

GLOBAL INTIMATIONS: CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY IN *BUDDENBROOKS*, *TONIO KRÖGER*, AND *DER TOD IN VENEDIG*

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Cultural geography emphasizes the role of imagination in structuring geographical objects of study and conversely sees places and landscapes as social fields in which identities are constructed. This article considers geographical motifs, within the context of Heimat discourse, in Buddenbrooks, which shows the collapse of locally rooted identity, and Tonio Kröger, which engages more explicitly and ironically with Heimat themes. Der Tod in Venedig leaves Heimat behind, however, as its hero travels abroad and muses upon European civilization. Aschenbach's reflections either sustain or undermine his sense of self, as he tries to superimpose a geographical order upon his world. But the boundaries prove porous and control slips away as the markers of otherness binding identity threaten to collapse. Aschenbach's deepest anxieties are stirred when class and national characteristics come into tension and mix with other cultural differences which cannot be assimilated to national stereotypes or when stereotypes take on the quality of conscious performance, arousing fear of the unknown behind the performer's mask. The Novelle massively subverts the Western bourgeois subject, ironically signalled in the phrase 'sein Ich und die europäische Seele', and the master narrative of enlightened progress. The sense of crisis it conveys still speaks in our globalizing times when fears of 'grenzenlose Vermischung' and assertions of cultural identity may induce violent exclusion of others.

Globalization reached a first peak in the decade leading up to the First World War, reaching comparable levels again only in the 1970s. Philippe Legrain compares global estimates for cross-border trade in 1914 of 18 per cent with 8 per cent in 1950 and 25 per cent in 2000.¹ Legrain notes too the huge increase in rail travel and tourism in the late nineteenth century and documents how the growth in trade and mobility spread disease: six cholera pandemics between 1817 and 1923 swept through three continents, killing millions, their passage assisted, no doubt, by the ocean steamships Hans Castorp failed to read about. In our globalizing age, *Buddenbrooks* (1901), *Tonio Kröger* (1903), and *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912) remain amongst the most popular of Thomas Mann's works and touch upon globalizing trends of the early twentieth century in trade, tourism, and the spread of disease. My

¹ Philippe Legrain, *Open World: The Truth About Globalisation* (London: Abacus, 2002), p. 108.

concern here, however, is with cultural rather than economic geography. Cultural geography emphasizes the role of imagination in structuring geographical objects of study and conversely sees places and landscapes as social fields in which identities are constructed: 'Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed', as one study snappily puts it.² The rise of cultural geography from the 1980s on has coincided with the explosion of the electronic technologies which are opening up ever wider virtual spaces dissociated from actual places. Anthony Giddens uses the term 'disembedding' to characterize modernization as 'the "lifting-out" of social relations from local contexts and their rearticulation across infinite tracts of time-space'.³ In the late nineteenth century, the processes of disembedding proceeded nowhere faster than in Germany. In 1871, when the new Reich was founded, two-thirds of the population still lived in native parishes of under 2,000 inhabitants, but by 1907, almost half the population lived outside their place of birth.⁴ A countervailing response around 1900 was the ascription of meaning which turned space into place in the widespread discourse of *Heimat*. At a time when so many people were leaving their native heath, the cult of *Heimat* as the place of origin offered a sense of stability and belonging in an age of rapid change. As a spatial metaphor, *Heimat* conveys the notion of umbilical connection with something larger than the self — it might be family, locality, native dialect or language — which serves to buttress and secure a sense of identity, though it may also become constraining and limiting. Thus the imagined *Heimat* of childhood, when one has left it, arouses *Heimweh*, but *Fernweh* or wanderlust may afflict the stay-at-home. *Heimat* discourse came in many guises from right-wing reaction against modernization, through sentimental escapism from the urban industrial world, to environmental planning and countryside protection as people struggled to cope with rapid change and to counter the worst despoliations of industrialization.⁵ *Heimat* ideals and images were propagated in a multiplicity of media: in journalism, polemical essays, tourist brochures and local museums, photo albums, the visual arts and literature. *Buddenbrooks* and *Tonio Kröger* stand, if not squarely within, then at least at a tangent to the literary trends collectively designated at the time as *Heimatkunst* whereas *Der Tod in Venedig* marks a decisive break.

Published in the same year, Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* and Gustav Frenssen's *Jörn Uhl*, the bestselling *Heimat* novel, shot to near the top of the lists of most-read books, in 1904 Frenssen in third place just topping Mann in fourth.⁶ Frenssen's hero, a Holstein farmer, suffers many trials including the failure of the wheat crop and the eventual loss of his farm. But he struggles on, trains as a land surveyor and dyke and canal engineer and ends up as *landvogt*. His tenacious heroism is constantly mirrored in the landscape and weather of

² Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), p. xii.

³ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 16.

⁴ On population movement see Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918*, vol. I: *Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist* (Munich: Beck, 1993), chapter 1.

⁵ For a relatively sympathetic account of social tendencies in the *Heimat* movement see Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); on cultural tendencies within *Heimat* discourse around 1900 see Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman, *Heimat a German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890–1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1–3; 30–41.

⁶ On the ranking order based on lending libraries figures see <http://www.karlheinz-everts.de/meistgelesen.htm>; visited on 18.04.2005.

his northern province. He starts off as a neglected, unhappy child but through the labour of farming his native soil, then transforming the landscape and making it productive as a surveyor and engineer, he builds up his own character too, achievements which would signally elude a later fictional land surveyor. *Jörn Uhl* exemplifies a liberal version of Heimat discourse in mediating between tradition and modernity, between emotional attachment to the land and scientific understanding, and between local and national identity when the hero serves in the Franco–Prussian War.⁷ *Buddenbrooks*, by contrast, shows the collapse of locally rooted identity and no trace of incipient national loyalty to a Prussian-dominated Reich; the founding war merits only a few fleeting references. Whereas Jörn Uhl perseveres to become provincial governor, Konsul and Senator Buddenbrook are followed by a boy who dies young, leaving only a gaggle of women. Both novels track a process of growing psychological and intellectual complexity which enables Jörn Uhl to survive, but which kills off Thomas Buddenbrook. Toni has the tenacious will to survive, but she is a woman. Women often embody, but cannot represent, the Heimat, whether as landvogt or consul.⁸ Hanno's death is a flight from the burdens of manhood as prescribed by Heimat ideology and so admirably fulfilled by Jörn Uhl.

Although *Buddenbrooks* culminates in Hanno's rejection of any identification with a local habitation and a name, generations of readers have continued to savour the novel's incomparable evocation of place, family, and community. As Martin Swales puts it, *Buddenbrooks* is 'replete with a sense of place' evoked by a narrator who imputes complicity to his readers, drawing us into the topography of a town, its streets and houses, its business offices and harbour, its nearby holiday beach in Travemünde.⁹ *Buddenbrooks* leaves the reader torn between lament for a lost world and a sense too of longing to escape from its limits as the narrator weaves an intricately ambivalent blend of *Heimweh* and *Fernweh*. *Buddenbrooks* is full of images imbued with the nostalgic longing and amused affection which signal the gaze backwards of an observer in the present and somewhere else remembering past times and the place of childhood. Without the alchemy of style, such images could easily tumble over into kitschy postcard images of cobbled streets, harbour scenes, gabled houses, and eccentric locals with their comic mannerisms of the kind which fuelled the Heimat cult. The cultural geography of *Buddenbrooks* is in tune with much Heimat writing. A north–south axis provides a contrast between Lübeck (never named but never concealed) and Munich, another scene of redolently local peculiarities. The clothes, manners, dialect, and cuisine of Munich help to define the northern Heimat by sharpening through contrast perception of the familiar. The northern Heimat, centred on a house and a town, is segmented by myriad internal boundaries marking social, psychological, and sexual differences which coexist, however, within an overarching sense of community. But the differences will intensify and the inner boundaries become harder to cross: the Konsul can address harbour workers in Platt, but his son cannot; nor can Thomas cross the threshold to restore marital harmony, but hovers unhappily outside the door, a stranger

⁷ *Jörn Uhl* was one of the biggest-selling novels in German publishing history and sold well through into the 1940s, but fell out of favour after the Second World War as public taste turned against an author who had welcomed the rise of the NSDAP.

⁸ On gender in Heimat discourse see Gisela Ecker, *Kein Land in Sicht: Heimat — weiblich?* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1997).

⁹ Martin Swales, *Buddenbrooks: Family Life and the Mirror of Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), p. 47.

in his own house, as his wife commits musical adultery. The northern Heimat extends regionally to include competing trading cities such as Hamburg or even Amsterdam; Gerda stays on in Lübeck, returning to Amsterdam only after the death of her husband, unlike Toni who divorced and fled back home from land-locked Munich. In *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1890), Julius Langbehn, a leading guru of the Heimat movement, claimed Amsterdam as the cradle of Nordic–Germanic culture. His book fed into the disputation within Heimat discourse between north and south, the North Sea or the Baltic competing with the Alps as scenes of the mythic encounter between man and nature which typically forms the climax of Heimat plots. Jörn Uhl has a visionary encounter with nymphs and spirits of the heathland.¹⁰ Hanno Buddenbrook, by contrast, in the moment of crisis flees from life, stretching his hand behind ‘in Abwehr’ like a nymph in flight from a satyr, in a grotesque denial of heroic manhood.¹¹ Simultaneously the ultimate Heimat novel of German literature *Buddenbrooks* rejects the Heimat mode.

In 1902, Friedrich Lienhard published his influential article ‘Los von Berlin?’ in the journal *Heimat*.¹² *Buddenbrooks* anticipates that rallying cry through simply ignoring Berlin. But while *Buddenbrooks* may not welcome the new Reich, it abjures parochialism. The comic mirroring of Lübeck and Munich as two Heimats sends a secret message from author to reader above the head of Toni who retreated back to the primary Heimat which has shaped her powerful but rigid sense of self and is ruining her life. The novel tracks hardening divisions and differences within the family and community even as changes in the world outside inexorably infiltrate the Heimat and further the processes of disembedding. Global intimations come in the shape of Gerda with her exotic aura and immense wealth; the build up of German naval power in competition with Britain was getting underway around 1900, but Holland had a richer history as a seafaring nation with overseas colonies, dealing in such exotic products as rubber, diamonds, or tulips. In marrying Gerda, Thomas takes a step towards a wider world, but brings his bride back to Lübeck where she merely heightens his growing alienation. Christian Buddenbrook did his business training in London, the capital of a worldwide empire; he traded in Valparaiso and ran an export and import company in Hamburg, Germany’s largest port in contrast to the relative backwater of Lübeck. Christian aims a radical knock-out blow at the Buddenbrooks’ business ethic in a quarrel which is a key moment in the collapse of his brother Thomas’s sense of self. But Mann undermines Christian’s radical challenge to Heimat values, whether as world-traveller, as proponent of the view that property is theft, or as a cosmopolitan man of the world who married an actress, by making him a clownish figure who appears to his brother’s horrified gaze as a ludicrous *Doppelgänger* and premonition of what he too might become. Thus the global intimations Christian carries with him break open the Heimat, but rather than signifying liberation they intensify by contrast the sense of a local identity which has become suffocating and is now falling apart.

¹⁰ The motif of nature spirits in *Jörn Uhl*, comparable to Kipling’s ‘Puck of Pook’s Hill’ (1906), belongs in the typical mix of naturalism with Jugendstil whimsy in much Heimat writing.

¹¹ *Buddenbrooks*, Stockholmer Gesamtausgabe der Werke von Thomas Mann, (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1965), p. 754; with his softly curling hair and long brown eyelashes (p. 550), Hanno has something of the epicene beauty celebrated in the Jugendstil.

¹² An abbreviated version can be found in Jürgen Schütte and Peter Sprengel, eds, *Die Berliner Moderne 1885–1914* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987), pp. 220–24.

Tonio Kröger engages much more explicitly with the Heimat mode than does *Buddenbrooks*, in response, perhaps, to the rapidly increasing currency of Heimat discourse in the early 1900s. Physical geography schematically heightens the Nordic theme as the homesick hero leaves Munich to return, not south to Italy where he had been living, but to his northern birthplace, then travels even further north to Denmark and the magical encounter with the dancing doubles of his blond and blue-eyed childhood loves. Physical and characterological geography mesh. Writers such as Langbehn and Frenssen deploy physiognomic description associated with geographical and racial origins. Thus Langbehn discerned contrasting Germanic and Slavic traces in the inhabitants of Venice. The Dithmarschers in *Jörn Uhl* come in two types which mix in the hero: the extended Krei family have round heads, red hair, and freckles, whereas the Uhls have narrow faces and intensely blond hair, the Uhls, especially the women, being the more attractive if not always the wiser. Like Frenssen's hero, the red-blond man with red eyes, who during the sea-crossing discourses with Tonio in a Hamburg accent about 'die Sderne' (p. 319) in the age of telephone and telegraph, mixes the red and the blond, the would-be poetic and the scientific, and may signal a swipe at a crude but best-selling competitor.¹³ That Tonio, himself a mix as his name indicates, identifies with the dark, physically disabled girl despite his love of blond Hans and Inge, echoes the typical Heimat theme of outsiders and intellectuals who cannot fit in, a tension resolved in *Jörn Uhl* but left fruitfully unresolved in *Tonio Kröger*.

The vision in the Danish holiday resort of the dancing childhood ghosts is preceded by a climactic night-time encounter with nature quite in the Heimat manner which would continue through into the mountain films of the 1920s. Here it is the Baltic which serves first as a screen for memories of the childhood Heimat. But then comes a wilder vision of the sea which 'warf neben schaumenden Klüften zackige und unwahrscheinliche Gebilde auf und schien mit der Kraft ungeheurer Arme in tollem Spiel den Gischt in alle Lüfte zu schleudern' (p. 321). The boat fighting its way through a wild seascape and its monsters evokes the liminal meeting of culture and nature, the core heroic moment of the Heimat mode.¹⁴ In the same paragraph, however, the author introduces a complicating global intimation in the shape of a polar bear and a tiger being transported from Hamburg to a Danish zoo. The polar bear comes from a wilderness beyond the limits even of the Nordic Heimat, to say nothing of the tiger. Through the sea's uproar Tonio hears the roar of the caged beasts down in the hold suffering from the ship's rolling motion. Such trade in wild animals torn out of their element unmasks Tonio's vision of a marine wilderness as the sentimental sublime through which modern man masks his domination of nature. The sublime effect is further subverted if not obliterated by the end of the paragraph when the seasick Hamburg star-gazer vomits. His talk of the natural elements gets 'unterbrochen'

¹³ Page references in brackets following quotations from *Tonio Kröger* refer to Thomas Mann, *Erzählungen*, Stockholmer Gesamtausgabe der Werke von Thomas Mann (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1960), pp. 271–338. Werner Bellmann, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente: Thomas Mann, 'Tonio Kröger'* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986), p. 31, suggests that one of the books written 'dort oben' which Tonio mentions to Lisaweta may be *Jörn Uhl*. If so, then the phrase 'dort oben' blurs the boundary established in 1864 between Schleswig-Holstein and Denmark, so strengthening the idea of a transnational Nordic region.

¹⁴ Such mythic encounters, often marine, follow on from the eighteenth-century sublime, through nineteenth-century painting, Kaspar David Friedrich or the cruder Arnold Böcklin, the masterpieces of poetic realism such as Storm's *Der Schimmelreiter*, hardening into stereotypes in popular *Heimatkunst*, to be reinvigorated in the Modernist turn to primitivism, then subjected to philosophical analysis by Horkheimer and Adorno as a symptom of the cultural crisis of modernity in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*.

(p. 321) in a comically oblique pun on 'sich erbrechen': nature fights back. As a realistic motif the animals evoke global trade; metaphorically the roars from down below may be a more sinister intimation of forces which might tear apart the Heimat idyll and will in a later story bring the death of the hero.

The most nostalgic Heimat settings were often not where one was at home as a child, but where one went on holiday, blissfully liberated from school, hence the popularity of Heimat novels and later on also films with locations such as the Alps, the Schwarzwald, the North Sea or the Baltic, Löns's Luneburger Heide or Viebig's Eifel. Rail travel, bicycles, then omnibuses and the early motor car, brought the age of day trips or family holidays and sentimental journeys by townies to visit parental or grandparental landscapes of origin. Tastes and smells, sensations on the skin, become Proustian signals redolent of the past. Toni's breakfast of currant bread and honey in Travemünde clearly works like that for the narrator of *Buddenbrooks*. *Tonio Kröger* too is full of evocative triggers of memory in a story where remembrance has descended from the extradiegetic level of the narrator to the protagonist. Gustav von Aschenbach, by contrast, does not return north to revisit his birthplace, but continues on further south to go on holiday abroad. Unlike Hanno fleeing inwards into death or his Auntie Toni who found even Munich too much, Aschenbach starts off happily enough with two Heimats: L. — Liegnitz in Lower Silesia — where he was born, and Munich as second *Wahlheimat*.¹⁵ But driven by *Fernweh*, Aschenbach sets off to travel, not as far as the tigers, as he wryly decides, but to the Mediterranean rather than the Baltic. And so the Novelle decisively exits from the Heimat mode.

Der Tod in Venedig conveys a double movement. Aschenbach looks at his surroundings and reflects upon them, lending them meaning. These acts of observation and imagination in turn either sustain or undermine his sense of self. According to David Sibley, geographies are often designed 'to place and displace the anxieties of a white, western self, a model self bounded by many marks of otherness'. But, Sibley suggests, the exercise is self-defeating: 'The geographies themselves create more unease because boundaries, once drawn, might be transgressed'.¹⁶ Initially, Aschenbach does seem to exemplify that paradigmatic target of the politically correct, the white, western, bourgeois male, and he does display symptoms of anxiety. As Matthias Uecker has argued, Aschenbach shows all the signs of the condition known at the time as neurasthenia.¹⁷ Aschenbach tries to assuage anxiety by superimposing a geographical order upon his world. This comes out in the meanings he attributes to places and his attitudes towards people whom he identifies through geographical categories. The spaces Aschenbach inhabits, named as places and imbued with cultural meanings, overlap. But they are not concentric, nor do the ascriptions of meaning neatly map onto one another so that orientation is uncertain and the ideal geographical order is threatened by turbulence. The places differ in scale from rooms, streets, beaches, and towns through to regions and continents. 'Geographical scale', one study suggests, 'defines the boundaries and bounds the identities around which control is exerted and

¹⁵ I am indebted to T. J. Reed's edition of Thomas Mann, *'Der Tod in Venedig': Text, Materialien, Kommentar* (Munich: Hanser, 1983) for a wealth of information and commentary.

¹⁶ David Sibley, 'Placing Anxieties', in *Cultural Turns/Geographical Turns: Perspectives on Cultural Geography*, ed. by Ian Cook, David Crouch, Simon Naylor, and James R. Ryan (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000), pp. 359–69 (here p. 367).

¹⁷ Matthias Uecker, 'Vorbild, Repräsentant und Warnung: Der Schriftsteller und sein Publikum in Thomas Manns *Der Tod in Venedig*', *literatur für leser*, 25 (2002), 227–43.

contested'.¹⁸ But in *Der Tod in Venedig* the boundaries prove porous and hard to fix, and control slips away as the markers of otherness binding identity threaten to collapse. Instead of order, the overlapping of places with different meanings creates an increasingly disorientating sense of 'heterotopia', to borrow Foucault's term.¹⁹ The wafts of intermingled smells hanging in the air in Venice — cooking oil, perfume, cigarette smoke, the stink of the canals, sea air, the Sirocco — queasily evoke such a heterotopia.

What are Aschenbach's geographies, then? He was born in Silesia, is German in nationality, and identifies as European, performing tasks which his 'Ich und die europäische Seele' (p. 447) set him. In the Middle Ages Silesia had a Slavic population, but was then colonized by Germans.²⁰ In the eighteenth century it was won from Austria by Aschenbach's hero, Frederick the Great, and retained by military might in the Seven Years War. As a landscape of origin Silesia conveys a sense not of organic unity, but of a prize won and of contested and controlling borders, like the discipline which Aschenbach exercises upon his body and in his life until the attraction of Polish Tadzio breaks through the carapace. Tadzio's rank and his Polishness come across as authentic and unstrained compared with Aschenbach's effortfully acquired 'von' and his persona as representative German. Aschenbach's works have entered the national canon, though his admiration of Frederick suggests Prussian rather than German identification. Either way, his Bohemian mother means a split inheritance: 'Von ihr stammten die Merkmale fremder Rasse in seinem Äußern' (p. 450).²¹ Geographical boundaries cut through Aschenbach's physiognomy, so that his self-image bears the mark of otherness. 'Die schöne Stadt, die ihm zur Heimat geworden' and his mountain summers in 'den rauhen Landsitz' (p. 448; my italics) are further geographical signs of psychic fault-lines between love of beauty and harsh self-discipline.

The north/south axis present in *Buddenbrooks* and *Tonio Kröger* prevails here too but, curtailed in the north, is now crossed by various east/west axes. Silesia lies on a historic fault line, being in central Europe, but on the eastern periphery of Germany. Those on the periphery often assert their national identity more anxiously than those at the centre. Silesia may be physically in the middle of Europe, but is hardly at its cultural heart. Greece, the birthplace, and Italy, the place of rebirth, lie physically at the edge of Europe,

¹⁸ N. Smith, 'Homeless/Global: Scaling Places' (1993), cited in Pamela Shurmer-Smith and Kevin Hannan, *Worlds of Desire, Realms of Power: A Cultural Geography* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), p. 15.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16/1 (1986), 22–27. The term offers a postmodern alternative to modernist rational utopias with their notorious tendency to transmute into authoritarian dystopia, just as heterotopias may become threateningly chaotic. See also Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 215.

²⁰ Page references in brackets following quotations from *Der Tod in Venedig* refer to Thomas Mann, *Erzählungen*, Stockholmer Gesamtausgabe der Werke von Thomas Mann (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1960), pp. 444–525.

²¹ Yahya Elzaghe, *Die imaginäre Nation: Thomas Mann und das 'Deutsche'*, (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2000), pp. 27–60, offers a highly critical analysis of geographical features in *Der Tod in Venedig*, arguing that the text is pervaded by racist, nationalistic, and misogynistic discourse. Elzaghe's method can lead to overstatement. He draws on a variety of sources to demonstrate interconnections between eugenics, racism, nationalism, religious prejudice, and misogyny, establishing chains of signifiers in contemporary discourse and discerning a 'Konglomerat von Assoziationen' (p. 61) in Mann's work. Single motifs are then treated as setting off the chain irrespective of whether the connections are drawn in the text. The discussion of Aschenbach's Bohemian mother (pp. 37–39) is especially convoluted, culminating in suspicion of anti-Semitism. Other aspects of Elzaghe's argument are more convincing, notably the critique of orientalist images.

along the northern shores of the Mediterranean. In travelling south, Aschenbach follows the tracks of the German literary imagination on a double quest: as a European looking for cultural origins and renewal, and as a German looking for exotically erotic others, though, paradoxically, the erotic other he will encounter comes from just across the eastern border of his home province. The Adriatic island Aschenbach initially visits has a ‘farbig zerlumptes, in wildfremden Lauten redendes Landvolk’ (p. 458), but alas the hotel is full of Austrians.²² Thus the island is at once too strange and not strange enough. The details succinctly evoke the stereotypical view of the Balkans as scarcely European at all: a heterogeneous region, cut across by Turkish–Islamic incursions, the Balkan peninsula is an intrusive *Fremdkörper* dividing western and northern Europe from the Greek cradle of civilization. The Austrians were the historic defenders against the Turk, but the haughty citizen of the new Reich has little love for the recent enemy in the politics of German unification, who may speak the same language, but in a different accent. In civilized Venice and the cosmopolitan Lido hotel Aschenbach feels both more securely in his element than on a Balkan island and more interestingly abroad than when surrounded by Austrians. The double effect is marked linguistically by ‘die Laute der großen Sprachen’ (p. 469), which Aschenbach either understands or, like Polish, enjoys as excitingly foreign, unlike the barbaric or all too familiar sounds on the island. At first, then, Venice and the hotel are comfortably familiar and pleurably strange. The familiarity is class-based: a common international bourgeois culture is signified in such details as correct evening dress — ‘eine Uniform der Gesittung’ (p. 469) — table manners, afternoon tea, and shared knowledge of English and French. The pleasurable strangeness comes from national stereotypes. These serve as boundary markers of difference which confirm Aschenbach’s sense of self. On the other hand, national tensions do cut across the shared upper-class culture. Polish Tadzio, robbed of his national birthright, hates the vulgar Russians. As for Aschenbach, it is unclear whether the Russians are not quite European or not quite upper class enough. All in all, though, national differences promote complacent self-satisfaction in the *flâneur* on holiday. They confirm him as German, as northern, and as western European, yet also as European *tout court*, as a civilized and cosmopolitan traveller.

But uncannily strange emanations from other sources undermine Aschenbach’s sense of self. The cultural turn in human geography marks a shift from national and class geographies, which construct objects of study by classifying shared features, to geographies of difference. Aschenbach’s deepest anxieties are stirred when class and national characteristics come into tension and mix with other cultural differences which cannot be simply assimilated to national stereotypes. Worrying too is when stereotypes take on the quality of conscious performance rather than organic essence, so that the observer is left fearing the unknown behind the performer’s mask. The first gondolier’s incomprehensible muttering is an example; he does not seem to be Venetian; in the disturbing proximity of a gondola he oversteps the bounds and breaks Aschenbach’s will, undermining his sense of self rather than confirming it. Or there are the Italian singers, especially the clownish lead singer whose dialect suggests Naples rather than Venice. On the German north/south axis, the Balkans begin in Munich, it is said. But the Italian north/south divide cuts a deeper chasm through national identity. When the singers perform, the vulgar Russians

²² Elsaghe, *Die imaginäre Nation*, p. 35, identifies the island as Brioni from a reference in one of Mann’s letters. Brioni at that time was politically part of Austria, but inhabited by a Slovenian population.

are sitting down on the same level, so blurring the social boundary between wealthy guests and begging buskers. More worryingly the Neapolitan singer climbs up onto the balcony, crossing the boundary of the balustrade to mingle with the guests and collect money. The topology of a ship in *Tonio Kröger* created the sense of caged beasts down below that are destined for the zoo but that might break out; here the topology of a hotel creates a more immediate frisson of fear of a breakthrough from below. The clownish singer mimes the obsequious gestures of a lackey, but before leaving, when he infects the hotel guests with laughter, he expunges the difference between masters and servants and takes on the sinister aspect of a *Doppelgänger*: the marks of difference securing an international bourgeois class order or Nordic–German superiority are threatened. Class and national geographies deal with shared features in the objects of study, but by that very token rely also on defining differences between classes or nations. The laughing song undoes defining borders to import difference across into the self, so threatening identity.

Even more transgressive is the singer's penetrating body odour. Geographers note the primacy of touch, hearing, and smell in pre-modern cultures as compared with the Enlightenment predominance of the ordering, classifying eye.²³ That the Neapolitan singer smells of disinfectant paradoxically signals the arrival of disease. His smell is analogous to the Sirocco, a wind which travels up the south/north axis bringing heat and smells from Africa, just as the cholera arrives on the east/west axis. Disease and smell are equally penetrative. Aschenbach has inhabited his body as a citadel or container for his talent. His working days start with cold showers; his 'Willensdauer und Zähigkeit' are compared with the qualities that achieved the conquest of his 'Heimatprovinz' (p. 452). But in stinking Venice water rots solid foundations and the boundaries between inside and outside begin to crumble. The Ganges Delta, source of the cholera, is an enormously bigger counterpart to Venice as a place where land and water mingle. Such blurring of elemental boundaries constitutes a symbolic feminizing of space. Bodily penetration by sounds and smells, the loss of the difference between outer citadel and inner self, are an analogous emasculation of the subject. Venice, the city that once held the gorgeous East in fee, marks the crossing point of north/south and east/west axes. The African wind and the Indian cholera symbolize a vulnerability of western civilization to penetration by forces of destruction. Modernist mythopoeia figures Africa, the dark continent, as female space just as orientalism constructs a luxurious Arab or Asiatic femininity. Although *Der Tod in Venedig* is remarkably empty of actual women, 'cherchez la femme' still holds. For Venice is the deadly female other, 'die schmeichlerische und verdächtige Schöne' (p. 503). Tadzio's austere mother and virginal sisters, the main actual females present in the action, are foils to beautiful and corrupt Venice. A market woman sells Aschenbach the rotting squelchy strawberries, the immediate transmitter of infection, but Aschenbach is already susceptible, softened up by the lascivious city. Like geographies which create unease because boundaries, once drawn, might be transgressed, so too the prescriptions of gender ideology around 1900. In his tract *Geschlecht und Charakter* of 1903, Otto Weininger argued that pure maleness consisted in ascetic, individual character, femaleness by contrast in engulfing sexuality which expunges individuality. (The antithesis is a sexualized variation on the polarized figures of Apollo and Dionysus.) Aschenbach has armoured himself with Weiningerian *Charakter*: after the death of his wife, his was an asexual life of cold showers,

²³ Sibley, 'Placing Anxieties', pp. 363–65, cites various commentators to this effect.

led apart from women and in continuing denial of forbidden desire. Venice, by contrast, symbolizes *Geschlecht*: the city is a whore pimped by a sequence of men selling tourism and sex tourism. By allowing, however, that individuals are always a mix of maleness and femaleness in different proportions, Weininger destabilized gender identity. For logically the proportions could be such that an individual might cross the line, so expunging the difference. And where else but in watery Venice might solid foundations crumble and differentiating boundaries fail?

Proponents of feminist and queer geographies contest the idea of absolute space untainted by the imaginary or the symbolic. Places are imaginatively infused arenas of power struggles over who is allowed in and who is excluded, who owns and who is owned, who gets to look and who gets looked at. Space becomes a stage for the performance of identity in encounters between the self and others. The policing of roles and the leeway available for free improvisation differ between different places and times: 'Space is thus ever mutable, unstable, a function as much of desire and power as of bricks and mortar', as one geographer suggests.²⁴ Whereas the childhood holiday resort is a place of blissful freedom from school, the grown-up holiday resort provides a liminal space of liberation from the normative practices and codes of working life, offering chance encounters with strangers and carnivalesque ritual pleasures which would be too risky at home.²⁵ If in England Brighton has figured as the archetypal place for a dirty weekend, how much more spectacular is the centuries-long reputation of Venice as a carnivalesque theatre for sexual encounters of the most varied kind.²⁶ Many motifs in *Der Tod in Venedig* gesture towards carnival and are potentially comic, like the Neapolitan singer who could also be a figure from the vulgar holiday postcards of the early twentieth century with their images of grotesque bodies.²⁷ But the carnivalesque provokes not laughter in Aschenbach, but an eerie mixing of phobic disgust and desire. For in modern times, as Stallybrass and White suggest, carnival came to encode 'that which the proper bourgeois must strive *not to be* in order to preserve a stable and "correct" sense of self'.²⁸ Masked carnival revellers play roles, sometimes in cross-gender travesty. Here the cross-overs concern age: the old-young man on the boat and later Aschenbach dress up to pass as young, though their use of make-up and hair dye is by conventional standards also effeminate. In Mann's *Novelle*, Venice shifts in aspect along with the changing mood and intensity of Aschenbach's desire. In part this is a matter of the difference between the city and the beach as spaces of desire.²⁹ The city is

²⁴ Mitchell, *Cultural Geography*, p. 214. Chapters 7 and 8 of this study offer a helpful overview of feminist and queer geographies.

²⁵ On holiday resorts, see Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), especially Chapter 2 on 'Ritual Pleasures of a Seaside Resort: Liminality, Carnivalesque and Dirty Weekends', pp. 73–116.

²⁶ On the erotic allure of Venice, see Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); the chapter 'Fear of Touching: The Jewish Ghetto in Renaissance Venice' in Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 212–51, focuses on Jewish and other national ghettos in Venice which prevented physical touching, but also looks at Venice as a magnet for seekers after sexual encounters.

²⁷ In England Donald McGill's first postcards date from 1905.

²⁸ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 178.

²⁹ For a Freudian interpretation of the leitmotiv of the seaside in Mann's work see Andrew J. Webber, 'Mann's Man's World: Gender and Sexuality', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann*, ed. by Ritchie Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 64–83.

the scene of Aschenbach's worst humiliation as a skulking paedophile stalker, like a figure in a dirty postcard. He reaches the nadir of moral degradation in St Mark's Square when he decides not to warn Tadzio's family. No longer the western male subject, the detached *flâneur* of the sovereign gaze, Aschenbach has lost all *Charakter* and merges with the corrupt feminized city. The dream of 'der fremde Gott' that same night is full of penetrating smells and sounds. The dreamer loses anthropological distance. Sound, smell, and touch overwhelm sight. He no longer observes but becomes one with the worshippers who tear into their own and others' flesh, undoing all boundaries in an orgy of 'grenzenlose Vermischung' (p. 517).

On the beach, by contrast, vision prevails and Aschenbach maintains a minimal aesthetic distance. Here the eye may look at bodies less surreptitiously than in the city for the beach is a zone of the body liberated from the controlling signifiers of dress. Clothes sustain conventions, the breaking of which might signify defiance, but can also create painful embarrassment and loss of dignity. At the end of *Der Tod in Venedig*, the beach is lifted out of modern time and reconfigured as a timelessly classical space. In Aschenbach's dying vision the figure of Tadzio stands out from the boundless element. As form emerging from formlessness, this image of Tadzio preserves distance and separation. The moment restores borders and reinstates the Platonic dualism as the *Psychagog* gestures towards the invisible world of the forms on the other side of the last frontier. Just before this last timeless vision, however, one odd detail is the camera on a tripod covered with a black cloth standing at the edge of the water. If to the dying Aschenbach the beach becomes the space of the timelessly classical, the camera draws attention to the modern field of vision in the here and now, just as the text as a whole makes how Aschenbach sees as much the centre of interest as what he sees. The camera belongs in the ambit of topographical science. It mechanically extends the optic lens of the human eye as it focuses on a scene, enabling the precise representation of surface detail from which the topographer abstracts his diagrammatic map. One study describes topography as a science of domination 'confirming boundaries, securing norms and treating questionable social conventions as unquestioned social facts'.³⁰ It works with a totalizing gaze, mimetically reducing the world to the text. But, the authors suggest, if we locate the eye of the surveyor within the landscape, then the illusion of absence is fractured. By locating Aschenbach's eye within the landscape, *Der Tod in Venedig* has progressively fractured the dominating gaze of an author who strove to reduce the world to text. Until the final vision, the process of fracturing has proceeded through a sequence of overlapping places revealed as heterotopic spaces of multiplicity and difference. At the end Aschenbach's face shows the lineaments of deep sleep suggesting that the last sight of Tadzio proceeds not from the optic lens but from the inner eye of imagination. Such envisioning of a gesture towards noumenal truth beyond the veil of appearances contrasts with the camera lens's mechanical reproduction of surface phenomena. On the other hand, the vertical line of the godlike figure standing out against the immeasurable sea has a diagrammatic quality: Tadzio's look back towards land, then his gesture out towards the sea restore elemental boundaries and establish meaning, but at the cost of expunging heterogeneity. These two ways of seeing the closing vision have implications for the emotional core of the Novelle. As T. J. Reed suggests, 'the tone of the final page has

³⁰ James Duncan and David Ley, 'Introduction: Representing the Place of Culture', in Duncan and Ley, *Place/Culture/Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 1–2.

left moralizing behind and raises him [Aschenbach] to a level of tragic dignity'.³¹ But the tragedy takes on an extra pathos for the reader who sees in Platonic dualism, as interpreted in western Christian culture, the seeds of stigmatization of the body and of sexual desire other than the licit pleasures of the marital bed. The restoration of dignity comes at the cost of the restoration of a value system which created the indignity in the first place.

Like many texts of classic modernism, *Der Tod in Venedig* destroys a subject position which has become untenable, but fails to see a way forwards in practice, turning instead to a transcendental vision which, however, risks reinstating the values which induced the crisis. To cite just one other example, the light the dying man from the country sees in the parable 'Vor dem Gesetz' in Kafka's *Der Proceß* perhaps restores the legal discourse which the novel has so massively subverted. What remains unclear is how far the author shares Aschenbach's way of seeing which equates a crisis of personal identity induced by the return of repressed desires incompatible with prevailing social norms with a cultural crisis threatening western civilization. The somewhat grotesque formulation, 'sein Ich und die europäische Seele' (p. 447), implies a homology in Aschenbach's self-image between himself and a cultural realm extending far beyond the identity of man and landscape of Heimat discourse. Post-Enlightenment nationalist and imperialist ideologies ascribe to Europe the task of promoting human progress and civilizing the barbarian. Romantic tradition equated Europe with Catholic Christianity. The Byzantine architecture of St Mark's unsettles the geographical contours, however, shifting the centre eastwards from Rome towards the very edge of Europe and to a city now within the Islamic world and straddling the border with Asia. Christianity is marginal to Aschenbach's quest for meaning, however. Greek classical culture provides the predominant meanings ascribed to Europe, but to borrow Ritchie Robertson's formulation, it is a classicism with pitfalls.³² The tiger-drawn carriage of Dionysus, the god from the East, breaks through the boundaries defining Europe to open up an indefinite space straddling continents. Here and everywhere, the barbarian other, the heart of darkness, invades Aschenbach's dreams, permeating 'sein Ich und die europäische Seele'. This is disembedding with a vengeance: engulfing space obliterates bounded place and indefinite mythic time overwhelms progressive history. Robertson suggests, however, that the sceptical narrator shows the 'mythic' experience to be a projection by Aschenbach on to his actual experience. On this account, character and narrator can be distinguished, though we may still wonder where the author stands.³³ Yahya Elsäghe, by contrast, makes no distinction. On his reading, *Der Tod in Venedig* constructs a Protestant Germanness through a sequence of negatives which combine in Venice: 'Die Imagination Venedigs, die Orientalisierung der Stadt und die Verdächtigung ihrer "unsauberen" Schönheit läßt sich auf ein religiöses Muster zurückführen, in dem sich Misogynie und Xenophobie, Infektions- und Sexualangst exemplarisch verbunden haben'.³⁴ There is some truth in these charges. Venice is orientalized, but as a step towards deconstructing Aschenbach's version of Germanness, of Europe, and of western civilization. Construction and demolition are here two-way processes: Aschenbach's gaze, to a degree at least, constructs its others in the

³¹ T.J. Reed, 'Homosexuality and Taboo in *Der Tod in Venedig*', in *Taboos in German Literature*, ed. by David Jackson (Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), pp. 119–34 (here p. 130).

³² See Ritchie Robertson, 'Classicism and its Pitfalls: *Death in Venice*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann*, ed. by Robertson, pp. 95–106, on the shadow-side of classicism.

³³ Robertson, 'Classicism and its Pitfalls', p. 101.

³⁴ Elsäghe, *Die imaginäre Nation*, p. 60.

terms Elsäghe too immediately attributes to the author; conversely the text fractures that gaze and demolishes Aschenbach's German and European identity when the repression such an identity entails gives way and desires return in estranged guise. The stigmatization of the Asiatic or African other or of feminized Venice inheres in Aschenbach's way of seeing which the text progressively demolishes. Yet, as I have suggested, the final return of the Apollonian or Platonic vision risks restoring the dismantled edifice, suggesting that the boundary between the author and Aschenbach is not watertight.

If *Der Tod in Venedig* undoes 'Europe', it also unsettles the modernist/postmodern distinction. For the Novelle massively subverts the Western bourgeois subject and the master narratives of progress and enlightenment, drawing, as do postmodern commentators, on Nietzsche's cultural criticism and deploying the characteristic postmodern device of parodic citation, here of Homer, Plato, or Platen. Yet the modernist sense of crisis paradigmatically represented in *Der Tod in Venedig* still speaks to readers in our globalizing times when cosmopolitan hopes for a borderless world meet fears of 'grenzenlose Vermischung' and when assertions of cultural identity can turn into violent exclusion of others. For the boundaries of Europe, whether defined as Christian or enlightened, remain deeply contested.