Duelling and the Fantasmatic Spectre of Male Honour in Imperial Germany: The Kaiser's Will and Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest*

Jeffrey Schneider, Vassar College

Published in: *Literature & History* 31.1 (2022): 25-40.

Duelling, as a means of resolving insults to a man's honour, has a long and storied history in Germany. The practice was initially the exclusive preserve of the nobility, with duels by others prosecuted as murder or attempted murder.[1] But as stark differences between the nobility and upper bourgeoisie were steadily eroded—most prominently through the expansion of the Prussian officer corps—more and more bourgeois men also began to duel over the course of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, since legal alternatives, such as the right to file private criminal lawsuits for cases of insult and libel, were available to nearly all Germans after 1871, the resolution of insults through violence remained politically controversial.[2] Moreover, as Tobias Bringmann points out, public outrage over particularly egregious duels involving officers in 1896 pushed even the practice's defenders to vote for a resolution in the Reichstag calling on the government 'to counteract, resolutely and with all the means at their disposal, the practice of duelling, which is inconsistent with penal law'.[3]

Though the secondary literature on honour and duelling in Imperial Germany is extensive, historians have remained as divided as the combatants they study. Because of the military obligation to issue and accept challenges in response to insults, Peter Dieners concludes that duelling operated in Imperial Germany as a 'form of corps-specific self-disciplining that was sanctioned by the state and taken up with increasing intensity', a

dimension that Kevin McAleer interprets as 'neo-chivalry' (and hence a sign of the bourgeoisie's 'feudalization').[4] In contrast to both, Ute Frevert contends that the popularity of the practice 'cannot be explained solely in terms of the institutional support which duelling enjoyed within the military system and student community', arguing instead that duelling offered men a heroic mode for asserting their autonomous personality and individual integrity—key components of bourgeois masculinity.[5] Despite their differences, however, all three authors more or less presume that individual duellists internalized the dictates of honour, either as a result of their membership in the officer corps or as a form of their masculine identity. As Frevert put it more recently, the honour code 'was carefully and smoothly translated into individual mindsets and demeanour'.[6]

Yet neither the presumed disciplinary effectiveness of institutional socialization nor a simple internalization model can sufficiently account for what made military honour so prone to the 'excesses' (*Auswüchse*) that caused such public outrage.[7] Instead, we need an approach to honour that treats individual psyches as invariably more complex than the products of a 'careful and smooth' internalization of institutional codes or social expectations. In what follows, I draw on the psychoanalytically inflected work of the philosopher Slavoj Žižek to analyse a range of military and civilian texts about honour and duelling involving current and former officers. The first part of this chapter focuses on the military honour code's mixed messages and impossible demands, which produced an obscene excess—what Žižek calls a fantasmatic spectre—that haunted the very operations of this form of discipline. That even sympathetic civilian observers were not immune to these mixed messages becomes apparent in the second section, when I turn to a series of letters that the novelist Theodor Fontane wrote to his friend Georg Friedlaender after the latter was charged with violating the military's honour code in 1886.

This discussion, in turn, lays the foundation for a brief reconsideration of duelling in Fontane's novel *Effi Briest* (1894/95), which Richard Faber has called 'an indispensable historical document'.[8] Though scholars have reconstructed Fontane's practice of fortifying his novels with facts "cut and pasted" from numerous sources, including newspaper articles and even gossip, his fiction also offers historical insights through the way it, as Peter Hohendahl and Ulrike Vedder note, 'endeavours to constitute the social', in particular by telling 'the story of people embedded in society, including their cognitive, psychological and existential situation'.[9] Thus, even as Fontane claimed that *Effi Briest* was based on the real-life Ardenne case of 1886, an extramarital relationship that resulted in a lethal duel, the novel departs radically from the facts by placing the duel six or seven years after the adulterous affair had ended.[10] Yet while most scholars have read the novel as a clear condemnation of the spurned husband's supposed conformity to the archaic social conventions of honour, I argue that *Effi Briest*'s real value—for both its Wilhelmine readers and historians today—lies in its exposure of the fantasmatic spectre that haunted the culture of honour in Imperial Germany. To be sure, as I have previously argued, Fontane's novel suggests that honour imbued male friendships—first between the husband and his wife's lover, and then between the duellist and his second—with a paranoid dimension.[11] While I still stand by this reading, my subsequent research on duelling has made me realize that it needs to be supplemented with greater attention to the hierarchical dictates of the military honour code. Indeed, by putting *Effi Briest* in dialogue with military edicts on honour as well as Fontane's reactions to his friend Friedlaender's predicament, we also glimpse the haunting psychological presence of 'a cruel and insatiable' master reigning over the honour code's rules and expectations.

The Excesses of the Military Code of Honour

Because the Prussian officer corps was composed almost entirely of members of the nobility

until its reorganization in 1807, the honour of military officers was originally indistinguishable from the honour that members of the nobility enjoyed as a result of their birth.[12] But during the nineteenth century, Prussian monarchs began disentangling the two as part of their ongoing process of subduing the independence of the nobility and tying its fortunes ever tighter to the Crown. For instance, to better control the behaviour of officers and curb (but not eliminate) the practice of duelling, Friedrich Wilhelm III introduced honour tribunals (*Ehrengerichte*) in 1808, which under his successor, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, were further supplemented with a second body, the honour council (*Ehrenrat*), in 1843.[13] Though the role and purview of these bodies varied over the course of the nineteenth century, their charge in Imperial Germany was laid out in Kaiser Wilhelm I's ordinance of 1874, which remained unchanged until 1897.[14]

Parallel with these developments, various Prussian royal ordinances attempted to derive a specifically military conception of honour that was less tied to the social background of noble officers and more to their duties as soldiers in the service of the king (and after 1871, the Kaiser). Like his predecessors, Wilhelm I articulated in the preamble to his 1874 edict a number of behaviours that officers should shun, including luxuries of any kind as well as 'all excess' of alcohol and gambling.[15] More important than these injunctions was the list of affirmative virtues specific to officers, such as 'faithfulness unto death, … firm determination, self-denying obedience, simple truthfulness and strict discretion' as well as 'the fulfilment of what may seem but trivial tasks'.[16]

Despite the effort to dictate the meaning of honour from above, the behaviour of officers often eluded the monarch's control. As Foucault reminds us in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, discourses 'can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing

strategy'.[17] Thus, while monarchs tried to tie honour to notions of Christian morality, aristocratic officers often understood their honour differently. Indeed, Demeter notes that there was 'a strange inconsistency' at the very heart of honour as the officers themselves perceived it: 'While an attack upon one's honour was a calamity incompatible with life, the gravity and recklessness of bringing this calamity upon a social equal was not by any means outrageous'.[18] This contradiction was of course possible because duelling restored honour to both men—the one whose honour was maligned as well as the one who had maligned it in the first place—by allowing both to vouch for their reputation by risking their lives to defend it. And certainly honour courts were often inconsistent in their examinations of officers charged with serious honour violations, such as merely 'warning' (rather than discharging) one officer who slept with the wife of a comrade while the latter was away from home.[19]

Yet the 'excesses' that provoked public outrage were not only a result of built-in resistances to the monarchical control of military honour. It is also important to see them as unintended by-products of the very system that sought to regulate honour, especially during the ongoing expansion of the Prussian officer corps that began after 1860. Whereas previously the military leadership could more or less expect new aristocratic recruits to arrive with a shared understanding of honour, the larger and more socially diverse body of new officers—many of whom, as reserve officers, served actively for one year followed by intermittent periods of training—made it necessary to specify these expectations in writing and make them part of training.[20] Beginning in the middle of the 1880s a veritable flood of guidebooks and training manuals emerged to meet this demand.[21] Most, such as Camill Schaible's *Standes- und Berufspflichten des deutschen Offiziers* (The Status and Professional Duties of the German Officer), which was first published in 1891 and revised several times before its tenth and final edition in 1919, carried subtitles like 'for prospective and younger

officers of the standing army and reserves'.[22] Though written for self-study and future reference, the book also included recommendations to instructors, such as assigning some chapters to be read at home and setting aside time for others to be discussed or even quizzed.[23] And as an example of the importance the army gave to honour, Schaible's discussion of the concept not only comprised half of the book but also preceded the enumeration of professional duties.

Despite the growing need to specify in print the honour code's expectations, it would be a mistake to underestimate the complexity of its psychic hold. For example, against arguments that there was 'nothing real' and 'logical' about the concept of honour, apologists for duelling, such as one Bruno Hase, happily conceded that 'reason (*Verstand*) will always come to the conclusion that there is no honour, that what one designates as honour is only a phantom, a ghost, that it only exists in the imagination, in the fantasy of people'.[24] Nevertheless, what looked like a problem was in this case easily handled by Hase (who seems to have been a pastor in a small town in Saxony) through an analogy with God: 'one could never rationally, objectively determine that there is a God. But is there not a subjective reality of belief next to the objective reality of reason?'[25] This seemingly innocuous question gets to the heart of honour as an ideology, for the subject's relationship to the Symbolic order—Lacan's term for the interconnected system of signs, symbols, and laws that organize social reality—is similarly organized through reference to 'the big Other,' 'the "God" who watches over me from beyond… and for which I am ready to give my life'.[26] In the symbolic construct of military honour in Imperial Germany, this role was filled by the Kaiser, whose rule, by the divine right of kings, was in turn legitimated by God. His authority over his officers likewise rested on a split between knowledge and belief: the (suppressed or rarely voiced) *knowledge* that he was an ordinary man with the same shortcomings of any other

mortal, which was drowned out in the loudly trumpeted *belief* in his symbolic mandate: the monarchical principle that transformed the 1874 edict into, as Major General Paul von Schmidt put it in 1892, 'the exhortations (*Mahnwort*) of our glorified Hero-Emperor Wilhelm I'.[27]

Thus, notwithstanding the Kaiser's singular role in the discourse of military honour, we need to see this unitary feature as divided into what Žižek calls the 'two masters,' which from their psychological function could be labelled the ego-ideal and superego.[28] As its name implies, the ego-ideal represents a consciously held, idealized image of one's self within the social order. In Lacanian theory, it operates at the level of the Symbolic and marks 'the point of my symbolic identification, the point in the big Other from which I observe (and judge) myself'.[29] This dimension is represented most clearly in the opening of the Wilhelm I's 1874 preface, when he states that 'I look to the whole corps of officers of My Army to make honour their finest jewel in future as they have always done hitherto. To keep its honour pure and spotless must be the most sacred duty of the whole Estate and of every member of it. If that duty is fulfilled, then every other duty incumbent on an officer will be fully and consciously performed'.[30] Calling honour a 'jewel' recast the concept from a mere collection of rules and expectations into a precious entity. And its centrality to the operation of the military was such that keeping one's honour 'pure and spotless' supposedly ensured the fulfilment of all the officer's other tasks. As Schmidt explained nearly two decades later, 'honour as the finest jewel… is, in a manner of speaking, the mental sensory organ to which is appealed at every opportunity…. One appeals to the officer's sense of honour whenever one demands the highest results of him'.[31]

Yet in addition to his role as ego-ideal, which guaranteed the military's internal ideology and privileged place in society, the Kaiser also operated as a kind of superego.

Superego is, of course, the name that Freud gave to conscience as the internalized voice devoted to self-observation. Wilhelm I's own 1874 edict initiated this superegoic function by stopping short of providing honour tribunals with detailed guidelines: 'It is not possible to offer in advance an exhaustive list of cases in which [their] action might be advisable. The intention which I have expressed above should furnish sufficient guidance for them to be identified as they arise'.[32] Instead, he ordered that 'From time to time… the Will which I have expressed herein is to be read aloud to the assembled individual corps of officers, so that it shall be the more often in the mind of the officers of My Army'.[33] The implication was that officers, as honourable men, should be able to deduce from these general guidelines which actions are honourable or dishonourable. Even so, as both Freud and Lacan note, the superego is not merely an internalization of authority. It can become an excessive voice that draws its energy from the extent to which meeting these symbolic expectations requires individuals to renounce their other desires: 'The superego, with its excessive feeling of guilt, is merely the necessary obverse of the Ego-Ideal: it exerts its unbearable pressure upon us on behalf of our betrayal of the "law of desire". … [S]uperego pressure demonstrates that we effectively *are* guilty of betraying our desire'.[34]

The subsequent process of codifying the honour code in various manuals only strengthened this superegoic dimension by enumerating the endless expectations and sacrifices the code required. Moreover, the seemingly contradictory commands contained in military manuals acutely reinforced the impression of serving a 'cruel and insatiable' master. For example, while Schaible intoned that an officer's 'drive to ideals and morality finds its purest and highest embodiment in the Christian religion' (and thus the expectation that officers attend church regularly), he also warned officers against falling into 'religious enthusiasm'.[35] Similarly, even as he never tired of reminding officers that they belonged to a

higher caste, he also insisted that 'an esprit de corps would be reprehensible (*verwerflich*),' if it devolved 'into a caste spirit (*Kastengeist*)' (56). Furthermore, while Schaible observed that 'the civilian is free to more or less participate in society (*an dem Besuche von Gesellschaften*), the officer is not' and hence must accept all social invitations (provided, of course, that they issued from morally upright and promilitary circles). However, this same officer was counselled not to spend so much time with others that he began to 'neglect his comrades' (64). Finally, Schaible's contradictory advice also extended to an officer's appearance, intoning that the honourable officer must 'follow the regulations, especially the [cabinet orders] for the uniform and not permit himself any arbitrary accessories or modifications' and 'steer equally clear from both carelessness and extravagance' (72). At the same time, though, he is told that 'on duty [the officer] is always to be well-dressed; off-duty [he] is to be immaculate' (72).

Finally, the duel itself represented a form of superegoic excess that operated as the obscene underside of the Symbolic Law, for it gave both parties—the wronged and the wrongdoer—permission to express murderous aggressions despite the social taboo against killing. Thus, even as duelling's critics pointed to the hypocrisy of breaking the Judeo-Christian commandment against killing another, especially when the duel was also provoked by behaviour that, like adultery, was itself a transgression of the Ten Commandments, defenders of duelling pointed to the law's supposed sanction of this otherwise illegal and immoral behaviour. Schaible made this clear by interpreting the light punishment that duellists received when they killed their opponent—two or more years of confinement in a fortress, usually commuted after a few months through a royal pardon—as an *official* 'recognition of that traditional and serious custom that seeks the restoration of one's reputation through means of self-help' (81).

Signatura temporis: A Case Study of Excess

That military honour did lead to duelling excesses was certainly visible in the three cases that provoked such heated debate in 1896, the so-called 'year of the duel', which Fontane loosely followed and sometimes commented on in his correspondence.[36] The first case, part of the long-running Kotze Affair, in which anonymous and obscene letters about sexual indiscretions were sent to numerous members of Wilhelm II's court, incited two duels that left one man injured and another dead.[37] While the public was appalled by both the sordid nature of the affair and the fact that the duels were fought over Easter weekend, it was incensed by a second case: the death of Ernst Zencker, a lawyer and reserve officer, who was forced by his unit's honour council to duel his estranged wife's lover, a naval officer, even though he was in the process of divorcing her.[38] Finally, the third episode, a case of so-called *Ehrennotwehr*, in which a lieutenant, Henning von Brüsewitz, simply used his sword to slay a working-class man who had refused to apologize for bumping his chair in a tavern, seemed beyond the pale of even the first two.[39] All three such cases led to extensive public debates, resulting in, as one conservative member of the Reichstag lamented at the time, 'a clear verdict against duelling'.[40] The public's brewing outrage pushed the Reichstag to devote several days of debate in February, April and November, during which it passed an unprecedented unanimous resolution calling on the government to do its utmost to curtail the practice.

Since these three cases (and the debates they engendered in the Reichstag) have already been treated in detail elsewhere, I want to illustrate the propensity toward excess in matters of honour by turning to a more mundane case involving a Prussian Reserve officer named Georg Friedlaender (1843–1914). Though we don't have his actual tribunal records, there is revealing evidence in the correspondence of Theodor Fontane (1819–1898), who first

met Friedlaender in 1884 while he and his family were vacationing in Silesia, where the younger man served as a district judge. At that time, the jurist was composing a memoir about his days as a second lieutenant in the Reserve during the Franco-Prussian War, which he eventually dedicated to Fontane.[41] He also sent copies of the book to several of his former officers, who apparently felt so insulted by their depiction in the book that they filed a grievance against Friedlaender in a military honour court. Unfortunately, Fontane's wife burned all of Friedlaender's letters to the author after his death.[42] Nevertheless, Fontane's own letters to the jurist indicate that General Otto von Wulffen, then a colonel in the regiment and, after 1884, governor of a hospital for disabled soldiers in Berlin, took particular offense at an anecdote in which Friedlaender, following an apparently extravagant dinner with the commanding general, overslept his watch, hastily threw on his uniform, and then reported for duty to Wulffen, who was described as 'dumbfounded' (*verblüfft*) by his subordinate's disarrayed dress.[43] Wulffen and several other officers also accused Friedlaender of having penned the positive review of his own book in the *Vossische Zeitung* (71).

The case is remarkable for several reasons, not least because it even happened or because it so fully absorbed Fontane's attention shortly before he wrote *Effi Briest*, which he probably began drafting in 1888 or 1889.[44] Indeed, even apart from its potential impact on the novel, the incident stands alone as its own real-life example of the fraught nature of military honour in Imperial Germany—as well as the fractures between military perceptions and civilian perceptions.[45] It is clear that it provoked Fontane to ruminate quite extensively, and with a great deal of agitation, on the exigencies of military honour, which he expressed in numerous letters to his friend between November 1886 and April 1888. But rather than offering a clear-headed take on the situation, Fontane's responses reproduced the contradictory and impossible superegoic commands of the honour code, finding fault not only

with the oversensitivity of Friedlaender's former superiors, but with his friend's behaviour as well.

What is most striking about these letters is Fontane's emotional investment in the issue as well as his vacillation between several extreme positions. On the one hand, Fontane repeatedly assured his friend that 'a fine, noble man like the war minister' (71) as well as 'hundreds of old military men—and the higher up, the more there are—… would characterize the proceedings initiated against you as a piece of nonsense, meanness, and wretchedness' (75). Nevertheless, he refrained from contacting old military acquaintances on his friend's behalf because, as he confided to Friedlaender, such individuals were more apt than not to defend even the exaggerated views of a fellow officer rather than give ground to those outside the institution (74). On the other hand, the most consistent tenor of Fontane's reaction is rage. In his initial response, for instance, the elder writer castigated men like Friedlaender's opponents as suffering from 'egoism and ruthless social climbing' (*Strebertum*) in whose 'hearts brutality and destructive ideas' have turned Germany into a new Byzantium (70). Honour, he continued, had become an 'epidemic from which the individual can hardly escape and which will last until a whole part of society has been "completely infected" (*ausgeseucht*)' (70). Fontane thus viewed his friend as 'the victim of such an epidemic', who 'was being dragged by epidemic invalids into their infirmary' (71). Even weeks after the affair was resolved in Friedlaender's favour, Fontane continued to rant about its larger significance: "There is something foul in the state of Denmark and a sense of fairness (*Billigkeitsgefühl*) and a healthy mind (*gesunder Sinn*) are being buried for the sake of an idol (*Götzenbild*) that sometimes calls itself "service" (*Dienst*), sometimes "honour"' (77). The case, he angrily concluded, was a '*signatura temporis*,' a sign of the times, of what was 'not only possible *in* Prussia, but also characteristic *for* Prussia' (84, emphasis in original).

Radical fluctuations also marked Fontane's assessment of Friedlaender's behaviour. For example, he took his friend to task for what he perceived were a series of misjudgements, which included not only the 'questionable' characterization of a Prussian officer as 'dumbfounded,' but also the decision to send him a copy of the book, and, most importantly, his subsequent failure to apologize for the characterization (68–69). For Fontane, Friedlaender's actions indicated poor judgment, vanity, and ill-manners—qualities that certainly fell short of the expectations for honourable men. But at the other end of the spectrum, Fontane also urged his friend to renounce the military's jurisdiction over his honour, vowing: '*I* would have said long ago: "do what you want with me, I could care less". I'd have thrown my uniform, lieutenant-ship, iron cross, the whole nonsense at their feet' (77). Repeatedly, Fontane's language evinced a peculiar identification with Friedlaender and his predicament, as if he himself were facing the accusations. And more often than not, he found his friend's behaviour lacking in comparison with his own imagined response.

Conceivably the most surprising reaction of all, though, is Fontane's disappointment that Friedlaender could not (or did not) challenge Wulffen to a duel: 'But you see, *that* is exactly what's most infuriating, that one knows full well that you—a father and *not* a marksman with a pistol—must tolerate this affront and thereby contribute (*beisteuern*) to the cheapest heroism of so many younger or even older officers' (70–71, emphasis in original). Though Fontane's outburst is clearly directed at the retired and active military officers who were taking advantage of Friedlaender's family obligations and lack of marksmanship, his angry diatribe, intentionally or not, hit Friedlaender, too, since the latter's inexperience with a pistol not only made it possible for professional soldiers to profit, but also 'contribute[d]' to the demise of authentic German military values in favour of 'the cheapest heroism'. Even six months after Friedlaender emerged victorious from his honour court proceedings, Fontane

lamented ‘had you been (I think, I wrote it already enough) a marksman like Prince Pückler or an odd fellow [*Querkopf*] like a captain I was friends with 45 years ago in Leipzig (who one after another shot dead three of his comrades who had insulted him), [their bragging] would have turned immediately into the most horrible cowardice’ (88–89). In this and other letters, Fontane repeatedly cited the example of Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau, who died in 1871 and who was as legendary for his numerous duels as for his famous gardens at Branitz. While Fontane imagines here that Pückler’s proven expertise with a weapon would have prevented the entire affair from even happening, it also seems that only evidence of a deadlier nature—not just good marksmanship, but the real deaths that resulted from it (‘three in a row’)—would have been sufficient to put an end to the exaggerated claims of wounded honour that Friedlaender’s former superior officers were making. And it is all the more startling that even after the military honour tribunal cleared Friedlaender of dishonourable conduct, Fontane still wished for a larger and more definitive victory that would have revealed the true cowardice of his friend’s opponents and deflated their claims to honour.

Such comments, uttered shortly before he began work on *Effi Briest*, should put to rest any assumptions that Fontane considered duelling archaic and obsolete. But it would be a mistake to conclude that Fontane’s wish that Friedlaender had challenged his opponents to a duel was his final position on the practice. For Fontane, Friedlaender’s case remained merely a ‘mock trial’ (76), and its resolution a mock victory, too. Fontane indicated as much in his gloomy response to Friedlaender’s triumph: ‘one must, and you along too, cry bloody tears as a patriot and man [*Mensch*]’ (84). In Fontane’s phrasing, it sounds more like a superegoic imperative than an accurate description of his vindicated friend’s state of mind. Indeed, it is more important to recognize that even after the conclusion of Friedlaender’s ordeal Fontane never advocated a position that sounded remotely realistic—certainly not to Friedlaender,

who neither duelled nor threw his uniform and medals at the army's feet, but instead chose to defend his honour through his rhetorical skills. But his victory in this case did not entirely settle the matter of male honour and duelling in his friend's eyes, as we can see when we turn to *Effi Briest*.

Giving up the Ghost: The Duel in *Effi Briest*

It is, of course, striking that the subject of honour emerged as such a prominent theme in *Effi Briest* so shortly after Friedlaender's ordeal in which Fontane denounced the cult of honour as an 'idol'. Indeed, the novel's treatment of the subject shares more similarities to his correspondence with Friedlaender than with the 1886 Ardenne case on which it was supposedly based. In particular, the conversation between Geert von Innstetten and his colleague Wüllersdorf, whom he has summoned to act as his second, structurally replays the dialogic nature of the correspondence (even if only Fontane's contributions have survived). But while Innstetten's deliberations with his colleague exhibit a much more sober, even military, tone than Fontane's correspondence with Friedlaender, the novel illustrates even more clearly the existence of an implacable superego through the repeated linkages between honour and ghosts.

More than most realist novels of the day, *Effi Briest* is chockful of spectral apparitions and ghost stories. Without doubt, the most famous narrative element in *Effi Briest* is the Chinese ghost story that Innstetten begins to tell Effi as they arrive in Kessin from their honeymoon. Though scholarship has focused on the Chinese ghost as an expression of the Real of Effi's sexual desires, recent digital analysis reveals that the word *Chinese* is actually the third most common noun uttered by Innstetten in the novel.[46] And even in his past, as his friend and former comrade Major von Crampas reveals, Innstetten evinced a predilection for telling ghost stories during the Franco-Prussian War. Yet rather than undermining the novel's

realist effects. ghosts, as Christian Begemann argues, 'mark a level of the individual and social imaginary', which in fact inhere in our perception of reality.[47] But because, as he deftly demonstrates, the characters' discussions about ghosts revolve around 'voids' (*Leerstellen*) in the original story of the Chinese ghost or the topography of the house, for instance, they should also be read as intrusions of the Real that disrupt the seeming consistency and coherence of the Symbolic. As Žižek explains, the problem with the Symbolic is that 'symbolization ultimately always fails, that it never succeeds in fully "covering" the real, that it always involves some unsettled, unredeemed symbolic debt. *This real (the part of reality that remains non-symbolized) returns in the guise of spectral apparitions*'.[48]

Within the milieu of honourable men, the seduction of a family member represented an insult of the third degree, the most serious form of disrespect that not only required a duel but one fought with the most serious terms.[49] Indeed, many opponents of duelling were willing to make an exception—or demonstrate some sympathetic understanding—for cases involving the seduction of a female family member.[50] However, despite his suspicions at the time Innstetten only learns about Effi's affair with Crampas six years after it is over, when he accidentally discovers their love letters and sends for his colleague Wüllersdorf. As his second, Wüllersdorf's first responsibility involves ascertaining whether a duel is necessary or can be avoided. Asked about his feelings, Innstetten acknowledges that though the discovery of the affair has made him miserable, he senses 'no hate at all, much less any thirst for revenge' (172). Even more, he admits that he still loves his wife: 'terrible as I find everything that has happened, I'm still so much under the spell of her delightful nature, of that vivacious charm which is all her own that in spite of myself I feel inclined, in my heart of hearts, to forgive her' (172). Thus, unlike Friedlaender's opponents, whose hearts supposedly harboured a sick 'brutality', Innstetten admirably feels neither hatred toward Crampas nor a

lack of love toward Effi. Indeed, the formulation 'heart of heart' (*im letzten Herzenswinkel*—literally: the last corner of my heart) suggests an authentic and deep-seated emotion. Nevertheless, this feeling toward Effi stands to some extent in opposition to his sense of self, for the inclination to forgive his wife would only occur 'in spite of' himself.

Innstetten's sense of self, of course, derives from his own understanding of himself as a respected individual (*Respektsperson*), a promising Prussian bureaucrat, and a man of principles. Yet the application of those principles come under duress in response to Wüllersdorf's most important reservation about a duel: the lapse of time between the event and Innstetten's knowledge. Is there a statute of limitations (*Verjährung*) for even serious insults? As Wüllersdorf tells Innstetten: 'I don't know either…. And I must confess to you that everything seems to revolve around this question' (172; my translation). The question of a time limit foregrounds the lack of an objective perspective on the matter, and like the Chinese ghost, forms a kind of void around which their deliberations turn.

The radical moment of undecidability at the heart of Innstetten's dilemma unleashes the superegoic dimension that, thanks to Wilhelm I's edict, reigns over questions of honour. Though the novel does not point directly to this military context, it strongly suggests the haunting presence of a 'cruel and insatiable' master. For instance, in earlier drafts of the two men's conversation, the word 'honour' [*Ehre*] appeared explicitly several times before eventually being replaced by the vaguer term 'social something' [*Gesellschafts-Etwas*].[51] Rather than downplaying the concept of honour, however, this substitute phrasing transforms it into an undefined spectre—all the more powerful because it seems to have no definite shape or substance. Moreover, in response to Innstetten's arguments in favour of duelling, Wüllersdorf uses the terminology from Fontane's correspondence with Friedlaender: 'The world is as it is, and things don't take the course we want, they take the course *other people*

want. … [T]his cult of honour of ours is a form of idolatry (*Götzendienst*), but as long as we have idols we have to worship them' (174, emphasis in original). Yet this famous diatribe against 'the cult of honour' as 'idolatry' is not only a form of cultural critique, but a recognition of the god-like superegoic dictates that both men must follow—against their own wishes—to please some unknown 'other people'.

As if to hammer home honour's haunting power, the problem of ghosts surfaces repeatedly in the conversation between the two men. For instance, in trying to steer Innstetten away from challenging Crampas, Wüllersdorf tells him that he'll keep the knowledge of Effi's affair to himself: 'I shall be as silent as a grave' (173). The image of the grave, of course, offers little reassurance since the haunting presence of the Chinese ghost is often marked through reference to his grave. Moreover, Innstetten lays out the potential consequences of his buried secret by painting for Wüllersdorf the man's possible reaction to one of Innstetten's future utterances: 'the shadow of a smile will cross your face, or it will at least register a twitch, and in your soul it echoes "Good old Innstetten…he never finds [an offence] with enough irritants in it to be harmful. He's never choked on anything yet"' (27:174; modified). The danger in Wüllersdorf's sympathy is thus precisely its potential ghostly, non-material quality that would haunt future relations between the two friends. Finally, the spectral quality of honour resurfaces in the brief conversation that the two men have on their way to the duel. As they ride by his former residence in Kessin, which he refers to as a haunted house (*Spukhaus*), Innstetten dismisses the Chinese ghost, so important early on in his marriage, by telling his second: 'Oh, some nonsense…. Makes a marvellous story, but not now. There are all kinds of other things that haunt (*spukt*) our thoughts now' (177; modified). Here the looming duel has produced a new and more powerful poltergeist in Innstetten's life.

Yet the real moment of honour's superegoic power comes after the duel, when the dead Crampas starts to function as a ghost in Innstetten's interior monologue: 'When I think of that last look, the resignation, with a smile in spite of his agony, what that look was saying was, "Innstetten, always the stickler for principles… You could have spared me this, and yourself too". And maybe he was right. My soul seems to be saying something like that' (178–179). Here Crampas's earlier critique of Innstetten's pedantic reliance on principles echoes in Innstetten's soul. Yet it is important to note that Innstetten's interpretation differs from the narrator's brief but enigmatic description of Crampas's death: '"Will you…". These were his last words. One more agonized but almost friendly flicker in his features and it was all over' (178). Crampas's incomplete sentence, of course, could easily be the beginning of a plea for forgiveness or a final request for his own family or Effi. But in this abbreviated form, the German phrase 'Wollen Sie…' can also be read as an imperative form of the verb 'want'. And as an injunction to desire, it underscores all the more the gap between Innstetten's inner desire for reconciliation with Effi (his 'law of desire') and the social compulsion to duel. Innstetten's superego—here in the form of Crampas's ghostly echo in his soul—draws its power from Innstetten's betrayal of his own desire to remain with the woman who still captivates him.

Conclusion

Coming on the eve of 1896's 'year of the duel,' *Effi Briest* seemed to not only anticipate the public's growing outrage against the excesses of duelling, but also index the rising disillusionment among duelling's supporters, most prominently all those (including many reserve or retired officers) in the Reichstag who felt compelled to vote for the unanimous resolution calling on the government to do more to prevent duels. Indeed, because Fontane initially imagined that—short of throwing his medals and uniform at their feet—duelling

offered Friedlaender the only way to really guarantee his honour in the conflict with Wulffen and other fellow officers (and, for Fontane, preserve military honour from its devaluation into the 'cheapest heroism'), it is all the more surprising that *Effi Briest* ends up portraying the practice as incapable of producing the kind of permanent resolution that Innstetten sought. In killing the man who seduced his wife, Innstetten remains haunted by the former's ghostly smile and final words, which he interprets as mocking him for his failure to decipher the correct course of action based on the supposedly 'sufficient guidance' offered in Wilhelm I's 1874 edict and the subsequent military guidebooks. Of course, as Žižek explains, 'the Freudian name for such an "irrational" injunction which prevents the subject from acting appropriately to present circumstances and thus organizes his failure is, of course, superego'.[52] In this case, both voices—the one that told him he had to duel and as well as the dying man's words echoing in his soul—represent the contradictory commands of the superego, which was inculcated during Innstetten's time as a Prussian officer before and during the Franco-Prussian War. But its force here against Innstetten's own wellbeing is fed by his decision to give way on his desire for Effi.

Though inspired by a real incident, *Effi Briest* is admittedly 'only' a novel. Yet as an exemplar of German realism, it narratively illustrates the deeper structural issues that I identified within the military honour code itself—not only in military manuals and policies but also in Fontane's own inconsistent reaction to his friend's honour proceedings. Most important, though, the psychologically more nuanced approach offered by psychoanalysis should help us see why it is critical for scholars of duelling to move beyond more straightforward models according to which individuals 'carefully and smoothly' internalized the honour code, either as a conscious decision or as the effect of institutional discipline. Though honour did operate as an important form of military discipline, it nevertheless

remained haunted by a fantasmatic excess that often undermined its ability to control the behaviour of officers.

I would like to thank Sophia Harvey, Susan Hiner, Silke von der Emde, Eva Woods, and the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

1 Dueling was covered by Section 15, paragraphs 201 to 210, while murder, attempted murder, manslaughter and other such crimes were covered in Section 16. See H. Rüdorff, ed., *Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich, mit Commentar* (Berlin 1871), pp. 339-348.

2 See A. Goldberg, *Honor, Politics, and the Law in Imperial Germany, 1871-1914* (Cambridge, 2010).

3 *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstags. IX. Legislaturperiode. IV. Session 1895/97* (Berlin, 1896), p. 1841. For a thorough discussion of the Reichstag debates, see T.C. Bringmann, *Reichstag und Zweikampf. Die Duellfrage als innenpolitischer Konflikt des deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871-1918* (Freiburg, 1997).

4 P. Dieners, *Das Duell und die Sonderrolle des Militärs. Zur preussisch-deutschen Entwicklung von Militär- und Zivilgewalt im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1992), p. 263; K. McAleer, *Dueling: The Cult of Honor in Fin-de-siècle Germany* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 206, 200, 207.

5 U. Frevert, *Men of Honour: A Social and Cultural History of the Duel* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), pp. 134, 137.

6 U. Frevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (Bundapest, Hungary; New York, 2011), p. 47.

7 Speech by August Bebel, the leader of the Social Democratic Party. *Stenographische Berichte. IX. Legislaturperiode. IV. Session 1895/97* 1896), p. 966.

8 R. Faber, 'Resignierte Auflösung und Erstarrung. Zu Theodor Fontanes Historischem Preußen-Roman “Geert Innstetten” alias *Effi Briest* (1894-1895)', in *Der historische Roman zwischen Kunst, Ideologie und Wissenschaft*, eds. I.U. Paul and R. Faber (Würzburg 2013), p. 391.

9 P.U. Hohendahl and U. Vedder, 'Zur Einleitung', in *Herausforderungen des Realismus. Theodor Fontanes Gesellschaftsromane*, eds. P.U. Hohendahl and U. Vedder (Freiburg i.B. 2018), pp. 11, 10. On Fontane’s use of media, see P. McGillen, *The Fontane Workshop: Manufacturing Realism in the Industrial Age of Print* (New York, 2019).

10 The affair between Else von Ardenne and Emil Hartwich led to a duel in which Hartwich was killed by Else’s husband Armand von Ardenne, a captain in the Prussian army. Though literary scholars have long made much of Fontane’s claim that he had merely changed some of the details, Rolf Zimmermann has since raised serious questions about how much Fontane really knew about the case, suggesting instead that *Effi Briest* amounted to an effort to rework his earlier novel *Cécile*. See R.C. Zimmermann, 'Was hat Fontanes *Effi Briest* noch mit dem Ardenne-Skandal zu tun? Zur Konkurrenz zweier Gestaltungsvorgaben bei Entstehung des Romans', *Fontane Blätter*, 64:(1998).

11 See J. Schneider, 'Masculinity, Male Friendship, and the Paranoid Logic of Honor in Theodore Fontane's *Effi Briest*', *The German Quarterly*, 75:3 (2002).

12 For an overview of the early origins of the concept of honor, see F. Zunkel, 'Ehre, Reputation', in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, eds. O. Brunner, W. Conze and R. Koselleck (Stuttgart 1975).

13 See K. Demeter, trans. A. Malcom, *The German Officer-Corps in Society and State, 1650-1945* (London, 1965), pp. 124-134; Dieners, *Das Duell*, pp. 184-187 and 193-207.

14 *Allerhöchste Verordnung über die Ehrengerichte der Offiziere im Preußischen Heere, vom 2. Mai 1874* (Berlin, 1901). Except where indicated, I draw on the translation of the preamble in Demeter, *The German Officer-Corps*, pp. 313-316.

15 Demeter, *The German Officer-Corps*, p. 313.

16 Ibid.

17 M. Foucault, trans. R. Hurley, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York, 1978), pp. 100-101.

18 Demeter, *The German Officer-Corps*, p. 130.

19 See McAleer, *Dueling*, pp. 100-101.

20 While officers of noble background still constituted the majority of all Prussian officers in 1860, already by the end of that decade more than half of all new officer candidates were men from bourgeois backgrounds, a process that picked up speed after 1871. See Demeter, *The German Officer-Corps*, pp. 20-32.

21 Dieners, *Das Duell*, pp. 223-224.

22 C. Schaible, *Standes- und Berufspflichten des deutschen Offizierkorps. Für angehende und jüngere Offiziere des stehenden Heeres und des Beurlaubtenstandes* (Berlin, 1896).

23 Ibid.

24 B. Hase, 'Die Ehre und der Zweikampf', *Die Grenzboten. Zeitschrift für Politik, Literatur und Kunst*, 55:(1896), 311.

25 Ibid. The only other known publication authored by Bruno Hase, *Heinrichsorter Kirchgemeinde-Ordnung*, lists him as a pastor in the small town of Heinrichsort. See 'Vom Büchertisch', *Sächsisches Kirchen- und Schulblatt*, 45:37 (1895), 414.

26 S. Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York, 2006), p. 9.

27 P.v. Schmidt, *Das Deutsche Offizierthum und die Zeitströmungen* (Berlin, 1892), p. 2.

28 S. Žižek, *Interrogating the Real* (London; New York, 2005), p. 265.

29 Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 80.

30 Demeter, *The German Officer-Corps*, p. 313.

31 Schmidt, *Das Deutsche Offizierthum*, p. 9.

32 Demeter, *The German Officer-Corps*, p. 315 (translation modified).

33 Ibid.

34 Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 81.

35 Schaible, *Standes- und Berufspflichten*, p. 40. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

36 See R. Kohne, '*Effi Briest* und die Duellfrage. Zu einem Brief Fontanes an Meximilian Harden', *Fontane Blätter*, 64:(1998), 111-112.

37 For an extensive discussion of the Kotze Affair, see Bringmann, *Reichstag und Zweikampf*, pp. 152-223.

38 On the Zencker case, see ibid.

39 *Ehrennotwehr* involved the immediate use of one's sword to incapacitate an adversary unworthy of a challenge. On this case, see ibid.; A. Borgstedt, 'Der Fall Brüsewitz: Zum Verhältnis von Militär und Zivilgesellschaft im Wilhelminischen Kaiserreich', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 55:7/8 (2007).

40 Speech by Count von Bernstorff of the Conservative Party in *Stenographische Berichte, X. Legislaturperiode. IV. Session 1895/97*, p. 1809.

41 G. Friedlaender, *Aus den Kriegstagen 1870* (Berlin, 1886). Fontane's first letter indicates that the two men had discussed Friedlaender's book. Fontane thanked him for the dedication

on 7 November 1886. T. Fontane, *Briefe an Georg Friedlaender* (Frankfurt/M, 1994). All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

42 K. Schreinert, 'Vorwort', in *Theodor Fontane. Briefe an Georg Friedlaender*, ed. K. Schreinert (Heidelberg 1954), p. ix.

43 Friedlaender, *Aus den Kriegstagen 1870*, p. 111. Wulffen is only referred to as 'Oberst v. W'.

44 Most Fontane scholars surmise that he began writing sometime in 1888 or 1889 and completed a rough draft by 1890. C. Grawe, *Theodor Fontane, Effi Briest* (Frankfurt/M, 1985).

45 No stranger to the Prussian army, Fontane had covered the three wars leading to German unification, during which he had been captured and imprisoned as a spy by France in 1870. In addition to writing his own histories of the conflicts and memoirs of his capture, his son Georg served as officer in the Prussian army. See H. Nürnberger, *Fontanes Welt* (Berlin, 1997), pp. 206-240.

46 L. Billepp, K. Grenzel, L. Keil and T. Klaus, 'Ein weites Wortfeld. Digitale Spurensuche in *Effi Briest*', *Fontane Blätter*, 106:(2020), 128. For a Lacanian reading of Effi's relationship to the ghost, see D.N. Prager, '"Alles so orientalistisch": The Elaboration of Desire in Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1896)', *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture*, 29:(2013).

47 C. Begemann, '"Ein Spukhaus ist nie was Gewöhnliches…" Das Gespenst und das soziale Imaginäre in Fontanes *Effi Briest*', in *Herausforderungen des Realismus. Theodor Fontanes Gesellschaftsromane*, eds. P.U. Hohendahl and U. Vedder (Freiburg i.B. 2018), p. 207.

48 S. Žižek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. S. Žižek (London 1994), p. 21 (emphasis in the original). Innstetten's 'unsettled symbolic debt' can be traced back to the

decision to ask for the hand of the daughter of his former love interest Luisa, who decades earlier rejected the poorly paid officer in favour of the older and financially stable landowner, Herr von Briest.

49 See H. Kufahl and J. Schmied-Kowarzik, *Duellbuch. Geschichte des Zweikampfes nebst einem Anhang enthaltend Duellregeln und Paukcomment* (Leipzig, 1896), pp. 213, 215.

50 For example, the staid *Vossische Zeitung* claimed 'there is one case, but only one single case, in which we can comprehend (*menschlich verstehen*) a duel, even if we can't justify it: when the family honour of the person concerned is put into question, when it concerns his wife, his lover, his daughter, his mother, his sister. Duelling goes against Christian morality even in this case, it also goes against all morality, yet nevertheless it is comprehensible'. Quoted by Martin Schall, a pastor, former army chaplain and representative of the German Conservative Party, in defense of an earlier speech that August Bebel attacked. *Stenographische Berichte, X. Legislaturperiode. IV. Session 1895/97*, p. 1834.

51 W. Schafarschik, *Theodor Fontane: Effi Briest* (Stuttgart, 1972), pp. 76-82.

52 S. Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London, 2008), p. 232.