his course of action as inexorably as any external hand of fate might. Described by Christine as an "Augenblicksmensch"<sup>13</sup> he is once more swamped by the feelings of the moment and is unable to see circumstances critically or consider the future rationally.

Christine has already discussed the idea that personal conviction, not necessarily based on rational thought, is a strong determining force. In a political discussion about the future of Prussia, she maintains that the state will survive and flourish because there are enough people who believe in the idea of Prussia as a strong independent state:

'Solche Vorstellungen sind nun mal eine Macht.  
In unserem Busen wohnen unsere Sterne, so heißt es  
irgendwo, und was die innere Stimme spricht, das

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12 N V, p.183.

13 Ibid. p.30.

erfüllt sich.<sup>14</sup>

Reference to the power of "Vorstellung" is made again in Effi Briest. This time it is not an ingrained political idea, but a social one that has determined the course of events. Instead, reflecting bitterly on his reasons for killing Crampas and banishing his wife, comes to the conclusion that he has acted "bloßen Vorstellungen zuliebe".<sup>15</sup> He has been conditioned by accepted social forms - forms which are in themselves lacking in any rational foundation.

Effi too is conditioned by "Vorstellungen", although in rather a different way:

'Effi ist anspruchslos; sie lebt in ihren Vorstellungen und Träumen.'<sup>16</sup>

What her mother is suggesting here is that the ideas influencing Effi are neither political nor social. She lives in a world of her own, whose values are created by her own capricious imagination. It is a world which has dangerously little relationship to mundane reality. In this respect her situation is comparable with Holk's. She is the victim of a state of mind which does not match up to the realities of the situations with which she is faced.

Christine's perception of irrational forces is more profound and consistent than her husband's. She is deeply religious. In one sense this disposes her towards a natural acceptance of irrational forces. Brought up in the pietistic atmosphere of a Herrnhuter convent she tends towards mysticism in her beliefs. Her only reservation about Pastor Petersen is that he has rationalist tendencies.<sup>17</sup> On the other

14 Ibid. p.24.

15 N VII, p.420.

16 Ibid. p.185.

17 N V, p.34.



hand, her mystical inclinations and fine sensibility make her receptive, almost in spite of herself, to irrational forces beyond the sphere of religion. From the first, she is seen to have a superstitious, almost prophetic, streak. She experiences strong forebodings about the future - particularly in connection with moving from the old castle into a new one. The terms in which Fontane describes her response to the move have overtones of some kind of inscrutable, and not entirely benign, force of destiny at work. This force has no apparent connection with a Christian God or religion. The strong suggestion made by Christine's reactions is that by moving they are bound to incur unpleasant workings of fate. Formulations such as:

'Wenn man glücklich ist, soll man nicht noch glücklicher sein wollen '18,

smack of an atavistic fear of angering "the Gods", rather than of any Christian ethic. Christine herself recognises the unchristian nature of her feelings:

'Aber ich bekenne dir offen, ich bleibe lieber hier unten in dem alten Steinhaus mit seinen Unbequemlichkeiten und seinem Spuk. Der Spuk bedeutet mir nichts, aber an Ahnungen glaub ich, wie wohl die Herrnhuter auch davon nichts wissen wollen, und werden wohl auch Recht damit haben. Trotzdem, man steckt nun 'mal in seiner menschlichen Schwachheit ---.'19

She explicitly condemns superstitious fears; for instance when Holk names their child Adam she maintains,

'--- das sei Heidentum und Aberglauben, und es werde sich strafen, denn der liebe Gott lasse sich nichts vorschreiben.'20

But she appears to be subject to such fears herself. The Uhland poem

18 Ibid. p.7.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid. p.45.

which Holk cites without knowing its unhappy end seems to her to be an omen. When she describes her dream on the eve of Holk's departure, she is once more filled with superstitious forebodings. She condemns her own attitude, but at the same time is unable to deny the strength of her feelings.<sup>21</sup> There is, however, surely a great difference between her superstition, or perception of fate and Holk's. Her sentiments are far more deeply experienced than his.

Her forebodings and prophetic dream can be interpreted as manifestations of her own subconscious fears about her marital relationship - fears that are psychologically well-founded. This interpretation is valid and should not be ignored. On the other hand, the terms in which her fears are expressed point to a concept of fate or determinism which cannot be entirely encompassed in a purely psychological interpretation. This implication of dual motivation, by both internal psychological factors and by external forces of fate, is a common feature of Fontane's writing. In Unwiederbringlich particularly, he builds up at the beginning a sense of impending doom which overshadows and drives on the course of events in an apparently inexorable way.

Christine's sensitivity to the forces determining her destiny is convincing precisely because she is unwilling to accept, but unable to deny, the consciousness she has of them. For all Holk's charges that for Christine everything in life was clear and unambiguous,<sup>22</sup> there is in fact a conflict within her between what she knows she should believe, and what she actually feels.

In Effi Briest Instetten's attitude is comparable to Christine's. Early in the novel Instetten is presented in a situation very similar

21 Ibid. p.55.

22 Ibid. p.122.

to Christine's near the beginning of Unwiederbringlich:<sup>23</sup>

Dieser [Instetten] nickte mechanisch zustimmend, war aber eigentlich wenig bei der Sache, sah vielmehr, wie gebannt, immer aufs neue nach dem drüben am Fenster rankenden wilden Wein hinüber, von dem Briest eben gesprochen, und während er dem nachhing, war es ihm, als säh er wieder die rotblonden Mädchenköpfe zwischen den Weinranken und höre dabei den übermütigen Zuruf: 'Effi, komm.'

Er glaubte nicht an Zeichen und Ähnliches, im Gegenteil, wies alles Abergläubische weit zurück. Aber er konnte trotzdem von den zwei Worten nicht los, und während Briest immer weiter perorirte, war es ihm beständig, als wäre der kleine Hergang doch mehr als ein bloßer Zufall gewesen.<sup>24</sup>

Here we find again the unwilling acceptance of an irrational phenomenon. The character's lack of superstition is emphasised. The same "trotzdem", however, asserts the strength of the character's feeling that, despite his or her better, rational judgment, he or she is here being confronted by something as undeniable as it is inexplicable. Christine's and Instetten's avowed scepticism on the subject serves to underline the importance of the incidents in question. Their natural scepticism, which is nevertheless overcome, adds weight and significance to what might otherwise be readily dismissed by the reader as the whims of an overactive imagination.

The presence of these two passages so early in each novel colours, and is intended to colour, the entire course of the ensuing action. Fontane has unobtrusively introduced a note of fate and inevitability into the works. From the outset he suggests to the reader that there may be more governing events than motivation of a purely social or psychological nature. As Instetten rightly, although rather unclearly, recognises, the two words, "Effi, komm" are indeed of fundamental significance. They indicate that Effi is about to be fettered to a way of

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23 Cf. above, chap.VII, p.171.

24 N VII, p.183.

life that does not suit her disposition at all. She flourishes in natural surroundings where there is no social constraint. She is still more of a child, suited for games with her friends, than a woman of maturity fit to play the part of wife and lady of the house in the serious and stuffy surroundings of a local government official's residence.

The motif reappears when Herr von Briest uses the same words in a telegram inviting his daughter to return home after she has been ostracised by both husband and family. At last she can return to what is her home in far more than the literal sense of the word. It is now too late, however, for her to live the life for which she was suited. Too much has happened to her. At least at Hohen-Cremmen, if she does not find the life she lost when she was removed, she does find peace. She has come back to the place where she belongs. Instetten, then, instinctively recognises the importance of the words, but is unable to fathom their meaning. This basic inability to understand what is important to Effi is a root cause of the ensuing tragedy.

Effi's perception of irrational forces and her response to them is far more spontaneous and unreflecting than her husband's. From the beginning she freely acknowledges their existence in various verbal formulations, whose common currency often seems to belie their telling implications. She prefaces the account of Instetten's rebuff as her mother's suitor with the words:

'Nun, es kam, wie's kommen mußte, wie's immer kommt.'<sup>25</sup>

This formulation, at first sight, is faintly comical in the mouth of the child, Effi. It expresses an apparently worldly-wise attitude to the workings of the adult world. It is similar in tone to Daisy Ashford's

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25 Ibid, p.175.

earnest pronouncements in The Young Visitors. The statement, which in the mouth of an adult could be ironical, cynical or resigned in tone, is treated by the speaker simply as an accepted and incontrovertible matter of fact. Effi's childlike lack of awareness and her naive presentation of this far-reaching statement is faintly comical and also deeply disturbing. The uncompromising "wie's kommen mußte" expresses more than a child's naturally rigid perspective on human behaviour. This is not just a case of accurately observed psychological detail on Fontane's part. It also suggests, subtly, the idea of predestination, of an irrational and above all inexorable force of fate to whose workings all are subject. It is the same kind of idea that is far less discreetly suggested in the title "Unwiederbringlich".

As a statement it does not stand alone in Effi Briest, but forms part of a network of remarks, made mainly by Effi, but also by other characters. It belongs to a pattern of cross-references which generally, by their very banality, do not stand out, but merge into the background of social small talk, and form an insidious undercurrent in the novel. The cumulative effect is to introduce, by a process that is non-rational rather than rational, the conviction that events are pre-ordained, and that within the fixed framework of the novel the course of events is dictated by a set of mysterious but inescapable norms.

Towards the end of the novel Crampas' words endorse Effi's earlier judgment, at first with tragic irony,

'Alles ist Schicksal',<sup>26</sup>

and then with the final recognition of what that fate is:

'--- es muß sein.'<sup>27</sup>

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26 Ibid. p.371

27 Ibid. p.377.

Intermediate admonitory pieces of the pattern are provided by the repetition of,

Hochmut kommt vor dem Fall.<sup>28</sup>

The first time it occurs, the proverb provides humorous characterisation of Hulda Niemeyer, the vicar's daughter. She is priggish and always ready to dampen the company's spirits. She makes the remark to Effi, associating it quite explicitly with fate, asserting that it is wrong to tempt Providence. In the context of girlish games and high spirits the remark is ludicrously weighty and inappropriate. However, when Frau von Padden uses it of Crampas twenty chapters later, it creates a sinister echo and forms part of the web of words and circumstances that binds the fates of Effi and Crampas to one another.

Effi too expresses this idea of fate overtaking offenders against its unwritten laws. Looking out across the sea from the verandah of the Strandhotel she dreams of the lands that lie beyond,

Und im Augenblick erfaßte sie eine Sehnsucht, das alles zu sehen.<sup>29</sup>

Shut up in the stifling and repressive atmosphere of Kessin, about to be further restricted by the ties of motherhood, Effi longs for freedom to be her real self - the wild, free, risk-loving self that her mother characterised as "Tochter der Luft".<sup>30</sup> However, by submitting of her own volition to social conventions, she has sacrificed her freedom, and she realises that indulging in daydreams of her other self is an inadmissible and possibly dangerous pastime:

'Vielleicht bestraft es sich auch noch, und alles

28 Ibid. p.174 and p.312.

29 Ibid. p.262.

30 Ibid. p.172.

stirbt hin, das Kind und ich.'<sup>31</sup>

Later she expresses similar sentiments in the same terms about Crampas. He too tries to escape from his social obligations by finding excuses to leave his wife at home and go out in search of pleasure.

'Aber dann ist es doch auch häßlich von ihm -----  
und so was bestraft sich immer.'<sup>32</sup>

Again the verbal echo connects her lot with Crampas', and associates them both with sanctions beyond the purely social and human.

Comparable too as indications of Effi's acceptance of such an order are utterances such as:

'Wie das Haar ist, ist der Charakter.'<sup>33</sup>

or, '--- da ruft der Kuckuck. Ich mag ihn nicht befragen.'<sup>34</sup>,

and quoting Pastor Niemeyer,

'--- der Name --- habe was geheimnisvoll Bestimmendes.'<sup>35</sup>

This is a theme that Fontane takes up elsewhere:

'Auf manchem Namen liegt ein Segen, und mit den Ebbas habe ich immer Glück gehabt.'<sup>36</sup>

These are the Princess's words in Unwiederbringlich, and they too suggest that a name can have some mysterious irrational influence or significance. This is particularly interesting in Ebba's case, as she has already explained the meaning of her name to Holk and the reader:

31 Ibid. p.262.

32 Ibid. p.295.

33 Ibid. p.229.

34 Ibid. p.414, cf. above, chap.II, p.22f.

35 N VII, p.221.

36 N V, p.91, also cf. above, chap.VI, p.163.

'Ebba ist Eva.'<sup>37</sup>

And if Ebba is Eve, then it is reasonable to suppose that Effi is also Eve. By Effi's words, "'der Name habe was geheimnisvoll Bestimmendes'" we are led to consider her own name. There is the suggestion that the age-old connotations of weakness, temptation and the Fall will have their influence on the bearer of the name. The implications of the partial identification of Effi with the archetype of womanhood are revealing - not only because they point to a more universal context for the course of Effi's life. The associations of guilt incurred through weakly succumbing to curiosity and the desire for something new are also clear. But the comparison is also particularly apt in that for Effi the garden at Hohen-Cremmen is her Garden of Eden, her state of grace and innocence. All her subsequent ills are a direct result of her, albeit voluntarily, but blindly, leaving her spiritual home there, to become embroiled in a sophisticated way of life where the innocence of childhood and a natural life soon become clouded and compromised in a society committed to artificiality and "Götzendienst".<sup>38</sup> Effi's 'Fall' after leaving home is inevitable, for in so doing she has embarked on a way of life which requires the suppression or destruction of her true self. Effi Briest is unable to accomplish the metamorphosis into Frau von Instetten, and the attempt ends in her eventual return to Hohen-Cremmen to die once more as Effi Briest.<sup>39</sup> The title "Effi Briest" already foreshadows the basic theme of the novel.<sup>40</sup>

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37 N V, p.87; it is not etymologically accurate to suggest that "Ebba" derives from "Eva"; Ebba provides suggestive connotations of her own for her name.

38 N VII, p.375.

39 Ibid. p.426, "--- die Sonnenuhr war fort, und an der Stelle, wo sie gestanden hatte, lag seit gestern eine weiße Marmorplatte, darauf stand nichts als 'Effi Briest' und darunter ein Kreuz. Das war Effis letzte Bitte gewesen ---".

40 Cf. Flaubert's title Madame Bovary, which points to the fact that all Emma's troubles arise precisely because she has become Madame Bovary. The romantically inclined Emma, with high-flown ideas of  
(Continued)



"Unwiederbringlich" is a less discreet pointer to the predetermined nature of the course of events in that work, but the implications of the title "Effi Briest", although veiled, are equally uncompromising. Fate, or however the irrational ordaining power may best be styled, has placed Effi in the world in the predetermined form of Effi Briest, and any attempt to deny that essential nature must be doomed from the outset.

Thus, very discreetly, by his choice of name for his heroine, and by drawing attention to the significance of "besonders der Taufname"<sup>41</sup> in another context, Fontane has set up another chain of associations in his novel which reinforces the idea that the course of events is being governed in an ineluctable way by irrational forces.

Apart from the instances where characters use words which point to the existence of a mysterious order beyond human comprehension, there are occasions in both Unwiederbringlich and Effi Briest when Fontane, from his authorial perspective, endorses and reinforces the sense of fate that they express.

At the beginning of Unwiederbringlich he cites Arne's description of Holk's new house as a latter day "Tempel zu Pästum" - "Natürlich alles ironisch" comments Fontane, but adds, "Und doch auch wieder mit einer gewissen Berechtigung".<sup>42</sup> And indeed his endorsement of the description is significant, for the justification for it lies not only in the physical similarities between Holk's new home and a classical temple, but also in the associations attached to it as an image. Already in the first paragraph, Fontane is suggesting something of the

40 (Contd.) what life and the world owe her, finds herself tied to a dullard, whose very name suggests his bovine clumsiness, and her hoped for escape and fulfilment through marriage turns out to be the exchange of one prison for another.

41 N VII, p.221.

42 N V, p.5.

nature of the drama that unfolds. The temple at Paestum was built to appease Neptune, the god of the sea. And thus Fontane invokes a framework of arbitrary powers, of hidden gods seeking to destroy man.

Holk's potential infidelity is made fact as the result of a journey across the sea, and Christine, when she succumbs to fate, is finally claimed by the sea. The image is appropriate too, in that the latter-day temple is Holk's creation, and with its pagan associations it stands in direct contrast to Christine's Christian convictions. Holk does not think in Christian terms at all, and the house is a symbol of his desire to escape from the dull and melancholy austerity of Christine's northern religion. Another detail about the house, lightly drawn, adds to the suggestion that the gods are in unpropitious mood, and that fate is against the protagonists:

Die ringsumher unter dem Säulengänge nistenden  
Schwalben waren fort ---.<sup>43</sup>

Despite such unpropitious signs there is a moment in each novel where Fontane intervenes to pass a comment which shows that the irrational forces are not purely hostile and unpropitious. The victims pause for an instant, as if arrested in their course of action by a fleeting intimation from beyond. Holk has just read again a letter which he has written to Christine from Copenhagen:

--- da überkam ihn eine leise Rührung, von der er  
sich kaum Ursach und Rechenschaft zu geben vermochte.  
Hätt er es gekonnt, so hätt er gewußt, daß ihn sein  
guter Engel warne.<sup>44</sup>

Effi has just heard of the plan to produce a play:

Aber als ob eine Stimme ihr zugerufen hätte: 'Sieh  
dich vor!' so fragte sie doch, inmitten ihrer

43 Ibid. p.10, cf. above, chap.IV, p.93f. and chap.VI, p.160f.

44 N V, p.100.

freudigen Erregung: 'Ist es der Major, der den Plan aufgebracht hat?'<sup>45</sup>

In both these cases, of course, one could argue that the thoughts are prompted in a purely psychological way, by subconscious feelings of guilt. The terms used by Fontane however, clearly suggest motivation of a less rationally explicable nature.<sup>46</sup> Having failed to heed the warning Effi

fürchtete sich und war doch zugleich wie in einem Zauberbann und wollte auch nicht heraus.<sup>47</sup>

----- die Kugel war im Rollen, und was an einem Tag geschah, machte das Tun des anderen zur Notwendigkeit.<sup>48</sup>

Here again the terms, "Zauberbann", "das Geheimnisvolle", "Notwendigkeit" belong to the verbal pattern that implies inscrutable and irresistible determining powers.<sup>49</sup> Fontane here reinforces the impression created by his characters' own utterances, and there can now be no question as to his own stand: "Einen Zufall gibt es nicht".<sup>50</sup>

Such observations lead inevitably to a consideration of where, if anywhere, the guilt or responsibility lies in Unwiederbringlich and Effi Briest. This is a question to which no unambiguous, or at least no unqualified answer is to be found. One answer of course is Briest's reply to his wife's series of "obs?" at the end of the novel:

45 N VII, p.292.

46 Cf. Riechel, op.cit., p.209, "However both motivations, the demonic and the psychological-realistic are present, and an either/or argument is illegitimate as well as quite un-Fontanean. It is more proper to argue as does Karl Richter (Resignation, p.25ff.) that the theme of fate and psychological-social motivation relativize each other ---".

47 N VII, p.308.

48 Ibid. p.315.

49 Riechel's detailed examination of the use of numbers, dates and references to ancient sacrificial rites provides an interesting and illuminating exploration of further aspects of the pattern.

50 H V, p.512.

'--- das ist ein zu weites Feld.'<sup>51</sup>,

which is comparable to Christine's,

'Schuld ist überall, und vielleicht ist meine die größere.'<sup>52</sup>

("Vielleicht auch nicht" implies Fontane.) These two judgments, although superficially vague, are quite clear indications of the fact that in Fontane's novels guilt cannot be located in any one person. The tragedy that ensues is quite literally not anyone's fault. It is the result of a - in the primary sense of the word - disastrous combination of personalities.

However it is not a question of simple psychological motivation of cause and effect. There is no suggestion that the course of events could have been changed or avoided if one character had eradicated some defect of character. Effi realises this when she reflects on her feelings.<sup>53</sup> Although she is apparently the guilty party, the wife who has erred, she maintains that what she feels is not personal guilt at all; she has no sense of having done wrong. All that she feels is a strong distaste for the situation in which she finds herself. This is surely how Fontane expects the reader to view the situation also. The tragedy can be explained away neither in terms of purely personal guilt, nor in terms of social forces, but it is brought about by an unhappy combination of the two, which in turn seems to point to the workings of a fate beyond the control and the comprehension of its victims.<sup>54</sup> Fontane's remarks in a review for a performance of

51 N VII, p.427.

52 N V, p.41.

53 N VII, p.359.

54 Cf. R.M. Meyer, "Theodor Fontane" in Allgemeine deutsche Biographie, Band 48, Leipzig, 1904, p.623, on Effi: "Seit Prévosts 'Manon Lescaut' ist die 'schöne Sünderin' nicht in so schlichter Wahrhaftigkeit dargestellt worden: weder ein romantisch-schuldloses Opfer der Verhältnisse noch eine sündhafte Natur, sondern die Trägerin eines von ihrem Wesen und Schicksal gleich sehr verschuldeten Looses."

Sophocles' Oedipus Rex are an eloquent source of comment on his own conception of tragic guilt:

Eine Tendenz ist da, aber freilich nicht das alte Tragödienrequisit: die Schuld. Unsere Dramaturgen haben es mehr zu einem Fundamentalsatz erhoben, daß es ohne eine solche nicht geht; - die Hinfälligkeit dieses Satzes kann nicht glänzender demonstriert werden als an diesem König Ödipus. In ihm waltet einfach das Verhängnis, und so gewiß jene Willkürtragödie verwerflich und unertragbar ist, in der sich nichts aus dem Rätselwillen der Götter, sondern alles nur aus dem *car tel est notre plaisir* eines krausen Dichterkopfs entwickelt, so gewiß ist es andererseits für unsere Empfindung, daß die große, die echte, die eigentliche Schicksalstragödie unsere Schuldtragödie an erschütternder Gewalt überragt. Es ist der weitaus größere Stil. In dem Begreiflichen liegt auch immer das Begrenzte, während erst das Unbegreifliche uns mit den Schauern des Ewigen erfaßt. Die Schuldtragödie dient dem Sittlichen, indem sie das Gesetz des Sittlichen in dem sich Vollziehenden proklamiert. So sei es. Aber das Größte und Gewaltigste liegt in diesem tragischen Gange von Ursache und Wirkung nicht beschlossen. Das Größte und Gewaltigste liegt darüber hinaus. Das unerbittliche Gesetz, das von Anfang an unsere Schicksale vorgezeichnet hat, das nur Unterwerfung und kein Erbarmen kennt und neben dem unsere 'sittliche Weltordnung' wie eine kleinbürgerliche, in Zeitlichkeit befangene Anschauung besteht, dies unerbittliche, unser kleines 'Woher' und 'Warum', unser ganzes Klügeln mit dem Finger beiseite schiebende Gesetz, das ist es, was die Seele am tiefsten fassen muß, nicht dies Zug- und Klippklapp-Spiel von Schuld und Sühne, nicht die alte Leier von 'Zahn um Zahn' und nicht die *haec fabula docet*-Lehre: wer Blut vergießt, des Blut soll wieder vergossen werden. All dies ist nicht heidnisch und am wenigsten 'modern überwunden'; - es war der große Gedanke Calvins, die Prädestination als einen Fundamentalsatz mit in das christliche Bekenntnis hinüberzunehmen. Das Chor in König Ödipus schließt:

Drum, dieweil du sterblich, harre, bis sich deinem  
 Auge zeigt

Jener letzte Tag, und preise keinen selig, eh er nicht  
 Überschritt das Ziel des Lebens, jedem Ungemach entflohn -  
 eine Mahnung, uns nicht selbstgefällig einzulullen und die  
 Hütte unseres Glückes wohl auf demütigem Hoffen, aber  
 nicht auf dem Glauben an unsere Schuldlosigkeit aufzubauen. <sup>55</sup>

This is precisely the view of tragedy that is implicit in Effi Briest and Unwiederbringlich.

The outcome is convincing in both novels in terms of both the

psychological and social conflicts which arise, but Fontane has so distributed the guilt or responsibility among the characters and circumstances that it is impossible to point to any one of them, or indeed to any coherent group of them, and say that there is where the guilt lies, and therefore it is there that retribution must be exacted. On the contrary, a sense of inevitable catastrophe is being built up all the time, not so much in terms of the characters' actions, but through the revelation of the existence of irrational forces at work behind the external circumstances of the action. This gradual revelation is made above all implicitly, through the characters' choice of words to express their reactions, and also through recurrent formulations by the author in his narrative, which acknowledge, always discreetly, forces beyond any rational framework of cause and effect. It is part of the subtlety of Fontane's style that these allusions often take the form of socially accepted clichés. As they occur they do not appear at first sight to be doom-laden or sinister. They blend into the background of social conversation. They are perfectly integrated, and the very unquestioning and unreflecting conviction with which they are uttered adds to the cumulative sense of inevitability which they serve to create.

This suggestion of inexplicable powers beyond both man's comprehension and his control is what gives the tragedies their power and depth. The element of mystery and of the inscrutable is an intimation to man of the eternal, a reminder of his limitations; and, as Fontane observes, as such, it is far more impressive than a simple pattern of cause and effect which is susceptible of rational analysis.

Having considered the various irrational elements in the two novels, it remains to examine the specifically supernatural features present in the works. These differ at least in degree if not in kind from the evidence so far drawn upon.

The most striking supernatural element in Effi Briest is the Chinaman. The question as to the function and success of this exotic motif is one which has occupied the attention of literary critics since the novel first appeared. It is a question that has been answered in many different ways, some complementary to each other, and others contradictory.<sup>56</sup> To dismiss it, as J.P. Stern does, as the novel's "only blemish (the obscure imagery of the Chinaman)" and as a "piece of bric-a-brac left over by poetic realism"<sup>57</sup> is unwise, especially in view of Fontane's own remarks in a letter to Widmann in 1895:

Obenan an Schrecknis stehen die, die einem die ganze Geschichte noch mal erzählen und nur gerade das weglassen, worauf es einem angekommen ist. Sie sind der erste, der auf das Spukhaus und den Chinesen hinweist; ich begreife nicht wie man daran vorbeisehen kann, denn erstlich ist dieser Spuk, so bilde ich mir wenigstens ein, an und für sich interessant, und zweitens, wie Sie hervorgehoben haben, steht die Sache nicht zum Spaß da, sondern ist ein Drehpunkt für die ganze Geschichte.<sup>58</sup>

This statement of Fontane's, of course, only reveals his intention that the Chinaman should be an important axis in the novel, it does not guarantee that he has been successful in carrying out his intention. His success or failure in integrating the motif will be examined later.

First of all, why did Fontane choose a Chinaman at all? What connotations did China and the Orient in general hold for him, and what is he trying to suggest to the reader? The Chinaman himself is only one element in a whole pattern of oriental references to be found in

56 Cf. Richter, *op.cit.*, p.44f., and B.A. Rowley, "Theodor Fontane: a German Novelist in the European Tradition", in German Life and Letters XV, p.77.

57 Stern, *op.cit.*, p.374, footnote 4.

58 IFD, p.107, An Joseph Victor Widmann, 19th November 1895.

Effi Briest, and there is a comparable, though more circumscribed pattern of oriental motifs in Unwiederbringlich.

If one goes beyond the novels to Fontane's correspondence, one can find the origins of the motifs partly in the figure of Frau Warnkens, who was Fontane's landlady in Norderney in July, 1883. She was the widow of a sea captain who travelled to the Far East. To judge from Fontane's letters to his wife, he was fascinated by Frau Warnkens' tales of what she had seen of the world.<sup>59</sup> In 1884 Fontane planned a piece on her in his uncompleted Sommers am Meer,<sup>60</sup> and he subsequently used her as a model for Frau Hansen and her daughter in Unwiederbringlich, and her husband for Thomsen, the Chinafahrer, in Effi Briest.

Another interesting piece on China and the Chinese, and a possible source of inspiration for the Chinaman in Effi Briest is an essay entitled, "Auf der Suche", which appeared in the Neue Rundschau in 1890. In this essay, Fontane decides to take foreign consulates in Berlin as his subject matter:

Aber mit welcher wollt' ich beginnen? Ich ließ die Gesamtheit der Gesandtschaften Révue passieren, und da mir als gutem Deutschen der Zug innewohnt, alles, was weither ist, zu bevorzugen, entschied ich mich natürlich für China, Heydtstraße 17. China lag mir auch am bequemsten an meiner täglichen Spaziergangslinie, die, mit der Potsdamerstraße beginnend, am jenseitigen Kanalufer entlangläuft ---<sup>61</sup>

59 H V, p.1068.

60 Cf. the following, part of the plan for the Norderney section, published in H V, p.815:

- a. Frau Warnkens. Ihre Abstammung, ihr Mann.
- b. ihre Weltreisen. Taifun.
- c. In Siam.
- d. Die Seeräuber und Piraten. Man kann nicht fechten, weil die eignen Leute unzuverlässig sind.
- e. Die Zimmerschilderung; alles chinesisches oder siamesisches.
- f. Die Schwestern und Sohn in London. Das Internationale, Weltmännische.

61 N XVIII, p.82.



This ironic view of his choice of material quite clearly shows that he realised that in choosing the Chinese Consulate he laid himself open to the charge of bad taste, and of following a path already too well-trodden by his countrymen. One can therefore assume that equally, in incorporating oriental material into Unwiederbringlich and Effi Briest, he was quite consciously choosing what Stern referred to as "bric-a-brac", and Richter as "ein Motiv des Trivialromans",<sup>62</sup> and that he was fully aware of the tradition on which he was drawing. It is a tradition, however, which he makes work in a different and often ironical way in its new context.<sup>63</sup>

In "Auf der Suche" Fontane ironises his own vain search for the stock Chinaman, only to be found it seems in the German imagination - mysterious, elusive, inscrutable -

Und in einem mir angeborenen Generalisierungshange  
das Thema weiterausspinnend, gestaltet sich mir der  
an Fenster und Balkon ausbleibende Chinese zur Epopöe,  
zum Hymnus auf das Himmlische Reich.<sup>64</sup>

The essay concludes with typically Fontanesque self-mockery. Abandoning his search for signs of Chinese life at the Consulate, he steps into Josty's coffee house for refreshment. There he finds two examples of the exotic species he has been stalking with so little success:

--- und siehe da, neben mir, in hellblauer Seide,  
saßen zwei Chinesen, ihre Zöpfe beinahe kokett über  
die Stuhllehne niederhängend. Der Jüngere, der  
erraten mochte, von welchen chinesischen Attentaten  
ich herkam, sah mich schelmisch freundlich an, so  
schelmisch freundlich, wie nur Chinesen einen an-  
sehen können, der Ältere aber war in seine Lektüre  
vertieft, nicht in Kon-fut-se, wohl aber in die

62 Richter, op.cit., p.44.

63 Cf. Mittenzwei, op.cit., p.135 and T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in The Sacred Wood, London 1928.

64 N XVIII, p.84.

Kölnische Zeitung. Und als nun die Tasse kam und ich das anderthalb Stunden lang vergeblich gesuchte Himmlische Reich so bequem und so mühelos neben mir hatte, dachte ich Platens und meiner Lieblingsstrophe:  
 Wohl kommt Erhörung oft geschritten  
 Mit ihrer himmlischen Gewalt,  
 Doch dann erst hört sie unsere Bitten,  
 Wenn unsere Bitten lang verhallt.<sup>65</sup>

In this playfully ironic piece, Fontane mocks the conventional awe and sense of mystery that the Orient inspires in the European breast. And this is precisely the conventional response that is called forth both from Effi and Holk.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, the care that Fontane takes to evoke the non-existent, fantasy world of the Orient suggests that he did indeed find attractive and romantic elements in the conventional notion of the Orient, even if at the same time he mocked himself for entertaining such thoughts. In this respect his attitude to the Orient is comparable to his view of the aristocracy. He thought that there was a large degree of mystification and fantasising attached to both, which had no place in the reality of the modern world. Nonetheless, as a writer and a man of imagination, he was attracted to both, almost in spite of himself, as subject matter for his pen.

On a purely practical, biographical level, his imaginative response to the Orient may have been stimulated by the fact that his daily walk took him past the Chinese Consulate, and that his friend Paul Lindau lived in a flat immediately opposite it. This, of course, must remain a matter for speculation.

The main interest of the essay lies in the fact that it reveals some of the contemporary, conventional connotations of the Orient, and

65 Ibid. p.86.

66 N VII, p.205, (Effi spricht) "'Ein Chinese, find ich, hat immer was Gruseliges.'" and N V, p.75, "--- diese(r) Erzählung [about the Emperor of Siam], die ----- Holk etwas märchenhaft vorgekommen war ---."

at the same time, Fontane's own highly conscious attitude of scepticism towards these conventions.<sup>67</sup> It is therefore not plausible to suppose that he was not fully aware of the associations of the motif that he employed in Effi Briest. It cannot simply be regarded as a piece of Romantic paraphernalia, accidentally left over in a novel of social realism.

Whatever associations may or may not have been expected to spring spontaneously to the reader's mind at the mention of the Far East, Fontane is careful to build up a set of associations which send out their ripples through the two novels. Each succeeding reference to the Orient comes to depend partly for its effect on an accumulation of associations from earlier contexts. This is particularly true in Effi Briest, where the first reference to the Far East comes from Effi herself in Chapter 4.<sup>68</sup> She tells her mother of her secret desire for a Japanese canopy for her marriage bed. The canopy is to have long-billed, black and gold birds on it, and is to be set off by a red lamp. The request itself and her mother's response to it point forward in a curious way to what is to come. Frau von Briest refers to the canopy,

'--- mit allerhand fabelhaftem Getier ---'

and gently reproves Effi for her fantastic notions. But in a sense Effi's vision of what will await her in her new home is not so very wide of the mark. She does indeed find all kinds of fantastic animals there - the stuffed crocodile and shark in the hall, and Frau Kruse's black fowl in the servants' quarters. This vision and the

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67 It is hard to understand how Emil Aegerter in his otherwise interesting and valid comparison of Theodor Fontane und der französische Naturalismus, op.cit., p.28 can state, Fontane "hat kein Verhältnis zum Orient", even if his relationship is not a conventionally Romantic one.

68 N VII, p.191.

accompanying verbal formulation is a kind of prophecy of what is to come; but, like so many prophecies, it is fulfilled in an unexpected way, and Effi finds the reality of the strange beasts disquieting rather than romantic. Her mother comments,

'Es kommt dir vor wie ein Märchen, und du möchtest Prinzessin sein.'

Here as elsewhere a warning against devotion to a dream is being sounded.<sup>69</sup>

The rest of Frau von Briest's objections point even more clearly forward:

'Aber meine liebe Effi, wir müssen vorsichtig im Leben sein, und zumal wir Frauen. Und wenn du nun nach Kessin kommst, einem kleinen Ort, wo nachts kaum eine Laterne brennt, so lacht man über dergleichen. Und wenn man bloß lachte. Die, die dir ungewogen sind, und solche gibt es immer, sprechen von schlechter Erziehung, und manche sagen wohl noch Schlimmeres.'

'Also nichts Japanisches und auch keine Ampel. Aber ich bekenne dir, ich hatte es mir so schön und poetisch gedacht, alles in einem roten Schimmer zu sehen.'

Frau von Briest war bewegt. Sie stand auf und küßte Effi. 'Du bist ein Kind. Schön und poetisch. Das sind so Vorstellungen. Die Wirklichkeit ist anders, und oft ist es gut, daß es statt Licht und Schimmer ein Dunkel gibt.'<sup>70</sup>

These last words, veiled and allusive as they are, become all too clear in the light of Effi's subsequent discoveries about life. Thus Fontane associates this first fleeting, and superficially trivial reference to the Orient with ideas of guilt, shame, criticism from society and even of eroticism ("zumal wir Frauen"). This conversation is very closely related to the central themes of the novel. However Fontane, typically, does not allow it to go too far and become any more explicit. Effi seems to be about to reply, but is interrupted, and we do not hear

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69 Cf. above, chap.VI, p.136.

70 N VII, p.191.

her answer to her mother.

In Unwiederbringlich the associations of the Orient are likewise created with care. They are first introduced when Holk enters his lodgings in the Hansens' house. The first reference to the "chinesisch-japanisch"<sup>71</sup> decoration of the rooms comes just after attention has been drawn to Brigitte Hansen's blandishments. The description of the room itself is rich in sensual appeal. We have again the association of the Orient with erotic pleasures. Later, when the tale of Brigitte and the Emperor of Siam is told, the further associations of infidelity and adultery are added.

The oriental themes are also associated with a sense of mystery and fear in both novels.<sup>72</sup> This is particularly striking in the passages where Instetten first speaks of the Chinaman to Effi.<sup>73</sup> Before Effi has expressed any reaction other than excited anticipation to the exotic elements in the new world which she is entering, Instetten quite explicitly suggests fear and horror to her as suitable reactions to the as yet unexplained affair of the Chinaman. Consider for example:

'Wenn du nicht furchtsam bist ---'

and, 'Es ist schön und sehr schauerlich.'<sup>74</sup>

Finally, the Orient, in the form of its rulers, connotes absolutism and cruelty. In Unwiederbringlich these are attributes of the Emperor of Siam that are emphasised.<sup>75</sup> Effi, significantly enough, compares

71 N V, p.60.

72 Ibid. p.103, "Märchengrusel".

73 N VII, p.205f and p.216.

74 Ibid. p.205.

75 N V, p.73.

Instetten to an Eastern potentate in a picture book she had as a child. In her description of the picture Effi unconsciously associates cruelty and violence with the ideas of rank and power.<sup>76</sup>

Fontane builds up a series of varied, but interrelated, connotations to be associated with the oriental motifs that appear in both novels. The motifs take on ever richer significance, and illuminate and complement the main themes of the works. He approaches the presentation of this exotic and supernatural material with the circumspection and restraint characteristic of his mature works. He does not attempt to incorporate outlandish and fantastic material into his novels of social realism, novels set in the austere atmosphere of North Germany, without casting severe doubts on its claim to belong to the world of reality. In Unwiederbringlich doubts are cast on the story of Brigitte and the Emperor of Siam. Holk is not at all clear in his own mind whether to believe the tale,<sup>77</sup> or to put it down to Frau Hansen's desire to make her daughter seem mysteriously attractive and a match for any man. The reader too is left to draw his own conclusions about this incident - as to whether it is not simply "märchenhaft"<sup>78</sup> but actually a Märchen.

In Effi Briest there is no doubt that the Chinaman did actually exist at one time, but it is never made quite clear how the reader should regard the question of the ghost. The scene where the ghost first appears to Effi is prefaced by a passage which suggests that such apparently supernatural manifestations may be susceptible of rational explanation.<sup>79</sup> Effi reads in a guide book about the ghostly

76 N VII, p.214.

77 N V, p.75 and p.103.

78 Ibid. p.75.

79 N VII, p.227.

'White Lady' whom Napoleon thought he saw in Schloß Eremitage. The guide book explains that the painting of the 'White Lady' hung on a concealed door in the wall, which was linked by a flight of stairs to the cellars. The suggestion is that what Napoleon saw was a human being of flesh and blood who entered his bed chamber by this door - not a ghost at all. This anecdote, as it immediately precedes Effi's own seeing of a ghost, naturally serves to raise doubts. Perhaps it was not an emanation of the spirit world, but something which could be rationally explained. On this occasion Effi points to the fact that Rollo suddenly barked in the night, as evidence that there really was something.<sup>80</sup> Later on however this is discredited as reliable corroboration:

Einmal trat sie spät abends vor den Spiegel in ihrer Schlafstube; die Lichter und Schatten flogen hin und her, und Rollo schlug draußen an, und im selben Augenblick war es ihr, als sähe ihr wer über die Schulter. Aber sie besann sich rasch. 'Ich weiß schon, was es ist; es war nicht der', und sie wies mit dem Finger nach dem Spukzimmer oben. 'Es war was anderes --- mein Gewissen ---'<sup>81</sup>

Here again Rollo has barked, but Effi sees quite clearly that what haunts her is not a ghost but her conscience.

In addition to such doubts and negative indications, there are, on the other hand, many positive indications which support the idea that the Chinaman's ghost is indeed a reality and not just a dream or a figment of the imagination. Everyone in the house seems to accept the fact of its existence. When it does appear to Effi, Fontane uses the positive formulation:

--- in diesem Augenblick huschte was an ihr vorbei, ---,<sup>82</sup>

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80 Ibid. p.232.

81 Ibid. p.315.

82 Ibid. p.231.

and although the sentence begins with "Ihr war, als ob ---" this has no grammatical connection with the thing that flits past. The "as if" that suggests that everything is only a creation of her own mind is linked with the actual apparition only in the most tenuous way. It is in the same sentence, but has no logical connection with the positive and indicative account of the occurrence. Support for the existence of ghosts comes in Effi's discussion with die Tripelli. Die Tripelli, for all her artistic prowess and unconventional way of life, is a woman of common sense and practicality. It is clear that Fontane is sympathetic towards this humorous, straightforward, vigorous woman. There is nothing romantic and over-sensitive about her. Her firm and unhesitating belief in ghosts therefore carries a weight of authenticity which would have been denied to a more spiritual, impressionable creature. It is precisely because die Tripelli is a strong, practical personality that her belief in the supernatural is so convincing.

Fontane presents supernatural phenomena in Effi Briest in an ambiguous and inconstant light. He gives indications for and against accepting their objective existence, but refuses to probe too far into the "suspekte Halbdunkel".<sup>83</sup> It is notoriously difficult to present supernatural phenomena in a convincing and effective way. This is even more the case in novels of social realism, where the context is above all a human one, and the preoccupations of the characters are human and social relations in a circumscribed milieu. Intimations from a supernatural sphere must be carefully handled, in order that they may be meaningfully integrated into such works.

Fontane is fully aware of the difficulty he faces, and he solves it by presenting his supernatural material in a suggestive and ambivalent fashion. He touches on the phenomenon in an allusive way, but

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83 N V, p.75.



makes no attempt to analyse or explain it.<sup>84</sup> He realises that the reader will respond imaginatively to,

--- den geheimnisvollen Reiz des nur Angedeuteten<sup>85</sup>,

and will respond with greater satisfaction to undisputed obscurity and mystery where the subject concerned is, by definition, not susceptible of rational explanation. In Von Zwanzig bis Dreißig Fontane quotes Storm's remarks on the technique involved in telling a successful ghost story:

Solche Geschichte muß immer ganz wenig sein und unbefriedigt lassen; aus dem Unbefriedigten ergibt sich zuletzt die höchste künstlerische Befriedigung!<sup>86</sup>

The words apply equally to Fontane's presentation of the ghost in Effi Briest.

Such then are the associations and the manner of presentation of the 'Spuk' motif when viewed in a general way. A closer examination of the material is necessary to discover more precisely the function of this supernatural motif in the novel as a whole.

It is Effi who first mentions the Chinaman, apparently at random, when she speculates about the exotic inhabitants of the new world which she is entering in Kessin. Instetten replies,

'Auch einen Chinesen. Wie gut du raten kannst.'<sup>87</sup>

84 FH, no.177, 17th June 1866, "Man muß nicht alles sagen wollen. Dadurch wird die Phantasie des Lesers in Ruhestand gesetzt, und dadurch wieder wird die Langeweile geboren."

85 Theodor Fontane: Aufsätze zur Literatur, p.373.

86 N XV, p.206.

87 N VII, p.205.

Referring to her remark as a good guess, he suggests the seemingly random nature of the comment. However the subsequent intricate development of the motif points to the fact that this was far more than a chance remark. Indeed, as Fontane's attitude to chance in his works is notoriously sceptical, it is clear that here not chance but fate is taking a hand in the course of events.

The conversation in which the fateful word is uttered provides the reader with his first view of the relationship between the newly wedded couple. It takes place as they drive in the moonlight towards Effi's new home. Effi's mood at first is of excited and enthusiastic curiosity. The tone of Instetten's remarks insidiously transmutes that enthusiasm into a sense of almost apprehensive wonder. He touches on the possible existence of mysterious and supernatural phenomena associated with the Chinaman, but deliberately leaves the subject wrapped in obscurity.<sup>88</sup> Effi is not slow to react, almost instinctively, to these suggestions:

Effi, die still in sich versunken, jedes Wort halb ängstlich, halb begierig eingesogen hatte ---<sup>89</sup>

and, Effi war wie benommen. 'Ja, du hast recht, Geert, wie schön; aber es hat zugleich so was Unheimliches. In Italien habe ich nie solchen Eindruck gehabt, auch nicht als wir von Mestre nach Venedig hinüber fahren. Da war auch Wasser und Sumpf und Mondschein, und ich dachte die Brücke würde brechen; aber es war nicht so gespenstig. Woran liegt es nur? Ist es doch das Nördliche?'<sup>90</sup>

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88 Ibid. "Es ist möglich, daß wir wirklich noch einen haben, aber jedenfalls haben wir einen gehabt; jetzt ist er tot und auf einem kleinen eingitterten Stück Erde begraben, dicht neben dem Kirchhof. Wenn du nicht furchtsam bist, will ich dir bei Gelegenheit mal sein Grab zeigen; es liegt zwischen den Dünen, bloß Strandhafer drum 'rum und dann und wann ein paar Immortellen, und immer hört man das Meer.. Es ist schön und sehr schauerlich.'" and p. 206, "'--- solange du den [Rollo] um dich hast, so lange bist du sicher und kann nichts an dich heran; kein Lebendiger und kein Toter.'"

89 Ibid. p.207.

90 Ibid.

Aegerter comments:

Gerade die Frauen zeigen sich bei Fontane häufig Einflüssen der Atmosphäre, Düften oder Geräuschen unterlegen.<sup>91</sup>

Here the atmosphere to which Effi attributes supernatural properties, the atmosphere which Fontane has evoked in the previous paragraph in terms of nature and landscape, also has another source. Effi is responding not merely to the atmosphere in the physical and natural sense suggested by Aegerter. Her acute sensitivity responds to the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, of supernatural mystery and obscurity evoked by Instetten's remarks. Fontane here fuses the spheres of the natural, the supernatural and the psychological in a highly suggestive way. This fusion is a first indication of the underlying fear and uneasiness that is to characterise Effi's attitude to her husband. It is also a first indication that the motif of the Chinaman with its supernatural overtones is to be associated with the flaws in the marital relationship.

The second link in the chain is provided by Effi. She awakens after her first night in the marriage bed in Kessin, and tells Johanna that she has been unable to sleep for quite some time during the night because of the sound of satin shoes dancing in the room above. She tells the maid this story partly to cover up what she feels to be her own faux pas in sleeping too late.<sup>92</sup> The motif is thus linked to Effi's guilty feeling that she is not fulfilling her new role adequately. On the other hand there seems to be evidence to substantiate the objective existence of the supernatural phenomenon. What Effi has seen and heard on this first night corresponds to the tale of the Chinaman's ghost,

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91 Aegerter, op.cit., p.45.

92 N VII, p,212 and p.216.

although Effi, like the reader, has no way of knowing this at the time. The reactions of Johanna and Instetten, however, make it clear that the ghost is not purely an emanation of Effi's overactive imagination.<sup>93</sup> Fontane does nothing to discourage an acceptance of the phenomenon on its own terms. He does not attempt to explain it away rationally, or even irrationally, but allows it to stand unchallenged and unanalysed, as part of the reality he portrays.

Irrespective of its ontological status, the phenomenon is again interesting for the reaction which it evokes in Effi and Instetten. Effi is quite prepared to accept the rational explanation that the curtains upstairs are too long. Instetten however is embarrassed and secretive once more, and in this context he is also moved to say:

'Jedenfalls aber eh' wir Änderungen vornehmen, mußst du dich in unserem Hauswesen erst umsehen, natürlich unter meiner Führung.'<sup>94</sup>

These are small details of behaviour, but nonetheless they can be seen to point first of all to a lack of openness and directness in Instetten's attitude to his wife, and secondly to a tendency to resist change and compromise, a lack of consideration for anything but his own desires and designs. This attitude may be in part attributable to the age difference between the partners, or simply to Instetten's personality, or to the ingrained egotism of prolonged bachelorhood. Whatever the causes, this is only one of a series of contexts in which the fundamental lack of harmony in the relationship becomes increasingly apparent.

Similarly, in the incident where they find the Chinaman's picture stuck to a chair upstairs, Fontane not only increases the air of mystery

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93 Cf. Ibid, p.205 "'--- ich habe dann immer gleich Visionen und Träume und möchte doch nicht, wenn ich diese Nacht hoffentlich gut schlafe, gleich einen Chinesen an mein Bett treten sehen.'"

94 N VII, p.216.

surrounding the Chinaman, but adds to the impression that Instetten is holding something back from his wife.<sup>95</sup> Again, at the end of the discussion, when Effi has suggested that the rooms would be suitable for her mother when she comes, Instetten makes a remark which seems to conceal more than it communicates:

Instetten war mit allem einverstanden gewesen und hatte nur zum Schlusse gesagt: 'Alles ganz gut. Aber es ist doch am Ende besser, wir logieren die Mama drüben ein, auf dem Landratsamt; die ganze erste Etage steht da leer, gerade so wie hier, und sie ist da noch mehr für sich.'<sup>96</sup>

The reader is left wondering quite what has motivated this remark. Is it a desire on Instetten's part to show that he is master in his own house, or a desire to keep mother and daughter apart as he wants to reinforce Effi in her role as wife, and wean her away from her child-like dependence on her mother? Is it simply selfishness and lack of consideration on his part, as he does not wish his domestic routine to be interfered with? Or is it perhaps that Instetten would feel uneasy, as a former suitor of Frau von Briest, to have both generations under the same roof with him? Whatever the reason, one thing is clear, he sees no need either to acquiesce to Effi's wishes, nor indeed to have a frank discussion with her on the subject.

These early suggestions of inadequacies in the marital relationship are soon to be underlined and reinforced by an episode, in which the Chinaman is once more the catalyst, which forces underlying emotions and thoughts towards the surface. Effi is left alone for the first time overnight in the house. Instetten has been called away by Bismarck to Varzin. Before she retires for the night, Effi confesses

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95 Ibid. p.219, "Effi --- war nur verwundert, daß Instetten alles so ernsthaft nahm, als ob es doch etwas sei."

96 Ibid.

to Johanna that she is afraid,<sup>97</sup> without saying exactly what it is that she fears. Johanna's reply shows that she assumes that what Effi fears is the Chinaman's ghost. The context in which Effi voices her fear suggests that this is not the sole, or even the primary source of her fears at this time. Her words, "'Ich habe solche Angst'" come at the end of a paragraph in which Effi has been reminiscing about her happy life at Hohen-Cremmen. There seems little immediate connection between these memories and her sudden expression of fear. However, if such thoughts of her abandoned home give rise to a feeling of longing and then fear in Effi, then surely what she is afraid of is the new life she has chosen. She is acutely aware of her own uneasiness, although she is not yet sufficiently conscious of the reasons for it, to be able to express them directly. Even if she were able to, Johanna as a servant, would not be a suitable confidante. Johanna offers to stay with her during the night, but Effi's reply, that Instetten must not know that she has been afraid, shows that her fear, at least in part, is of him and his criticism.

Thus, when the Chinaman's ghost does appear to her in the night, it seems as if it is a manifestation of her own fears about her marriage. She has, as it were, transferred her subconscious fears about her relationship to the Chinaman, and his ghost becomes a symbol for her, at this stage largely irrational and intuitive, fears about her relationship to Instetten.

It is only natural that these fears should be acute on a night when Instetten, from Effi's point of view, is neglecting her and is showing no consideration for her feelings.

The discussion between Effi and Instetten next morning<sup>98</sup> throws

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97 Ibid. p.230.

98 Ibid. p.235f.

significant light on their attitudes to each other. In it Effi's intuitive fears, both about the existence of the ghost and about the imperfections in her marital relationship, find confirmation rather than contradiction. At the end of the discussion, Effi quite accurately and clear-sightedly sums up Instetten's arguments against moving house or staying at home every night, by saying that he is afraid of making a fool of himself in the eyes of others. He has even gone so far as to say that she should look on the ghost as a status symbol. Effi, in her straightforward simplicity, sincerely condemns her husband's craven concern for appearances, and, as a result of this conversation, she begins to see more clearly what kind of man she has married.

Fontane has thus used the appearance of the Chinaman's ghost both to suggest Effi's uneasiness and fear in her new situation, and to reveal that these fears are to some extent justified. The episode points forward to the further strife to come.

The story of the Chinaman is at last told for the first time by Instetten to Effi.<sup>99</sup> In the telling, the motif of the Chinaman is associated with the idea of a young bride, a thematic link with Effi, and with the idea of death and burial in the dunes - a link with Crampas' death in the future. Another point which Fontane makes here about the Chinaman is that he was a good man, no worse than anyone else.<sup>100</sup> This statement, coupled with Roswitha's comment,

'Denn die Chinesen sind doch auch Menschen, und es wird wohl alles ebenso mit ihnen sein, wie mit uns.'<sup>101</sup>

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99 Ibid. p.239ff.

100 Ibid. p.241.

101 Ibid. p.319.

underlines the fact that the Chinaman should be thought of, not only as a supernatural phenomenon of exotic origin, but also as someone who is relevant in purely human terms to the characters and action in the novel. Here, as elsewhere, Fontane seeks to tone down his supernatural motifs, in order to integrate them meaningfully into the human and social milieu of his works.

The story of the Chinaman is related four times in all in the course of the novel.<sup>102</sup> The second time is in a letter from Effi to her mother, in which she voices her dissatisfaction with her new home,<sup>103</sup> and with Instetten's treatment of her. Here she returns to the episode where the Chinaman appeared to her in the night, and complains of Instetten's lack of understanding for her feelings. This confession to her mother shows that she is still brooding on the matter and that her continuous concealment of her true feelings from her husband is quietly eating away her relationship with him. Until her marriage she has been open and sincere in her ways, but now Instetten's attitudes have forced her into suppressing and concealing her emotions from him. This is a habit which is strengthened with time, and finds its culmination in her affair with Crampas.

It is no accident in the structure of the novel that Effi's first step towards committing herself to Crampas is made by her confiding in him her secret fears about the Chinaman, and her incomprehension of her husband's attitude to the ghost.<sup>104</sup> Here again Fontane uses the motif of the Chinaman at a crucial stage in the work to throw into relief the flaws in Effi's marriage. As Schillemeit comments:

102 The third time, on p.319, by Frau Kruse to Roswitha; the fourth time, on p.378, by Instetten to Wüllersdorf.

103 Ibid. p.253, she refers to her new home as "'doch eigentlich gar kein richtiges Haus.'" a remark that condemns more than merely the number and disposition of the rooms.

104 Ibid. p.281.



Das Motiv des spukenden Chinesen gibt Anlaß zu jenem Geheimnis, das Effi an Crampas bindet und sie ihrem Mann entfremdet.<sup>105</sup>

Crampas indeed wins Effi's affection and supplies a need in her emotional life by listening with sympathy and understanding to her fears. He fills a gap left by Instetten's inadequacy.<sup>106</sup> It is Crampas who suggests to Effi that Instetten is deliberately fostering her fear of the ghost in order to make her behave with propriety, that he is intentionally trying to tame her high spirits and make her a submissive and faithful wife. This suggestion, the truth of which must be weighed up by the reader for himself, can have only a negative effect on Effi. She herself is uncertain whether to believe Crampas' explanation. Nonetheless it does not seem completely implausible to her and the seeds of doubt and suspicion have been sown in her heart.

Fontane's use of the 'Spuk' motif, however, is not confined to crucial stages in Effi's relationship with her husband. In places, it functions not so much to create an episode in which the consciousness of marital disharmony is forced to the surface, but to remind the reader of the constant presence of elements in the relationship that are slowly but surely wearing it away. For instance, in a letter to her mother written in the April of her pregnancy, Effi mentions the ghost, not as

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105 J. Schillemeit, Theodor Fontane. Geist und Kunst seines Alterswerkes, Zürich, 1961, p.99.

106 Cf. Müller-Seidel, "Gesellschaft und Menschlichkeit im Roman Theodor Fontanes", Heidelberger Jahrbücher IV, p.119, "Ohne Gestalten wie Crampas müßte die Gesellschaft im Unmenschlichen erstarren. Aber ohne die Instettens lösen sich Ordnung und Sitte auf. Wenn der Baron die starren Prinzipien der Gesellschaft verkörpert und Crampas das Menschlich-Natürliche im Absehen von unnötigen Konventionen, so läßt sich dieses Verhältnis bis in einzelne Züge hineinfolgen. Bezeichnend ist Effis Angst vor der Spukgestalt des Chinesen. Es ist eine ganz natürliche, eine fast kreatürliche Angst. Aber Verständnis findet sie in diesem Punkt nicht bei ihrem Gemahl, sondern bei Crampas. Instetten sieht diese Angst ausschließlich im Spiegel der Gesellschaft."

a symbol of her fear and uneasiness about her marriage, but to underline its boredom and monotony.<sup>107</sup> She almost hopes that the Chinaman will reappear - even a ghost would be welcome as a relief from her lonely and uninteresting existence. Here again, through the 'Spuk' motif, is an indirect criticism of Instetten for his inadequacy as a marriage partner for this youthful, imaginative and normally active young wife.

Later Effi thinks that she has seen the Chinaman again, looking over her shoulder in the mirror.<sup>108</sup> But in this case she realises that it was only her own conscience that was haunting her. The motif has been adopted by Effi once more to express her awareness of faults in her marriage. It is no longer a question of the actual phenomenon itself, but it has been verbalised, transferred from the realm of external phenomena by Effi to represent her own state of mind.

Similarly, although perhaps on a less conscious level, Effi invokes the 'Spuk' motif when Instetten is warning her against Crampas:

'Unbefangenheit ist immer das beste, und natürlich das allerbeste ist Charakter und Festigkeit und, wenn ich solch steifleinenes Wort brauchen darf, eine reine Seele.'

Sie sah ihn groß an. Dann sagte sie: 'Ja, gewiß. Aber nun sprich nicht mehr, und noch dazu lauter Dinge, die mich nicht recht froh machen können. Weißt du, mir ist als hörte ich oben das Tanzen. Sonderbar, daß es immer wieder kommt. Ich dachte du hättest mit dem allen nur so gespaßt.'

'Das will ich doch nicht sagen, Effi. Aber so oder so, man muß nur in Ordnung sein und sich nicht zu fürchten brauchen.'

Effi nickte und dachte mit einem Male wieder an die Worte, die ihr Crampas über ihren Mann als "Erzieher" gesagt hatte.<sup>109</sup>

107 N VII, p.256f.

108 Ibid. p.315.

109 Ibid. p.295.

This short exchange shows once more an aspect of the misalliance. Instetten seems to be lacking in trust for Effi and is speaking to her, as Effi eventually realises, more in the tone of a teacher to a pupil than of a loving husband to a wife. Effi at first expresses her consciousness of her uneasiness by invoking the ghost. It seems as if the accusing voice of her husband calls up feelings of guilt and resentment which she can only voice obliquely, by referring to the ghost, which from the beginning has been a source of disharmony in their marriage, and equally has become a kind of objective correlative for the deficiencies in their union.

A few chapters later, when he is about to leave for Berlin, Instetten's suspicions about Crampas are once more aroused. This time it is he who mentions the ghost. Effi's reaction to this reveals the stage to which the relationship between herself, her husband and Crampas has developed:

Effi lächelte vor sich hin, und es mischte sich etwas von Wehmut mit ein. Sie mußte des Tages gedenken, wo Crampas ihr zum ersten Male gesagt hatte, daß er mit dem Spuk und ihrer Furcht eine Komödie spiele. Der große Erzieher! Aber hatte er nicht recht? War die Komödie nicht am Platz? Und allerhand Widerstreitendes, Gutes und Böses, ging ihr durch den Kopf.<sup>110</sup>

Effi's reaction to the mention of the ghost has undergone a radical change since the motif was first introduced. Now her thoughts no longer betray the spontaneous wonder and apprehension of an inexperienced and impressionable girl. She has clearly developed a degree of cynicism through the disillusioning experience of her marriage. At the same time she has become sufficiently mature and aware of the complexities of human relations to recognise the ambiguity and compromise in her own situation. Even if Instetten has been deliberately trying to keep her in check by frightening her, has he not been proved to be justified by

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110 Ibid. p.317.

her adulterous relationship with Crampas? Here she has arrived at the painful realisation, which comes to so many of Fontane's characters, that in human relations it is difficult, if not impossible, to apportion guilt justly, for the complexity of such problems admits of no unambiguous answer. The simple, straightforward 'Naturkind' of the beginning of the novel has been drawn inexorably, and in spite of herself, into the adult world of deception and compromise. The imaginary terrors of the ghostly Chinaman can hold no fear for her now that she has discovered that fate has more immediate and human means of tormenting her spirit.<sup>111</sup>

The motif is used to chart Effi's development in her relationship to Instetten, and indeed to life. Her changing attitude to it indicates her changing attitude to her situation.

The final scene in which Effi expresses at length her attitude to the Chinaman's ghost occurs when Instetten tells her that they are moving to Berlin.<sup>112</sup> Her heartfelt expression of relief at the news arouses Instetten's suspicions again, and in order to allay them she pretends that her relief stems from her desire to escape from the Chinaman's ghost. Although this is simply an excuse which she produces, it is nonetheless appropriate, and in a sense it is true that what she hopes to escape from is the ghost which, as we have seen, has come to be associated both with marital disharmony and with her infidelity. There is a sense in which what she says is true, for the ghost symbolises all that is wrong in their relationship. Starting a new life in Berlin, where there is more social life and amusement, Effi hopes to escape from the claustrophobic, introspective life which has forced her into

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111 Cf. Ibid. p.397, "'Ach, Spuk ist lange nicht das Schlimmste'", which is the final reference to the motif in the novel.

112 Ibid. p.326f.

guilt and concealment in her search for human warmth, sympathetic understanding and diversion.

When Instetten does arrive in Berlin, and enters the flat which Effi has chosen for them, things indeed look more hopeful between the couple. However, thoughts of the ghost have not been totally banished. It is Instetten who keeps them alive, and again we may question his motives in doing so. As he enters the hall he observes:

'kein Haifisch, kein Krokodil und hoffentlich auch  
kein Spuk.'<sup>113</sup>

He goes further, for it is not long before he tells Effi that the Chinaman has followed them to Berlin. Johanna has brought his picture with her.<sup>114</sup> Effi is understandably distressed at hearing this, and, on a purely psychological level, the incident once more reveals that Instetten is, at best, wanting in tact and consideration. At worst he is deliberately tormenting his wife.

On a symbolic level, this episode shows that the Chinaman and all that he represents are an inescapable part of Effi's marital relationship. Effi herself recognises that it would be useless to destroy the picture. It is merely a physical manifestation of something intangible and indestructible that pursues her. Indeed the Chinaman can be seen in this sense to be a symbol of fate.<sup>115</sup>

This sense of fate is reinforced by one of the last references<sup>116</sup>

113 Ibid. p.345.

114 Ibid. p.349.

115 Cf. Braun, op.cit., p.84, "The symbol of 'the Chinese' appears to me to be neither an educational device thought up by Instetten nor a symbol of Effi's conscience, but rather a symbol of what here has been called destiny, denoting a lack of harmony and foreshadowing disaster."

116 The only subsequent reference to it occurs on p.397 and is very brief.

in the novel to the 'Spuk' motif. This occurs as Instetten is on his way through Kessin to fight a duel with Crampas:

--- durch die Plantage mußte man jedenfalls, und so führte dann der Weg unvermeidlich an Instettens alter Wohnung vorüber. Das Haus lag noch stiller da als früher; ziemlich vernachlässigt sah's in den Parterreräumen aus; wie mocht es erst da oben sein! Und das Gefühl des Unheimlichen, das Instetten an Effi so oft bekämpft oder auch wohl belächelt hatte, jetzt überkam es ihn selbst, und er war froh, als sie daran vorüber waren.

'Da hab ich gewohnt', sagte er zu Wüllersdorf.

'Es sieht sonderbar aus, etwas öd und verlassen.'

'Mag auch wohl. In der Stadt galt es als ein Spukhaus, und wie's heute da liegt, kann ich den Leuten nicht unrecht geben.'<sup>117</sup>

Here the 'Spuk' motif is once more inextricably linked to the catastrophe in Effi's and Instetten's life. Even the use of the adverb, "unvermeidlich" holds overtones of fate. It is at once ironical and appropriate that at this point Instetten at last recognises, even if it is only momentarily, the forces of which Effi has been so acutely aware - forces which have been symbolised or suggested by the Chinaman throughout. Here Instetten has another brief insight into the world of irrational forces, just as he had at the very beginning of his relationship with Effi, when the shout of "Effi, komm!"<sup>118</sup> had seemed so fraught with mysterious meaning to him. The final, and brief, recognition of the forces comes too late, and is too fleeting and enigmatic to avert Instetten's course of action. It serves, however, to condone Effi's intuitive attitudes and fears. It indicates that all that Effi felt and feared in relation to the Chinaman and the atmosphere of the house has not been the idle figments of an overactive imagination. There are indeed "more things in heaven and earth, Horatio."

Here as elsewhere, the motif points not only to fate, and

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117 N VII, p.378.

118 Ibid. p.183.

irrational forces beyond man. It can also be seen to reflect the characters' - in this case Instetten's - state of mind and feelings about the marital relationship. "Öd und verlassen" characterising the house must apply equally to the feeling of emptiness in Instetten's heart, and "unheimlich" can be transferred to his feelings at the thought of the grotesque scene that is about to be played out, and all that led up to it.

The motif of the Chinaman's ghost can therefore be seen as a "Drehpunkt für die ganze Geschichte".<sup>119</sup> It is absent from the first thirty pages of the novel as it is from the last thirty, for these are sections of the work in which Effi is allowed to be herself, that is Effi Briest. The motif appears only in the central one hundred and ninety pages of the novel, and is exclusively associated with her disastrous relationship with Instetten. It is not merely a fanciful piece of supernatural paraphernalia introduced at random by Fontane, but can be seen to be an indispensable element in the underlying structure of the novel. Fontane uses it not only to symbolise and suggest flaws in the marital relationship, but also to chart the development and deterioration of that relationship. Finally, by the accumulation of references, it comes indeed to symbolise the inevitable disintegration of the marriage, and in so doing takes on the connotations of destiny. Fontane manipulates the motif in such a way that it both reveals and reflects Effi's emotional and psychological state, but at the same time it may be seen to point to irrational forces beyond the inner life of the individual. The function of the motif is a complex one. Fontane is no longer using a supernatural motif, as for example in Vor dem Sturm, simply as a device to hammer home the message that the course of the action is predetermined. In

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119 Cf. above, chap.VII, p.185.

Effi Briest the supernatural motif of the Chinaman is so fully integrated into the work as to form an essential element of its structure, that is, an element which serves to illuminate and develop the central themes of the work.

Related to the central supernatural image of the Chinaman are the secondary motif of Frau Kruse's "schwarzes Huhn", and the Schloon episode. Instetten introduces Effi to Frau Kruse and her black hen in much the same way as he does to the Chinaman, namely as a brief and unexplained allusion when she first arrives at her new home.<sup>120</sup> Again there is the same air of almost deliberate mystification. Effi's response to this mentally disturbed woman, who sits in the house day and night, nursing her black fowl, is not unnatural. After a vain attempt to be friendly, she feels only fear and distaste for the woman, and connects her quite explicitly with the Chinaman<sup>121</sup> and other irrational forces in the house. Kruse himself relates that his wife has been in this state of mental disturbance ever since they came to live there.<sup>122</sup> Her reaction to the forces in the house may then be seen as a reflection of Effi's, but carried to a grotesque extreme.

Frau Kruse is a perfectly acceptable character in a novel of social realism. Indeed the coming generation of naturalist writers could not but have applauded the inclusion of an insane servant as a natural part of the spectrum of humanity. However, like so much in Fontane's novels, she can be regarded on more than one level. On the level of social realism she is simply a piece of local colour, an unfortunate woman, who incidentally provides a point of comparison with some of the other female characters - Effi, Frau Crampas and Roswitha

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120 N VII, p.208.

121 Ibid. p.232, p.321.

122 Ibid. p.320.



for example. In addition she has other connotations, which form part of the web of irrational and supernatural images in the work. Alone with her black hen, voluntarily set apart from the other 'normal' characters, she is a kind of witch figure with her familiar in the shape of the hen. She calls forth superstitious fears in Effi, who does not wish her to take part in the preparations for the baby.<sup>123</sup> The hen itself is sterile, and one of a witch's traditional skills is to bring influence to bear on the reproductive functions of man and beast. She too contributes to the pervading atmosphere of fear and superstition in the Kessin milieu. She, like the Chinaman, is part of a symbolic pattern pointing to the fact that natural forces are out of joint and that human relationships are therefore threatened in this setting.

On seeing the flat in Berlin which Effi has chosen, Instetten remarks:

'Nicht einmal das schwarze Huhn hätten wir unterbringen können. Oder unterschätz ich die Wohnung?' Effi schüttelte den Kopf, und als eine kleine Pause eintrat erhob sich die Mama ---<sup>124</sup>

This is the last reference to the black hen in the novel, but here as with the 'Spuk' motif, we see that it has not been left behind in Kessin. Through Instetten, its memory has been invoked in Berlin. Once more we may wonder how good his intentions were in mentioning it. It is quite clear from Effi's inability to utter a word in reply that she still finds even the mention of it highly disturbing. One may be reminded of Fontane's many references to the folly of "den Teufel an die Wand malen", and of "Glück bereden". Effi's reaction here in remaining

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123 Ibid. p.259.

124 Ibid. p.346.

silent suggests that such thoughts are in her mind. Her largely intuitive attitude to phenomena warns her against disregarding superstitious practices, and she clearly wishes that her husband had acted likewise. The hen has been mentioned, however, and therefore may be seen as a discreet portent of doom, an indication that the obscure forces of fate will not be cheated.

In the Schloon episode Fontane uses not a minor character, but a natural phenomenon to reinforce the irrational symbolism in the novel. Effi asks,

'Der Schloon? Was ist das? Ich sehe nichts.'  
 Kruse wiegte den Kopf hin und her, wie wenn er ausdrücken wollte, daß die Frage leichter gestellt als beantwortet sei.<sup>125</sup>

Once more she is faced with a mysterious, invisible threat and the reluctance or inability of her fellows to explain it. It turns out that the Schloon is an underground channel, which in winter can prove treacherous, by turning the road into a bog which sucks down unwary travellers. The elemental danger that threatens Effi here prefigures the unseen currents of feeling that drag her into adultery with Crampas. She first succumbs to him, as, led by Instetten, they make a detour to avoid the physical danger of the Schloon.<sup>126</sup> Effi is carried away both physically and spiritually as she is borne off against her will into the claustrophobic gloom of the woods with Crampas.

Bis dahin waren Luft und Licht um sie her gewesen, aber jetzt war es damit vorbei ---<sup>127</sup>

125 Ibid. p.305.

126 Cf. Ohl, op.cit., p.218, "Dieses kleine, unterirdische 'Rinnsal' --- wird zum Bilde der noch verborgenen, aber sich ankündigenden elementaren Bedrohung, in der Effi sich befindet, - und in die Instetten sie noch tiefer hineintreibt, indem er, dem Schloon zu entgehen, einen Umweg in den Wald macht."

127 N VII, p.308.

Removed as it were by force from her natural elements of light and air, she is exposed to alien forces over which she has no power, and she submits to them as if to a magic spell. The imagery here is supernatural and magical - Effi has entered an enchanted forest and has had a spell cast on her. Like so much of Fontane's fairytale imagery it can only bode ill, for it represents a denial of reality, a failure to face up to the demands of social convention. The idea of physical 'Ver-sinken' into the Schloön is projected on to Effi's sinking into adultery.<sup>128</sup>

In Effi Briest the supernatural and irrational imagery and motifs are much more pronounced than in Unwiederbringlich, and form a more all-pervading and coherent pattern. In both novels, however, they frequently have similar connotations of erotic attraction and guilt.<sup>129</sup> In both novels the imagery is connected primarily with the female characters who are, in Fontane's works, more sensitive in their intuitive response to irrational influences than are the men. Fontane's comment, that he himself had written Effi Briest "wie mit einem Psychographen"<sup>130</sup> testifies to the fundamental sympathy between

128 As J. Thanner points out, this image is by no means conceived as moral criticism on Fontane's part: "Symbol and Function of the Symbol in Theodor Fontane's Effi Briest", Monatshefte 57, p.46f., "Fontane moralisiert auf keinen Fall, d.h. er stellt keine Reflexionen an über Gut und Böse, nicht einmal metaphorisch. Was allerdings erzählt ist und worüber auch die fiktiven Personen sprechen, ist sein man könnte sagen Lieblingssujet: die sensible, faszinierende Frau, die ihren Impulsen gehorcht und deshalb in konstanter Gefahr schwebt, den gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen zuwiderzuhandeln."

129 Cf. frequent references to Brigitte and Ebba, N V, p.68, "eine schöne Person. Aber unheimlich", p.125, "Und hat man Glück, so spukt es auch noch, und ist es keine tote Prinzessin, so ist es eine lebendige Kammerfrau oder eine Hofdame mit wasserblauen Stechaugen ---", p.159, "Behextsein" and "Zauber", p.203 "bezaubernd" of Ebba, p.209 (Holk spricht) "'Ihr [Ebbas] Gespenst ging immer noch in mir um und war nicht ganz zu bannen.'"

130 FE II, p.385, An Paul Schlenther, 11th November 1895.

his own attitude and the intuitive and irrational processes that govern his heroines. In his mature novels, Fontane depicts this feminine sensitivity so skilfully that it becomes a fundamental element of the structure of the novel. He uses it to create,

Das Gefühl des unentrinnbaren Verhängnisses, der  
heraufziehenden Katastrophe.<sup>131</sup>

Through the response of Effi and Christine to irrational influences, he charts their progress to catastrophe in a way which is at once psychologically convincing and poetically satisfying. These are by no means case histories of neuroses, but symbolically reinforced representations of a poetical view of reality - poetical in the most positive sense of the word: here poetry is not the pseudonym of fantasy but of truth.

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131 H-H. Reuter, *op.cit.*, p.645.

## VIII

Der Stechlin

Der Stechlin, Fontane's final fictional comment on literature and the world, is often seen as an expression of the sum of wisdom and experience of an old man. Although such an approach is easy to justify in a general way, an examination of the particularities of this final comment reveals uncertain and shifting ground. There are constant reminders of the force of Dubslav von Stechlin's aphorism:

'Unanfechtbare Wahrheiten gibt es überhaupt nicht,  
und wenn es welche gibt, so sind sie langweilig.' <sup>1</sup>

The novel, set in 1895, at a time of political, social and industrial change in Germany, considers the often conflicting claims of the old and new ways of life, and seeks to make a statement on their relative value. In a literary context too, Fontane uses old and new devices as his medium of examination. Familiar irrational and supernatural motifs appear, but in examining them it is advisable to tread carefully in order to appreciate not only their familiarity but also their novelty in their present context.

Schloß Stechlin at first sight seems an obvious setting for super-

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1 N VIII, p.8.

natural phenomena, and indeed the assumption that the castle may harbour ghosts is made by two sets of visitors, first Czacko and Rex,<sup>2</sup> and later Armgard and Melusine,<sup>3</sup> who arrive there. However the 'Spuk' motif thus invoked twice, fails to conjure up the supernatural phenomena themselves. On the contrary, Fontane from his authorial standpoint explicitly denies the presence of spirits there:

Nichts war da was sie hätte stören können.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that there are no ghostly manifestations in the house suggests that all is in order there. Dubslav's and his forebears' way of life has been such as to allow of no tormented or unquiet spirits. Dubslav's ironical threat to return and haunt Lorenzen if he influences Woldemar against traditional values<sup>5</sup> brings out the conventional connotations of ghosts as manifestations of a disturbed consciousness, trying to set things right in the world of reality. The same idea, again with humorous overtones, is echoed in the comparison of the ghostly ship 'Rolf Krake'<sup>6</sup> to the ghost of social democracy which haunts the upper classes. Here the 'Spuk' motif once more combines the themes of menace and the hope of exacting justice in the real world.

The familiar motifs of providential coincidence (Fügung), pointers from fate (Fingerzeige) and presentiments (Ahnungen) reappear in the novel, likewise generally in contexts which question or qualify their validity. The first coincidence is so trivial, and the concept is used in such an ironical way as to discredit it from the outset as

2 Ibid. p.15 and p.17.

3 Ibid. p.240f.

4 Ibid. p.43.

5 Ibid. p.343.

6 Ibid. p.154f., and p.244.

a serious phenomenon. Melusine uses the term "Fügung" of Woldemar's arrival in time to advise on their choice of hats.<sup>7</sup> This is closely followed by a humorously deflating account of the absurd emphasis placed on the coincidence that Schickedanz died three days before Christmas.<sup>8</sup> The third reference to coincidence again displays it in a highly suspect light. Princess Ermyntrod, in her overpowering and self-consciously virtuous way wonders whether she may see in the arrival of Superintendent Koseleger - a cleric of unfortunately worldly and unclerically aristocratic tastes - a "gnädige Fügung",<sup>9</sup> a providential act for her benefit. Fontane is at pains to ironise this pair of characters and reveal them in their, albeit unconscious, hypocrisy as participants in what he calls elsewhere the "Tugend-komödie".<sup>10</sup> The irony makes it clear that here again no credence can be afforded to coincidence as a serious determining force.

Both references in the novel to pointers from fate are made by Dubslav. These carry more positive weight, despite their ironical tone. Peewits have recently come to nest by the lake, but only on the side near the glassworks at Globow.<sup>11</sup> Dubslav muses that this is perhaps an indication that he should send some of the eggs to Bismarck, who, fallen from favour, has retired to Friedrichsruh. The peewits' nesting habits can indeed be seen as a "Fingerzeig", although of a rather different kind than the one that Dubslav envisages. In folk poetry, the peewit is the republican among birds;<sup>12</sup> he refused to participate when the other birds decided to choose a king. Globow,

7 Ibid. p.103.

8 Ibid. p.321f.

9 Ibid. p.306.

10 N V, p.150.

11 N VIII, p.321.

12 Cf. Bächtold Stäubli, op.cit. IV, p.1303f.

with its glass factory, near which the peewits have chosen to settle, represents the rising industrial proletariat, with their social democratic as opposed to monarchical sympathies. Even the allusion to Bismarck as a phenomenon of the past, no longer approved of or tolerated, suggests this contrast between the old order and the new, the exploration and reconciliation of which is a central theme in the novel. Here Fontane uses an irrational motif, which, despite Dubslav's misinterpretation, does in fact point to a political and social reality. Dubslav's blindness to its true implications suggests that, despite his comparative sympathy and broadmindedness with regard to the new era, he is nonetheless, at his advanced age, very much a product of the passing order, of the age of pre-eminence of the Prussian Junkerdom. The other pointer he discerns is of a more general nature. The frame of reference is human and natural, rather than social and political. Here Dubslav's interpretation although once more not rationally founded, may be accepted with less reservation as an expression of a tenable view of the world. He speaks of the formation of wax in a honeycomb as an indication from nature that it is, like the skin of an apple, there for a purpose, and should be eaten with the rest as a source of strength and goodness.<sup>13</sup> That the honey from Krippenstapel seems to do him good after the concoctions prescribed by die Buschen have failed to bring lasting relief leads him to remark that a good spirit lies behind the one, and an evil one behind the other. Drawing the analogy of Lorenzen and Koseleger he infers that these are parallel cases of good and evil spirits and

'an solchen Rätselhaftigkeiten liegt sehr viel im Leben.'<sup>14</sup>

This sequence of thought is typically Fontanesque, combining as it does

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13 N VIII, p.335.

14 Ibid. p.336.



the idea of the primacy of "Gesinnung",<sup>15</sup> of the importance of man's general attitude to life, the feelings underlying his actions and words, rather than any systematically proclaimed thoughts and beliefs, and secondly the idea of an inscrutable order at the heart of life which, despite its inaccessibility to human reason, nonetheless follows a coherent pattern.

The nature and function of presentiments experienced by the characters in Der Stechlin is rather different from those in earlier novels. A comparison of Der Stechlin with Unwiederbringlich illuminates the change in emphasis. In earlier works intimations of future events were usually fulfilled as part of the inevitable development of the plot, which in turn was determined in the main by the psychology and circumstances of the characters. In his last novel, where the plot is of even less significance than elsewhere and conversation and discussion are all important, presentiments are confined exclusively to the anticipation of the arrival of visitors to either the Barby or Stechlin household. They serve to create tension in a mild degree, and in their imperfect reliability they restate Fontane's contention that any attempt at seeing into the future is likely to be only partially successful. Because Melusine predicted Woldemar's visit, Graf Barby announces:

'Damen sind groß in Ahnungen, und bei Melusine hat es schon geradezu was Prophetisches.'<sup>16</sup>

but he immediately adopts an ironical attitude to this standpoint, commenting that if she had been confident in her prediction, she would not have gone out. Later presentiments on her and Dubslav's parts prove justified up to a point, but in each case, the precise prediction

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15 Ibid. p.317.

16 Ibid. p.116.

of the coming visitor's identity is inaccurate.<sup>17</sup> Further ambiguous light is thrown on the process by the fact that a most disturbing arrival, Adelheid's to nurse her brother, is completely unexpected.<sup>18</sup>

Superstition and proverbs once more feature as a vital part of human life as Fontane sees it. The familiar theme of "Glück verreden"<sup>19</sup> is introduced by Woldemar, and his father fully endorses his son's caution. Graf Barby too is superstitious in his attachment to the flat where life has been free from care.<sup>20</sup> This kind of superstitious attachment to a dwelling has already been seen in Unwiederbringlich, where Christine was unwilling to tempt providence by moving from the old castle. Melusine warns Woldemar, jokingly, against tempting providence:

'Zudem sollen Sie wissen, daß so was sich rächt.'<sup>21</sup>

None of these references is particularly significant in itself, but it is interesting to note the recurrence of such familiar motifs to the very end of Fontane's creative life. Superstitious feelings are experienced in this novel by characters whose opinions and attitudes are obviously viewed seriously and sympathetically by the author. Superstition is clearly presented, even through these minor instances, as a valid response by sensible and rational men and women to certain aspects of life. It is not merely a mental aberration on the part of simple and unsophisticated characters, but is seen to be an accepted and acceptable feature of the complex reality of human experience. This fact is demonstrated equally by the positive use of proverbs in

17 Ibid. p.211, p.212, p.302, p.315.

18 Ibid. p.320.

19 Ibid. p.46.

20 Ibid. p.113.

21 Ibid. p.129.

the novel. Dubslav's improvement in health, even although it is temporary, makes him a living demonstration of the validity of die Buschen's "Hexenspruch", "Dat Woater nimmt dat Woater."<sup>22</sup> The proverb, "Kindermund tut Wahrheit kund", cited by Graf Barby earlier in the novel,<sup>23</sup> is fulfilled in a curiously oblique, but unmistakable way at Dubslav's funeral. Von Blechernhahn says of Lorenzen, who pronounces the funeral oration,

'Er gehört ja zur Richtung Göhre.'<sup>24</sup>,

that is, his ideas are in tune with those of Paul Göhre, a social democrat concerned with contemporary social problems. Von Molchow points out, ironically, the coincidence that Göhre's name sounds the same as a Mark dialect word for a child. He means this pun to be taken disparagingly, as he disapproves of the new current of ideas abroad, but the reader, who has been reminded of what to expect from the "mouths of babes and sucklings" can only take this pun as an indication of the truth of Lorenzen's words on Dubslav and life.

The treatment of religious themes in Der Stechlin affords further insight into important aspects of the irrational strands in the novel. The work is unfolded under the not entirely benign eye of the God of Time, a scythe-bearing figure above the clock which dominates the entrance hall in Schloß Stechlin.<sup>25</sup> The disquieting presence of this pagan deity is the sign under which the exploration of old and new values takes place. It is a constant reminder of the transience of life, of the mortality of man in general, and of Dubslav in particular.<sup>26</sup>

22 Ibid. p.312.

23 Ibid. p.200.

24 Ibid. p.351f.

25 Ibid. p.16.

26 Ibid. p.303.

At the same time it is a symbol of a dimension beyond man's control, an element in which he must live, with which he must come to terms, but which at the same time transcends and defeats him. Time more than anything is the ultimate mystery of man's existence, the unknowable which he strives to comprehend. Within this frame of reference, a Christian God and a Christian system of beliefs exist only in a very relative form. The main characters in this Fontane's final literary work are unanimous in their scepticism. Dubslav, despite his nearness to death, serenely rejects belief in an after-life.<sup>27</sup> Melusine, without excluding the possibility that she may change her mind, asserts:

'Meiner ganzen Natur nach bin ich ungläubig.'<sup>28</sup>,

and in humorous parenthesis Uncke too is established in this sceptical camp:

Uncke begleitete dies Wort mit einer Kopfbewegung, die seine respektvolle Stellung (aber doch auch nicht mehr) zum lieben Gott ausdrücken sollte.<sup>29</sup>

Even Pastor Lorenzen, the humane, free-thinking clergyman, seems to belong more among the sceptics than the believers. His integrity is not questioned on this score, but rather seems to be strengthened in Fontane's eyes as a result. Dubslav comments on him:

'Er spricht nicht von Erlösung und auch nicht von der Unsterblichkeit, und is beinah als ob so was für alltags zu schade sei. Vielleicht ist es aber noch was andres, und er weiß am Ende selber nicht viel davon.'<sup>30</sup>

The question as to Lorenzen's Christian belief is left unanswered, and Dubslav goes on to emphasise the fact that to him the early precepts

27 Ibid. p.8.

28 Ibid. p.250.

29 Ibid. p.337f.

30 Ibid. p.339.

of Christianity, the Ten Commandments, have always had a distinctly secular flavour:

'das schließt eigentlich auch keine großen Rätsel auf. Es ist alles sehr diesseitig geblieben ---'<sup>31</sup>.

Fontane's attitude to more doctrinaire religious beliefs and practices is correspondingly negative. When the princess comes to save Dubslav's soul, having made the arrogant assumptions, firstly, that it was in need of saving, secondly, that she was equipped for the task, and thirdly, that there is only one way to salvation - hers and Koseleger's - Dubslav is manifestly discomfited, and is moved to pronounce his own relative and tolerant point of view:

'Der Alte auf Sanssouci, mit seinem 'nach der eignen Façon selig werden', hat's auch darin getroffen.'<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, Fontane discredits an uncompromising fundamentalist approach to Christianity by the comically inconclusive account of die Schmargendorf's dream of angelic revelations about the "Wortlaut".<sup>33</sup>

Catholicism, a theme employed in a more far-reaching way in earlier works,<sup>34</sup> is also touched on. Here, as with many familiar motifs which re-emerge in Fontane's last novel, it is a case of fleeting

31 Ibid. p.340.

32 Ibid. p.307, also cf. G. Radbruch, Theodor Fontane oder Skepsis und Glaube, Leipzig, 1948, p.34f., "Man kennt wohl die alten Darstellungen der 'ars moriendi': gute und böse Geister um das Sterbebett im Kampf um die Seele des Sterbenden. So versammeln sich auch um den sterbenden Stechlin zwei kämpfende Fronten: auf der einen Seite der Superintendent Koseleger, ein strenggläubiger Streber, auf der anderen der freidenkende und edelgesinnte Pastor Lorenzen; dort die Prinzessin Ermyntud, Frau eines Oberförstern und Pathetikerin höherer Sittlichkeit, hier die moralischer Werte gänzlich bare Hexe und Kurpfuscherin, die 'alte Buschen'; Stechlins Schwester aber, die fromme, strenge und saure Domina Adelheid, wird vom Sterbebett ihres Bruders listig vertrieben durch die Gegenwart der rotstrümpfigen kleinen Agnes, Enkelin der Buschen, Kind der Sünde, und wie es scheint, selbst für den Weg ihrer Mutter vorbestimmt. Dort die Korrekten und Selbstgerechten, hier die Ketzer, Zöllner und Sünder, die dennoch oder deshalb näher zu Gott sind."

33 N VIII, p.89f.

34 Cf. above, chap.V, p.124ff.

references rather than of developed and integrated motifs. Here, as before, Fontane comments on aspects of Catholicism which seem to provide comfort absent from the Protestant faith. In both instances, however, the commendation by one character is immediately questioned by another, and the doubts voiced are thus afforded greater weight than the original assertion. Von der Nonne is roundly ridiculed by von Molchow for saying:

'Die Seelenmessen --- sind doch eine wirklich tröst-  
sende Seite des Katholizismus!'<sup>35</sup>

and on the basis of this assertion aspiring to save the departed soul of Frederick the Great. Similarly, when Dubslav suggests that the Catholics, with their special benediction for nursing the sick, understand such matters better, this supposition is immediately denied by Engelke.<sup>36</sup>

Hubert Ohl in his comparison of Vor dem Sturm and Der Stechlin from the point of view of the status of religion, sums up the stance at which Fontane has arrived thus:

---so erlaubt der Roman [Vor dem Sturm] im ganzen doch den Schluß, daß der Fontane dieses Buches an eine Erneuerung der geschichtlichen Welt aus der Kraft göttlicher Gnade glaubt. --- Von einem solchen metaphysisch-religiös bestimmten Glauben ist in Fontanes letztem Roman, dem Stechlin nichts mehr zu finden.<sup>37</sup>

The novel bears witness to a secular view of the world. Although religious strands are still perceptible in the total picture, they appear not as powerful living influences running through life, and bearing life along with them, but rather they are comparable to mineral veins in rock formations, which, no longer active, nonetheless

35 N VIII, p.173.

36 Ibid. p.310.

37 Ohl, op.cit., p.232.

furnish visible evidence of the historical origins of the present structures. From Fontane's perspective in Der Stechlin these veins are not solely or even predominantly Christian. Rich seams of pagan themes and imagery contribute to the overall picture. These can be seen to function in different ways. They widen the historical perspective of the novel. Reference to Dubslav in his "wotanartigen schwarzen Filzhut",<sup>38</sup> oak-staff in hand expresses a vivid consciousness of his pre-Christian heritage. Most strikingly, however, pagan imagery is used to express the cruel, inhuman, almost fossilised forms of the old aristocracy in the contemporary world. Dubslav himself, of course, cannot be confined in this negative category, as he has shown flexibility and a willingness to change with the times. His sister, Adelheid, on the other hand, and in more exaggerated forms der Herr von Alten-Friesack and die Triglaff are described as throwbacks to an earlier era:

Die Triglaff, wie sich das bei Kakadugesichtern so häufig findet, verband in sich den Ausdruck höchster Tiefsinnigkeit mit ganz ungewöhnlicher Umnachtung, und ein letzter Rest von Helle, der ihr vielleicht geblieben sein mochte, war ihr durch eine stupende Triglaffvorstellung schließlich doch auch noch abhanden gekommen. Eine direkte Descendenz von dem gleichnamigen Wendengotte, etwa wie Czacko von Czacko, war freilich nicht nachzuweisen, aber doch auch nicht ausgeschlossen.<sup>39</sup>

The comparison to a Wendic deity is clearly associated here with an absurd degree of self-esteem based purely on ancestry. The measure of absurdity in this case is suggested by the fact that this obsessive family pride has been the last straw in pushing the Triglaff beyond the bounds of sanity, that is, of finally severing her links with the real world. Herr von Alten-Friesack shares this inordinate family

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38 N VIII, p.50.

39 Ibid. p.83.

pride,<sup>40</sup> and he has equally lost contact with contemporary reality. He can no longer speak coherently, and simply nods.<sup>41</sup> Adelheid, although a less extreme example, is ranged with these two in her rigid refusal to face up to new social developments. Melusine unwittingly implies this connection when she speculates on Adelheid's Wendic ancestry.<sup>42</sup> Die Triglaff and Alten-Friesack are both compared to Wendic idols.<sup>43</sup> This recalls the term "Götzendienst"<sup>44</sup> which Wüllersdorf, in Effi Briest, used of the aristocratic code of honour to which Instetten senselessly sacrificed his own happiness and Effi's, and her life and Crampas'. Fontane uses the image of pagan idols to symbolise the pernicious and fossilised forms of a class of society which has outlived its usefulness and relevance in the modern world, and whose members can only survive meaningfully if they adjust to new conditions.

Fairytale motifs, familiar from earlier works, reappear in Der Stechlin. Their previous development has already been considered,<sup>45</sup> and it only remains to examine the final manifestations of this widely employed complex of images. In the later Berlin novels, it was seen that the imagery functioned primarily to illuminate the fact that magic and fairytales are ineffectual in the modern world, to emphasise the ineluctable sway of hard reality over the characters' idyllic dreams and aspirations. This theme is reiterated in Der Stechlin firstly, in passing, by Frau von Gundermann who, in a highly prosaic conversation

40 Ibid. p.349: "Er hielt sich nämlich (worin er einer ererbten Geschlechtsanschauung folgte) für den einzig wirklich berechtigten Bewohner und Vertreter der ganzen Grafschaft."

41 Ibid. p.84.

42 Ibid. p.241.

43 Ibid. p.84, p.177, p.349.

44 N VII, p.375, and above, chap. VII, p.178.

45 Above, chap.VI, pp.132-137.



about rats in the Berlin streets of her childhood, observes about the Pied Piper and the magical means he used to rid the town of rats,

'Aber die gibt es doch nicht mehr.'<sup>46</sup>

The realities of nineteenth-century urban life admit of no magical transformation. Similarly there is a denial of the present-day existence of the fairytale, and an affirmation of the ascendancy of modern industrial reality when Dubslav shows Czacko the locality. At the mention of the "grüne Glashütte" Czacko's response:

'Das klingt ja beinah wie aus 'nem Märchen.'

is immediately contradicted by Dubslav:

'Ist aber eher das Gegenteil davon. Sie heißt nämlich so, weil man da grünes Glas macht, allergerwöhnlichstes Flaschenglas.'<sup>47</sup>

Thirdly, Dubslav recounts how the princess, in her absurd sentimentality when choosing names for her daughters,

'--- verlangt ihrer Natur nach zu dem Dynastisch-Genealogischen auch noch etwas poetisch Märchenhaftes.'<sup>48</sup>

She has increasing difficulty in fulfilling these desires, and Dubslav mocks her gently for attempting to. This is again an indication that there is little room in the modern world for such fantasies.

Curiously enough there is one character in the novel whose idyll is unquestioned and unshattered, at least from her own point of view. Of Frau Schickedanz, the Barby's Berlin landlady, widow of an insurance secretary, Fontane writes:

46 N VIII, p.30.

47 Ibid. p.51.

48 Ibid. p.169.

ihr Leben [kam ihr], wenn sie rückblickte, wie ein Märchen vor, drin sie die Rolle der Prinzessin spielte.<sup>49</sup>

Although the attainment of happiness in life is not to be despised, the image of a fairytale applied to Frau Schickedanz's humdrum, petit-bourgeois existence cannot but be incongruous. If this is what a "Märchen" is, then the term has been devalued and transformed in an urban environment. Frau Schickedanz, although a respectable and well-meaning woman, has not the slightest glimmer of the idealistic and imaginative qualities that have been associated with the image in the past. Her "Märchen", although in a rather different way from the real princess's, is just as illusory.

It is interesting to note that these 'anti-fairytale' motifs are very different in tone from most of those in the earlier novels. Here, the tone is humorous and untroubled. Before, the unrealisable magical state was most frequently a source of lingering sorrow, a cause for painful resignation. This change of emphasis can be explained in terms of the structure of the novel. In the earlier novels the structure was linear, the plot developed progressively to show the fulfilment, or more often the thwarting of the characters' aspirations. In Der Stechlin the structure is, rather, agglomerative. The whole is formed out of an aggregation of ideas and images, opinions and attitudes, assembled to express in detail a view of the world. In the earlier novels the imagery was used to foreshadow the fulfilment or otherwise of the characters' wishes, whereas in Der Stechlin there is little question of that, but simply of a more general statement about the world.

Among the magical motifs in Der Stechlin, there are various echoes

of Fontane's first novel, Vor dem Sturm.<sup>50</sup> Armgard, Woldemar's bride, is in some ways reminiscent of Lewin's bride, Marie. A close parallel could be drawn, of course, between Marie and Melusine. This aspect of the correspondence will be considered below. Armgard is not superficially the most attractive object for Woldemar's affection, but like Marie she, in her quiet way, has special qualities which gradually become apparent. Like Marie she is an outsider, a foreigner who is going to bring new blood into the family. The supernatural imagery associated with her is by no means as pronounced as it was in Marie's case, nonetheless Melusine says of her when she sees her lost in thoughts of Woldemar:

'Du sitzt so märchenhaft da.'<sup>51</sup>,

suggesting the kind of strange abstraction and remoteness that was peculiar to Marie. Here it is only a fleeting reference, but it does suggest that Armgard, in her love for Woldemar, has some of the mysterious and alluring qualities peculiar to so many of Fontane's female figures. In common with Vor dem Sturm, Der Stechlin also has its witch: die Buschen, with a basket of twigs on her back, recalls Hoppenmarieken.<sup>52</sup> Both have been labelled "witch" by popular local tradition, although, particularly in Buschen's case, there is little objective fact to support this belief. Their existence as accepted features of the Mark Brandenburg landscape demonstrates man's willingness to perceive supernatural phenomena in his surroundings. It is as

50 Cf. Bamme's necrophilia in Vor dem Sturm and the discussion of Prinz Heinrich in Der Stechlin, N VIII, p.122f; also the discussion of star motifs, above chap.III, p.55f. and Dubslav's contemplation of the "Sterngelimmer", N VIII, p.288.

51 Ibid. p.101.

52 Cf. also Mutter Jeschke in Unterm Birnbaum, see above, chap.IV, p.83.

clear from Dubslav's benign and tolerant attitude to her,<sup>53</sup> as from Adelheid's condemnation of her, that Buschen is to be seen in a sympathetic light. There is nothing evil about her. In turning to her to cure his illness Dubslav displays an unorthodox open-mindedness, a sanguine disregard for the social and religious mores of his peers. His inflexible, doctrinaire sister is scandalised by such an attitude. Buschen, however, with her herbal remedies, is shown to have a genuine knowledge of the healing powers of nature. She stands in positive contrast to the highly cultivated but arrogant and unsympathetic character of Dr. Moscheles. Her cure is ultimately powerless against Dubslav's advancing heart disease, but she has at least brought him temporary relief, and in the array of characters who surround Dubslav in his last days, she belongs amongst those who have their heart in the right place. She belongs with Lorenzen, Krippenstapel and Engelke and not with Frau Katzler, Koseleger, Adelheid and Hirschfeld who are all activated by ulterior motives or false values.

Buschen is important also as she brings with her the child, Agnes. Agnes introduces a modification to the "Märchen" motif. She shares a strange otherworldliness with characters such as Marie in Vor dem Sturm:

Sie träumte bloß so hin, und daß sie dies Wesen hatte,  
das war es recht eigentlich, was den alten Herrn so an  
sie fesselte. Das Auge, womit sie die Menschen ansah,  
war anders als das der andern.<sup>54</sup>

Despite these dreamy qualities which set her apart from the world of everyday reality, Agnes belongs equally in the present of the new age. She sits and knits red stockings, which Adelheid interprets irately as a revolutionary manifestation;<sup>55</sup> and as she overhears the conversation

53 N VIII, p.209.

54 Ibid. p.336.

55 Ibid. p.327f.

of her elders, it is not the "Märchen" of her grandmother as an evil spirit and Krippenstapel as a good one that rivets her attention, but:

Agnes horchte. Verhaftung! Demokratennest ausgenommen! Das war doch noch besser als ein Märchen 'vom guten und bösen Geist'.<sup>56</sup>

It is the political realities of the moment that are of more immediate interest to her, so that in Agnes in a sense, is found a combination of the forces that threaten the Junkers' old feudal order with its fixed social and religious structures. An illegitimate child, with a mother of doubtful morals, she knows no conventional family life, nor fixed religious practice. She is associated with supernatural forces through fairytale imagery and her witch-like grandmother, and is more at home in the natural surroundings of the woods<sup>57</sup> or at a circus in Berlin, than in any well-ordered social environment. She is unbound by convention and she is associated with the revolutionary tendencies of the age. Neither Dubslav nor Fontane appears to be in the slightest disturbed by this potential harbinger of disorder. On the contrary they apparently rejoice in her freedom from all that they consider stifling and restricting in the old order.

The poetry-prose motif examined earlier<sup>58</sup> in conjunction with the fairytale imagery recurs in Der Stechlin too. In spite of disparaging remarks about poets in connection with the Poetensteig in his garden,<sup>59</sup> Dubslav, not without self-irony, makes a plea to Woldemar for a less prosaic approach to his courtship:

'Ich bin nicht für's Poetische, das ist für Gouvernanten und arme Lehrer --- aber diese Wendung 'sich beschäftigen',

56 Ibid. p.337

57 Ibid. p.352, "da schlich es noch eine Weile weinend zwischen den Gräbern hin und her und ging dann die Straße hinunter auf den Wald zu."

58 Above, chap.VI, p.137ff.

59 N VIII, p.50.

das ist mir doch zu prosaisch.'<sup>60</sup>

Dubslav, almost in spite of himself, is advocating more emphasis on imaginative and spiritual values in the place of what seems to him to be Woldemar's over-pragmatic approach. Adelheid is condemned for "die tiefe Prosa ihrer Natur"<sup>61</sup> and here prose represents the antithesis of freedom; so that poetry, its opposite, emerges by implication as a symbol of freedom in thought and deed. There is a playful warning against the expectation of a perfect idyll:

'Ach Frau Gräfin, ich sehe, Sie rechnen auf etwas extrem Idyllisches und erwarten, wenn wir angelangt sein werden, einen Mischling von Kiosk und Hütte. Da harrt Ihrer aber eine grausame Enttäuschung. Das Eierhäuschen ist ein sogenanntes Lokal.'<sup>62</sup>

The party's destination is not a remote, idyllic setting, but a commercial enterprise full of people from the metropolis.

On the whole, however, poetic or aesthetic values are affirmed. It becomes clear from an examination of the relevant passages that the terms poetic and aesthetic in the work connote some kind of moral value. Indeed Dubslav remarks on the correspondence in current thought between "schönheitlich" and "sittlich".<sup>63</sup> He maintains that the highest moral integrity consists in an ability to commit oneself to an idea to the point of self sacrifice. These are precisely the values for which Lorenzen's ideal model, the poet, Joao de Deus stands. F. Behrend in his study of Der Stechlin criticises Lorenzen:

So ergreift Lorenzen nicht von sich aus sein Leben, er findet in Joao de Deus sein Vorbild. Die Flucht Lorenzens in eine Traumwelt bringt ihn aber in einen

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60 Ibid. p.45.

61 Ibid. p.75.

62 Ibid. p.130.

63 Ibid. p.303.

Aesthetizismus, er wählt nicht sich selbst, sondern flüchtet in ein Vorbild.<sup>64</sup>

This accusation that Lorenzen takes refuge in aestheticism, that he concentrates on an ideal and not on life itself is hard to accept. Joao de Deus is exemplary because he lived for others and not for himself, and this is surely a very practical kind of ideal, in the pursuit of which, activity in the real world, as opposed to abstract meditation, has primacy. Lorenzen's model, even although he is a poet, represents not escape from the world but a positive return to it, and an active involvement with its people.

To Fontane in Der Stechlin aesthetic values become equated with humanitarian and to some extent with socialist ones. Here one is reminded of the reference to the Nietzschean "Umwertung", the re-evaluation of values, alluded to, ironically enough, by Adelheid.<sup>65</sup> What is of central importance is the ability to commit oneself and have the courage of one's convictions, whatever the cost. Lorenzen, in defining true heroism, casts aside traditional views, and moots a concept where, under the re-assessment of values, "ein Niedrigstes" may emerge "als Höchstes". Here he is no longer talking about beauty, but asserts "das Häßliche" as potentially a positive value, because, "die Gesinnung entscheidet";<sup>66</sup> that is to say, as illustrated in the tale of the Arctic explorers that follows, it may be truly heroic to shoot a man in the back. The deed itself is irrelevant. Of itself, it is neither heroic nor unheroic. Heroism, moral integrity are determined by the motives of the man who does the deed. This is a re-assertion of Fontane's well-known contention that values are relative,

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64 F. Behrend, Theodor Fontanes Roman "Der Stechlin", Marburg, 1929, p.35.

65 N VIII, p.89.

66 Ibid. p.317.

not absolute. At the same time Lorenzen appears for once to be positing personal commitment as a kind of absolute, and it is curious to find this assertion in view of the occasions in the past when Fontane has so unequivocally condemned any form of fanaticism, which is surely what Lorenzen's "Eigenidee"<sup>67</sup> is akin to. His view that the deed is of secondary significance, and the attitude of mind is all important raises certain problems. Who is to sit in judgment on the "Gesinnung",<sup>68</sup> or is this some kind of existential view of the world? These are problems which remain unresolved.

The question as to what constitutes "Schönheit" and how this ideal state is to be reattained in the present after its purity has been lost is explored in a Siamese fairytale told by Rector Thormeyer on the day of the election.<sup>69</sup> Here we find an amalgamation of the aesthetic/poetical imagery with the magical, fairytale motif, and this occurs in the context of the already familiar oriental motif, which has appeared variously in Effi Briest and Unwiederbringlich. The tale tells of the mystical purification of the King of Siam's daughter by bathing her in blood after she has been violated by a neighbouring prince. All the familiar connotations of eroticism, guilt, absolutism and cruelty are present,<sup>70</sup> and this highly-coloured tale can scarcely withstand rational scrutiny. Besides providing an exotic interlude in the monotony of the electoral proceedings, and widening the frame of reference in the novel, it can also be seen to have some bearing on two important strands in the novel as a whole. First of all the question

67 Ibid.

68 That there are very different definitions of beauty and the prosaic is made clear when Koseleger uses these terms in a worldly sense that is far-removed from the idealism of the characters with the "right" attitude of mind. c.f. N VIII, p.160f.

69 Ibid. p.182ff.

70 Cf. above, chap.VII, p.190ff.



of "Reinheitwiederherstellung"<sup>71</sup> is relevant to Melusine, who despite her brief and disastrous marriage, can be considered to be intact and undamaged by the experience. She seems to have come through it with her essential nature unaltered and unscathed, unlike her less fortunate predecessor, Effi Briest, whose marriage destroyed her. Secondly, as V.J. Günther points out, the tale comments on the political realities of the time. It is told on the day of the election where the social democrats are to gain the upper hand and the old order is crumbling:

Die Katastrophe wird und muß kommen, aber sie wird nur ein Übergang sein zu einer neuen Reinheit und Freiheit, die die gegenwärtige befleckte Gesellschaft nicht allein erreichen kann.<sup>72</sup>

The oriental fairytale then is not an exotic intrusion, but is germane to the central issues of the work.

In Frau Jenny Treibel the poetry motif was used to represent "das Höhere", a higher, more idealistic view of life, a view that was free from materialistic values. In Der Stechlin also poetry stands for an ideal, but for a rather more precisely defined ideal. It stands above all for wholehearted commitment associated with self-sacrifice. We are told that Dubslav never remarried, "halb aus ästhetischer Rücksicht"<sup>73</sup> and here too the idea of commitment to his first wife is not inappropriate. Finally, the motif occurs in connection with the Mark Brandenburg scenery:

--- der Himmel war gleichmäßig grau, nur hier und da eine blaue Stelle. Der Rauch stand in der stillen Luft, die Spatzen quiriliierten auf den Telegraphendrähten und aus dem Saatengrün stiegen die Lerchen auf. 'Wie schön',

71 N VIII, p.182.

72 Günther, op.cit., p.122f.

73 N VIII, p.8.

sagte Baron Berchtesgaden, 'und dabei spricht man immer von der Dürftigkeit und der Prosa dieser Gegenden.' Alles stimmte zu.<sup>74</sup>

This is once again an indication of the necessity to rethink values. What in the past was considered prosaic is now seen to be poetic, just as "das Häßliche"<sup>75</sup> to which Lorenzen referred can in fact be perceived to be "sittlich" or "schönheitlich"<sup>76</sup>. It is significant that this is no longer pure natural landscape. Part of its charm lies in the very inroads made into it by the modern man-made world - the smoke and the telegraph wires. The poetry-prose imagery is used to assert the need for and the existence of ideals, but at the same time it is employed in such a way as to emphasise the new order which demands a rethinking and reassessment of the precise nature of these values.

One of the strongest and most consistently recurring irrational themes running through Fontane's novels is that of the character with elemental affinities.<sup>77</sup> There is evidence of it first in the early sketches of his *Melusine* (1877) and *Oceane von Parceval* (1882) novels which were never completed. It is perhaps precisely because the theme appears in a form that is blatantly irrational, with strong supernatural overtones, that these works remained unfinished. It is revealing to see, in what might be termed crude form, the material that was to be reworked and refined in so many subsequent works. The first *Melusine* figure that Fontane envisaged was very close to her legendary prototype:<sup>78</sup>

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74 Ibid. p.355.

75 Ibid. p:317.

76 Ibid. p.303.

77 This aspect of the novels has been examined in some detail, without reference to *Der Stechlin*, by P. Demetz, op.cit, in the chapter, "Symbolische Motive: Flug und Flocke", pp.204-216; and with reference primarily to *Der Stechlin* by R. Schäfer in her article, 'Fontanes Melusine-Motiv' in *Euphorion* 56, 1962.

78 Cf. H V, p.1009: "*Melusine-Märchen*: nach der altfranz. Sage war die Wasserfee Melusine die Gemahlin des Grafen Raimondin von

Das Mädchen ist eine Art Wassernixe, das Wasser ist ihr Element: baden, schwimmen, fahren, segeln, Schlittschuh laufen. --- Sie verschwindet; man weiß nicht wie; nur sagen- und legendenhaft klingt es.<sup>79</sup>

Sie geht unter. Elementar. --- Es heißt: das Element nahm sie zurück.<sup>80</sup>

It is hard to see how Fontane could have worked on this mermaid-like figure, with her irresistible affinity for the element of water, in such a way as to make her even temporarily a plausible inhabitant of the world of social reality, but it is interesting to see him attempting to come to grips at such an early stage with the theme, which clearly fascinated him.

The Oceane fragment, written a few years later, is worked out more fully. In it is added the important detail that the elemental, mermaid-like figure is incapable of normal human emotions:

Es gibt Unglückliche, die statt des Gefühls nur die Sehnsucht nach dem Gefühl haben und diese Sehnsucht macht sie reizend und tragisch.<sup>81</sup>

There is also a protracted discussion of the definition of "das Elementare". It is established that it is something quite different from supernatural phenomena, such as ghosts and spirits on the one hand, and from religious belief on the other.<sup>82</sup> Frau von Parceval rejects the claim that the elemental is something new. She interprets it in

78 (Contd.) Lusignan --- im Turm des von ihrem Gemahl ihr zu Ehren gebauten Schloßes --- erschien sie jedoch als 'weiße Frau', sooft dem Geschlecht der Grafen L. oder dem franz. Königshaus Gefahr drohte." The associated motif of the 'White Lady' has also been widely employed by Fontane: cf. above, chap.II, p.14f.

79 N XXIV, p.129.

80 Ibid. p.130.

81 Ibid. p.284.

82 Ibid. p.294: "Das Spukhafte, das Gespensterwesen steht dem Menschlichen und Religiösen näher. Es ist die Nachtseite jener Lichtseite, die wir Glauben nennen. Aber mit all dem hat das Elementare nichts zu tun."

Christian terms as the motive force which urges all God's creatures to return to their spiritual home in God:

'Es ist ein neues apartes Wort aber nicht ein apartes Ding; die Sache war längst da. Und wie bei so vielem läuft alles nur auf einen Streit um Worte hinaus. Elementar. Elementar ist alles. Alles an und in uns ist Teil vom Ganzen und dieser Teil will ins Ganze zurück. Ich will nicht Pantheismus damit predigen, keinen Augenblick, ich predige nur einen christlichen Satz damit und wenn wir Gottes Kinder sind, Ausströmungen seiner Herrlichkeit, so drängt alles nach Wiedervereinigung mit ihm. Die Sünde hinderte daran, die Versöhnungslehre, der Versöhnungstod hat die Barrière wieder weggeräumt und wir kehren in Gott zurück von dem wir ein Teil sind.'<sup>83</sup>

The Professor reacts politely but sceptically to this neatly argued Christian interpretation. Frau von Parceval observes that man returns to the earth from which he has come, but Felgentreu is more interested in the other three more ethereal elements:

'Und so haben sich die andren drei, von dem gröbsten zu emanzipieren gesucht: Wasser, Feuer, Luft. Wasser, Feuer, Luft sind auch Elemente, sind auch Ganzheiten und schicken Teilchen in die Welt und nach dem alten Gravitations-Gesetz wollen diese Teilchen, auch diese Teilchen in ihre Ganzheit zurück. Und das ist es was unsrer neuren Kunst und Dichtung einen Charakter gibt und so haben wir eine Melusine, einen Salamander, eine Sturmgret. Und ich glaube, solche Gestalten leben nicht bloß in Dichtungen und ich wollt' es unternehmen, alle die, die hier versammelt sind, danach zu teilen.'<sup>84</sup>

Although Felgentreu's words cannot necessarily be equated with Fontane's own opinions, it is nevertheless undeniable that these are the three elements to which his most sensitive characters respond. The formulation is far more bald and explicit than anything that survives in his completed novels, and it should be treated with caution, but it is interesting to find the statements that 'das Elementare' is an important theme in modern literature, and that elemental qualities can

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83 Ibid. p.294f.

84 Ibid. p.295f.

be discerned generally in people in life as well as in art. These contentions are supported by many passages in the novels. In none of the novels does Fontane make such unequivocal statements about the precise nature of the elemental forces by which many of his characters, particularly the women, are influenced, but the presence and effect of such forces are expressed repeatedly by a group of elemental images and motifs to be found in one form or another in almost every one of them.

Oceane von Parceval's element is water. In the novel her affinity with it is so great, her consciousness of her otherness in the world of human emotions and social reality so acute that she goes to her death in the sea. Characters in other works share this affinity in a less extreme degree, and the motif retains its associations of risk and danger. In Graf Petöfy, as Egon and Franziska go sailing, he warns her:

'Ich habe manches von diesem See gehört und muß Ihnen sagen, daß Sie beides haben können, Abenteuer und Gefahr.'<sup>85</sup>

Ebba appears in Holk's dream as a "Meerweib" who drags him to his doom.<sup>86</sup> Effi Briest, having declared her desire to be thrown out of her sledge into the breakers, imagines that she hears the mermaids' song.<sup>87</sup> In Schach von Wuthenow there is reference to the "stumme Sirene"<sup>88</sup> and even Frau Jenny Treibel is not without its, albeit prosaic, mention of "die schöne Melusine".<sup>89</sup> Finally Melusine in Der Stechlin is the character in Fontane's work with greatest elemental affinity to water, apart from the two early prototypes.

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85 N II, p.140.

86 N V, p.158.

87 N VII, p.304.

88 N II, p.377.

89 N VII, p.131.

The Melusine of Fontane's last work differs in a vital aspect from her predecessors. She shares their affinity with the element, and Fontane intimates this here and there:

'Mir persönlich ist die Böcklinsche Meerfrau mit dem Fischleib lieber. Ich bin freilich Partei.'<sup>90</sup>

'Und heute früh bin ich wie der Fisch im Wasser.'<sup>91</sup>

On one occasion she betrays a sense of being threatened by the element to which she bears allegiance: she prevents the ice on the Stechlinsee from being broken,

'Aber ich bin zugleich auch abergläubisch und mag kein Eingreifen ins Elementare.--- Ich würde glauben, eine Hand führe heraus und packte mich.'<sup>92</sup>

This reveals her consciousness of an irrational force whose power over her she fears. Apart from this occasion, Melusine appears very well-adjusted to her elemental propensities. Unlike her less happy sisters,<sup>93</sup> she has come to terms with both her inner inclinations and the world, and holds them in equilibrium, not in any state of complacent passivity, but rather through an active going out to meet the world on her own terms.<sup>94</sup> She has escaped from the world's attempt to bind her and tie her down, when she refused to remain married, and now she enjoys the state most important to the elemental creature, and, Fontane implies, to humanity itself: freedom from confinement within meaningless bonds.

90 N VIII, p.190.

91 Ibid. p.242.

92 Ibid. p.347.

93 Cf. for example, Effi Briest with her thwarted longing to fly through the air, or to be enveloped in the breakers. Cf. also D. Weber's comments on Effi's elemental affinity with the air, suggested by her death as a result of exposing herself to the night air, op.cit., p.465 and p.468.

94 Cf. Schäfer, op.cit., p.95.

Melusine expresses her need to avoid restrictions and achieve freedom of movement when she rejects the Lennéstraße as a place to live:

'Aber die Lennéstraßenwelt ist geschlossen, ist zu, sie hat keinen Blick ins Weite, kein Wasser, das fließt, keinen Verkehr, der flutet.'<sup>95</sup>

A few sentences later the fundamental contrast between her and her sister is suggested. Standing on the balcony, she calls to Armgard to come and see the sunset and Armgard replies that she prefers the fire-side. Armgard is content with the human, domestic dimension, while Melusine looks beyond this for stimulation from a wider natural context. In conversation with Baroness Berchtesgaden she wishes:

'Ach, daß doch das Natürliche wieder obenauf käme.'<sup>96</sup>

This remark is prompted partly by her memories of stylised religious paintings in Italy. Her sphere then, although elemental, is by no means transcendental. The elements to which she is drawn are the natural, if at times mysterious, phenomena of this world, and not the suspect realms of the next. She does remark, in praise of unbounded enthusiasm,

'Nichts beneidenswerter als eine Seele, die schwärmen kann. Schwärmen ist fliegen, eine himmlische Bewegung nach oben.'<sup>97</sup>,

so that in the terms of this image, although her element is this world, and not the next, she is happy if her feet are not always too firmly on the ground. Through this image, Melusine is associated with the air as well as with water, and she is equally in tune with the third element, fire, which she brings together with water in a letter to

95 N VIII, p.101, cf. Hilde in Ellernklipp, N II, p.180, "--- diese Sehnsucht in die Weite war ihr Glück."

96 N VIII, p.212.

97 Ibid. p.249.

Woldemar about their proposed excursion:

'--- wir haben den Vorteil auf der Rückfahrt die Lichter im Wasser sich spiegeln zu sehen. Und vielleicht ist auch irgendwo Feuerwerk, und wir sehen dann die Raketen steigen.'<sup>98</sup>,

and again later,

'Tulpen wären nicht mein Geschmack. Aber Feuerwerk!'<sup>99</sup>

Her pyromanic tendencies are shared in previous novels by Grete Minde and Ebba.

This association of characters raises another interesting question about these elemental creatures: the extent of their moral responsibility. Already in Ellernklipp the Heidereiter has said of Hilde:

'Sie kennt nicht Gut und nicht Bö's.'<sup>100</sup>

This is true to a greater or lesser extent of many of the figures under discussion. Grete Minde when she burns the town is mentally unbalanced and beyond the bounds of a knowledge of good and evil, she is without moral responsibility for her actions. In L'Adultera Melanie commits adultery in what might be termed a state of diminished responsibility. She is numbed and almost intoxicated not simply physically, but in spirit too, by the heady hot-house atmosphere, and is powerless to resist.<sup>101</sup>

98 Ibid. p.126.

99 Ibid. p.143.

100 N II, p.176.

101 N IV, p.73, "Es atmete sich wonnig aber schwer in dieser dichten Laube; dabei war es, als ob hundert Geheimnisse sprächen, und Melanie fühlte, wie dieser berausende Duft ihre Nerven hinschwenden machte. Sie zählte jenen von äußeren Eindrücken, von Luft und Licht abhängigen Naturen zu, die der Frische bedürfen, um selber frisch zu sein. Über ein Schneefeld hin bei rasender Fahrt und scharfem Ost, - da wär ihr der heitere Sinn, der tapfere Mut ihrer Seele wiedergekommen; aber diese weiche, schlaffe Luft machte sie selber weich und schlaff; und die Rüstung ihres Geistes lockerte sich und löste sich und fiel."



Although adultery is condemned by social convention, it is clear that Melanie is considered to be free from guilt. Her action in freeing herself from her unsuitable husband is vindicated. Effi Briest succumbs in a very similar situation<sup>102</sup> and she is equally placed beyond any guilt and responsibility both in her own and in Fontane's eyes.<sup>103</sup> Ebba in Unwiederbringlich is in some respects a different case as she is not really a victim of society's rules and conventions, but, mockingly standing above them, she shares with the other elemental figures a disregard for conventional constraints on behaviour. For this Fontane does not condemn her, even when she is in part the cause of the collapse of Holk's marriage. He suggests rather that in her apartness she is beyond the dictates of conventional morality, and that in playing with the elemental extremes of ice and fire, in entering the realms of risk and in recklessly confronting danger, she is in her natural element. Melusine, similarly, is unscrupulous and uncompromising in a more muted context. Unlike her quiet and steadfast sister:

'An der einen alles Temperament und Anmut, an der andern alles Charakter oder, wenn das zu viel gesagt sein sollte, Schlichtheit, Festigkeit.<sup>104</sup> Es bleibt mit den Namen doch eine eigene Sache;<sup>105</sup> die Gräfin ist ganz Melusine und die Komtesse ganz Armgard.'<sup>106</sup>

Melusine cares little for other people's feelings and opinions and says exactly what she pleases. She herself admits that Armgard,

102 Cf. above, chap.VII, p.212f.

103 Ibid.p.181f. Cécile also is a comparable example of what Demetz, op.cit., p.211, refers to as a "schuldlos-schuldige Frauengestalt."

104 This distinction applies equally to Ebba and Christine in Unwiederbringlich.

105 Cf. above, chap.VII, p.177 and N VIII, p.263f.

106 N VIII, p.106f.

gefühlsvoller ist als ich<sup>107</sup>,

and this recalls the traditional view of the mermaid's inability to feel. She is an attractive and fascinating creature, but she is lacking in human warmth. G. Radbruch comments on this peculiarity of Fontane's elemental figures:

Fremd war seinem [Fontanes] Wesen und Leben auch das Dämonische, wenn man in ihm eine zerstörerische oder schöpferische Kraft sieht und nicht jene von Fontane selbst als dämonisch empfundene elementare Apathie, Kühle und Fühllosigkeit, die er in der Hilde (Ellernklipp) dargestellt hat und in der Oceane von Parceval gestalten wollte.<sup>108</sup>

He confines himself to two early manifestations of the type, but the comment is just as applicable to later creations. This coldness is symbolised by the association of Marie,<sup>109</sup> Melanie,<sup>110</sup> Ebba,<sup>111</sup> Effi,<sup>112</sup> and Melusine<sup>113</sup> with water in its frozen forms as snow and ice.

What then is the function, if it has a consistent function, of this recurrent irrational theme, the Melusine figure, in the wider context of Fontane's work as a whole? Why was he moved again and again to create characters whose motivation and preoccupations appear remote from the generality of the society in which they live? The affinity of all these figures with the elements can be seen as a sign of their closeness to nature in a world where a rigid and artificial social

107 Ibid. p.129.

108 Radbruch, op.cit., p.49.

109 N I, p.67, although curiously in Marie's case the more negative characteristics are absent. In his first novel Fontane writes from a more idealistic standpoint than later, and the promise of salvation lies in the strange, magical creature.

110 N IV, p.11, p.73, p.92.

111 N V, p.167, p.173.

112 N VII, p.304.

113 N VIII, p.247.

system is threatening to divide man irrevocably from the natural world of his origins. Effi is referred to as a "Naturkind"<sup>114</sup> and Cécile has a "Kinderseele"<sup>115</sup>. This suggests innocence and their remoteness from the sophisticated and often corrupt ways of the adult world. The Melusine figures all have the quality of freedom, or at least a longing for freedom from social strictures.<sup>116</sup> In trying to live out this freedom, to escape from the trammels of life in an unnatural state they may come to grief, but there is a positive value in the desire to escape from what Fontane frequently reveals to be an empty set of man-made norms of behaviour.

The elemental forces which seem to beckon the privileged few to escape do not, however, bring any ideal solution to life. On the contrary, the attempt to follow them is always fraught with danger. To leave the confines of the accepted norms of human behaviour is to take the risk of becoming completely lost. The elemental aspect of existence suggested by the aspirations of the various Melusine figures does not represent a transcendental reality into which the characters long to enter. It differs too from the Romantic ideal of an ultimately desirable universal reality, beyond the world, where all forces and beings will be harmoniously synthesised.<sup>117</sup> It intimates rather a

114 N VII, p.197.

115 N IV, p.167.

116 Cf. Behrend, op.cit., p.51, "Ihre [Melusines] Erscheinung flüchtet in dieser Welt des Preußentums ganz ins Märchenhafte --- Melusine [sucht] die Flucht aus der engen, festen sie bedrückenden Welt, in die ihr Schicksal sie geführt hat; ihre Natur hat hier nicht Raum sich auszuwirken, sie lebt in dieser Welt, die sie wohl versteht, aber diese Welt faßt sie nicht."

117 R. Schäfer's observation here is telling, op.cit., p.103; "So hat man die zweifellos ironischen Stiltzüge in Fontanes Sprache, die Spiegelungstechnik, die Unbestimmtheit der Figuren, die Neigung zu Paradoxen, die stete Zurücknahme des Gesagten - Stiltzüge, die auch in der Formung des Melusine-Motivs zu beobachten waren - als Ausdruck romantischen Geistes erklärt. Aber Fontanes Ironie ist von ganz anderer Art als die romantische. Es ist nicht mehr das Bewußtsein der Fülle und Mannigfaltigkeit des Unendlichen, das das Endliche vernichtet, sondern das Bewußtsein der Fülle und Mannigfaltigkeit des Endlichen."

quality of life to be aspired to in this world; a mode of existence which is ready to reach out towards and encompass a wider and in some ways more disturbing reality. The characters should be free and clear-sighted enough to recognise the existence of irrational elemental forces in the world, which are stimulating as well as unsettling, and which represent in their fluidity and unpredictability, in their capacity to inspire man, a means of release or escape from rigid social conventions which threaten to cripple or suffocate man both mentally and spiritually.

The nature of the development of the elemental motif in Fontane's works reveals a progression that is typical of the general transformation of his style with time. From the bald and stark statement of the motif in the early fragments to the highly allusive and delicately suggested form in his later works we see a development and refinement of technique which is characterised by an ever greater reluctance to state facts or recount action directly. Everything is conveyed in the end through a multitude of statements and images which illuminate and qualify one another. The tissue is extremely finely woven, and it is a sharp eye that can pick out all the individual strands that go to create the overall effect.<sup>118</sup>

Through the theme of freedom Dubslav von Stechlin is associated with Melusine; Woldemar in his diary comments on this aspect of his father's attitude to life:

'--- und doch kenne ich keinen Menschen, der innerlich so frei wäre, wie gerade mein guter Alter. Zugeben wird er es freilich nie und wird in dem Glauben sterben: 'Morgen tragen sie einen echten alten Junker zu Grabe.'

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118 Cf. Schäfer, *ibid.*, p.100, "Die verschiedenen Gestaltungen des Melusine-Motivs offenbaren eine immer weiter fortschreitende Dämpfung des Stils. Sie bezeichnen den Weg vom versuchten Unmittelbaren zum erreichten Mittelbaren, den Fontanes Dichtung geht."

Das ist er auch, aber doch auch wieder das volle Gegenteil davon.<sup>119</sup>

Dubslav, like Melusine, is unbound by the conventions of the social sphere to which he belongs. This observation leads to a more general consideration of the whole concept of "der Stechlin" of which Dubslav forms an important part. His part however is overshadowed, or at least qualified, by the central symbol of the lake - with which Melusine is closely associated. In a letter to Adolf Hoffman written in May/June, 1897, Fontane comments on the role of the lake in his novel:

Dieser See, klein und unbedeutend, hat die Besonderheit, mit der zweiten Welt draußen in einer halb rätselhaften Verbindung zu stehen, und wenn in der Welt draußen 'was los ist', wenn auf Island oder auf Java ein Berg Feuer speit und die Erde bebt, so macht der 'Stechlin', klein und unbedeutend wie er ist, die große Weltbewegung mit und sprudelt und wirft Strahlen und bildet Trichter. Um dies- so ungefähr fängt der Roman an- und um das Thema dreht sich die ganze Geschichte.<sup>120</sup>

This form of words recalls what he wrote about Effi Briest, namely that the Chinaman was "ein Drehpunkt für die ganze Geschichte",<sup>121</sup> so that for a second time Fontane makes quite explicit the fact that his novel is centred on an irrational symbol.

The origin of Fontane's interest in the Stechlinsee is to be found in the Grafschaft Ruppın section of the Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg.<sup>122</sup> It is revealing to examine the differences between his description of it there and the accounts he gives of it in the novel. The original version dwells at some length on the tale

119 N VIII, p.107.

120 FE II, p.427.

121 Cf. above, chap.VII, p.185.

122 N IX, pp.315-20.

of a mysterious death at the lakeside, and alludes to other such occurrences.<sup>123</sup> By the time Fontane comes to use the Stechlinsee in his novel, he has cut away any peripheral anecdotes in order to convey simply a sense of its physical actuality and above all its symbolic value. The point of departure of both descriptions is the lake's reality as a natural phenomenon. The very fact that it is not an invention of Fontane's, but corresponds to a geographical reality underlines its existence as a concrete phenomenon in the natural world.<sup>124</sup> However, in both cases, in describing the lake, Fontane draws attention to a somewhat unnatural aspect of the natural surroundings - the silence:

und nun setzten wir uns an den Rand eines Vorsprungs und horchten auf die Stille. Die blieb, wie sie war: kein Boot, kein Vogel; auch kein Gewölk. Nur Grün und Blau und Sonne.<sup>125</sup>

and, Hie und da wächst ein wenig von Schilf und Binsen auf, aber kein Kahn zieht seine Furchen, kein Vogel singt, und nur selten, daß ein Habicht drüber hinfliegt und seinen Schatten auf die Spiegelfläche wirft. Alles still hier.<sup>126</sup>

There is a faintly sinister air about the place which seems to be avoided by man and beast alike. This unnatural, disquieting stillness is contrasted almost immediately in both versions with the potential uproar and disturbance that may break forth at any time. The apparent calm conceals its precise opposite.

123 This change in emphasis may be seen to support Günther's contention, op.cit., p.99, that the Stechlinsee stands for, "Nicht so sehr eine direkte Bedrohung des Menschen, als vielmehr eine allgemeine Bedrohtheit der Welt."

124 Cf. Fürstenau, op.cit., p.147, "Er unterbaut die Sage --- vom roten Hahn im Stechlin biologisch und naturwissenschaftlich, schafft dadurch eine Verankerung in der Ebene der Wirklichkeit, ohne jedoch die mythische Hintergründigkeit zu verlieren."

125 N IX, p.316.

126 N VIII, p.5.

This central instance of an ambivalent natural symbol is echoed elsewhere in miniature in the novel. Dubslav takes particular pleasure in a sickly aloe which every summer deceives his visitors by appearing to be covered with luxuriant blooms. In fact the aloe itself is diseased, and the flowers stem from a plant, "ein fremdes Samenkorn",<sup>127</sup> that has been deposited there by the wind. The elderberry tree at Kloster Wutz has undergone a comparable transformation:

Es war an und für sich schon eine Pracht. Was ihm aber noch eine besondere Schönheit lieh, das war, daß sein Laubdach von ein paar dahinter stehenden Ebereschenbäumen wie durchwachsen war, so daß man überall, neben den schwarzen Fruchtdolden des Holunders die leuchtenden roten Ebereschenbüschel sah.<sup>128</sup>,

and this unnatural, natural conjunction of growths is repeated at the church at Dubslav's funeral:

--- nur Holunderbüsche, die zu grünen anfangen, und dazwischen Ebereschensträucher wuchsen um den Chor herum.<sup>129</sup>

In each case the ambivalent, paradoxical natural phenomenon illuminates the central theme of the novel, the coming together and reconciliation of the old and new orders. The Stechlinsee symbolises both continued existence in the heart of the Mark Brandenburg, the heart of Prussian Junkerdom, and at the same time the constant and unpredictable threat of revolution, symbolised by the legend of the red cockerel which emerges from the depths at intervals, as the lake responds to seismic disturbances elsewhere in the world. The sickly aloe symbolises the dying class of the Prussian Junker, but at the same time the luxuriant wild flower that enhances it and blooms in its place represents the vigorous new order, as yet not generally recognised, that is coming to strengthen and perhaps replace, but not necessarily

127 Ibid. p.7.

128 Ibid. p.87.

129 Ibid. p.349.

totally smother the old. The final phenomenon, the red rowan berries flourishing intertwined with the black elderberries, apparently as a unified organic growth, symbolises a happy coming together of the old order, symbolised by the black of conservatism, and the new, represented by the red of radicalism. It is appropriate that Dubslav at his funeral should be surrounded by both elements. He has sought to preserve what is good in the old order, but at the same time his mind has been open to new influences. A harmonious and fruitful growing together of the two has been his hope for the future. Each of these in some respects unnatural manifestations in the natural world is an intimation of far-reaching changes that are afoot in the world at large.

That the Stechlinsee is more than simply a remote beauty spot is soon obvious. Both in the Wanderungen and the novel, Fontane makes clear its close connection with the modern world of industrialisation and politics. A glassworks has been built near the lake at Globzow, and it is the workers there who play a major part in assuring the success of the social democratic candidate in the local election. Fontane referred to Der Stechlin as a "politischen Roman"<sup>130</sup> and the symbol of the lake is used to refer to the particular political situation in Germany in 1895, to the rise of the influence in parliament of the Social Democrats, which accompanied the widespread industrialisation of the country. However, as J. Petersen points out, in the final version of the novel Fontane suppresses precise political comment in favour of a less direct, more discreet and humorous approach:

Welchen Wert Fontane nunmehr auf diese Partie [last section of chap.28] legt, geht aus den mehrfachen Umarbeitungen hervor, unter denen der früheste Entwurf weit deutlicher als in der letzten Fassung die politische Beziehung hervortreten läßt:

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130 An Heilborn, 12.Mai, 1897, in Fontane Blätter, Sonderheft 2, 1969, p.80.



'Ich hätte gern die Stelle gesehen. Wie ist das eigentlich? Wenn draußen was los ist und es ist Winter, so versagt ja der ganze revolutionäre Apparat. Ja, sagt Lorenzen, dann geht es nicht. Der Winter ist einer der erfolgreichsten Polizeimeister. Aber er hält nicht vor und nächsten Sommer brodelt es um so toller. Und vielleicht kräht dann der Hahn.'

Diese ernste und fast zu sichtliche Vordeutung auf kommenden Umsturz ist jetzt durch die scherzhafte Wendung, daß das Eis das Revolutionäre ducke, so daß selbst der Polizist Uncke nichts zu notieren habe, wie durch die abergläubische Angst Melusins vor dem Aufhacken des Eises gemildert.<sup>131</sup>

The lake stands for much more than simply the unstable and unpredictable political reality of the day. With its legendary associations and the mysterious and inexplicable activity of its unexplored depths, it points beyond the here and now of everyday reality. The central exploration of its significance takes place in conversation between Melusine and Pastor Lorenzen. At the beginning of the discussion Melusine emphasises the importance of both "das Gegebene" and "das Werdende",<sup>132</sup> that is of both elements in the argument about the old versus the new that has been pursued throughout the novel. She goes on to interpret the significance of the Stechlinsee:

'Und vor allem sollen wir, wie der Stechlin uns lehrt, den großen Zusammenhang der Dinge nie vergessen. Sich abschließen heißt sich einmauern, und sich einmauern ist Tod.'

The Stechlin, with its responsiveness to world-wide events, acts as a constant reminder that there is more to the world than the small corner in which the individual happens to live, and that it is important to maintain a global perspective in order to be truly alive. To cut oneself off, and Melusine cites class prejudice as one means of doing this, is fatal, as this means that man has ceased to develop and be

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131 J. Petersen, op.cit., p.37.

132 N VIII, p.251.

open to new ideas,<sup>133</sup> even if these ideas are in some ways disturbing or alarming. Lorenzen expands this view of the lake's importance as a symbol for an ideal view of the world. He condemns the rigid adherence to the old in the form of "das Kirchliche" and "Preußische", precisely because it is a blind and unreflecting adherence, which has nothing to do with "das Christliche", a true Christian spirit. He advocates the embracing of new ideas where the old ones prove inadequate, and the fundamental and crucial characteristic of these new ideas is that they mean freedom and equal opportunity for the mass of people:

'Der Hauptgegensatz alles Modernen gegen das Alte besteht darin, daß die Menschen nicht mehr durch ihre Geburt auf den von ihnen einzunehmenden Platz gestellt werden. Sie haben jetzt die Freiheit, ihre Fähigkeiten nach allen Seiten hin, und auf jedem Gebiet zu betätigen.<sup>134</sup>

These ideas are very close to those considered earlier in connection with the Melusine motif. There is a clear correspondence between the two central irrational symbols in the novel; the elemental figure of Melusine and the lake. They both stand for an openness to events and influences, for a fluidity and unpredictability of approach and equally for an acceptance of some kind of order beyond man's invention and control.<sup>135</sup> It is not everyone who can accept these ideas and this message. At Dubslav's funeral, von Molchow and von der Nonne, dyed in the wool representatives of the old order, are unpleasantly affected by the influence of the Stechlinsee:

Beide froren bitterlich bei der scharfen Luft, die vom See herwehte.<sup>136</sup>

133 Cf. Schillemeit, op.cit., p.118, and Strech, op.cit., p.9.

134 N VIII, p.251f.

135 Cf. N VIII, p.247, "Kein Eingreifen ins Elementare."

136 Ibid. p.352.

Dubslav on the other hand, identified as he is from the outset with the lake,<sup>137</sup> recognises the existence of an inscrutable order beyond man, which he accepts in the end with serenity - although in truly Fontanesque style, this acceptance is qualified by the familiar 'doch wieder', but this qualification simply points to inescapable human susceptibility, and by no means invalidates the initial assertion:

Er fühlte, daß es zu Ende gehe. 'Das "Ich" ist nichts - damit muß man sich durchdringen. Ein ewig Gesetzliches vollzieht sich, weiter nichts, und dieser Vollzug, auch wenn er "Tod" heißt, darf uns nicht schrecken. In das Gesetzliche sich ruhig schicken, das macht den sittlichen Menschen und hebt ihn.'

Er hing dem noch so nach und freute sich, alle Furcht überwunden zu haben. Aber dann kamen doch wieder Anfälle von Angst und er seufzte: 'Das Leben ist kurz, aber die Stunde ist lang.'<sup>138</sup>

In Fontane's last novel man is once more shown to be at the mercy of inscrutable powers beyond his control. The theme of predestination, which runs in one form or another through so many of the novels, is sounded again in muted tones. As Adelheid says:

Melusine ist kein Zufall

she is rather,

wie 'ne Offenbarung.<sup>139</sup>

In some mysterious and unexplained way her nature and the course of her life seem to have been dictated or conditioned by her name. The familiar theme of "Nomen et Omen" enjoys its final and fullest blossoming here. Melusine is also a revelation in the sense that, through her, the other characters may see an intimation of a way of

137 Ibid. p.7.

138 Ibid. p.346.

139 Ibid. p.264.

life full of grace and charm, that is at once liberated and tolerant. Armgard and Pastor Lorenzen also recognise the existence of a determining force whose workings may often be benign. Armgard restates a firmly held belief of the author:

'-- man erringt sich nichts. Alles ist Gnade.'<sup>140</sup>

and Lorenzen interprets historical development in the light of a trust in providential grace:

'Ich --- empfind es als eine Gnade, da, wo das Alte versagt, ganz in einem Neuen aufzugehen.'<sup>141</sup>

Although many familiar irrational themes and motifs appear in Der Stechlin, it is in the nature of the structure of the novel that they function generally in a rather different way than in the preceding works. Fontane himself emphasised the lack of conflict and plot development in the novel.<sup>142</sup> Because there is no well-defined linear progression, there is equally no need for irrational motifs to function, as in the past, as prophetic indications of what is to come, as discreet pointers to the inevitability with which the characters' fate will overtake them. Rather, in Der Stechlin, the irrational themes and motifs are simply part, and an important part, of the picture of reality that is gradually built up in the course of the work. Their insistent, if unobtrusive, recurrence as threads in the pattern produces a final image of a world in which, despite the necessity for an honest attempt to come to grips with life, much will remain unexplained and inexplicable. The secret of life is to arrive at an acceptance of the incomprehensible variety of phenomena that life

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140 Ibid. p.226.

141 Ibid. p.251.

142 An Adolf Hoffmann, Mai/Juni, 1897, FE II, p.427.

offers, and to face the world with an open and generous mind. The central irrational symbol, the Stechlinsee, does not function as a prophecy of future events in a narrow sense, but it does provide guidance, perhaps with some of the ambiguity of an oracle, as to how the new age should be met.

## IX

CONCLUSION

Looking back over the full range of Fontane's fictional writing, and the abundance of irrational and supernatural strands running through it, the question arises as to whether any progressive development may be detected in the employment of such material. If so, what form does the development take, and what is the force and significance of this aspect of the novelist's work?

Fontane's earlier writings, the ballads and Wanderungen, clearly demonstrate his close acquaintance with supernatural motifs, and there can be no doubt that ghost stories exercised their own fascination over his imagination. On the other hand, it is equally apparent that Fontane was aware of the difficulties involved in rendering such material in literary form. In his first novel, Vor dem Sturm, the two well-authenticated resident ghosts, 'der alte Matthias' and the Black Lady of Guse, are generally presented to the reader, not directly, from the authorial point of view, but indirectly, through the perspective of a range of characters who experience the ghostly manifestations. Thus, although the spectral figures are a significant and vital part of the characters' environment and form an integral part of the reality depicted, they are presented in such a way that the

sceptic is also satisfied, for he is at liberty to interpret them as figments of the local imagination. On rare occasions certain ostensibly supernatural occurrences, such as Hoppenmarieken's fire extinguishing, remain totally unaccounted for, but here again the author has sought to evade the sceptic's criticism by his manner of presentation. The simple facts are stated and no attempt is made at an explanation, rational or otherwise, of the events. It is therefore impossible to refute the explanation.<sup>1</sup> Even in his first novel, which is rich in supernatural material, and when the parallel composition of the Wanderungen favoured the propagation of such motifs in his fictional world, Fontane does not overlook the need for strict control in adapting his ghosts for literary purposes. Throughout the novel, from his standpoint as the author, he maintains an ambivalent, uncommitted attitude to the supernatural phenomena which he presents, and the restraint exercised in their presentation is to become a hallmark of his later works. A letter to Heilborn, written in 1895, reveals the consciousness of this aspect of his artistry:

Sie sind, wie ich zu meiner Freude sehe, auch einverstanden damit, daß ich, --- der Phantasie des Lesers viel überlasse; dies anders zu machen wäre mir ganz unmöglich, und ich würde totale Dunkelheiten immer noch einer Gasglühlichtbeleuchtung von Dingen vorziehen, die, selbst wenn ihre Darstellung geglückt ist (ein sehr selten vorkommender Fall), immer noch mißglückt wirken.<sup>2</sup>

In the crime stories 'Spuk' motifs emerge again: in Ellernklipp it seems at first that the voice of the Heidereiter's murdered son may be no more than the voice of his conscience, but the darkness and

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1 F. Servaes, op.cit., p.36, makes a comment on Fontane's ballads which is equally relevant to his novels: "Denn das Geheimnisvolle deutlich herauszustellen und doch das Geheimnis keusch zu verschließen, das eben ist die Kunst, die er beherrscht."

2 FE II, p.387, an Ernst Heilborn, 24th November 1895.

mystery surrounding the spectral manifestation are at once briefly illuminated and intensified, when independent witnesses, in ignorance of the murder, also hear the voice. Here, as in Vor dem Sturm, Fontane presents the supernatural phenomenon indirectly, through the perceptions of his characters, but at the same time, the assertion of its existence seems to outweigh any suggestions of scepticism.

In Ellernklipp the 'Spuk' motif is employed above all for its connotations of guilt. The recurrent motif of an unquiet spirit which, as a result of an unrighted wrong, has failed to find rest, is clearly sounded here. The supernatural motif functions primarily as a correlative for the protagonist's psychological state. His inner guilt is echoed in the outer world by the ghostly voice. In Unterm Birnbaum the 'Spuk' motif has been transformed entirely into an image of the murderer's guilty conscience. At the same time, Ede's fear of ghosts in the cellars shows that they were still considered to be a plausible possibility in the community. In fact there is no longer any question of an actual ghost, it is rather a question of human psychology. The corpse must be dug up and reburied to allow the murderer and not the dead man peace of mind. Fontane has ironically inverted the traditional theme in a work of psychological realism, a study of guilt in circumstances which are only too mundane.

In the early social novels the 'Spuk' motif recurs purely in the context of conversation. Ghosts are no longer presented as directly observed phenomena. In Graf Petöfy, Cécile and Schach von Wuthenow allusions to ghosts and witches in conversation function as expressions of guilt, unease or confusion in the characters' hearts and minds. The themes have been reduced to social dimensions, but their strong suggestive power emerges at moments of emotional tension. The characters in these novels of marital disharmony reveal their emotional



disturbance obliquely, through reference to phenomena which have no place in the strictly regulated world of social propriety. The later Berlin novels, in which Fontane turns to social themes other than marital discord and adultery, are devoid of ghosts and their unhappy associations of guilt and torment. The pavements of the new metropolis are not calculated to invite spectral footsteps.

In the Schleswig Holstein of Unwiederbringlich and the Kessin of Effi Briest, however, marital problems are once more under examination, and the 'Spuk' motif returns. In Unwiederbringlich it is briefly touched on.<sup>3</sup> In Effi Briest it finds its most significant and intricate form of expression. The Chinaman's ghost in the novel has all the previous associations of guilt and confusion, of torment and the search for peace. The motif is no longer used simply to throw light on the characters' frames of mind in a particular context, it has become a central element in the structure of the novel. The motif is used to chart Effi's relationship to Instetten and to life itself. It suggests and symbolises flaws in the marriage and traces the disintegration of the union. In the end it takes on the connotations of destiny, pointing at once to forces inside and beyond the characters. In contrast to the early social novels the motif has again broken the bounds of social convention; it occurs not only in the verbal dimension of conversation, but, as in Vor dem Sturm and Ellernklipp, only with heightened subtlety and ambiguity, it is strongly suggested that the ghostly phenomenon actually exists in the real world and has its part to play there. In this late, mature work Fontane seems to be emphasising the fact that to measure reality according to its purely social dimensions is not enough, and that the social reality of the time is challenged and threatened by irrational, uncontrollable

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3 N V, p.7 and p.209.

elements with which the system and its products are unable to come to terms.

In Fontane's last novel, Der Stechlin, the overriding tone is conciliatory, and marital problems do not arise. Conflict and longing have been superseded, but the 'Spuk' motif, like so many of Fontane's best-loved motifs and sentiments, recurs. Here, however, it is more or less playfully touched on in passing. Schloß Stechlin, despite its visitors' expectations, is unable to furnish even the suggestion of a spectre, and the absence of ghostly inhabitants indicates the rare state of grace of the surroundings, where all is at peace and no influence of guilt or wrong, past or present, troubles the atmosphere.

The other important supernatural motif which can be traced through the novels is the fairytale. To begin with, in Vor dem Sturm and the early social novels, L'Adultera, Schach von Wuthenow and Cécile, the fairytale motif is used to characterise the heroines of the novels; to suggest that they have singularly alluring characteristics, a power of attraction which sets them apart. In Cécile, for the first time, a new connotation of the fairytale is intimated. Cécile discovers that an idyllically situated villa which looks like an enchanted house in a fairy story, has in fact been the scene of sorrow and death.<sup>4</sup> The illusory idyll is shattered, the fairytale denied. It is in this form that the fairytale motif is to recur repeatedly in the later novels. In Irrungen Wirungen, Stine, Die Poggenpuhls and Frau Jenny Treibel the 'Märchen' motif stands for an ideal state which is unattainable in the modern world, with its uncompromising social and financial strictures. In the course of these works, the motif frequently emerges on the lips of the characters who are either too blind to the demands of reality to

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4 N IV, p.143f.

recognise its invalidity, or who nonetheless feel the need to express a longing for an ideal existence. The denial and rejection of the motif inevitably follows, either verbally in a comment from another character, or in actuality in the relentless course of events. The fairytale imagery, most prominent in these later Berlin novels, is also touched on in similar vein in Effi Briest, where Effi's mother dismisses her daughter's fanciful ideas about her future marriage with the words,

'Es kommt dir vor wie ein Märchen.'<sup>5</sup>

In Der Stechlin the motif reappears, but here, where a greater degree of equilibrium in life has been achieved by the characters, the tone of the references is humorous and conciliatory. The bitter, painful undertones of the Berlin novels have been mitigated and transmuted; the motif no longer expresses the individual's frustrated longing or sense of loss, but the more positive, general need to adjust to the reality of the modern world.

The development of the central irrational theme of the character with elemental affinities undergoes a comparable refinement and transmutation in Fontane's final work. Like the 'Spuk' motif, the elemental theme has a significant part to play in almost all of Fontane's fictional works with the exception of the later Berlin novels. In the central body of his work, from Grete Minde to Effi Briest, Fontane again and again creates female figures who are curiously set apart from the other members of their social milieu, and this apartness is expressed primarily through their affinity with, and susceptibility to, the influence of the elements, fire, air and water. Their characteristic sensitivity symbolises a yearning to escape from the confines of

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5 N VII, p.191.

social convention, and at the same time it suggests the danger to the individual inherent in any such rejection of the prevailing social structures.

The susceptibility of these characters to influences whose origins are primitive and natural almost inevitably turns them into transgressors against social and human norms of behaviour, but the transgression in the eyes of society is dissociated from any sense of guilt in the sinners themselves. Fontane depicts characters who have succumbed to natural and irresistible forces, against which the society of the day has no remedy. The dynamic forces of the natural world claim for themselves some of society's more sensitive creatures; creatures in whom the last spark of natural response has not yet been extinguished by man-made conventions. The almost total absence of characters endowed with a sensitivity to elemental influences in the later Berlin novels may be accounted an indication that man's affinity with natural forces is gradually being stifled by the development of urban civilisation. He is constructing for himself an environment where the elements of air, fire and water have been tamed and functionally channelled to meet his material needs.

In Fontane's first novel, Vor dem Sturm, the elemental creature, Marie, is free from all the negative associations of danger and unfulfilled longing that afflict subsequent descendants in her line.<sup>6</sup> In her case the distinctive qualities are seen purely as signs of grace and she is regarded as a source of fresh blood bringing new strength to the local nobility into which she marries. In a sense in Der Stechlin Fontane has come full circle, for here the elemental figure,

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6 i.e. Grete Minde, Hilde, Melanie van der Straaten, Cécile, Franziska, Victoire, Ebba and Effi Briest.

Melusine, also lives at peace with her environment and is free from the torment to which the intervening elemental characters have been subject. In Marie's case it seems as if, from the outset, she has been magically set apart in a state of grace, whereas as far as Melusine is concerned, it seems rather that she has attained her state of equilibrium through a conscious effort. She has freed herself from the unwanted bonds of marriage, and has chosen to live her life according to her own and not society's inclinations. She feels uneasy if she is denied the possibility of free movement and the unrestricted prospect of the ebb and flow of life. At the same time she is able to fulfil her needs within a social context, and the flow of traffic on the city streets is an acceptable alternative to the flood of water in a river.<sup>7</sup>

Despite her capacity to reconcile her own needs with society's demands, she is nevertheless aware that the elemental world may still constitute a threat as well as a stimulus. Her fear of breaking the Stechlinsee ice demonstrates her heightened awareness of natural forces and their potential destructiveness. From the instinctively harmonious elemental creature portrayed in Marie, Fontane has proceeded through a series of threatened and tormented creatures to a new harmony. His final elemental creation has brought about this harmony between natural and social forces consciously, by intelligence and an effort of will, and although Fontane's final statement of the elemental theme is thus predominantly positive and conciliatory, the undercurrents of unease and impermanence have not been entirely banned. Melusine, like the mermaid, has been unable to bind herself emotionally to another human being, and her achievement of equilibrium must stand as an individual case, an example perhaps, but not a direct source of descendants.

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7 Cf. N VIII, p.101.

Possibly the most striking and unexpected irrational feature of Fontane's work is his treatment of the theme of fate, with its attendant motifs of prophecy, omen, grace and superstition. In Vor dem Sturm Fontane uses a prophetic verse, whose terms are gradually fulfilled, to provide the long, rambling work with a degree of structural solidity. In the course of the novel frequent reference is also made to signs and omens, and although these are not always taken seriously, the characters' superstitions are on the whole vindicated, and the existence of an order beyond man, a force of destiny, is strongly, at times too strongly, suggested.

In the crime stories Fontane depicts more baldly and clearly than anywhere else the individual in conflict with a wider concept of order. Man is shown to be subject to a fixed law which, despite its obscure provenance, relentlessly exacts retribution for crime. In these stark and uncompromising demonstrations of the inexorable workings of the force of order, the possibility of grace is mentioned, but remains unrealised - no more than a faint and unfulfilled hope. Of the crime stories Unterm Birnbaum is the most convincing, for in it Fontane has not only depicted fate overtaking and punishing the criminal, he has so presented the situation that it is equally susceptible of psychological interpretation. The murderer in his fear of discovery is hoist with his own petard.

The progressive fusion of the motivation of events both on a psychological plane and in terms of the workings of fate is symptomatic of the maturing of Fontane's style. Earlier works suffer from the imperfect combination of these two essential aspects of his interpretation of reality. In early social novels, such as L'Adultera for example, an over-emphatic insistence on Van der Straaten's premonitions leads to an artificially imposed sense of predestination which carries

the plot. In Cécile and Graf Petöfy Fontane also experiments with irrational motifs - signs and omens for instance - as structural elements. At this stage however they remain insufficiently integrated, whereas in the later Berlin novels, in Unwiederbringlich and above all in Effi Briest his subtle and differentiated employment of irrational motifs suggesting destiny results in their complete integration into the tissue of the works. Fontane achieves this integration in part through the maturing of his mastery of conversational style. Ominous utterances appear in the innocuous guise of proverbs which occur naturally in the unreflecting usage of the characters. Two of the central and recurrent proverbial formulations are, "sein Glück be-reden" and "den Teufel an die Wand malen". They are typical, for they harbour pronounced Fontanesque undertones of a belief in fate and a recognition of the fragility of man's happiness.

A further development which the theme of fate undergoes in the later works is that it often becomes fused not only with the psychological motivation of the characters, but also or alternatively with the concept of social determinism. In Irrungen Wirungen and in Effi Briest in particular it is no longer possible to separate these two strands of motivation. Intimations of their existence come frequently in the form of the clichés of social small-talk. The workings of irrational forces beyond man's control and comprehension are conveyed in the superficially harmless and banal formulations of social intercourse. It is precisely through the subtlety and discretion of his technique that they have their insidious effect on the reader's consciousness. Fontane's omens and prophecies are no longer introduced in immediately recognisable shape, they come camouflaged and verbally refined into a form that melts into its surroundings. Nonetheless, by their carefully chosen terms they achieve their effect gradually and cumulatively, through their inexorable re-emergence in contexts where

the echo's resonance becomes increasingly intensified.

In Der Stechlin the theme of destiny recurs, like so many other irrational themes, in a more generalised and harmonious form. There is no longer any real question of foreshadowing doom. Dubslav's death is imminent, but his departure from the world is untroubled and serene. It is, however, seen as a fulfilment of "ein ewig Gesetzliches".<sup>8</sup> Here, as in all the previous works, the existence of an order beyond man is recognised. In this novel too, superstition and proverbs play their part in the characters' utterances. Proverbs are used now predominantly in a positive way, not as heralds of disaster; and superstition is portrayed as a natural, acceptable feature of human experience, as the justified recognition of the existence of irrational forces. In his last novel Fontane leaves the reader in no doubt that all the previous intimations of the existence of some kind of "Dunkle Rätselmacht" are to be taken seriously. The nature of the force remains of necessity mysterious and incomprehensible, but its existence is certain. That Fontane succeeded in combining his expression of its existence so subtly and ambiguously with the more readily acceptable and comprehensible forces of psychological and social determinism is a tribute to his artistry and to his complex view of reality. It is quite clear from the reiteration and refinement of the theme of fate in Fontane's writings, fictional and non-fictional, that,

His use of symbols of destiny is more than a narrative device; it is an expression of his self.<sup>9</sup>

The foregoing study of supernatural and irrational elements has resulted in a close examination of some of the central themes and most

8 Ibid. p.346.

9 E. Braun, op.cit., p.119f.



important stylistic aspects of the novels. Irrational themes and supernatural motifs have been seen to express and illuminate the problem of guilt and retribution, and the question of man's vain aspirations to happiness in the real world; what P. Bange has termed,

Das Grundthema seiner Romane und seines Lebens. ---  
Die unüberwindbare Dualität zwischen Glücksträumen,  
Selbsterfüllungsstreben und den realen, unabänder-  
lichen Bedingungen des Daseins.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Fontane has used such irrational and supernatural terms in his exploration of these complex and elusive themes suggests a desire to express their fundamental inscrutability. They are problems which cannot simply be solved by rational calculation, by objective argument within a well-defined frame of reference. They are problems whose examination leads not to a clear-cut solution, but to a more sensitive perception of their intricacy and obscurity, of the infinite and ultimately imponderable aspects of man's condition. This realisation has its own value in stimulating the imagination and in widening the reader's horizons beyond those of conventional mundane reality:

In dem Begreiflichen liegt auch immer das Begrenzte,  
während erst das Unbegreifliche uns mit den Schauern  
des Ewigen erfaßt.<sup>11</sup>

G.C. Avery remarks on Fontane's

insuring the permanence of his novel [Effi Briest] by his unique fusion of the irrational within realistic observation.<sup>12</sup>,

and this observation is true of all Fontane's major works. The consideration of irrational features has led to the highlighting of funda-

10 P. Bange, "Zwischen Mythos und Kritik", Maschinenschrift, Grenoble, 1974, p.8.

11 N XXII/1, p.293.

12 G.C. Avery, "The Chinese Wall: Fontane's Psychograph of Effi Briest" in Festschrift for A.D. Klarmann, Munich, 1974, p.38.

mental aspects of Fontane's literary technique. Fontane has succeeded in integrating such, at first sight, alien material into realistic novels by means of his highly allusive and oblique style of expression.<sup>13</sup> He has used the same discretion in introducing supernatural and irrational elements into his work that he has employed in conveying the potentially sensational events in his plots. Both are woven into a tissue of conversations and description whose cumulative and associative effect is suggestive rather than explicit. Fatalism, ghosts and fairytales are no more 'salonfähig' than adultery and suicide. Their existence in the world can therefore only be acknowledged indirectly through acceptable conversational forms which suggest rather than denote. In a late work such as Effi Briest an intricate, at times ambiguous, pattern of irrational references is so closely fused with the more realistic aspects of the novel that a division between the two dimensions is no longer perceptible. This stylistic fusion is in itself expressive of Fontane's view of the relationship between these two aspects of reality.

To attempt to deduce a consistent philosophical or theoretical view of life from Fontane's employment of irrational and supernatural elements in his works would be futile. In an unpublished letter written in 1890 he characterised himself as:

kolossal empirisch und ganz unphilosophisch.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Cf. D. Weber, op.cit., p.458: "Der folgende Beitrag--- stößt --- auf so befremdliche Dinge wie Naturkultus, Naturmagie und das unmittelbare Wirken der Elemente. Befremdlich, weil sie sich mit dem realistischen Charakter des Stoffes offenbar nicht vereinbaren lassen; weniger befremdlich, wenn man berücksichtigt, daß sie kaum jemals explizit ausgesprochen, sondern meistens nur angedeutet werden, also im Hintergrund des realistisch erzählten faktischen Geschehens stehen und so mit der realistischen Erzählweise nicht in Konflikt geraten."

14 Quoted by H.-H. Reuter, op.cit., II, p.642.

In his empirical observation of the reality he lived in Fontane came to the conclusions that some kind of irrational force of destiny formed part of that reality, and that supernatural phenomena might form part of it. His presentation of supernatural material maintains a nice balance of credulity and scepticism. That the existence of irrational elements in reality or even the possibility of their existence fascinated him is clear from his repeated treatment of the material. Besides being an observer Fontane is also a creative artist, and such material, irrespective of its validity in the real world, appealed to him as poetically expressive, as one means of achieving the poetical transfiguration of reality which he sought.

In his repeated formulation and reformulation of irrational material Fontane was expressing and coming to terms with his view of life itself. A large body of irrational and supernatural material consists of pointers to the future, or is concerned with the escape from the constraints of stifling social reality. It expresses Fontane's concern for the future, his acute interest in the shape of things to come, allied to an ambiguous attitude of mistrust and affection for present forms, and a recognition of the negative effects of contemporary rigid social structures.

Although Fontane's formulation of irrational material yields no consistent philosophy of life, it suggests an attitude of mind which is open to possibilities beyond what is normally empirically observed or rationally deduced. It corroborates his paradoxical assertion,

Nichts steht fest,<sup>15</sup>

an assertion which ironically invalidates itself and throws the world

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15 FFR no.212, 7th November 1893.

into the ambiguous and ever-changing light in which Fontane portrayed it. In the words of Wellek and Warren:

The novelist offers less a case - a character or event - than a world. The great novelists all have such a world - recognizable as overlapping the empirical world but distinct in its self-coherent intelligibility.<sup>16</sup>

The accumulation of irrational and supernatural material in Fontane's novels has, in large measure, contributed to the essential flavour and coherence of the world as he recreated it.

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16 R. Wellek and A. Warren, The Theory of Literature, Harmondsworth, 1963, p.214.

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