Heritage, Heimat and the Political Coding of the Reimagined Past
The Early Twentieth Century in Contemporary British and German Popular Culture

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1 Introduction: Reimagining the early twentieth century in contemporary British and German popular culture

1.1 Context: The 'Downton Effect'

The 2013-14 session of the House of Lords saw the introduction of the Equality (Titles) Bill[1] by The Lord Lucas, aimed at making "provisions for the succession of female heirs to hereditary titles" (Equality (Titles) Act, 2013). This legislative effort coincided with the Succession to the Crown Act 2013, which eliminated male-preference primogeniture in the Royal family. While the latter successfully passed, the Equality (Titles) Bill did not. However, it remains notable for its informal moniker, the 'Downton Abbey Law.' This nickname (cf. Campbell 2014)[2] references the popular television series *Downton Abbey* (2010-15), created by Julian Fellowes, in which the Earl of Grantham's eldest daughter is overlooked in favour of a distant male relative as the heir presumptive.

It is remarkable how a period drama set in the Edwardian era, like *Downton Abbey*, can influence contemporary political legislation. This phenomenon raises questions about the potential impact that popular reimaginings of history might have on current attitudes towards both the past and present. The influence of political and socio-historical contexts during the time of the production of these cultural works is evident, yet the extent to which they shape contemporary society, politics, and cultural memory remains a subject of speculation.

In the case of *Downton Abbey*, its influence on contemporary popular culture is evident in the heightened interest in the Edwardian period and a surge in in *Downton*-inspired or *Downton*-esque fiction in the wake of the show's initial success. Works such as *Rutherford Park* (2013) by Elizabeth Cook or *Cavendon Hall* (2014) by Barbara Taylor-Bradford evoke the popular series by their titles alone and have proliferated in the years since 2010. *Downton Abbey* has also been referenced or parodied in a range of popular cultural productions, including *The Simpsons* (1989-), *How I met your Mother* (2005-14), *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* (2009-14), and even the children's

[1] Long title of HL Bill 012 2013-14 (as introduced): "A Bill to make provision for the succession of female heirs to hereditary titles; for husbands and civil partners of those receiving honours to be allowed to use equivalent honorary titles to those available to wives; and for connected purposes." (Equality (Titles) Act 2013)

[2] https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/jan/11/downton-bill-women-rights-liza-campbell

program *Sesame Street* (1969-). The fascination with the series and the lifestyle it portrays has catalysed an entire industry of *Downton Abbey*-inspired merchandise, from clothing lines to jewellery collections[3], and even *Downton*-themed etiquette courses[4], such as one offered by Camden House College in New Jersey. This course promises to "explore various aspects of the show, including lessons applicable to society today" (Sedeghi 2013), suggesting that our engagement with the past as reimagined through *Downton Abbey* might carry educational value.

The unexpected breakout success of *Downton Abbey* in 2010 underlined the rarity of a period or heritage production evolving into a mainstream cultural phenomenon. Media and critics have extensively analysed the reasons behind the show's popularity, often attributing it to its commodification of nostalgia and its provision of an escapist distance from contemporary issues. However, it could be argued that *Downton Abbey*'s appeal extends beyond the allure of merely 'pastness', as it also encapsulates a certain brand of Britishness. 'Downton Britain' serves as a canvas for fantasies and romanticised visions of pre-war Britain, and by extension, a Britain before the European Union. The show's depiction of an idealised British past is not only nostalgic; it is highly commodified, consumable, and desirable, contributing significantly to its global popularity. Particularly noteworthy is how the series' interpretation of history allows for the early twentieth century to influence contemporary consciousness, including the resurgence of more conservative, traditionalist, and reactionary values and beliefs. This phenomenon suggests that a society consuming this type of production may indeed regard the mindset of a bygone era as offering "lessons applicable to society today" (Sedeghi 2013).

Despite the overt conservatism in *Downton Abbey*, which reflects the political views of its creator Julian Fellowes, a member of the House of Lords, the series has maintained its popularity, with critical readings doing little to diminish its appeal. This dynamic highlights the complex interplay between media, nostalgia, and the shaping of public perceptions and values.

The heightened interest in the early twentieth century during the 2010s was foreseeable due to the centenary commemoration of pivotal historical events such as the sinking of the R.M.S. Titanic and the First World War. In the 2010s, public remem-

[3] https://www.1928.com/collections/downton-abbey-jewelry
[4] https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/oct/08/downton-abbey-merchandise-makeup-wine

brance, commemoration and retrospective critical assessment of these events dominated national and cultural memory. However, it is the representation of this historical era in popular cultural productions like *Downton Abbey* that may have the most significant impact on contemporary society. According to Aleida Assmann:

> For today, more than books and exhibition, films, comics, and manga produce the widely influential narratives of entire historical epochs.[5] [translation by author[6]] (Assmann 42)

In addition to books and exhibitions, television series and mini-series have emerged as highly effective mediums in terms of cultural impact and reach, particularly with the rise of streaming television. Serial storytelling, with its broader canvas for world-building, ongoing plots, and expansive character development, offers a more intricate and nuanced reimagination of the past. This trend towards seriality is evident in German popular cultural as well. Following the success of the series *Weissensee* (2010-2018) on German national television, the ZDF and SkyTV co-production *Babylon Berlin* (2017-) has garnered substantial international viewership. Set at the juncture between the end of the Weimar Republic and the emergence of the NS regime, *Babylon Berlin*, akin to *Downton Abbey*, adeptly presents national history to an international audience in a stylised and entertaining manner. The series depicts political developments from various societal perspectives, engaging with the perennial question of how the National Socialists rose to power without making them the central focus. This approach not only entertains but also encourages viewers to contemplate the complexities of history and its impact on contemporary society.

According to Aleida Assmann, German approaches to engaging with the history of the early twentieth century in cultural depictions have led to a "vague unease[7]" with German memory culture, which has become more pronounced in recent years (Assmann 60). Assmann refers to an ongoing moralisation in addressing the National Socialist past, which she argues has a limiting effect on the historical assessment of this era in contemporary culture (cf. Assmann 92). Despite this, she attributes a "pedagogical task[8]" to German memory culture and the historicisation of the NS era in cultural

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5 Denn stärker als Bücher und Ausstellungen produzieren heute Filme, Comics und Mangas die breitenwirksamen Erzählungen ganzer Geschichtsepochen. (Assmann 42)

6 Author's note: all consecutive translations are also by the author. Translations are marked by a footnote where the original cited text is provided.

7 dumpfes Unbehagen (Assmann 60)

8 pädagogische Aufgabe (ibid. 92)

depictions, emphasising that this role should not merely consist of a "formulaic reiteration of condemnation of Nazi history." Instead, it should involve "continually new attempts to establish connections between the past and the present[9]" (ibid.). Assmann advocates for a more complex and less black-and-white depiction of Germany's NS past, recognising the inherent dilemma of contemporary historical reimagining. These reimaginings must navigate between the need for more nuanced and complex engagement with the NS era and the risks of abuse, misinterpretation, and misappropriation by revisionists and right-wing proponents. This ongoing challenge suggests that German reimagining of the period during and surrounding the National Socialist regime are susceptible to accusations of historical revisionism.

Astrid Erll and Stephanie Wodianka encapsulate this dilemma of popular memory culture in Germany as a tension between the distinctiveness of NS and Holocaust memory as continuous topics of interest in audio-visual representations and the moral implications of fictional memory representations (cf. Erll and Wodianka 9). They argue that German history is a privileged topic in memory films due to this complexity (ibid.), indicating that the portrayal of this period is fraught with both opportunity and ethical responsibility. This discussion underscores the challenge of delineating a nuanced view of Germany's past while maintaining a critical and morally aware perspective. Such dilemmas and reservations surrounding historical representations have been particularly significant in Germany, given its unique historical context. Conversely, in countries like Britain, historical programs such as *Downton Abbey* have been successful partly because of their sanitised and politically conservative portrayal of the early twentieth century.

These programs often face minimal backlash for omitting or glossing over the problematic aspects of British history, such as colonialism or the British Union of Fascists (BUF). This disparity indicates a marked difference in attitudes towards historical depictions in Britain and Germany. In Britain, the early twentieth century often serves as a backdrop for nostalgic entertainment, whereas in Germany, it demands a more critical historiographical engagement with the past.

Despite their often apolitical and harmonious appearance, British productions like *Downton Abbey* are not devoid of underlying political subtexts and controversies.

[9] formelhaft wiederholte Verurteilung der NS-Geschichte, sondern umgekehrt in immer neuen Versuchen, Verbindungen zwischen der Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart herzustellen (ibid. 92)

Similarly, German reimaginings of the early twentieth century are not immune to romanticisation or the use of problematic aspects of history for entertainment purposes. A common thread across both is the element of subtlety and latency in these reimaginings. This raises important questions about the 'hidden' or latent content in British and German films and series set in the early twentieth century. What underlying messages are these productions conveying about the past? And how do these messages reflect current attitudes towards historical, political, and socio-historical issues of the present moment? The answers to these questions can reveal much about the collective consciousness and cultural memory in both contexts, highlighting the intricate relationship between history, entertainment, and national identity.

1.2 Key Questions and Focus of Analysis

The central inquiry of my thesis examines how contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, manifested through films and television series, are influenced by and embedded within postmillennial political and cultural contexts. I am particularly interested in narrative elements that reflect a conservative or even right-wing political shift, which, although not immediately apparent, is discernible within the underlying and latent content. The secondary question of this thesis is more speculative. It considers how cultural productions, such as literature and film, which are inherently shaped by the socio-cultural and political climates of their times, influence political or socio-cultural developments within society. Mark Arenhövel argues that fictional narratives in popular culture are increasingly becoming integral to political communication, thereby shaping and framing the interpretative contexts of contemporary events and political issues (cf. Arenhövel 14). Addressing the extent to which contemporary reimaginings of the past influence current or future politics is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, my analysis will delve into the underlying political content of productions like *Downton Abbey* to speculate on their potential effects on recent political events, such as the Brexit referendum in 2016.

Additionally, this thesis examines the potential of these reimaginings to subtly disseminate populist or propagandist ideas through their coded content. For instance, political scientist Hans-Georg Betz, who foresaw a 'renaissance' of populism in the twenty-first century (cf. Betz 1994), identifies a resurgence of populism as an outcome of popular culture's ascendancy to a dominant cultural form. Politicians often employ strategies of subtle inference and coded language to obscure a populist agenda within

layers of ambiguity and covertness. This thesis aims to explore whether film and series creators, perhaps unconsciously, employ similar strategies by projecting contemporary political and socio-cultural issues onto a historically setting.

To narrow the scope of my analysis, I have focused on the settings, subject matters, characters, and their characterisations within the narratives examined. Within these elements, I differentiate between explicit content and implicit content or subtext, which can be mediated either textually through narration or dialogue, or visually through imagery. For the underlying content, I utilise the term ‘latent content,’ derived from Freudian dream analysis, to describe the presence of repressed ideas beneath the surface of immediate perception. Aleida Assmann also addresses the concept of latency in relation to memory in contemporary culture. She discusses the latency of an unspeakable past that was neither fully repressed nor eradicated but lingered beneath the surface of collective memory (cf. Assmann 44).

Consequently, I am interested in how the repressed resurfaces in the coded and latent content of contemporary reimaginings. Here, “the repressed” pertains both to historical suppression and to elements currently repressed in contemporary political discourse. Although my focus is primarily on the latent content, I also consider the familiar and identifiable cultural frameworks and conventions that are characteristic of nation-specific narratives or genres. I begin my analysis by assessing the overall effect and impression these contemporary reimaginings create: Is the past depicted as a positive or negative place? Is it represented as a sanitised, idyllic realm of nostalgic romanticisation, or as a setting marked by class precarity, stark realism, and troubling social norms that evoke discomfort in the viewer?

In exploring which aspects of British and German national history are either emphasised or omitted from contemporary narratives, I analyse the conscious selection of content alongside the selective and subjective emphasis on specific aspects of cultural memory. Echoing Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik’s assertion that “memory [is] shaped by media” (Plate and Smelik 10), I investigate whether contemporary reimaginings in popular cultural media either reinforce or challenge historical perspectives on cultural memory in Britain and Germany. This inquiry extends to examining how these productions reflect the self-image of both nations. I aim to identify overt thematic and conceptual intersections, as well as shared cultural codes within these narratives. For instance, I question how genre-specific and nation-specific codes, such as those found

in British heritage films and the German Heimatfilm, manifest in contemporary reimaginings.

Additionally, I explore how contemporary political discourses – on topics such as gender, social injustice, migration, racism, and nationalism – are reflected in the overriding themes and coded within the underlying and latent content of these historical reimaginings.

In the subsequent chapters, I undertake a close reading that encompasses settings, frameworks, imagery, themes, motifs, and characterisations to identify the underlying cultural codes and concepts within these productions. Central to my analysis are the themes of spatiality and the concept of character coding. I operate under the assumption that the settings and characters in these productions provide the most apparent canvases for projecting contemporary attitudes and ideas. This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of how these elements function both as manifestations of and conduits for the dissemination of current societal and cultural ideologies.

1.3 Works Analysed

For the selection of works analysed in this thesis, I have chosen to focus on audiovisual media. As discussed in chapter 1.1, following the centenary of the First World War and the international success of *Downton Abbey*, there was a notable increase in the publication of novels set in the same era. These works often adhere to a similar formula, capitalising on the success of *Downton Abbey* and can be seen as by-products of the '*Downton* effect' with limited cultural impact. In contrast, films and television series set during the early twentieth century and the First World War have attracted a broader audience and greater media attention, extending beyond the commemorative moments of the Titanic and First World War centenaries, or the momentum of the '*Downton* effect.' It is crucial that the selected productions have had a significant impact, either as products of mass consumption and popular entertainment, like *Downton Abbey,* or through critical acclaim, such as Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* (2009).

The films and series, analysed in this thesis, are considered as 'texts' to be subjected to a close reading, with an emphasis on their latent content and underlying political coding. The seriality and the format of television or streaming series arguably represents the medium with the broadest reach and most significant cultural impact at present. The series, according to Arenhövel, is an ideal format to infuse with politics without being obvious about it:

> But precisely in those series formats that may not seem political at first glance, contemporary issues are addressed, such as the role and significance of government, the validity of law and constitution, the treatment of the Other, the threshold between democracy and dictatorship, and the transformation of gender.[10] (Arenhövel 23)

I have selected the television series *Downton Abbey* and *Babylon Berlin* as central works to base my analysis on. Overall, I have chosen four British and four German reimaginings as key works, including films, series and mini-series produced between 2006 and 2017, with the exception of James Cameron's *Titanic*, which dates back to 1997 and serves as an example of the 1990s costume film and its socio-cultural and political contexts.

This selection spans different media formats and a variety of genres and subgenres. I focus primarily on the British heritage film and the German Heimatfilm genre as they underlie the conceptualisation of contemporary productions like *Downton Abbey* or *The White Ribbon*. To avoid confusion, I refer to all productions analysed in this thesis as 'reimaginings' regardless of genre or format. This umbrella term emphasises the focus on 'images' in audio-visual presentations. The prefix 're-' indicates the notion of a new, or at least different, approach to historical imagining compared to productions of the twentieth century.

Downton Abbey (2010-15)

The authored series *Downton Abbey* was produced between 2010 and 2015 by Carnival Films and ITV studios for the British television network ITV. In addition to the six seasons, a feature film titled *Downton Abbey* (2019) was released, followed by the sequel *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022). The creator, Julian Fellowes, who holds the title of Baron Fellowes of West Stafford and a seat in the House of Lords, sets the series in a fictional Yorkshire country house from 1912 to 1928. The narrative centres around the daily lives of the family of Robert Crawley, Earl of Grantham (Hugh Bonneville), his wife Cora (Elizabeth McGovern) and their three daughters Mary (Michelle Dockery), Edith (Laura Carmichael) and Sybil (Jessica Brown Findlay), along with their servants, including the butler Carson (Jim Carter), housekeeper Mrs Hughes (Phyllis

[10] Aber gerade in jenen Serienformaten, die auf den ersten Blick so gar nicht politisch erscheinen mögen, werden gegenwartsrelevante Fragen verhandelt wie die nach der Rolle und Bedeutung der Regierung, der Geltung von Recht und Verfassung, dem Umgang mit dem Anderen, der Schwelle zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur und der Transformation von Geschlechtlichkeit. (Arenhövel 23)

Logan) and valet Bates (Brendan Coyle). The inheritance plot of the first series revolves around the death of the heir presumptive, Patrick Crawley, to whom the estate was entailed, and his successor, Matthew Crawley (Dan Stevens), a lawyer and the new heir to title and estate. The second series explores the impact of the First World War, while subsequent seasons address the impending financial crisis of the estate (series 3) and various romance plots involving the earl's daughters and servants (series 4-6).

The series has achieved tremendous commercial success and critical acclaim, particularly for its first season. Its worldwide distribution has bolstered the image of *Downton Abbey* as a British 'export', commodifying and commercialising 'Britishness' in international popular culture. Critics have noted the series for its sanitised reimagining of class relations and working conditions during a period marked by social and political upheaval, war, disease, and instability.

According to Chapman, *Downton Abbey* is a "cultural phenomenon" (Chapman 133) that "exemplifies the idea of costume drama as a 'heritage export'" (ibid. 135), having been distributed in over one hundred countries with an estimated audience of approximately 120 million (cf. ibid.). As an authored series, unlike many successful heritage productions which are often based on literary sources, *Downton Abbey* represents a reimagining of the past by its author Julian Fellowes, who won an Academy Award for the screenplay of *Gosford Park* (2001), a precursor to *Downton Abbey*:

> Like *Gosford Park*, *Downton Abbey* features an ensemble cast and focuses equally on life 'above' and 'below' stairs; like *Gosford Park* it is preoccupied with the social life of the English country house and explores the social codes and rituals of that environment; and like *Gosford Park* it demonstrates an acute sense of class consciousness as the social hierarchies above and below stairs are laid out in detail. (Chapman 136)

While *Gosford Park* takes a deconstructive look at the heritage house genre and was praised and awarded for this approach, *Downton Abbey* is criticised for its "clichés or for being a backwards-looking, sentimental, reactionary drama." (Chapman 137). Simon Schama has dismissed the series as a "servile soap opera" (Schama 2012) that panders to the "instincts of cultural necrophilia." (ibid.) while Chapman sees it as a reinvention of the heritage or costume drama genre by "reinterpreting the politics of class for a supposedly classless society." (Chapman 141). The impact of the series is thus variously interpreted as trivialisation, degeneration, or reinvention.

Babylon Berlin (2017-)

The German series *Babylon Berlin* (2017-), set in late 1920s Berlin, features prominently in my analysis of contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century. As the most successful German television production with an international audience, it constitutes the closest German counterpart to *Downton Abbey* in terms of reach and impact. Produced for Sky Germany but aired on the ZDF state network, the series is based on the historical crime novels by Volker Kutscher, beginning with *Der Nasse Fisch* (2007). In their adaptation, series creators Tom Tykwer, Achim von Borries, and Hendrik Handloegten have significantly altered the plot and, most notably, the characterisation of the protagonist and other significant characters. The series' depiction of life during the Weimar Republic is highly stylised and markedly darker than its literary source material. The protagonist, Gereon Rath (Volker Bruch), a morphine addict due to shell shock, becomes entangled in several parallel plots across the first and second season, which intersect with the criminal underground of the city and the complex political struggle between the declining Weimar Republic and the rising National Socialists.

Mr. Selfridge (2013-16)

The British series *Mr. Selfridge* was produced by ITV Studios from 2013 to 2016, following the success of *Downton Abbey*. Created by Andrew Davies and based on Lindy Woodhead's biography of Harry Gordon Selfridge, *Shopping, Seduction and Mr. Selfridge* (2007), the series centres on the historical figure of Harry Gordon Selfridge (Jeremy Piven) and the fictional character Agnes Towler (Aisling Loftus), who begins her career in the London department store under his guidance. Though an original series with original characters set in the Edwardian era, *Mr. Selfridge* draws notable parallels to Émile Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* [*Au Bonheur des Dames*] (1883). Both Zola's novel and *Mr. Selfridge* feature a young female character who ambitiously climbs the ranks of a department store's hierarchy with the support of the store's charismatic owner. The series' urban setting offers a contrast to the heritage backdrop of *Downton Abbey,* introducing elements of early twentieth-century commodity culture and commerce through its depiction of a bustling department store and the vibrant atmosphere of business and industry, juxtaposed against the idyllic tranquillity of *Downton Abbey*.

Das Adlon. Eine Familiensaga. (2013)

The German mini-series *Das Adlon. Eine Familiensaga* [engl. *The Adlon. A Family Saga*; hereafter referred to as *Das Adlon*], created by Rodica Doehnert and Uli Edel, premiered on the ZDF in early 2013. Like *Mr. Selfridge* (2013), *Das Adlon* revolves around a commercial enterprise, in this case a hotel, initially led by a historical figure, Lorenz Adlon (Burghard Klaußner) and later his son Louis (Heino Ferch). This three-part series structures the narrative of Hotel Adlon around the life of the protagonist Sonja Schadt (Rosemarie Fendel, Josefine Preuß), spanning from 1904 to 1997 and touching on major historical events in Germany as experienced by the hotel's residents. Distinct from the linear storytelling of many series, *Das Adlon*, similar to *Titanic* (1997), utilises a frame narrative set in the late 1990s where an aged version of the female protagonist narrates the events of the story in retrospect. This narrative technique offers a personal and historical reflection on the century, framed through the intimate perspective of the hotel's inhabitants.

Titanic (1997)

James Cameron's film *Titanic* from 1997 holds a notable place within the scope of this thesis as the oldest production analysed, originating from the late 1990s. I have included the film in my analysis due to its substantial cultural impact as a prominent reimagining of the early twentieth century in popular cultural memory. Furthermore, *Titanic* serves as a contrasting foil to postmillennial reimaginings, offering a reflection of the socio-cultural and political contexts of the outgoing twentieth century, which are distinct from those of the 2010s. Centred on the protagonist Rose DeWitt Bukater (Kate Winslet) and her romance with Jack Dawson (Leonardo DiCaprio), *Titanic* presents a brief, yet poignant snapshot of Edwardian society during the historical disaster. I have selected the film to be examined as an example of the British costume productions from the 1980s and 1990s that took a more critical and deconstructing approach to the reimagining of Edwardian society. To this day, *Titanic* has an enduring impact on the perception of the Titanic narrative and its memory in contemporary culture.

The Village (2013-14)

The short-lived series *The Village* was produced between 2013 and 2014 and written by Peter Moffat for BBC One. The series illustrates the childhood of the protagonist Bert Middleton (David Ryall, Alfie Stewart, Bill Jones, Tom Varey), who narrates the events of the series in a frame narrative set up as a fictional contemporary witness interview, akin to the framing used in *Titanic* (1997) and *Das Adlon*. Therefore, the series is based on the fictional memoirs and childhood memories of Bert Middleton growing up in a Derbyshire village during the First World War. Unlike *Downton Abbey*, *The Village* reimagines the precarity and hardships of working-class life outside of service and challenges the authority of the local nobility, represented by Lord Allingham (Kit Jackson). Jerome De Groot describes to *The Village* as "actively anti-conservative" (De Groot 166) and positions it in deliberate contrast to *Downton Abbey*, underlining its unique perspective on historical and social issues.

The White Ribbon (2009)

Austrian director Michael Haneke's 2009 film *Das Weiße Band. Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte* [engl. *The White Ribbon. A German Children's Tale,* hereafter referred to as *The White Ribbon*] is another reimagining of a village community shortly before the First World War that I have selected for my analysis. *The White Ribbon* employs a retrospective narrative, delivered through the voiceover of a teacher (Christian Friedel, voice by Ernst Jacobi), who recounts his memories of this time in the fictional village of Eichwald and the unsettling events that disrupted the tranquillity of the rural community. The film presents two sets of characters: the adults, who are known only by their titles of The Teacher, The Baron (Ulrich Tukur), The Pastor (Burghart Klaußner), The Doctor (Rainer Bock), and The Midwife (Susanne Lothar); and their children, who play a pivotal role in the unfolding plot. Class and intergenerational relations are central to the narrative, which depicts Prussian obedience and Protestant pietism as cultural forces that shaped a generation of children susceptible to National Socialist ideology. This portrayal highlights the significant influence of societal structures and values on the formation of political ideologies.

Charité (2017-21)

Furthermore, I have selected the first season (2017) of the ZDF serial *Charité* (2017-2021) in my analysis, which is set around 1888 in the eponymous Berlin hospital. *Charité* is notable as the only reimagining in this study set in an era predating the early twentieth century. Directed by Sönke Wortmann and written by Dorothee Schön, *Charité* reimagines the successes and failures of Nobel Prize-winning doctors such as Robert Koch (Justus von Dohnányi), Emil Behring (Matthias Koeberlin), Paul Ehrlich (Christoph Bach) and Rudolph Virchow (Ernst Stötzner), focusing on their efforts to combat infectious diseases like tuberculosis or diphtheria. In the series, the early Wilhelmine era is explored through the perspective of a fictional female protagonist and nurse, Ida Lenze (Alicia von Rittberg). Despite its setting in a period earlier than the main focus of this thesis, I have selected *Charité* as an example of a German production set in the Prussian Kaiserreich. This series provides a vivid depiction of the cultural and socio-political contexts and atmosphere of the German Empire, characterised by monarchism, jingoism, imperialism, and overt antisemitism. This reimagining offers valuable insights into the foundational socio-political attitudes that would later influence developments in early twentieth-century Germany.

In addition to these film and series productions that form the primary focus of my analysis, some minor productions will be incorporated into this study. These include the German series *Unter den Linden – Das Haus Gravenhorst* (2006), produced for the private network Sat1 and created by Christian Pfannenschmidt[11]. I will further refer to the *Titanic* (2012) four-episode mini-series written by *Downton Abbey* creator Julian Fellowes for ITV and the 2015 film *Suffragette*, written by Abi Morgan and directed by Sarah Gavron – a film that depicts the fight for women's suffrage in Britain, led by historical figures Emmeline Pankhurst (Meryl Streep) and Emily Davison (Natalie Press), albeit told through the perspective of a fictional protagonist, Maud Watts (Carey Mulligan).

[11] Set in 1906 in Berlin, the series is recognised as a German remake of the seminal British Upstairs, Downstairs (1971-75), cancelled after thirteen episodes due to lack of viewer interest

2 Theoretical and methodological background

2.1 Current state of research

The existing body of research on history-themed popular culture in Britain and Germany lacks a collaborative focus, despite its potential for intersection. In Britain, film and television productions set in the past are generally viewed as products of the country's heritage industry and the heritage film genre, particularly as they emerged during the late twentieth century. Conversely, in Germany, the discourse surrounding historical representations in popular culture is dominated by portrayals of the National Socialist era, especially in film and television.

The terminology used to describe and label these productions is varied and inconsistently applied. Terms like ‘costume drama,’ ‘costume film,’ or ‘period drama’ are frequently used as umbrella labels for films or series set in both recent and distant pasts. Notably, the German terms ‘Geschichtsfilm’ (engl. historical film) or ‘Erinnerungsfilm’ (engl. memory film), as coined by Astrid Erll and Stephanie Wodianka (2008), suggest a deeper engagement with historical events and memory beyond the temporal setting in the past. In this thesis, I propose the use the term ‘reimagining’ as a comprehensive descriptor for the films and series analysed. The term allows me to forgo a more extensive discourse on the genres of historically themed productions, focusing instead on comparing the British heritage film genre and the German Heimatfilm genre.

Since the 2000s, popular history as a form of mass entertainment has garnered increased scholarly attention. Scholars like Barbara Korte (2009) and Jerome De Groot (2009, 2015, 2016) have contributed significantly to this field, exploring the ways in which history is remade in popular culture. The international success of *Downton Abbey* from 2010 onwards, for instance, has sparked renewed academic interest in the representation of Edwardian society in popular culture.

This interest is reflected in the research of scholars such as Katherine Byrne (2015), James Leggott and Julie Anne Taddeo (2015), James Chapman (2014), Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (2014), and De Groot (2009, 2016). De Groot (2016) has notably argued that the elements of enjoyability and pleasure, which are crucial to the genre's success, have not been sufficiently theorised (cf. De Groot 2016 151). With this thesis, I aim to expand on the role of entertainment and pleasure as sometimes controversial carriers of memory, historical knowledge, and covert political messages

in post-millennial reimaginings of the early twentieth century in Britain and Germany. De Groot explains the contested place of costume drama within British culture:

> Costume drama […] is never just a genre but always a site of contention about memory, national identity, and nostalgia. It is produced by a set of cultural institutions (e.g., Granada, ITV, and BBC) with their own agendas, by writers (Andrew Davies, Julian Fellowes, etc.) with particular biases, and for a set of markets (e.g., Sunday teatime, American Masterpiece presentation, and Chinese export) with particular tastes and desires. Costume drama presents us with a serious canon of fictional production of the past. Often dismissed as something trite, conservative, and dull, costume drama demonstrates to us throughout its history the multiple ways that television might dramatise and enact relationships between the past and the present, illustrate a way of conceptualizing and idealizing the past, and resource the contemporary historical imagination. (De Groot 2016 x-xi)

The costume drama or heritage film genre, and by extension the costume series, thus provides a broad and complex framework for scholarly inquiry into popular historical and cultural memory.

2.1.1 The heritage film and heritage series

Contemporary British reimaginings, such as *Downton Abbey*, must be understood within the context of the British heritage genre, a subgenre of costume film or period drama that encompasses British films and series produced in the late twentieth century. These productions, often created by companies like Merchant Ivory or British broadcasters such as the BBC and ITV, are frequently based on the classic literature of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, the Brontës, or E.M. Forster.

Andrew Higson, in his seminal work on the genre, coined the term "heritage film," positioning it as a byproduct of the conservative Thatcher era in Britain (1993, 1996). James Chapman (2005) agrees, noting that academic discourse surrounding the heritage film or genre is generally centred on the "heritage industry" of the 1980s and the "cultural and political manifestations of Thatcherism" (Chapman, 296) during the genre's heyday in the 1980s and early 1990s. Despite their "innately conservative [...] uncritical view of the past" (ibid.), heritage films have also been praised for providing "a critique of social and sexual repression" (ibid.). Helbig (1999) describes "heritage cinema" as a relatively recent film genre set in bygone eras but distinct from other

historical films by its avoidance of spectacular action or adventure sequences. Moreover, the heritage genre is not dominated by historical events or figures. Instead, it focuses primarily on a romanticised visual reconstruction of the Victorian and Edwardian eras (cf. Helbig 276-277).

Critics of the heritage film argue that it offers a skewed image of the past, presenting a romanticised pre-war idyll that focuses on the upper class and aristocracy while largely ignoring the working class. Portrayals of the latter often clash with the genre's sumptuous and lavish aesthetic, which tends to commodify the past as a lost paradise. Consequently, the costume drama, particularly within the heritage genre, is seen as inherently conservative "in both its content and its aesthetics," distancing itself from contemporary issues through a nostalgic recourse to the past (Chapman 132). The heritage film is characterised by its aesthetic, which can be described as ‘museal’ concerning costume, mise-en-scène, and setting, and ‘picturesque’ in relation to landscape shots. Eckart Voigts-Virchow (2004) has focused on the ‘retrovisional’ potential of the British heritage genre since the 1990s, while Claire Monk (1995) criticises the reduction of the heritage genre to literary adaptations, which she argues "signals a conscious desire on the part of the films' makers to affiliate themselves with 'high' English literary cultural values rather than popular cinematic ones" (Monk 117-118). Monk further questions whether the heritage film is truly a genre or subgenre of costume film or merely an "entity defined by the critical and media discourse" surrounding it (Monk 118), leaving it open to new definitions and interpretations.

The term ‘post-heritage’ has been applied to films and serials set in the past that deviate from the heritage genre's familiar features by incorporating experimental or subversive tropes and stylistic choices. The critical focus has shifted from viewing the heritage film as an inherently conservative and British genre to a more postmodern and deconstructive one, incorporating postcolonial and feminist criticism. Graham Huggan (2001) and Elena Oliete-Aldea (2015) have called attention to the element of British imperialism and colonial history in the so-called Raj Revival of the 1980s and 1990s heritage films, such as *A Passage to India* (1984). The overt use of exoticism and "orientalist modes of representation" in these "Raj productions" (Oliete-Aldea 58) can be seen as both reactionary in their romanticisation of imperialism and progressive in their implicit criticism of colonialism. In this thesis, I also focus on representations of imperialism and engagement with colonial history in British and German contemporary

reimaginings. I examine whether the themes of colonialism and imperialism are included or excluded from the narrative, and if they are reflected critically or as a given part of the historical backdrop.

Adopting a feminist critical approach, scholars like Pam Cook (1996) have pointed out the 'feminine' tropes of the heritage genre, which is evident in the gendered "ambivalence between public and private spheres" (Cook 2). Chapman (2005) also refers to the socio-historical contexts of the heritage film in the 1990s, which emphasised a "narrative of female empowerment" (Chapman 314), linked to the "discourse of 'Girl Power' popularised by the success of the Spice Girls" (ibid.) and the emergence of Third-wave feminism as a defining cultural context for costume productions of the outgoing twentieth century, such as *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) or *Titanic* (1997).

2.1.2 The German memory film and the Heimatfilm

There is no precise equivalent to the British heritage film in German cinema. However, certain German genres, notably the memory film and the Heimatfilm, exhibit parallels to the heritage genre that warrant further examination. Since the 1980s, there has been an increased interest in representations of the recent past in Germany, particularly the early twentieth century and the National Socialist (NS[12]) era. This surge in interest coincided with the heyday of the British heritage genre and reflected a shift in the historical perception of the NS period, following the so-called 'Historikerstreit' (historians' debate). The 1990s saw a notable increase in German film and television productions set during the NS era and World War II, such as Joseph Vilsmaier's *Comedian Harmonists* (1997) or Max Fäberbock's *Aimée and Jaguar* (1999).

Similar to Claire Monk's assertion that the heritage film is less of a distinct genre and more defined by the media discourse surrounding it, Astrid Erll and Stephanie Wodianka (2008) view the German historical or memory film as a social phenomenon. They argue that this genre relates to different film genres and should be understood within its socio-cultural and media contexts (cf. Erll and Wodianka 7). In their view, the memory film is defined not by its content but by what they term pluri-medial processes surrounding its production and distribution (cf. Erll and Wodianka 2). This includes the broader socio-cultural frameworks in which these films are produced and consumed. According to Erll and Wodianka, the German memory film must be considered within

[12] The abbreviation NS is used interchangeably with National Socialist or the term Nazi throughout this thesis.

the complex and morally charged responsibility of representing National Socialism and the Holocaust in German cultural memory (cf. ibid. 9).

This tension between the distinctiveness of NS and Holocaust memory and the moral ambiguity of fictional representations as both commemoration and entertainment is central to my thesis. Though my research for this thesis is not primarily focused on reimagining the NS era in contemporary film and series, the subject of impending National Socialism has emerged as a recurring motif in German reimaginings of the early twentieth century and must therefore be considered within the broader context of popular memory culture in Germany.

With this thesis, I aim to contribute to the research on German historical film and television productions that do not focus exclusively on the NS era but instead showcase its projection and impact on German cultural memory as a whole. In this regard, the German history- or memory film is less comparable to the British heritage film and more aligned with the German Heimatfilm.

The Heimatfilm, a distinctly German film genre, has been one of the most commercially and popularly successful genres, attracting significant scholarly attention since the latter half of the twentieth century. Early studies by scholars like Willi Höfig (1973) and Wolfgang Kichua (1989) critically examined the Heimatfilm, while Jürgen Trimborn (1998) explored the defining features of the genre in the 1950s. Manuela Fiedler (1995) focused on the reactionary and utopian aspects of the Heimatfilm, and more recent research by Johannes von Moltke (2005) and Alexandra Ludewig (2011) has delved into the evolution of Heimat genre over the past century. The scholarly discourse on Heimatfilm has shifted to include the political and historical implications of the genre. For instance, Verena Feistauer (2017) investigated the integration of refugees and displaced people in the post-war Heimatfilm, while Sarah Kordecki (2020) analysed Heimatfilm waves in the post-war and post-unification eras. Notably, discussions surrounding both the British heritage genre and the German Heimatfilm genre often include their opposites – the Anti-Heimatfilm and anti-heritage genres, sometimes termed "dark heritage" or "misery drama" (Byrne, 2015a; De Groot, 2016). This further underlines the connections between the heritage and Heimat genres, which I explore further in this thesis.

2.1.3 Heritage and Heimat genre as hybrid and transferable concepts

The potential kinship or at least likeness between the British heritage film and the German Heimatfilm has been previously suggested by scholars such as Lutz Koepnick (2002, 2004), Alexandra Ludewig (2011), and Johannes von Moltke (2005). In this thesis, I will explore this relationship further, particularly in how these two genres have influenced the foundational structure of contemporary reimaginings such as *Downton Abbey*. Sarah Street (1997, 2009) has noted the transferability of elements and traits from the heritage genre to other genres or subgenres. For example, she highlights the influence of heritage on British romantic comedies set in contemporary times, such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994). This film presents a form of hybrid 'modern heritage':

> The heritage genre has spilled over into representations of Englishness which are not necessarily set in the past. The top British film at the box office in 1995 was *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Mike Newell, 1994) which bears a relationship to the heritage films in several important ways […] it displays a fascination with the upper classes, featuring numerous ceremonies at which they, their clothes and possessions are on full display. Yet in *Four Weddings* there is little sense of the underlying social contradictions and rifts which were suggested in many of the heritage films of the 1980s. (Street 105)

Similarly, Claire Monk (1995) notes the heritage-like qualities of British non-costume films, such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, which she argues "could be classed as heritage films" due to how they "exploit a number of traits and themes familiar from the costume heritage films [...] Moreover, I would argue that they do so in a far more clichéd, unironic, and regressive fashion than many of the costume heritage films do" (Monk 118-119). In this thesis, I will examine these intersections between the British heritage genre and the German Heimatfilm genre that inform the creation of contemporary historical productions.

Contemporary reimaginings, such as *Downton Abbey*, can potentially be related to the German Heimatfilm, a connection I will investigate in detail. According to Jerome De Groot (2016), *Downton Abbey* marks a "historiographic trend away from social history towards soap history" (De Groot 154). However, it is the series' "lack of complexity" that renders it "excellent historical entertainment" (ibid.). De Groot argues that precisely this "hybrid then of 'historical' and entertainment" needs to be more deeply understood (ibid. 155). Therefore, the political and ideological implications of the British heritage

genre and the German Heimatfilm must be considered in light of their power to entertain and, consequently, their influence and reach in popular culture. De Groot's assertion that the "concept of being 'entertained' in various ways is clearly ideologically and culturally coded" (De Groot 152) will be further explored in my analysis of the ideologically and culturally coded content in popular reimaginings.

2.2 Cultural Memory Studies and Popular Cultural Memory

Cultural productions that engage with the past, whether fictional or non-fictional, pertain to cultural memory. Cultural memory studies serve as a foundational framework for understanding the reimaginings analysed in this thesis. Of particular interest is the intersection between cultural memory and popular culture, which is manifested in films, television, and other popular mass media that engage with history and memory. Modern research in cultural memory studies is generally traced back to the work of French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. In *La Mémoire collective* (1950), Halbwachs introduced the theory that societies possess a collective memory, which relies on certain frameworks or *cadres* that situate this memory within a social context. Halbwachs further developed this idea in *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1952), where he emphasised the essential role of social frameworks – such as religious beliefs, communities, and family structures – in the formation and maintenance of collective memory.

Building on Halbwachs' distinction between individual and collective memory, Aleida and Jan Assmann have made significant contributions to the field, particularly with their distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory (1987, 1992, 2006, 2008). Their theory of cultural memory is grounded in the understanding that memory is not only a passive "storage memory" but also encompasses the reactivation of the past and its appropriation as an active "functional memory." This implies that structures of participation play a crucial role in enabling processes of individual or collective re-appropriation (Assmann 26). According to Aleida Assmann, communicative memory relates to oral history, which "relies not on the usually written accounts but exclusively on memories extracted orally from people" (Assmann 37). This form of memory is primarily represented by the contemporary witness, whose recollections typically span no more than approximately eighty years and are often comprised of personal anecdotes. As such, it is categorised as oral history. In my analysis, the figure

of the contemporary witness features prominently as a carrier and embodiment of communicative memory, serving as both a narrative device and a performer of memory in contemporary reimaginings.

2.2.1 Materiality, Spatiality and Memory

In cultural studies, the materiality of memory has become a focal point, with scholars like Richard Terdiman (1993) stressing the physical absence of the past as a trigger for nostalgia. Susan Stewart (1993) further explores the manifestation of memory in objects of longing and nostalgia. Her work on the concept of size, particularly the extremes of the miniature and the gigantic, as manifestations of nostalgic longing, is expanded upon in this thesis through an analysis of these elements in contemporary reimaginings.

Beyond its manifestation in objects or figures, cultural memory is also effectively stored in spaces and sites of memory. For example, the concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), introduced by French historian Pierre Nora in his pioneering work *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984-1992), is integral to active remembrance and commemoration in post-war Europe. According to Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009), sites of memory "provide relatively stable points of reference for individuals and communities recalling a shared past" (Erll and Rigney 1-2). Aleida Assmann concurs, noting that memory places or memorials serve as carriers of cultural memory over extended periods:

> These memorial places transform the communicative memory of the contemporary witnesses into a long-term cultural memory, which explains to the current and future inhabitants of this country their own history.[13] (Assmann 120)

In this thesis, I examine the emplacement of memory in fictional *lieux de mémoire*, such as the grand house in *Downton Abbey* or the ship in *Titanic*. Here, the scale and monumentality of these sites are essential considerations. In his study of urban architecture and memory, Andreas Huyssen (2003) refers to the ambiguity of the monumental, which can be both positively and negatively connoted—promising permanence yet often associated with fascism. Thus, I analyse the representation of the gigantic

[13] Diese Gedenkstätten verwandeln das kommunikative Gedächtnis der Zeitzeugen in ein langfristiges kulturelles Gedächtnis, das die heutigen und zukünftigen Bewohner dieses Landes über ihre eigene Geschichte aufklärt. (Assmann 120)

and the monumental in settings, particularly concerning their depiction of patriarchal power, either reinforced or deconstructed.

2.2.2 Memory as Narrative in Popular Culture

Additionally, I focus on the ‘narrativity’ of memory in popular culture, which refers to the enactment and narration of memory in films and series. In *Acts of Memory* (1999), literary and cultural critic Mieke Bal distinguishes between "unreflected habitual memories" and "narrative memories," which are "affectively colored" (Bal viii). My thesis refers to different moods of reimagining the past, which can positively or negatively affect viewers. This expands on Bal's understanding of "varying moods and specific colorings of memory" (Bal xi):

> Nostalgia’ is certainly one of these. This mood has often been criticized as unproductive, escapist, and sentimental. It is considered regressive, romanticizing, the temporal equivalent of tourism and the search for the picturesque. It has also been conceived as longing for an idyllic past that never was. (Bal xi)

Bal’s concept of "narrative (and narratable) memory" (Bal viii) also extends to traumatic memory, which she argues "entails a more problematic relationship to narrative" (ibid.). In this thesis, the figure of the contemporary witness and their narration of memory in *Titanic*, *Das Adlon*, or *The Village* can be examined within the context of traumatic memory as narrated memory, highlighting the potential challenges of representing such memories in popular culture.

Popular cultural productions as carriers of cultural memory have received increased scholarly attention in recent years. This includes Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney's (2009) work on cultural memory studies, particularly their exploration of premediation and remediation in contemporary media, especially audiovisual productions. As mentioned in Chapter 2.1, Erll and Stephanie Wodianka's (2008) study of the memory film and the pluri-medial constellations – such as supplementary materials, media and press echo, critical acclaim, or educational materials – surrounding it is also significant. These must now be expanded to include the influence of social media and the emergence of seriality and streaming networks as the most influential distributors of memory in popular culture, surpassing traditional media like the novel and film.

2.2.3 Performance and Embodiment of Memory

Film and television productions do more than narrate the past – they enact and perform it, often through the embodiment of memory by actors and actresses. The notion of 'embodied memory' has been explored by Paul Connerton (1989) in his work on the body as a container or carrier of memory and physical activity as a performance of memory. More recently, in their introduction to *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (2013), Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik discuss the connection between performance, mediation, and spatiality in popular cultural memory (cf. Plate and Smelik 2). They emphasise performative acts of memory and understand memory as something that can be performed, acted out, and embodied in popular culture (cf. ibid. 5). Their concept of memory as an active element in popular culture forms a key part of my analysis of characters and figures who explicitly and implicitly 'perform memory' in British and German reimaginings. This includes the reimagining of fictional contemporary witnesses. As figures of oral history and communicative memory, contemporary witnesses have an iconic place in the cultural memory of the twentieth century.

Historians and critics like Lutz Niethammer (1980), Martin Sabrow (2012), Harald Welzer (2002, 2005, 2012), and Heidemarie Uhl (2002) have examined the contemporary witness in oral history, noting their role as both revered and contentious figures. For example, Rainer Gries (2012) regards the contemporary witness as a professional actor, while Judith Keilbach (2012) observes the media dynamics surrounding this figure. In my analysis, the fictional contemporary witness is central to understanding how memory is performed in film and serial productions. These characters often unite the performance of memory with its embodiment, functioning as both narrative devices and storytellers.

The image of the fictional contemporary witness as a storyteller is analysed more closely in this thesis, particularly regarding the controversy surrounding the contemporary witness as an entertainer rather than a serious carrier of often traumatic memory. For instance, Erll and Wodianka (2008) question whether the memory film "is allowed to or must attempt to imitate the contemporary witness and their specific memory competences" or whether it "should present remembrance as something experienced and 'to be experienced' through film?" (Erll and Wodianka 10). This encapsulates the difficulty of popular cultural reimaginings of NS history and the Holocaust, as these productions carry a moral obligation that extends to the reimagining of contemporary witnesses.

2.3 Underlying content and subtextual coding

In my analysis of the narrative content of films and series, I focus primarily on underlying content and subtextual codes found in language, imagery and characterisation that relate to secondary themes hidden in the narrative. I consider the latent presence of contemporary politics and cultural concepts in reimaginings that are not immediately evident but covert and implicit, connoted and coded. The term ‘codes’ is largely used in fields of linguistics and semiotics to refer to the ordering of signs and sets of cultural conventions in human communication. Used in spoken and textual communication, codes are also parts of narratives and work as “organizing principles and assumptions underlying a text” (Murfin and Ray 63). Essentially, codes belong to an agreed-upon framework of interpretation between addressers and addressees who know how to encode and decode their messages. When I refer to something as coded or -coded, it is to be understood as a form of connotation situated in the underlying and latent content. For example, imagery or characters may be ‘coded’ as something implying a political or ideological secondary layer of meaning.

2.3.1 Cultural and media discourse on coding

Although my analysis of codes and character coding primarily addresses the underlying and implicit coding of characters and spaces, the function of codes and their interpretation has long been a subject of linguistic and literary studies. Foundational work in linguistics and semiotics by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, along with Roman Jakobson's pioneering work on structural linguistics and the functions of language, laid the groundwork for understanding codes in everyday communication and cultural productions. For example, structuralist critics like Umberto Eco (1979) expanded on the importance of coding in their theories of semiotics as applied to literary texts. In *S/Z* (1970), Roland Barthes introduced five principal codes for literary textual analysis, distinguishing between texts in which the reader plays an active role in the creative process and those that are more restricted in their interpretation (cf. Barthes 1987). Barthes' perception of codes in literary texts has led to an understanding of these texts as being more open to interpretation.

For my analysis, I do not focus on typological differentiations between different codes, such as logical or aesthetic codes. Instead, I consider how cultural and literary critics of the twentieth century have emphasised the significance of codes in shaping

narrative structures and influencing interpretation. Claude Lévi-Strauss, for instance, pointed out that "codes are grounded in the binary oppositions that permeate Western discourse, including literary works" (Murfin and Ray 64). According to Lévi-Strauss, these codes shape the structure of plots, character struggles, and symbolic patterns in literary texts, thereby influencing our interpretation of these works. Expanding on this, Jacques Derrida suggested that the dichotomies forming binary oppositions in Western discourse are not merely oppositions but also valuative hierarchies, where one component is viewed as positive or superior, while the other is considered negative or inferior (cf. Murfin and Ray 64). For example, in the opposition between ‘active’ and ‘passive,’ ‘active’ is typically regarded as the more positive term.

In this thesis, I apply these ideas to spatial dichotomies such as inside/outside and upstairs/downstairs, which are also connoted and coded as a pleasant *locus amoenus* or an unpleasant *locus terribilis*. By examining overt and covert subversions of these binary oppositions, I explore potential deconstructive elements that underlie the reimaginings analysed in this thesis. According to Murfin and Ray:

> Codes are thus also used in the deconstruction of Western discourse on gender, race and class. Cultural critics refer to codes in the way in which characters of a particular gender, race or class are referred to and characterized, reflecting “racist and sexist attitudes in cultural ‘code.’” (Murfin and Ray 64)

In recent media discourse surrounding popular cultural productions, the concept of ‘coding’ has been particularly relevant in discussions of representation. In this thesis, I apply this concept to discuss the appearance of race coding in contemporary reimaginings: characters that are presented with traits or attributes that are coded as ethically or racially divergent from the otherwise predominantly white Western characters. This includes the racialisation of Jewish and Irish people, as well as the coding of relationships and romance narratives as interracial.

Coded content in fiction, as analysed in this thesis, often pertains to underlying political structures, including the representation of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Mark Arenhövel’s research on politics in popular culture emphasises the covert and implicit nature of political content in contemporary series:

> It is, however, those series and serial formats which do not appear to be explicitly political in which current issues regarding leadership, law and order, democracy and dictatorship as well as the appearance of the Other emerge as relevant themes.[14] (cf. Arenhövel 23).

In this thesis, I analyse how political coding in film and serial productions can reflect both progressive, liberal, and decentring ideologies in some cases, while reinforcing conservative and right-wing populist ideologies in others.

2.3.2 Underlying populism and political coding

The idea that mass and popular culture products serve as carriers of populism and political propaganda is not new. However, as political and populism scholar Hans-Georg Betz points out, there has been a notable resurgence of populism as "a byproduct of the inevitable rise of popular culture to become the dominant culture in recent decades, as it is propagated on television, for instance" (Betz 129). This proposed nexus between populism and popular culture, particularly television culture, can be seen as a continuation of the relationship between propaganda and film, which proved to be a powerful agent throughout the twentieth century due to its widespread popularity and reach.

According to Cull et al., any popular film with a large audience has the potential to be propagandist, with the ability to "shape attitudes and dictate appropriate behavior or modes of attire" (Cull et al. 130), as well as political and ideological ideas. Notably, National Socialist propaganda films were rarely overt and explicit in their ideological and political messaging:

> Of the 1,097 feature films produced, only about one sixth were overtly propagandistic, with direct political content. […] Of the entire production of feature films, half were either love stories or comedies, and a quarter were dramatic films like crime thrillers or musicals. Yet all went through the precensorship process and all were associated with the National Socialist ideology in that they were produced and performed in accordance with the propagandistic aims of the period. […] This strategy illustrates Goebbels's desire to mix entertainment with propaganda. He encouraged the production of feature films that reflected the ambience of National Socialism instead of loudly proclaiming its

[14] Aber gerade in jenen Serienformaten, die auf den ersten Blick so gar nicht politisch erscheinen mögen, werden gegenwartsrelevante Fragen verhandelt wie die nach der Rolle und Bedeutung der Regierung, der Geltung von Recht und Verfassung, dem Umgang mit dem Anderen, der Schwelle zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur und der Transformation von Geschlechtlichkeit. (Arenhövel 23)

> ideology. The results of such a *Filmpolitik* were a monopolistic system of control and organization that stressed profits, increased audience attendance, and resulted in an extremely high standard of technical proficiency. In the final analysis, however, it contributed little stylistically to the history of the cinema. (Cull et al. 130-132)

The fact that these popular and entertaining films from the National Socialist era frequently served as blueprints for the German Heimatfilm of the 1950s suggests that the underlying ideology propagated in NS films has been transferred onto the Heimatfilm genre. This connection is expanded upon in this thesis, particularly regarding the parallels between the British heritage genre and the German Heimatfilm.

Mark Arenhövel argues that fictional narratives in popular culture increasingly form part of political communication, contributing to the framing and interpretation of current events and political issues (cf. Arenhövel 14). Contemporary series and serial productions are, according to Arenhövel, rife with social criticism and politically relevant themes (cf. ibid. 23). This suggests that even if a television series does not directly relate to politics, it still contributes to the frameworks through which we understand and discuss politics. As Arenhövel points out, the content of politics, values, goods, ideas, and ideologies is co-created by the media, which have a significant influence on politics (cf. ibid. 16). Film and television productions, Arenhövel argues, have the power to present social phenomena, practices, and institutions – essentially anything created by society – as natural and inevitable (cf. ibid. 11), including, for example, the propagation of conservative values or a lack of diversity. Arenhövel further emphasises that even ostensibly non-political television series can still shape the frameworks through which we engage with politics:

> Such a content- and narrative analysis of television series would thereby have to interpret which sections of 'social reality' are reflected and which ones are covered and hidden under the surface and belong to the invisible and covert themes of the production.[15] (Arenhövel 9)

The representation of daily life, social structures, and power relations in reimaginings of the past, such as *Downton Abbey*, is as infused with covert and implicit politics as narratives that explicitly address these issues. It could be argued that covertly political narratives may be more effective and impactful by addressing an ostensibly neutral,

[15] Eine solche inhaltlich-narrative Analyse von Fernsehserien hätte also immer zu interpretieren, welche Ausschnitte der „sozialen Wirklichkeit" widergespiegelt werden und welche verhüllt und verborgen unter der Oberfläche gleichsam unsichtbar mitthematisiert werden. (Arenhövel 9)

apolitical audience, or rather one that is not aware of being exposed to underlying political messages. In their imagological work on national images in children's literature, a popular literary genre, Emer O'Sullivan and Andrea Immel highlight the importance of codes in representation:

> The participants within any given culture must, if they are to communicate successfully with one another, speak the same language in the widest sense of that meaning; but they must also be able to use the same linguistic codes and to decode visual images in more or less the same manner. Representation is therefore closely tied to both identity and knowledge. (O'Sullivan and Immel 7)

In popular depictions of nations, for example in picture books, such visual cues and codes of culture encompass "name, language, dress [...] food and drink [...] architectural icons [...] manufactured items [...] religious and mythical elements [...] topography [...] characters from fairy tales [or] children's books [...] and occupation" (O'Sullivan and Immel 13). In her work on comparative children's literature, O'Sullivan identifies such "unique characteristics" as a "type of visual shorthand" (O'Sullivan 2005 61) that encourages further associations with national identities but also stereotypes, such as "camel for Arabians, hookah for Turks, tea drinking for the Chinese" (ibid.). In this thesis, my analysis of character coding and stereotypes explores how representation is often conveyed through the reduction of complex identities to a set of easily recognisable codes in contemporary reimaginings.

2.4 Spatial- and topological analysis

As part of my analysis of underlying themes of political import in contemporary reimaginings, I have selected the theme of spatiality and topology as a focal point. In his analysis of the heritage film, Andrew Higson discusses the significance of landscape within the genre, identifying several key functions:

> Firstly, landscapes can constitute a narrative space, that is, a space for the enactment of the drama, a space in which narrative actions occur. This drifts imperceptibly into the narrative use of landscapes as places — specific places, that is, at the level of the fiction, which can be constructed in the studio or on location. But there is a second more specific use of landscape images to signify real historical places, lending the narrative a sense of realism if the spectator 'recognizes' these places. […] A third function for landscapes in narrative films is as a metaphor for the state of mind of a particular

> character within the narrative, very much within the romantic tradition. Finally, landscapes can function as spectacle, as images to be looked at, interesting in themselves as images. (Higson 1987 8)

Beyond its metaphorical function, the narrative space of the heritage film is often attributed with the task of creating a realistic, recognisable, yet pleasurable space for the enactment of the past. In my analysis of narrative spaces in reimaginings, I focus on the symbolic dimension of space and its underlying political implications.

2.4.1 The Spatial Turn

The so-called 'spatial turn,' sometimes referred to as the 'topological turn,' represents a movement and paradigm shift in the humanities towards space as a critical category of analysis. This shift is often seen as a simultaneous turn away from the modernist focus on time, as "the metaphor of time as a smoothly flowing river and the evolutionary theory of history as progressively moving from barbarism towards civilization could not be maintained in the aftermath of concentration camps and atomic bombs" (Tally 13). The widespread displacement and redrawing of territorial boundaries in the aftermath of World War II further reinforced the need to focus on space and spatial anxieties. Social changes in the twentieth century also enforced focus and attention on "spatial organization within societies, including the purported divisions between rural and urban" (ibid. 14) and the gradual blurring and deconstruction of class, gender, and racial boundaries in such spaces – which I examine more closely in my analysis.

Henri Lefebvre's work on *The Production of Space* (1974) significantly influenced the spatial turn from the 1970s onwards. Lefebvre distinguished between natural and social spaces, which are socially produced, and he linked these different modes of space to everyday practices, perceptions, and representations of space (cf. Lefebvre 1974). In *The Poetics of Space* (1958), French philosopher Gaston Bachelard explored the relationship between the space of the house and memory, linking architectural spaces to psychological states (cf. Moran 30). Bachelard's phenomenological approach to architecture focuses on the emotional and personal perception of architectural space in both reality and literary works. In this thesis, I reference Bachelard's analysis of different spaces within the house, such as the cellar or attic, as metaphorical manifestations of psychological states. I explore how these marginal spaces of the house are used as metaphors for psychological repression and trauma, as well as politicised spaces that reflect class and gender relations.

In my analysis, I focus on settings as prominent factors that generate atmosphere and inspire emotions, imbuing the spaces of the past with positive and negative qualities. At a fundamental level, I distinguish between 'good place' and 'bad place,' inscribed in the literary topoi of *locus amoenus* (pleasant place) and *locus terribilis* (terrifying place). Idyllic or arcadian places, such as Downton Abbey,[16] are often connoted as utopian, while Michel Foucault's concept of the heterotopia, as defined in *Of Other Places* (1986), denotes a place of 'crisis' and transformation that underlies many prominent settings in contemporary reimaginings analysed in this thesis.

[16] When referring to the title of the series, *Downton Abbey* will be italicised, whereas reference to the fictional place and building, the name Downton Abbey will not be italicised.

3 The Good, the Bad and the Heterotopic Place: settings and conceptualisations of the past as *locus amoenus* and *locus terribilis*

One primary objective of this thesis is to explore the potential effects and emotional responses that contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century might evoke in viewers of productions such as *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015) and *Babylon Berlin* (2017-). To achieve this, key elements of literary analysis and film analysis, such as setting, tone and atmosphere, will be examined and compared. While I will address the impact of manifest features like lighting, music or mise-en-scène – elements consciously employed to evoke a specific atmosphere – my main focus is on stylistic choices and cultural concepts within these reimaginings. These elements act as conduits to explore the underlying cultural, ideological, and political frameworks that, although latent, significantly influence viewers' perceptions of heritage productions.

This analysis aims to uncover these subtle layers, which may not be immediately apparent to consumers. In the following chapter, settings will be analysed as a prominent factor in generating atmosphere and evoking emotions within audio-visual productions, thereby imbuing the reimagined past with both positive and negative qualities. Contemporary reimaginings and their settings are examined as they navigate the binary of 'good place' and 'bad place', often inscribed within cultural and literary frameworks such as heaven and hell, utopia and dystopia, or *locus amoenus* and *locus terribilis*. Additionally, Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia is explored as a recurring motif that accentuates the theme of crisis, serving as a critical element in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century in Britain and Germany.

3.1 The past reimagined as a utopian dreamscape

The ITV television series *Downton Abbey* invites comparison to the seminal *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1971-1975), as both series are set in aristocratic households at the beginning of the twentieth century and focus on the lives of upper-class masters and their servants. However, there is a crucial difference between the two productions: the setting. The urban setting of *Upstairs, Downstairs'* London townhouse at No. 165 Eaton Place stands in contrast to the imposing country house of *Downton Abbey,* with its extensive estate and adjacent village. *Downton Abbey* transports the premise of *Up-*

stairs, Downstairs from the confined space of the townhouse to the bucolic and pastoral landscape of rural Yorkshire. *Downton Abbey* follows the tradition of literary works and their adaptations centred around a fictional country house, often inspired by real heritage sites such as Chatsworth or Blenheim. Additionally, the picturesque backdrop of the English countryside surrounding the series' primary shooting location, Highclere Castle, facilitates the reimagining of the archetypal 'Edwardian summer.' As identified by Katherine Byrne, this period refers to the first years of the twentieth century, often depicted as "warm, sunlit and peaceful" (Byrne 2015a 15–16), an image frequently reiterated in British popular cultural memory.

3.1.1 The 'Good' Place: *Downton Abbey* as utopian fantasy and *locus amoenus*

Written by Julian Fellowes, *Downton Abbey* reimagines the proverbial 'good place' as a country estate, characterised by its inhabitants. The series represents a sense of inherent goodness, beauty, and harmony, which is reinforced by both the material setting and the harmonious interpersonal relationships between the classes throughout the series. This suggests an overarching goodness that permeates both the exterior and interior aspects of the estate.

In the first episode, the place Downton Abbey is introduced to viewers through an aesthetically pleasing wide shot of the country house and its surrounding landscape, bathed in the early morning sunlight. The strategic use of advantageous natural lighting showcases the house at its most attractive. Simultaneously, the symbolic associations of morning light and sunrise contribute to creating an overwhelmingly positive atmosphere of optimism and elation,[17] effectively setting the tone for the series. The idyllic morning atmosphere with the rising sun in episode 1.01 of *Downton Abbey* subtly evokes the phrase 'the sun never sets on the British Empire'. Although never explicitly addressed, the British Empire, as an institution, is symbolically emplaced in the house of Downton Abbey, representing a bastion of British traditionalism, power and dominion that endures even beyond the era of imperialism. This sense of grandeur

[17] The impact of this first impression of the series' setting was so profound that the *Downton Abbey* (2019) feature film reintroduces the house in an almost identical shot. The camera follows the journey of a letter being dispatched toward Downton Abbey, passing through shots of the English landscape and culminating in a wide shot of the house emerging from behind a green hill, bathed in the soft morning sunlight that grows brighter and more pronounced as the camera approaches. In this scene, the picturesque setting of the English countryside is given even more prominence than in the pilot episode of the series, with the stunning effect of the first introduction to the house being repeated and amplified for the cinema audience.

is reinforced by the rousing *Downton Abbey Suite* by John Lunn, which reaches a climax during the first wide shot of the house.

The introduction of Downton Abbey as a beautiful and pleasant place mirrors the portrayal of the ocean liner R.M.S. Titanic in James Cameron's 1997 film *Titanic* on the morning of its maiden voyage. Announced as "the ship of dreams" by the voice-over narrator, the film transitions from actual footage of the shipwreck to a visually stunning wide shot of the vessel at the quays of Southampton in 1912. The combination of the upbeat and rousing music theme *Southampton*, composed by James Horner, with the image of the magnificent ship illuminated by bright morning sunlight,[18] enhances the intensely positive atmosphere of optimism and bustling activity leading up to the maiden voyage of the ship.

As previously noted, the rural setting distinguishes *Downton Abbey* from similar productions such as *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1971-1975, 2010-2012) or *Mr. Selfridge* (2013-2016), which are set in the urban environment of London. In contrast, *Downton Abbey* is evocative of the pastoral, embodying the literary and cultural concept of the *locus amoenus*. This setting is a popular feature in the British heritage genre, notably in adaptations of Jane Austen's novels or Thomas Hardy's works, such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (2008), and more recently *Far from the Madding Crowd* (2015), which heavily leans into the novel's pastoral theme.

According to Terry Gifford, the "Pastoral is essentially a discourse of retreat which may [represent] either simply escape from the complexities of the city, the court, the present, 'our manners', or explore them" (Gifford 56). Katherine Byrne notes that the pastoral setting of heritage films and literary adaptations "perpetuate the usual idea of the perpetual Edwardian summer, with England portrayed as a sunny and leafy idyll" (Byrne 2015a 31). *Downton Abbey,* in a rather self-referential manner, consistently presents both the pastoral idyll and the 'Edwardian summer' throughout the series, exemplified in a parade of flower shows (1.05), garden parties (1.07), cricket matches (3.08) and church bazaars (4.08). The mythicised 'Edwardian summer' serves as a

[18] The effect of lighting, particularly the use of sunlight to create a positive atmosphere in *Downton Abbey*, becomes more pronounced when compared with Julian Fellowes's earlier feature film *Gosford Park* (2001), which precedes *Downton Abbey* by nearly a decade. Unlike *Downton Abbey*, *Gosford Park* evokes its sense of space through "environmental conditions such as wind, rain, and snow" (Spadoni 59) from the very beginning, as the film opens on a grey morning with copious rainfall. The house, *Gosford Park*, is thus introduced in a sombre, even gloomy atmosphere that is also stereotypically 'British'. This difference in atmosphere and tone already marks a clear distinction between *Downton Abbey* and its presumed 'prototype', *Gosford Park*.

twentieth-century reiteration of the *locus amoenus* trope, further defined by Richard Thomas and Jan Ziolkowski as follows:

> The collocation locus amoenus 'beautiful setting' (plural loca amoena) is first attested in Cicero, who uses it both in an aesthetically positive and ethically neutral sense, simply to refer to pleasant and salubrious surroundings in which to spend time […] (Thomas and Ziolkowski 1)

The *locus amoenus* or 'good place' is defined aesthetically as pleasant to behold and ideal as a location for leisure and pleasure. In mythology, the *locus amoenus* is often envisioned as the setting for deities and demi-gods rather than mortals (cf. Haß 1998). Similarly, in *Downton Abbey* and other heritage productions, the *locus amoenus* serves as a pleasant retreat for the upper classes, rather than representing a 'good place' for the working classes. It is characterised as a place of idleness and leisure, rather than labour and industry, aligning it with the upper-class elite and an idealised nature, distanced from the industrious clamour of the city.

Downton Abbey's reimagining of the *locus amoenus* as an early twenty-first-century British heritage dreamscape suggests a connection with other mythical places like Arcadia or Elysium. Nils Jablonski points out a temporal distinction between these imagined places, noting that the past is seen as Arcadian while the future is envisioned as Elysian (cf. Jablonski 436). By this definition, *Downton Abbey*'s reimagined 'good place' is depicted as an Arcadian dreamscape set in an idealised past.

Terry Gifford further observes that "nostalgia is an essential element of Arcadia," yet he also notes that "the evocation of a past Golden Age has implications for the present" (Gifford 46). In this context, the perpetual depiction of the 'Edwardian summer' as an Arcadian 'Golden Age' in *Downton Abbey* reflects contemporary anxieties[19] and desires projected onto the past. This reimagining functions not only as a form of escapism but also as a commentary on the present, suggesting a longing for what is perceived as a simpler or more noble time.

The term 'good place' often refers to mythical and religious conceptions of the afterlife, such as heaven or paradise. As Gifford notes, the biblical garden Eden is "the

[19] Thematically, the Latin phrase "Et in Arcadia Ego" also echoes the ongoing motif of the *memento mori* that runs throughout *Downton Abbey*. Characters frequently reflect on the fleeting nature of life and the inevitability of death, as seen in quotes like, "In the midst of life, we are in death" (*Downton Abbey*, 1.03) and "Life is short, death is sure. That is all we know." (*Downton Abbey*, 6.05)

original Arcadia of Christian culture" (Gifford 43), situating *Downton Abbey*'s association with mythical 'good places' like the *locus amoenus* or Arcadia within the series' underlying Christian themes. This is further underscored by the series' choice of setting: Downton *Abbey*, rather than, for example, *Downton Castle*, *Downton Manor*, or *Downton Hall*. The use of 'Abbey' in the title imbues the setting with a religious background and clerical history akin to real converted country houses like Calke Abbey[20] or Flaxley Abbey,[21] which were originally built as Augustinian and Cistercian monasteries.

Highclere Castle in Hampshire, the filming location for the series, has undergone several refurbishments, with a final design that is distinctly manorial rather than clerical. *Downton Abbey* presents the 'look' of a castle – grand and representative. Yet, the name 'Abbey' suggests that the private estate is built on consecrated ground, despite the temporal gap between its clerical use and its status as a stately home. Although the building's history is only explicitly addressed later in the series, the name 'Abbey' not only attributes a quality of holiness and sacrality to the main setting but also emphasises the theme of spatiality, interiority, and enclosure, which will be further discussed in this thesis. The history of the house is not explored until the series' final season, in episode 6.06, when the house is opened to the public. Lady Grantham explains the architecture of the edifice, revealing more about its historical and architectural significance:

> Cora, Countess of Grantham: No, the third earl built it. Well, he didn't really build it so much as envelop it because this room is originally medieval. It was the monks' refectory of an abbey that King Henry sold after the dissolution of the monasteries. (*Downton Abbey* 6.06)

The word 'envelop' is particularly interesting here, as it suggests that the clerical, yet eponymous part of Downton Abbey remains the core of the house, while a secular casing or shell has been constructed around it. Lady Edith Crawley explains to visitors that this secular structure was designed by the architect Sir Charles Barry, who also completed the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. While this detail is true for the filming location, Highclere Castle, it introduces an additional layer of meaning to the

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20 "Calke Abbey stands on the site of a medieval religious house. People first came to live at Calke in the 12th century as part of a small religious community, attracted by the secluded forest and good water supply." (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/calke-abbey/features/the-history-of-calke-abbey)

21 "The Cistercian abbey of Flaxley (or the Abbey of Dean) was founded c 1150 by Roger, Earl of Hereford. Tradition states that it marked the spot where his father Miles of Gloucester was killed hunting in 1143. Several medieval kings stayed here while hunting in the Forest of Dean. The abbey was dissolved in 1536." (https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000763)

fictional house. The connection between Downton Abbey and the Houses of Parliament is emphasised, presenting Downton as a sort of 'sibling' to these emblematic buildings. This kinship imbues the grand house with an aura of political significance, explicitly linking it to the British houses of government and political power.

Downton Abbey is thus concentrically layered: with religious power and medieval English culture at its core, and the secular power of the British political establishment 'enveloping' and enclosing it. In this context, 'The Abbey' is effectively associated with what Smaranda Spanu describes as the "final formula of sacred space," the monastery cloister (Spanu 214):

> The ordering of the monastic space, deeply imprinted into the practice-dictated spatial ordering of the built object […] Moreover, we also have the utopian encoding […] with the monastery as a Jerusalem, an Eden and a sanctuary, as well as the materialization of an ideal ordering with a modelling objective of spiritual salvation and redemption of society's sins. (Spanu 215)

Downton Abbey's underlying Christian theme contributes to the overall impression of the setting not just as an aesthetically pleasing place or *locus amoenus*, but also as a 'sanctuary' – a site that is inherently safe, 'good' and morally superior, by virtue of reclaiming and occupying the formerly sacred sphere of the monastery or 'Abbey' as indicated by its name. *Downton Abbey* has been noted for its reimagining of a morally superior and utopian depiction of a world where all classes coexist in harmony, contentment, mutual respect and affection (cf. Byrne 2015a; Cornelson 2013). While it is evident that the aristocratic Crawley family and their servants are not equals within the rigid Edwardian class system, *Downton Abbey* promotes the notion that servants are treated as 'equals' by their masters – that is, with the same respect, affection, and care that they would extend towards their social peers.

In doing so, Byrne argues, "[t]he drama validates and sanitises class inequality by framing it in terms of mutual support and even love" (Byrne 2015a, 75). Financial dependence aside, the series implies that the loyalty of servants in *Downton Abbey* is rooted in a deep sense of duty and respect for their noble masters. The Crawley family is presented as model employers who appreciate their servants' work, regard them as individuals, and offer them care and protection. This symbiotic relationship between masters and servants is idealised to a near-fantastical degree, portraying a utopian vision of a perfect society that never existed. As Foucault states:

> Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. (Foucault 24)

Though unrealistic, *Downton Abbey*'s portrayal as a social utopia set in the past has become one of its defining traits, conveying a sense of unity and harmony between the classes that deliberately overlooks historical accuracy. This depiction of emphatic harmony between servants and masters is essentially a form of hegemony. As John Storey clarifies, hegemony does not imply a society of consensus devoid of conflict:

> What the concept is meant to suggest is a society in which conflict is contained and channelled into ideologically safe harbours. That is, hegemony is maintained (and must be continually maintained: it is an ongoing process) by dominant groups and classes 'negotiating' with, and making concessions to, subordinate groups and classes. (Storey 80)

The maintenance of this utopian harmony in *Downton Abbey* hinges on an unspoken understanding between the ruling class (the Crawley family) and their subordinates (the servants). The servants refrain from voicing complaints or engaging in conflict with their employers not only out of duty and loyalty but also due to the ongoing concessions and gestures of goodwill extended by the masters. While this dynamic promotes peaceful coexistence, it subtly underscores the power imbalances and managed relations that are essential to sustaining the apparent hegemony.

According to Byrne, "It is this that is most problematically conservative about Downton: its portrayal of a status quo that is successful under the loving, paternalistic eye of the patriarch." (Byrne 2015b 179). As representatives of the era's working class, the servants in *Downton Abbey* enjoy a privileged existence under the roof and protective powers of the masters. This is exemplified in episode 1.02 when the butler Charles Carson (Jim Carter) is blackmailed by a former associate, who threatens to reveal his past occupation as a Vaudeville artist. Instead of dismissing the butler, Lord Grantham (Hugh Bonneville) pays off the blackmailer and threatens him with imprisonment should he further harass his employee. The Earl of Grantham uses his patriarchal power to protect Carson and accepts the servants' embarrassing past with affection and empathy: "My dear fellow, we all have chapters we would rather keep unpublished" (*Downton Abbey* 1.02).

The protective powers of Lord Grantham are similarly invoked on other occasions throughout the series. For instance, when his valet, John Bates (Brendan Coyle), is charged with murder in episode 2.08, the earl employs his lawyer to assist Bates and even appears as a character witness in court (*Downton Abbey* 2.08), despite the potential risk to his own reputation. This characterisation of the benevolent, protective aristocrat reinforces a conservative narrative of class relations, where the upper class is depicted as a benign, guiding force for the lower classes. This subtly perpetuates traditional class dynamics under the guise of paternal care and protection.

Furthermore, *Downton Abbey* consistently reassures viewers that servants will be provided with care and comfort by their masters in case of injury or medical ailments. For example, when the cook, Beryl Patmore (Lesley Nicol), is diagnosed with a cataract in episode 1.07, Lord Grantham announces that she will be sent to an eye specialist in London at his cost and even reside with the Earl's sister in Eaton Square (*Downton Abbey* 1.07). This theme is revisited in the third season when the housekeeper, Elsie Hughes (Phyllis Logan), is diagnosed with suspected breast cancer. In this instance, it is Lady Grantham who declares:

> That if you are ill, you are welcome here for as long as you want to stay. Lady Sybil will help us find a suitable nurse. […] I don't want you to have any concerns about where you'll go, or who'll look after you, because the answer is here, and we will. (*Downton Abbey* 3.02)

This consistent pattern of benevolent care – which reinforces the show's reimagining of the aristocratic family as not only employers but also as guardians and caretakers of their staff – might appear sentimental and heartwarming but glosses over the harsh realities of poor working conditions faced by servants and other working-class individuals at the beginning of the twentieth century. The servants in *Downton Abbey* are effectively provided with comprehensive healthcare and legal protection by their employers, which portrays them as privileged even by today's standards. By propagating the image of benevolent and charitable upper-class employers, the series suggests that:

> [i]n the Downton world, there is no need for an organised, external welfare state: the house and its owners will provide and care for their staff, in ways which are a significant departure from the laissez-faire legacy of the New Poor Law which had in actuality controlled British provision until this point. Paternalism, loyalty and love are more crucial than any insurance […] (Byrne 2015a 77)

This theme is further explored during the First World War arc in the second series when the young footman William Mason (Thomas Howes) is fatally injured. Lord Grantham uses his influence to arrange William's return to Downton Abbey, now serving as a convalescent home for officers only (series 2). After an 'urgent wedding' to his fiancée, Daisy Robinson (Sophie McShera), William Mason dies in an 'upstairs' bed. While the protective powers of the Crawleys may not have saved the life of the loyal footman, they enabled a privileged and more comfortable death, compared to what other soldiers of his generation might have experienced. This portrayal reinforces the series' depiction of a paternalistic system where the aristocracy takes care of their own, thereby mitigating the harsher realities of the era.

In exchange for their acts of kindness and generosity, the Crawleys receive hard-working, slavishly loyal servants who obey their orders and agree with their values and moral code. The presence of antagonistic servants like footman Thomas Barrow (Rob James-Collier) and Sarah O'Brien (Siobhan Finneran), the scheming lady's maid, accentuates this dynamic by contrast. These characters serve as exceptions and foils to the 'good' servant characters such as Carson, Bates and Anna Smith (Joanne Froggatt). As the designated 'bad' servants, O'Brien and Thomas betray the trust and confidence of their employers, who frequently consult their servants on various issues and entrust them with family secrets. This display of trust casts the aristocratic masters in a naïve and vulnerable light, as they unwittingly empower disloyal servants with the means to harm them.

The symbiotic bond of mutual trust and care between masters and servants can also be subverted into a destructive force across the class divide. For instance, in episode 1.07, the lady's maid O'Brien, suspecting that her mistress intends to replace her, fears that she might "destroy" her with a "bad reference" (*Downton Abbey* 1.07). Angered by what she perceives as disloyalty from her mistress, she orchestrates an accident leading to Lady Grantham's miscarriage (1.07). Byrne notes that "O'Brien here reveals the power servants wield: their subservient position is potentially very subversive because those in 'authority' are so dependent upon them" (Byrne 2015a 78). This incident suggests a type of 'social contract' between servants and masters that demands loyalty from both sides. While servants and masters possess the power to potentially harm or even destroy each other, whether through a "bad reference," the betrayal of a secret, or actual physical harm, as seen in the case of O'Brien and Lady

Grantham, any harm to the noble family ultimately impacts the servants who rely on the family's prosperity for their own livelihood.

3.1.2 A World in Order: sanitising the early twentieth century

Regarding the success of *Downton Abbey*, Jesseca Cornelson notes, "the incongruity of the popularity of a lavish historical drama that romanticises a period of sharp class distinctions and gross wealth inequality given the current environment of economic and social unease" (Cornelson 166) since the financial crisis of 2008. Yet, it appears that it is precisely this depiction of a perfectly 'ordered' society with steep hierarchies "where everyone knows their place" (Byrne 2015b 178) that attracts viewers. *Downton Abbey* showcases a minutely structured lifestyle characterised by strict rules and rituals that are meticulously observed, creating a reliable routine. The repetitive performance of everyday tasks by the servants – such as cooking, cleaning, making beds, and lighting fires, alongside the family gathering for breakfast, tea, and dinner, writing letters or arranging flowers – arguably contributed to the series' success. These routines of partly mundane everyday activities are evocative of the *slice-of-life* genre and provide a sense of comfort. The triviality of these tasks has arguably become part of *Downton Abbey*'s style, serving to balance out the more dramatic plot developments. Some of these tasks are even presented in the series' introductory sequence, which includes opening windows, dusting, and cleaning the stairs (cf. *Downton Abbey* title sequence). Joe Moran points out that:

> Houses owe their evocative power to the fact that they connect these wider discourses of wealth, taste, class and nostalgia with the unstated force of habit and custom. Houses are, above all, space for everyday, routine activities. (Moran 38)

This connection underlines how *Downton Abbey* leverages the familiarity and repetitiveness of domestic chores to resonate with audiences, intertwining these simple acts with grander narratives of class and history.

In *Downton Abbey*, routine tasks often adhere to strict protocol, exemplified in episode 1.01, where the decanting of wine for dinner is performed by the butler, Mr. Carson, in a manner that appears ritualised, echoing the preparation of the Eucharist. These seemingly mundane everyday tasks and activities around the house are imbued with an air of portent and mysticism, creating a sense of sanctity that reads as self-

conscious, humorous, and sometimes absurd. *Downton Abbey* illustrates the functioning of the household as a reliable, clockwork-like machine, repeating tasks and processes with a reassuring continuity for the viewer, despite ongoing dramatic developments in the series' narrative.

The significance of this continuity is often emphasised by the characters, for example, by Lady Grantham's Jewish-American mother, Martha Levinson (Shirley MacLaine), who declares, "Come war and peace, Downton still stands and the Crawleys are still in it." (3.01). Following the death of Lady Sybil in episode 3.05, butler Carson reminds his staff that they must "Carry on." (3.05). Such phrases symbolise the stoic 'stiff-upper-lip' mentality associated with Britishness in the series. The idea of British stoicism is also evident in *Titanic* (1997) and the miniseries *Titanic* (2012), where it is characterised as a trait of the upper-class gentleman who dons his best attire and enjoys one last brandy, resigned to die "as gentlemen" (*Titanic* 1997) on the sinking ship.

The adoption of the 'stiff upper lip' mentality by servants in *Downton Abbey* – notably through Butler Carson's professional philosophy – echoes the stoicism described in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989). In Ishiguro's novel, the butler James Stevens is inspired by the story of a butler in British-ruled India who, despite shooting a tiger, remains unwavering in his service (Ishiguro 36). This autostereotype of the stiff-upper-lip British is not only perpetuated in reimaginings like *Downton Abbey* but has also become deeply ingrained in British popular and memory culture, as evidenced in the widespread commodification of the 'Keep Calm and Carry On' motif, now emblazoned on merchandise, like posters and cups.

In both small- or large-scale crises, the 'proper' running of the house must continue. In *Titanic* (1997), British stoicism is symbolically coded in the image of the teacup, which plays on the stereotype of the British as avid tea drinkers, as well as stoic, placid and 'stiff upper lip'. The teacup motif recurs throughout the film as a prop and a visual shorthand for upper class Britishness and stoicism. For instance, the act of drinking tea by ladies of the First Class signifies affectation and snobbery, contrasting with the newly rich Molly Brown (Kathy Bates) and the protagonist Rose de Witt Bukater (Kate Winslet). Rose's observation of a small upper-class girl's affected manners while drinking tea sparks a moment of epiphany and changes her outlook. The motif of tea drinking is also used to signify stoicism among the ship's staff, such as when an officer discusses the difficulty of detecting icebergs without breakers, while the camera zooms

in on Captain Smith stirring a cup of tea with pointed stoicism, indicating his awareness of the danger yet his choice to disregard it. This scene is recalled later when an iceberg is sighted and an officer, in a moment of panic, knocks a teacup out of another's hand, symbolically shattering the icon of British stoicism.

Operating under its own distinct laws and rules that govern life within its walls, *Downton Abbey* presents an enclosed world, remote and removed from the realities of those not privileged to be part of it. This portrayal of *Downton Abbey* as both a heterotopia and a sacred place (see chapter 3.1.1.) resurfaces in how the strict order of life within the estate mirrors that of a religious community, akin to Foucault's concept of the heterotopia of the monastery:

> The daily life of individuals was regulated, not by the whistle, but by the bell. Everyone was awakened at the same time, everyone began work at the same time; meals were at noon and five o'clock; then came bedtime, and at midnight came what was called the marital wake-up, that is, at the chime of the church-bell, each person carried out her/his duty. (Foucault 27)

Spanu's characterisation of the monastery or abbey as a heterotopic place (see chapter 3.1.1.) – defined by its strict adherence to routine, structure, and ritual – parallels this. The daily life in 'The Abbey,' regulated by bells and gongs, reflects the monastic heritage implied in the name Downton Abbey, reinforcing the setting as a place of order, peace, and inherent 'goodness.' This correlation further emphasises the estate as a space where traditional values are upheld and idealised, making it a comforting and morally anchored environment for viewers.

Downton Abbey's reimagining of the social history of the early twentieth century includes a remarkably sanitised depiction of historical events, particularly evident in its portrayal of the First World War during the series' second season. Season 2, set partly in the trenches of the Somme, shows several of the series' male characters participating in the war. However, *Downton Abbey* notably tones down the horrors and realities of the war, lacking the abject imagery typically associated with trench warfare, such as rats, lice, the spread of diseases, and generally disastrous hygienic conditions. Byrne regards the series' sanitisation of the war as "ideologically disturbing" yet consistent with the "recognised sanitizing of class conflict apparent in the series as a whole" (Byrne 2015a 85). The implication is that if *Downton Abbey* generally glosses over the harsher realities of life in the early twentieth century, it logically extends this approach to its depiction of significant historical events, such as the First World War.

A focus on the gritty reality of trench warfare could have served as a stylistic break and a juxtaposition to the idyllic *locus amoenus* of *Downton Abbey*. Instead, the series swiftly transitions away from the unpleasant locus of the trenches by transforming the house into a convalescent home for recovering officers. In this context, Byrne argues, "Downton does not sanitise war […] but it does confine and control it by relocating it within a familiar safe environment of the house" (Byrne 2015a 86). This relocation of the war narrative into the confines of the house Downton Abbey itself can be interpreted as a literal 'sanitisation': in episode 2.05, Matthew Crawley (Dan Stevens) is injured in battle and arrives at the Downton Abbey convalescent home where his cousins, Lady Mary (Michelle Dockery) and Lady Sybil (Jessica Brown-Findlay), immediately tend to him, with their first action being to have him "cleaned up" (*Downton Abbey* 2.05), thus physically removing the dirt of the trenches as the first step towards recovery. The emphatically clean, safe environment of *Downton Abbey* thus transforms into a therapeutic heterotopia that cleans and heals the war-wounded characters who return there, further softening the harsh realities of the conflict, in accordance with the series' overall treatment of historical and social issues.

Cleanliness and the act of cleaning are recurring motifs in *Downton Abbey*, reflecting the series' emphasis on the domestic sphere and the roles of those who maintain it. The show consistently depicts at least one servant engaged in cleaning or tidying the house in every episode, underscoring the meticulous upkeep of the estate. This theme is visually reinforced in the introductory sequence, which features close-up shots of a servant's hand dusting a chandelier or a maid scrubbing the servants' stairs on her knees. Through these repeated images, *Downton Abbey* creates a nostalgic impression of the past as an impeccably clean, orderly, and sanitary environment, subtly romanticising the era and the labour required to maintain such standards. An emphasis on hygiene arguably renders the reimagining of a past era more relatable to twenty-first-century viewers' standards and expectations regarding cleanliness, enhancing the 'feel' of comfort and pleasure associated with the series.

Additionally, the heterotopic nature of Downton Abbey (see chapter 3.1.1.) is further supported by the underlying theme of cleaning and purification: according to Foucault, some heterotopias are "entirely consecrated to these activities of purification – purification that is partly religious and partly hygienic" (Foucault 26). The representation of cleanliness as morally 'good' and positive, as well as the performative act of purification, further underline the ideological subtext of *Downton Abbey* as inherently

conservative. The seventeenth-century adage ‘Cleanliness is next to Godliness’ resonates with *Downton Abbey*, where cleanliness is equated with moral ‘goodness’ and purity.

This thematic element subtly infuses the narrative with a conservative ideology, suggesting that order and cleanliness are parallel to moral righteousness and societal stability. The meticulous attention to cleanliness within the household not only reflects the characters' devotion to their duties but also reinforces a vision of the past where moral and social order are maintained through strict adherence to routines and standards, thus upholding a conservative worldview. In *Downton Abbey*, an association of sexuality with ‘uncleanliness,’ impurity and negative consequences is strongly implied and becomes explicit in the plot surrounding Lady Mary Crawley’s encounter with Kemal Pamuk (Theo James) early in the series (*Downton Abbey* 1.03). Because of this premarital sexual encounter, Lady Mary is referred to, and notably refers to herself, as “tainted” (1.04) or “impure” (2.09). Although this portrayal realistically reflects the social mores of the time, *Downton Abbey* reinforces the notion that the ‘sin’ of premarital sex, or even the mere appearance of it, must be followed by suffering and punishment. This depiction upholds a moral framework in which female sexuality, especially outside of marriage, is subject to societal judgment and consequences, thereby perpetuating traditional views on gender and morality.

Moreover, the series continuously suggests a nexus between sexuality and death, where sexuality – and pregnancy as a consequence – is frequently followed by social downfall, misery and loss of life. In the second series, the maid Ethel Parks (Amy Nuttall) is seduced by an officer residing in the convalescent home. This indiscretion leads to her pregnancy, which results in the maid losing her position and being forced into prostitution (3.02). The correlation between pregnancy and death is further stressed by the consecutive deaths of major characters: Lady Sybil dies of pre-eclampsia (3.05), followed by Matthew Crawley, who dies in an automobile accident parallel to his wife Lady Mary giving birth to their son (3.09).

Supporting the series’ overall conservative bend, the fates of these characters underscore the definition of sexuality as fraught with negative consequences. In line with this theme, the extramarital affair between Lady Edith (Laura Carmichael) and her love interest Michael Gregson (Charles Edwards), a married man, results in Lady Edith’s pregnancy and Michael Gregson’s disappearance and violent death (*Downton*

Abbey 4.09). It could be argued that *Downton Abbey's* depiction as a sanitised, pristine, and 'clean' world, both in a physically and morally, invites comparisons with other conservatively coded genres, such as the German Heimatfilm, which similarly presents a morally 'clean' and sanitised version of reality. This thematic consistency in *Downton Abbey* calls attention to the traditional and conservative values embedded within the narrative, portraying any deviation from these values as leading to inevitable downfall and tragedy.

3.1.3 Genre cousins: British Heritage and the German Heimatfilm

Downton Abbey, with its historical premise and country house setting, is firmly rooted in the tradition of the British heritage genre. However, it distinguishes itself from other British heritage productions, which are often adaptations of literary works from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Productions by companies such as Merchant/Ivory during the 1980s and 1990s are cited as defining works of the British heritage (cf. De Groot 211). De Groot identifies a distinct feature of the heritage genre as the claim to 'highbrow' status and "the idea that the films presented a nostalgic Englishness addressing a culturally conservative elite." (De Groot 211) by "presenting a version of the past as homogenous, class-ridden, visually rich and viewed through the twin lenses of quality and authenticity" (ibid. 212).

Countering this traditional image, the late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a wave of what de Groot terms "innovative costume films," which "explicitly took issue with the staid image of the heritage series, and reacted by introducing realism, sex, fragmented narratives and moral complexity" (De Groot 212). *Downton Abbey* , however, arguably has less in common with these 'innovative' post-heritage productions and aligns more closely with the traditional "[c]ostume drama heritage productions" that "were accused of pandering to a vision of 'a lost or vanishing country-house England', looking back with yearning to a time when life somehow was better and less complicated" (De Groot 211).

Byrne notes that "ideologically speaking," *Downton Abbey* represents "in many ways a return to the more traditional notion of heritage" (Byrne 2015a 69), citing the socio-historical contexts surrounding the emergence of *Downton Abbey* as akin to those during the heyday of the British heritage genre in the 1980s:

> Of course, if the "classic" heritage film, as defined by Higson, was a product of Thatcher's Britain, it seems appropriate that Downton should become popular in a time

> of equal comparable unrest, financial crisis and Conservative-dominated government. (Byrne 2015a 69)

Typical heritage tropes, such as “a crisis of inheritance among the privileged classes” (ibid. 71) are also central to the plot of *Downton Abbey*. It is precisely “Pride and Prejudice’s version of this theme that Fellowes adopts.” (ibid.) Notably, the romance plot averts the inheritance crisis in *Downton Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), leading to a happy ending for the characters and the estate. According to Byrne, these parallels are no coincidence, as a likeness to the narratives of Jane Austen makes *Downton Abbey* “instantly accessible and desirable” (Byrne 2015a 71) to viewers familiar with the celebrated Jane Austen adaptations of the 1990s (cf. ibid.) *Downton Abbey* closely adheres to the heritage film genre’s settings, formulaic plot structures, character constellations, and tropes. The constant repetition of these elements especially those pertaining to class and gender relations, has been criticised as reinforcing a conservative stance (cf. Higson 233). The heritage genre shares several generic codes with the German Heimatfilm, including its form, structure, characters, and most prominently, its inherent conservatism.

Von Moltke notes the similarities between the two genres, noting that the heritage film’s “investment in mise-en-scène, rural spectacle, and high production values brings to mind a number of films from the Heimat tradition” (Von Moltke 233). This comparison underscores how *Downton Abbey*, through its meticulous attention to setting and visual aesthetics, evokes the pastoral idealisation typical of the Heimatfilm, thereby appealing to nostalgic sentiments and a longing for a seemingly simpler, more orderly past. This alignment not only enhances the series’ aesthetic appeal but also embeds it within a tradition that often romanticises and idealises rural life and traditional social structures, thus perpetuating a culturally conservative narrative.

Lutz Koepnick describes the “German heritage film” in comparison to the British heritage genre of the 1980s and 1990s, which being “[c]oncerned with character, place, and atmospheric detail rather than goal oriented action […] reproduced inch history as a museum object of identification, consumption, and exportability. (Koepnick 2004 191). In Germany, Koepnick argues, the turn of the millennium in late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a wave of “sweeping historical melodramas that reproduced national past, including that of the Nazi period, as a source of nostalgic pleasure and positive identifications,” which could be considered Germany’s “own version of the heritage

genre" (ibid. 192). Despite some similarities, the heritage cinema of Germany and Britain are, according to Koepnick, quite distinct:

> And yet due to a fundamentally different political social, economic, and cultural context, German cinemas turned to the past diverged from its British forerunner in both aesthetic and ideological terms. First, whereas the British heritage film displaced the experience of a multicultural present with pastoral images of upper class imperial grandeur, most of the new German melodramas aspire nothing less than to reclaim sites of social consensus against the grain of historical trauma. Unlike the British heritage film, which reconstructed National History through the eyes of the pasts social elite, the German model by at large pictures political elites (i.e. the Nazis as the true nemesis of the nation's (multicultural) story. (Koepnick 2004 192)

This distinction suggests that while both countries use their respective heritage films to reconstruct and consume their pasts, the thematic focus and historical periods represented vary significantly, reflecting different cultural needs and historical contexts. The German films, dealing explicitly with the Nazi period, engage with a controversial and painful history that seeks reconciliation and understanding through a cinematic lens. In contrast, British heritage films often focus on idyllic, pastoral representations of England's past, emphasising class dynamics and personal relationships within historical settings. This divergence underlines the unique ways in which nations use film to negotiate their histories and collective memories.

In his analysis of the German Heimatfilm genre, Von Moltke discusses Lutz Koepnick's work, noting, "Koepnick's apt reference bears further elaboration, for it reveals a striking set of links to the history of the Heimatfilm" (Von Moltke 233). Von Moltke elaborates on these connections, underscoring how the thematic and aesthetic elements of the Heimatfilm resonate with broader cultural narratives and historical contexts within Germany. As Eckhart Voigts-Virchow explains:

> The concept of 'cultural areas' is useful for the discussion of the transnational appeal of heritage films that clearly transcend the boundaries of Britain. One may say that British heritage films speak to an international audience, for instance fulfilling heritage functions in Germany across a national divide (in the relative absence of a German 'heritage' film). In Germany, one certainly could not witness anything remotely equivalent to the wave of post 1980s or 1990s heritage films, to the Andrew Davies serials for the BBC and WBGH or the Merchant/Ivory industry or the transatlantic Edith Wharton and Henry James 'gang'. Even if there have been attempts at rejuvenating the Austro-

> German Heimatfilm one can hardly overestimate the influence of the British heritage formula on the German market. In this sense, Germany and Britain seem to share a 'culture area', British traditions imaginatively replacing the lacunae of German heritage culture destroyed by militarism and fascism. (Voigts-Virchow 23)

Citing the success of "German 'trash heritage' television productions exemplified by works such as those of "Mills and Boon novelist" Rosamunde Pilcher, Voigts-Virchow refers to the "scope of the heritage film formula" (ibid.) as a point of intersection between British 'heritage' and German 'Heimat' productions. This comparison highlights how both genres, despite their cultural differences, utilise similar narrative structures and themes that appeal broadly to audience sentiments of nostalgia and romanticism.

Moreover, Carola Surkamp suggests a comparative student-centred approach toward British heritage films and the German Heimatfilm in EFL education, as it "takes the students' world outside the foreign language classroom into consideration" and asks them "about their own national heritage" (Surkamp 177) in direct comparison with British heritage. Such an approach not only enhances language skills but also fosters a deeper understanding of cultural similarities and differences. This educational strategy encourages students to reflect on how national cinema can shape and reflect cultural identity and values, thus enriching their learning experience by connecting classroom content with real-world cultural contexts.

According to Von Moltke, German Heimat productions, such as the popular Sissi trilogy – Sissi (1955), Die junge Kaiserin (1956) [engl. Sissi – The Young Empress], and Sissi – Schicksalsjahre einer Kaisern (1957) [engl. Sissi – Fateful Years of an Empress] – "certainly display heritage properties […] with as much prominence as do the more recent Merchant-Ivory productions" (Von Moltke 233). Like their British counterparts, these films prioritise "character, place, atmosphere, and milieu over dramatic, goal-directed action" is also predominant in the German Heimatfilm genre (ibid.). Notably, the British heritage genre boom in the 1980s coincided with the emergence of popular German television formats such as Schwarzwaldklinik (1984-88, 1991, 2005), Das Erbe der Guldenburgs [engl. The Legacy of the Guldenburgs] (1987-1990), Oh Gott, Herr Pfarrer (1988) *Schlosshotel Orth* (1996-2006) and *Forsthaus Falkenau* (1989-2012) (cf. Ludewig 296).

According to Ludewig, these series "promoted traditional families, German landscapes, and a sense of security and comfort in one's own land." (Ludewig 296). These traits illustrate how elements of the 1950s Heimatfilm intermingle with the influence of

the British heritage film, culminating in what Voigts-Virchow refer to as the German 'trash heritage' format.

The cross pollination between these genres reflects broader trends in European cinema and television, where domestic narratives are interwoven with aesthetic and thematic elements borrowed from international successes. The term 'trash heritage' in this context critiques the perceived commercialisation and superficiality of these productions, yet it also indicates a significant cultural engagement with national history and identity repackaged for contemporary audiences.

The early 2000s can be considered as the heyday of German telenovelas such as *Bianca – Wege zum Glück* (2004-2005), *Wege zum Glück* [previously named *Julia – Wege zum Glück*] (2005-2009), *Verliebt in Berlin* (2005-2007), *Alissa/Hanna – Folge deinem Herzen* (2009-2010*), Lena – Liebe meines Lebens* (2010-2011) or the period series *Sophie – Braut wider Willen* (2005-2006). These series succeeded the 'trash heritage' productions of the 1980s and 1990s while adopting similar formulas, plots and character constellations.

Notably, the two most enduring of these productions, *Sturm der Liebe* (2005-) and *Rote Rosen* (2006-), make use of settings popularised by the German Heimatfilm genre: the "picturesque Alpine landscapes" (Von Moltke 23) in *Sturm der Liebe*, which is set in a hotel located in the Bavarian Prealps, and "herds of sheep roaming the northern plains" (ibid.) in *Rote Rosen,* set in the heritage town of Lüneburg, surrounded by the picturesque Lüneburg Heath. Despite their contemporary settings, these productions maintain a nostalgic connection to the traditional Heimatfilm, blending it with modern themes to appeal to contemporary audiences.

> [a]ttractive rural settings, character constellations which allowed lovers to find one another, and society as the provider of a stable, cosy, and comforting environment were successfully recycled and adapted for the contemporary context. (Ludewig 296)

It can be inferred that the shared framework of tropes, settings, and other distinctive formulas of the British heritage and German Heimat genres possess an enduring fascination and popularity that transcend national and temporal boundaries.

If, as Ludewig suggests, German productions such as *Das Erbe der Guldenburgs* (1987-1990) can be interpreted as byproducts of the British heritage genre of the 1980s and 1990s, then contemporary British heritage productions like *Downton Abbey* may similarly be considered within the context of the German Heimatfilm genre. This cross-cultural exchange highlights the fluidity between these genres and suggests

that *Downton Abbey* can be viewed as not just a continuation of British heritage traditions, but also as an adaptation that resonates with the conventions of the Heimatfilm, reflecting a shared culture of nostalgia and idealisation of the past.

The ambiguous status of the Heimatfilm as both a disparaged and formative genre in German culture is partly due to the problematic definition of the term 'Heimat' itself, which according to Ludewig

> are its sensitive associations relating, on the one hand, to Romanticism and its idolization of the fatherland and, on the other, to the Nazi blood-and-soil propaganda, which brought Heimat into disrepute for many and added to the difficulties of translating the German word. (Ludewig 19)

The term 'Heimat' loosely translates to the English homeland, representing the place of one's origin, birthplace, or ancestry (cf. Ludewig 19). However, there has also been a "semantic shift of home towards nostalgia" (ibid. 20) in the German understanding of Heimat as a more "melancholy term that speaks to us of nostalgia and of the past more than of the future" (ibid.). Thus, the concept of Heimat, especially in a cultural context, may more closely resemble the English idea of heritage than previously acknowledged, embodying a complex interplay of identity, nostalgia, and cultural memory.

The concept of a 'lost' past, also in the sense of a lost home, is inherent in the Heimatfilm genre, typically set in a "lyrical locus amoenus, an idyllic place" (Ludewig 21) not unlike the *locus amoenus* that serves as a popular setting in British heritage films and contemporary reimaginings such as *Downton Abbey.* Ludewig posits that over the twentieth century, Heimat gradually "becomes a staged construct, a visualized utopia or a locus amoenus" (Ludewig 199), a notion that critics of *Downton Abbey* have pointed out as a problematic aspect of the series. It could be argued that *Downton Abbey*, being set in the past, fulfils the dual function of depicting the Heimat concept even more accurately than the German Heimatfilm, catering to both a nostalgia for an idealised past and a place of romanticised national identity for British viewers.

Jerome De Groot observes that the British heritage genre, and the costume drama as its product, is a form that "has insulated itself" (De Groot xi) criticising that the heritage genre is not very versatile as "[its] core aesthetic and representational values rarely shift, but it increasingly looks to colonize new subgenres" (ibid.). De Groot's choice of vocabulary, describing Britain as insulating and colonising, characterises the genre as representative of the nation and its history. Implied here is that

British heritage stands alone, largely disconnected and untouched by other, even similar genres. However, parallels between the heritage film or series and the Heimatfilm genre, as analysed in this thesis, contradict this view. What appears profoundly British may not be as unique or removed from other, similar genres. De Groot views the heritage genre as the dominant one influencing other, yet it is pertinent to ask how much it is influenced by other genres and traditions originating in other countries, like the German Heimatfilm.

In conclusion, it can be argued that 'new heritage' productions like *Downton Abbey* exhibit specific parallels to the "social utopias[22]" (Trimborn 40) of the Heimatfilm. This suggests a shared cultural narrative across these genres, stressing their role in constructing and reconstructing national identity and cultural memory through a romanticised lens. The so-called 'Heile Welt' [intact world] presented in the Heimatfilm, according to Ludewig, is "a perfect environment" that can also be identified in *Downton Abbey*, where it serves "not as a means of critically engaging with reality but rather as a vehicle for dreaming" (Ludewig 21-22). Von Moltke identifies the Heimatfilm as a product of the Adenauer era in German history, which was "ruled by an imperative of harmony" (Von Moltke 206) to counter the trauma of the post-war years. Jesseca Cornelson has pointed out that *Downton Abbey*'s overt emphasis on harmony should be considered within the context of the postmillennial financial crisis, in the wake of which the series has been conceptualised (cf. Cornelson 2013).

This framing suggests that both the German Heimatfilm and *Downton Abbey* utilise their narratives to create a sense of order and tranquillity that contrasts with social upheavals. These productions, therefore, not only provide escapism but also offer a reconstructed past that reassures contemporary audiences by depicting a world where everything is in its right place. By providing such narratives, these films and series offer a form of cultural consolation, projecting a stabilised vision of society that resonates with viewers' desires for coherence and security in uncertain times.

Any source of conflict or upheaval in the "Heimat utopia" (Ludewig 203) is quickly resolved, "eradicated or rendered harmless and integrated" (ibid. 184). This is a hallmark of the *Downton Abbey* world, where dramatic occurrences are swiftly resolved, often leading to a positive outcome by the end of each season or episode. The predictability and repetition of plot elements that culminate in the obligatory 'happy

[22] Sozialutopien (Trimborn 40)

ending' (ibid. 60) are key factors contributing to the immense popularity of both the Heimatfilm genre and reimaginings like the series *Downton Abbey*.

The discrepancy between viewer reception and critical appraisal of these productions is evident in the criticism of *Downton Abbey*. Byrne observes, "Downton remains a guilty pleasure for many viewers: it is eminently watchable but at times politically or ideologically indefensible" (Byrne 2015b 177), a sentiment that aligns closely with the reception history of the Heimatfilm:

> The history of Heimat film reception is a fitting example of this ambivalence, with praise and disdain, popular acclaim and critical condemnation, at a constant stand-off. (Ludewig 54)

According to Ludewig, the German Heimatfilm of the 1950s "promoted traditional lifestyles and patriarchal households" (Ludewig 60) at a time when "endorsing patriarchy ensured that traditions were upheld" (ibid.). Von Moltke identifies a reorientation towards the values and traditions of the Wilhelmine empire embedded in the Heimatfilm that offered a "conservative sense of normalization that would undo the transgressions of the Nazi regime" (Von Moltke 116). This analysis highlights how both *Downton Abbey* and the Heimatfilm serve not only as entertainment but also as cultural artifacts that reinforce traditional values and social structures. These productions subtly promote a return to a perceived stable past, using nostalgia to gloss over historical complexities and reaffirm a conservative worldview.

In his analysis of the German Heimatfilm, Jürgen Trimborn identifies a "a fundamental longing for ordered hierarchical structures […] in which one can relinquish one's own responsibility to a vaguely romanticized authority[23]" (Trimborn 40) as essential for the emergence of the genre in post-1945 German culture. Similarly, *Downton Abbey* ideologically reimagines harmonious class relations and expresses a "hanker[ing] for a simpler time" (*Downton Abbey* 1.03) with clearly defined social structures and hierarchical orders, conforming with the ideology underlying the Heimatfilm genre. Ludewig adds that "Heimat became increasingly symbolic and emotionally charged as a value that had become threatened for the strata of society that had benefited most from the old order: the landed gentry and the middle class" (Ludewig 21).

[23] grundlegende Sehnsucht nach geordneten hierarchischen Strukturen […] in denen man seine eigene Verantwortung an eine diffus verklärte Obrigkeit abgeben kann (Trimborn 40)

Depictions of a restored social order in which the landed gentry and their extended arms 'naturally' rule over the lower classes thus became a staple of the Heimat genre. Trimborn summarises:

> At the top of the hierarchies in the Heimatfilms is […] the typically aristocratic estate and landowner, along with his foresters, who appear as representatives of an undefined 'Heimat order', based on ethnic moral values and norms[24] (Trimborn 112)

As previously analysed in this chapter, *Downton Abbey* promotes such a return to an 'ordered' society that functions best under the watchful eye of the noble patriarch Lord Grantham. He is one of the "heroic […] power players" that Ludewig identifies as leading characters in the Heimatfilm genre, upholding the "patriarchal hierarchy" promoted in these films (Ludewig 198). This portrayal correlates with the thematic underpinning of the Heimatfilm, where the restoration of a stable, hierarchical social order is often central, and authority is depicted as both benign and justified, thereby reinforcing traditional societal structures.

Ludewig considers the Heimatfilm genre an example of the transference of "shared aesthetic codes and storyline motifs, with which very different agendas were pursued at different times" (Ludewig 63). The spatial, temporal, and cultural gap between the German Heimatfilm of the 1950s and *Downton Abbey* is thus bridged by these shared codes and motifs that represent similar desires, albeit within different socio-historical contexts. As Ludewig points out:

> Sociohistorical conflicts are aesthetically transformed and translated into universally understandable images, myths, and constellations. The genre addresses the principal human desire for happiness and identification with one's natural and social surroundings by offering answers that may aid in attaining or defining these goals. Thus Heimat films tend to respond to a deep human quest or urge that—latent or suppressed—is part of us all and makes the genre curiously timeless. (Ludewig 63)

One of these shared codes and motifs is the theme of enclosure, which Von Moltke sees as the "closed world" of the Heimatfilm (Von Moltke 214), while Ludewig views it as indicative of "reactionary values" that "lent themselves to the exclusion of outsiders as well as the encouragement of national ideologies" (Ludewig 23). This theme of a

[24] An der Spitze der Hierarchien in den Heimatfilmen steht […) der meist adlige Guts- und Landbesitzer mit seinen Förstern, die als Vertreter einer nicht weiter definierten 'heimatlichen Ordnung', die auf ethnischmoralischen Werten und Normen beruht, auftreten. (Trimborn 112)

bounded, self-contained community not only conveys a preference for a stable, unchanging environment but also mirrors broader societal desires for order and predictability. These close settings function as microcosms where traditional values and structures can be preserved and showcased, subtly promoting a homogenised cultural identity and often resisting the influence of external change.

The theme of the outsider and the concept of enclosure are prominently featured in *Downton Abbey*, with particular emphasis on the importance of assimilation within the series. This focus relates to the "Heimat ideal" propagated in the Heimatfilm, which "clearly advocates the social integration of individuals and conformist behaviour" (Ludewig 59). Critics such as Byrne have identified *Downton Abbey*'s conservatism "as an ideological tool of the Right" (Byrne 2015a 87), suggesting that it propagates "a conservative nation in microcosm which puts forward traditional values of loyalty and order" (ibid.). Similarly, the Heimatfilm is recognised for its "potential for propagating values and role models" (Ludewig 54-55), that seem outdated even by the standards of the 1950s, indicating the genre's roots in the cinema of National Socialist Germany.

> Many Heimat films produced in the second half of the twentieth century were remakes of films from the Hitler era that were intended to assist the struggling population in Central Europe by providing them with familiar images and ideals. (Ludewig 61)

This genre's emphasis on unquestioning loyalty towards leadership, a machine-like system that guarantees the continuation of order, tradition, and conservative values, as well as a clear distinction between the community and the diffuse threat of outsiders, complements narratives promoted by the NS regime and the underlying structures of its film productions and later Heimatfilm narratives. Ludewig concludes that "[t]he concept of Nazism and Fascism is in itself ultimately heimatesque" (Ludewig 136), which is critical to consider when analysing any parallels and intersections between the German Heimat genre and Julian Fellowes' *Downton Abbey*:

> As with their post-Nazi counterparts, the Heimat films produced during Hitler's domination expressed social fantasies and promoted a place so delightful that people wanted to share the dream. (Ludewig 135)

Von Moltke explains the general aversion to the Heimatfilm of the 1950s, noting that "it tends to function historiographically as a postscript to Nazi cinema or simply as a cinematic wasteland" (Von Moltke 21). Despite its roots in NS cinema, the Heimatfilm of the post-war years avoids direct engagement with the events of the Third Reich, with

its nostalgia for the era only manifested in underlying motifs and images. This disengagement from overt political subject matter and its general triviality made the Heimatfilm appear politically harmless when judged by the Allied Control Council (cf. Marek 2011):

> National Socialist ideas were characterized by their calculated intention to appeal to people's emotions rather than their intellect. Nazi demagogues happily borrowed and misappropriated images, emblems, and symbols from a variety of areas, including nationalist-imperialistic beliefs, Germanic-Nordic myths, blood-and-soil cults, race ideology, pseudo-romanticism of rural and agrarian lifestyles, and the ever present dichotomy of Heimat and the corrupting 'other' (Ludewig 25)

Recycling appears to be at the heart of the Heimatfilm, or 'Heimat genre,' which must be seen as encompassing literature and series as well. These are forms of 'translation' and re-inscription of German and 'Völkische' cultural heritage, where elements of the past are repurposed to fit a contemporary narrative while maintaining a semblance of political neutrality. This process masks the deeper ideological continuities with the past, subtly perpetuating certain values under the guise of harmless entertainment.

The Heimatfilm's strategy of covert politicisation is similarly applied in *Downton Abbey* with its underlying political coding. By avoiding controversial political subjects, the series appears trite and 'above suspicion,' echoing the Heimatfilm of the 1950s. As Byrne notes,

> […] although a drama which has repeatedly come under fire for its right-wing agenda, Downton frequently prefers to avoid direct engagement with political events, as though they endanger the escapist qualities of the programme. (Byrne 2015a 85)

The political message in *Downton Abbey* is subtle and coded rather than overt, requiring a close analysis of specific elements such as spatiality or characterisations to be fully understood. The series employs nationalist-imperialist motifs and territorial imagery, emphasising the significance of ownership and land. This is particularly evident in episode 1.04, where Lord Grantham and his eldest daughter, Lady Mary, walk around the estate discussing the importance of preserving the legacy of Downton Abbey by keeping the estate intact:

> Robert, Earl of Grantham: My fortune is the work of others, who laboured to build a great dynasty. Do I have the right to destroy their work? Or impoverish that dynasty? I

> am a custodian, my dear, not an owner. I must strive to be worthy of the task I have been set. (*Downton Abbey* 1.04)

In the inaugural episode of the series, Lord Grantham passionately asserts: “Downton is in my blood and in my bones […] And I can no more be the cause of its destruction than I could betray my country” (1.01). This statement romanticises and elevates the land tied to heritage, establishing a potent connection between blood, soil and homeland, represented here by the specific property of Downton Abbey that must be defended with patriotic and nationalist fervour. Consequently, love for the ‘soil,’ here for the estate of Downton Abbey, is equated with love for the British nation and its heritage. There emerges an intersection of heritage and patriotism: potential destruction of the estate – a manifestation of conservative values, politics, and nationalist-imperialist heritage – equates to a betrayal of Britain itself.

This image of Downton Abbey as an intact world functions as a projection of conservative values and traditions, which advocates of conservative politics, such as the creator of *Downton Abbey,* Julian Fellowes – who is an outspoken supporter of Brexit – perceive as under threat in the current political climate (Hallemann 2019). Fellowes claims that his character Lord Grantham would have voted in favour of the United Kingdom leaving the EU (cf. ibid.). In an interview with the *Daily Mail*, he elaborates on his political views, declaring:

> I believe we should be out. It’s about philosophy, it’s about democracy; it’s about democracy versus autocracy, all of those issues, […] It’s not just that I think they are important—because they are—but I think it’s the wrong direction. History has for hundreds of years been moving towards government that is answerable to the people and suddenly we have done an about-turn and we’ve gone back to the Austro-Hungarian empire. I don’t think that’s the right direction. (Hastings 2016)

Given his political views and public statements, it is essential to consider to what extent Fellowes’ work serves as a projection of his politics, both explicitly and implicitly. Subtextually, *Downton Abbey* reflects contemporary anxieties about preserving British heritage, culture, traditions, and conservative values against the perceived threat of a liberal and multicultural Europe. In this respect, *Downton Abbey* can be seen as innately Heimat-esque and Heimat-coded, echoing the themes and emotional appeals typical of the German Heimatfilm genre.

Comparisons between the genres of British heritage and German Heimatfilm can be made effectively only by acknowledging the significant differences in historical

and cultural contexts, the spatial and temporal gaps, and the distinct creative intentions behind each genre. Nevertheless, definitive analogies and shared codes exist between the heritage and Heimat genres. Von Moltke suggests that despite "apparent differences" between German productions such as Edgar Reitz's *Heimat* (1981-2012) series and Merchant Ivory productions such as *A Room with a View* (1985), "a detailed comparison could reveal an important set of aesthetic, ideological, and historiographic parallels that further substantiate the links between cinematic modes of Heimat and heritage" (Von Moltke 234). Given the Heimatfilm's transformative nature, which, according to Ludewig, has led to the emergence of numerous "sub-genres […] sister-genres, or cousins" (Ludewig 67), the British heritage genre appears as a not-so-distant cousin of the German Heimatfilm. Von Moltke's proposal for a comparison between the 'new' Heimatfilm or Anti-Heimatfilm and the British heritage wave of the 1980s and 1990s could be enriched by a more detailed examination of the escapist Heimatfilm of the 1950s and the conservative 'new' heritage of the 2010s as represented in *Downton Abbey* and similar productions.

3.1.4 Selling Britishness: The Empire and the First World War 'celebrated' in *Mr. Selfridge*

Underlying political subtexts are evident in the ITV series *Mr. Selfridge,* particularly concerning British colonialism and the memory of the First World War. The series describes patriotism and the legacy of the British Empire with historical accuracy, yet it lacks critical reflection on these aspects of British history. Byrne notes that a "nationalist subtext in a period drama is itself unsurprising," as critics have viewed historical fiction as a means "to be packaging and marketing nationality" (Byrne 2015a 103). For example, *Downton Abbey*, subtly supports nationalism by portraying imperialist Britain as a nostalgic dreamscape, though its nationalism is largely implicit. In contrast, the patriotic fervour in the second season of *Mr. Selfridge* is overt and explicit. Byrne suggests that Harry Gordon Selfridge's status as a foreigner might lead to a form of overcompensation to prove his worth, given his lack of inherent 'Britishness':

> Harry has to overcome xenophobia and prejudice and convince his backers, staff and customers of his intelligence and vision, which he does: his success is not accidental or easily won, but is a result of his innate superiority in many areas. […] The kind of reverse colonisation this implies risks being unpopular with a British audience, of

> course, especially as it is a reminder of the real-life dominance of foreign companies over the national and global marketplace. (Byrne 2015a 103)

This strategy may be a calculated effort by the show's creators to appeal to an audience expecting 'Britishness' from a British period drama. Harry Selfridge's attempts to assimilate and embrace British society render 'Britishness' as an aspirational and desirable identity. Byrne remarks, "What Harry wants, more than anything, is to be British" (ibid.), and this desire is exemplified during the First World War when he becomes a spy for the British government (*Mr. Selfridge* 2.06). According to Lindy Woodhead's biographical *Shopping, Seduction and Mr. Selfridge* (2007), which inspired Andrew Davies' series, Harry Selfridge was an Anglophile who became a British citizen in the 1930s (cf. Woodhead 228).

In the second series of *Mr. Selfridge,* the character's eagerness to adjust to the British norms is exemplified by his overt displays of British nationalism and patriotism. According to Byrne, "the programme's preoccupation with British nationalism goes well beyond the attitudes of its central character." (Byrne 2015a, 104). This is evident in the unanimous support among the characters for Britain's role in the First World War and its status as a colonial power. The series dramatises efforts to celebrate Britishness, notably through the removal of German imports and the promotion of British goods (2.06). In episode 2.03, the department store stages an 'Empire Show' adorned with Union Jack flags, taxidermy animals, and other memorabilia representative of the British Empire. Central to this display is a gigantic statue of Britannia, symbolising patriotism and nationalism, presiding over the exhibition.

From a postcolonial perspective, the blatant celebration of the British Empire in a twenty-first-century production appears alienating. Byrne argues that "nationalism is being constructed and represented in […] disturbing ways" (Byrne 2015a 104), pointing out that the 'Empire Show' (2.03) is "so unambiguous and uncritical that it feels highly unusual in a contemporary television or film drama" (ibid.). One might argue that the ostentatiousness of the Empire exhibition – complete with stuffed tigers and mannequins dressed as big game hunters, accompanied by a choir singing Thomas Arne's *Rule Britannia* (1740) – is a deliberate critique of blatant patriotism and its performative nature. However, this interpretation is undermined by the absence of critical voices within the narrative. Byrne notes, "there is no negativity about this exhibition and no critical commentary is offered on this celebration of the Empire at its height" (ibid.),

accurately reflecting the spirit of the era but starkly contrasting with the more progressive and critical sentiments of the twenty-first century:

> Even though most viewers will have an uneasy awareness of the dark legacy of Imperialism, there is no sense of this within the drama: we are not invited to question the implied exploitation of the Colonies, but only to rejoice in the riches they offer. (Byrne 2015a 105)

Conversely, *Downton Abbey* significantly omits any mention of the British Empire and Britain's colonial history. Unlike *Mr. Selfridge*, Julian Fellowes' series also adopts a more critical stance towards the First World War and its legacy. This is illustrated by contrasting how the outbreak of the war is received in both series: while in *Mr. Selfridge*, the reaction is akin to a celebration with eager volunteers (ibid.), the declaration of war in *Downton Abbey* (1.07) has a sobering effect on a summer garden party, with Lord Grantham's doom-laden speech eliciting reactions of shock and worry rather than excitement and frenzy. This is enhanced by dramatic and unsettling non-diegetic music. Unlike the celebratory atmosphere in *Mr. Selfridge*, the war announcement marks a sombre end to the Edwardian summer party in *Downton Abbey*.

In line with the theme of 'showiness,' *Mr. Selfridge* reimagines the initial enthusiasm for the war in a scene from episode 2.04, where young male staff members of Selfridge's parade through the store to a military drumbeat (2.04) before they enlist. They are observed from an upstairs balcony by Selfridge and other upper-class characters. Selfridge announces:

> Ladies and gentlemen, these are our boys, our men, our soldiers. Off to fight for King and country. And when they return victorious, every man will have their job waiting for them at Selfridge's. A job fit for a hero. Three cheers for the Selfridge brigade! [*cheers of hipp hipp hooray*] Men, you are all free to sign up. Company dismissed. (*Mr. Selfridge* 2.04)

The overt display of patriotism, coupled with a naïve understanding of the war's impact, lends a grotesque quality to this historical moment, which Byrne describes as "at once moving and disturbing from a modern perspective" (Byrne 2015a 105). However, she concedes that Davies' reimagining in *Mr. Selfridge* might in fact capture the "optimistic mood of the time" (ibid.) more accurately and in doing so "prioritises – and indeed celebrates – the values of the early years of the twentieth century over those of the

twenty-first" (ibid.). The stark discrepancy between the characters' attitudes and modern viewers' sentiments toward imperialism and the First World War might seem to create a disconnect between the narrative and its audience. Yet, Byrne suggests that the opposite may be the case:

> *Mr Selfridge's* refusal to comment critically on the War may be reflective of the views of recent revisionist historians who have challenged the dominant twentieth- century view of the conflict as a pointless and reckless waste of life. (Byrne 2015a 105)

This suggests that *Mr. Selfridge*'s non-critical portrayal of the First World War and the British Empire corresponds with twenty-first century attitudes that are revisionist and overlook the jingoistic, racist, and nationalist sentiments underlying such celebrations. Byrne contrasts *Mr. Selfridge*'s immersion "in the mood and attitudes of the time" (ibid.) with *Downton Abbey*'s "deliberate postmodern lens" (ibid.), noting that *Downton Abbey* is "more anachronistic" (ibid.) in its critical reflection of the war and its late twentieth-century perspective on issues such as conscientious objectors, desertion and shell shock.

Patricia Molloy observes that *Downton Abbey* continues to engage with the war's legacy well beyond its conclusion at the end of the second series, notably during the centennial of the war's start in 2014, as "the thorny issue of remembrance, and who can be commemorated" creates further conflict (Molloy 4). In episodes like the armistice commemoration in season five, *Downton Abbey,* while critical of the war, stages events that allow the viewer to participate in post-war remembrance with a similar performative display of patriotism and national pride as seen in *Mr. Selfridge*.

Ironically, despite the series' propagation of the 'loyal servant' image, one of *Downton Abbey*'s significant critiques of the war includes the delineation of soldiers' mindless obedience to their superiors. The young footman, William Mason (Thomas Howes), is characterised as the stereotypical naïve 'good soldier,' eager to join the war effort. His patriotic zeal is challenged by the new valet, Henry Lang (Cal MacAininch), who suffers from shell shock:

> William: I'm not sorry to be part of it, and I can't pretend I am.
> Lang: Oh, yes, you're part of it. Like a metal cog is part of a factory, or a grain of sand is part of the beach. (*Downton Abbey* 2.02)

William Mason's eagerness to 'serve' his country mirrors his role as one of the 'good' servants at Downton Abbey, further emphasised when he is drafted and becomes Matthew Crawley's aide-de-camp (2.03). Here, the idealised master-servant relationship within the estate's safe confines is replicated on the battlefield. William Mason's fatal injury, while serving Matthew Crawley, indicates the sacrificial nature of the servants' loyalty to the aristocratic family:

> The implication here – that service equates to death – is surprising given the previous message of the series. We can see here that while William is the epitome of the honest Tommy, his limited intelligence and unquestioning acceptance of all forms of authority make him a character who belongs to the old world and who has no place in the new. (Byrne 2015a 81–82)

This parallel between service in the household and in the trenches is further highlighted by the actions of Thomas Barrow, one of the 'bad servants,' who deliberately injures himself to be invalided out and sent home (2.01). In contrast to William Mason's patriotic 'heroism,' Thomas sacrifices his hand, not his life, prioritising his survival. A contemporary audience, aware of the horrific conditions in the trenches and the traumatic impact of the war, might empathise more with the desperation that drives Barrow's actions rather than condemn him. This empathy extends to soldiers suffering from shell shock, like valet Lang, who is treated with kindness and understanding in *Downton Abbey*. However, despite Lord Grantham's acknowledgement of Lang's "perfectly honourable" service (2.02), the valet is dismissed when he can no longer perform his duties, indicating his misfit in the ordered, pristine world of the estate.

Lang views himself as a "metal cog" (ibid.) in the war's machinery and becomes a malfunctioning cog within the otherwise well-oiled machinery of the Downton household. Byrne considers the character as an example of the series' sanitised reimagining of the war, noting that the trauma of the conflict is effectively "'confined' to Lang" (Byrne 2015a 84). And while Lang is quickly removed from the narrative, the war narrative itself is also relocated from the front lines to the relative safety of Yorkshire within a few episodes.

Apart from visually sanitising the abject realities of warfare, *Downton Abbey* also diminishes the grim implications of the war by limiting its impact. William Mason is the only character from the main cast who dies in the war, while others, such as Matthew Crawley and Thomas Barrow, return with injuries that are minor or temporary. This lack

of lasting consequences or changes for the characters, as well as the absence of significant alterations in class and gender relations within the house post-war, reflect a certain thematic inconsistency. According to Byrne, “Fellowes’s creation chronicles a time of rapid transition and suggests that war acts as a social leveller, yet still clings fast to a socially conservative message” (Byrne 2015a 84–85). In this way, the series seems to be in conflict with itself, attempting to depict the changing dynamics of the early twentieth century while simultaneously striving to preserve the status quo of the pre-war era, so as not to forfeit the element of escapism that contributes to its popularity.

3.2 The Bad Place: crisis narratives and the *locus terribilis*

In the seemingly harmonious world of heritage productions like *Downton Abbey*, crises and disasters serve as narrative devices to momentarily disrupt the routine complacency of the story. These crisis narratives provide a dramatic momentum that temporarily transforms the idyllic *locus amoenus* of Downton Abbey into a *locus terribilis*, altering the mood and atmosphere of the setting. This transition is depicted in reimaginings of the Titanic disaster, such as in Julian Fellowes’ mini-series *Titanic* (2012) and James Cameron’s *Titanic* (1997). In Cameron’s film, the collision with the iceberg represents a definitive turning point, occurring precisely midway through the film (*Titanic* 1997: 1:37:58). The atmosphere and music shift dramatically, moving from the romantic interlude between Jack and Rose to the impending crisis of the iceberg collision. Beyond generating dramatic tension, these crisis narratives foster a sense of emergency in which societal norms and regulations are temporarily relaxed. The typically strict and rigid politics of class, gender, and other social norms may be disregarded, challenged, or subverted, at least temporarily. In the aftermath of such crises, lasting social reformations may ensue. Instances of these disruptions can lead to a break down in class distinctions and social order, thus crises can be interpreted as carnivalesque forces (cf. Bakhtin 1965) that temporarily invert the conventional order of society.

3.2.1 The Ship of (Bad) Dreams: James Cameron's *Titanic* as a *locus terribilis*

In James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997), the ship is initially depicted as a beautiful dreamscape, qualifying as a "potential locus amoenus[25]" (Jablonski 430). Jablonski refers to this locus as an idyllic yet "kitschy place for romantic encounters[26]" (ibid.) in both *Titanic* (1997) and the German television series *Das Traumschiff* (1981-) [literally 'The Ship of Dreams'] which is an adaptation of the popular U.S. series *The Love Boat* (1977-1986). In *The Love Boat* and *Das Traumschiff*, the everyday problems and negative influences are suspended for the duration of the cruise (cf. Jablonski 187), making the "spatially confined and limited space of the ship[27]" appear idyllic (ibid. 181). In Germany, *Das Traumschiff* is regarded in much the same way as *Downton Abbey* is on British television; both are seen as emblematic of the "idyllic-kitschy 'intact-world-program'[28]"(Jablonski 188) of their respective national broadcasters.

The initial half of James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) draws heavily on the tropes typical of the 'cruise ship' genre, effectively presenting itself as a historical version of *The Love Boat*. Scenes depict passengers revelling in ocean views, with dolphins cutting through the glittering seawater, all set to the optimistic orchestration of James Horner's *Take her to sea, Mr. Murdoch* (1997). Besides the ship acting as a dreamscape, the surrounding sea itself is portrayed as another beautiful and benign dreamscape, enhancing the positive sensations experienced by the characters onboard and the film's audience. According to Sean Redmond:

> However, unlike a number of land-locked heritage films that return us again and again to the country house, the recurring motif of this film is the awesome sight of the ship and the grandiose interior that leads to the restaurant (twisting balcony, colossal chandeliers, and the antique Grandfather clock that keeps time so accurately—Rose herself returns us to this interior in the final death/dream sequence at the end of the film). When the camera roams in the film, which it frequently does, through Rose's point of view, and omnipresently, it captures oak and marble and glass, china crockery, all manner of finery, silver cutlery, and the fetishised lines and curves of the graceful ship as it soars through the waves. (Redmond 198)

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25 potenzieller locus amoenus (Jablonski 430)
26 kitschiger Ort für Liebesbegegnungen (ibid.)
27 räumlich überschaubare begrenzte Raum des Schiffs (Jablonski 181)
28 idyllisch-kitschige 'Heile-Welt-program' (Jablonski 188)

Comparable to the traditional heritage film, *Titanic* (1997) possesses a "heritage-like setting" which according to Redmond represents "not some authentic, accurate, informed sense of the past but the surface level reproduction of a commodity fetish" (Redmond 198). This approach matches *Titanic* with productions like *Downton Abbey* and *Mr. Selfridge,* which predominantly showcase the opulent "lives and lived spaces of the upper classes" (Redmond 197-198). Even when the focus shifts to the lower classes, "the steerage is so lovingly reproduced that it too becomes commodified, 'heritage-like' because of its sanitisation." (ibid.) much like the living conditions of servants in *Downton Abbey*. Redmond argues that "poverty and exclusion are heavily romanticised in the film," (ibid.) a notion that is furthermore represented in the inter-class romance of *Titanic* (1997).

Jablonski notes that that the private suite inhabited by Rose, her mother and her fiancé Cal Hockley (Billy Zane) serves as an "self-contained microcosm,[29]" complete with several state rooms, a conservatory with private promenade deck full lush with plants, evoking the imagery of a "hortus conclusus" (Jablonski 459). However, for the protagonist Rose, this idyllic place transforms into the site of a "catastrophe" (ibid.) when her fiancé Cal displays a violent rage, shattering the superficial charm of the ship's idyllic setting and dramatically upending the *locus amoenus* (*Titanic* 1997).

Michel Foucault characterises the ship as "the heterotopia par excellence" (Foucault 27), with its subjective and shifting functions as a free-floating entity in both space and time. Foucault further describes the boat or ship as an exemplary heterotopic space:

> [A] floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development (I have not been speaking of that today), but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. (Foucault 27)

[29] abgeschlossene ‚Welt im Kleinen' (Jablonski 459)

For Rose, the ship represents a heterotopic ‘other space’ where the ordinary constraints of daily life are suspended, enabling her romantic entanglement with Jack Dawson (cf. Jablonski 462). Yet, this brief idyll is confined to the ship and ends abruptly with the disaster that ensues (ibid.). As Rose begins to perceive the Titanic as a *locus amoenus* through her romance, the heterotopic nature of the ship shifts. With the iceberg collision, both the ship and the surrounding ocean alter drastically for the characters and the viewers. What was once a ‘safe space’ breaks apart, and the ocean, previously seen as a beautiful and benign natural dreamscape, becomes a vast and threatening void. The superficial charm of the Titanic is revealed to have been entirely dependent on the safety and integrity of the ship. Once this sense of security is shattered, the liner’s beauties and luxurious amenities lose their significance. The ship, once a *locus amoenus*, a place of idyllic beauty, emerges as a *locus terribilis*, exposing the former dreamscape as false and treacherous (cf. Schwabl 2013).

As previously noted, James Cameron’s *Titanic* (1997) presents a sharp delineation between the ship before and after the iceberg collision, marking a significant structural ‘tipping point’ that transitions the narrative from one genre to another. This pivotal moment effectively splits the film into two distinct halves: the first predominantly pertains to the romance genre, infused with the *Love Boat/Traumschiff* kitsch, while the second half transitions into the adventure or disaster film genre. Susan Sydney-Smith observes that *Titanic* harnesses the “most influential ur-genres” of romance and adventure (Sydney-Smith 190), emphasising the film’s broad appeal and narrative scope. The transition between these genres is further accentuated by the film’s musical score; the onset of ‘Hard to Starboard’ signals the end of the romantic theme, ushering in a mood of suspense and escalating tension, thus reshaping the viewer’s experience of the ship from a *locus amoenus* to a *locus terribilis*.

In *Titanic* (1997), the recurring motif of a ‘turning point’ is vividly depicted through the film’s imagery and is symbolically encoded in scenes such as the frantic turning of the steering wheel and the moment when the gigantic pistons in the engine room halt abruptly, only to reverse direction. These visuals powerfully reinforce the notion of a cataclysmic shift, which Ansgar Nünning and Kai Sicks describe as “those points or decisive moments at which a very significant change occurs, e.g. a change of direction or motion.” (Nünning and Sicks 3). This thematic and visual motif is integral to the film’s structure, marking a definitive division between its two halves.

Sydney-Smith comments on the broader contextual significance of this structural division, noting that critics have situated “the film’s narrative structure within a contemporary mode of analysis, and related it to millennial Angst” (Sydney-Smith 185). The looming end of the millennium, often expressed through narratives of endings, beginnings, and anxieties surrounding cataclysmic change, is mirrored in Titanic’s story, which dramatises a historical turning point through its disaster narrative. “As a millennial narrative,” Sydney-smith argues, “Titanic shares characteristics with a cluster of historical films of the late 1990s dealing with sea-journeys and voyages” (Sydney-Smith 186). These films frequently explore themes of transition and transformation, reflecting broader societal concerns about the impending new millennium. This thematic focus positions *Titanic* not merely as a personal or isolated tragedy but as part of a larger tapestry of narratives that grapple with pivotal changes and the human response to them.

While James Cameron’s *Titanic* (1997) seamlessly integrates the monumental turning point of the iceberg collision, Julian Fellowes’ mini-series *Titanic* (2012), created for the centenary of the sinking, does not achieve the same narrative impact. The series’ structure, spanning four episodes with a non-linear narrative that revisits the sinking from various characters’ perspectives, dilutes the impact of the critical turning point. Critics have noted that this format, which emulates the character-driven structure of *Downton Abbey*, diminishes the suspense typically associated with the Titanic’s story by reducing the immediacy and climactic buildup of the disaster. Fellowes’ approach to focus on a diverse array of passengers, including representations from all social classes, genders, and the often-overlooked staff and servants, aims to offer a broader description of life aboard the Titanic. However, this narrative choice leads to repetitive structure that lacks the singular dramatic crescendo found in Cameron’s film, where the sinking is a central and singular event that dramatically shifts and drives the narrative.

In the *Titanic* (2012) mini-series, there is no definitive turning point; instead, each episode retraces the narrative, adding layers through different viewpoints but leading to an anticlimactic feel when compared to the 1997 film. This method may deepen character development and explore the personal crises of the individual across Edwardian society, but it ultimately subordinates the dramatic potential of the ship’s sinking. The ship serves more as a backdrop for these personal dramas rather than as

a symbol of human ambition and tragedy, contrasting sharply with its portrayal in Cameron's *Titanic*, where the ship's journey and catastrophic end are laden with metaphorical and symbolic significance. The focus on individual 'turning points' over the collective disaster may offer a fresh perspective but risks diminishing the overarching narrative power of the historical event. Here, the crisis of the sinking serves primarily as a catalyst to intensify the personal crises of characters, with their individual 'turning points' presented as more impactful than the monumental 'turning point' of the ship's doomed journey.

However, in both James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) and Julian Fellowes' miniseries *Titanic* (2012), the ship is depicted as a topos with significant narrative functions, particularly as a heterotopia. Lieven Ameel notes that "heterotopias in literature can be analyzed as spatial settings for turning points in narrative" (Ameel 125) and are "a part of society's spatial framework, potentially performing a healing as well as a punishing function" (ibid. 126). This dual function is evident in both the *Titanic* film and series, where the ship serves as a transformative space for self-discovery, character building, and self-actualisation, similar to the role of the ship as a heterotopia in the *Love Boat/Traumschiff* narrative (cf. Jablonski 2019). Foucault describes these transformative spaces as crisis heterotopias, where individuals in a state of personal crisis or 'state of exception' are isolated from the outside world:

> In the so-called primitive societies, there is a certain form of heterotopia that I would call crisis heterotopias, i.e., there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. (Foucault 24)

For instance, in *Titanic* (1997), Rose's identity crisis as a late adolescent is emblematically presented within this heterotopic space. In *Titanic* (2012), characters across different social classes confront personal crises, particularly marital ones, while aboard the ship: for example, Lord Manton (Linus Roach) and Lady Manton (Geraldine Somerville), the Earl's middle-class employee John Batley (Toby Jones) and his wife Muriel (Maria Doyle Kennedy), as well as the workman Jim Maloney (Peter McDonald) and his wife Mary (Georgia McCutcheon). Foucault further asserts that traditional heterotopias of crisis are disappearing with some exceptions, such as the boarding school (cf. Foucault 24):

> But these heterotopias of crisis are disappearing today and are being replaced, I believe, by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed. Cases of this are rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons. (Foucault 25)

This shift underscores the evolving function of heterotopic spaces in contemporary society and narratives. Confinement and isolation from society are key factors in heterotopias of crisis (or deviation), making settings such as prisons, hospitals, boarding schools or psychiatric homes prevalent settings in narrative contexts.

The ship in both *Titanic* adaptations thus not only facilitates a narrative turning point but also reflects broader societal dynamics by isolating characters during pivotal personal crises, providing a dramatic backdrop where conventional societal rules are temporarily suspended, allowing for critical character development and narrative progression. The ship in James Cameron's *Titanic* can be interpreted as a crisis heterotopia in multiple ways. It provides a setting of an isolated, confined space, detached from everyday society, and through its catastrophic sinking, mirrors and catalyses the personal crises experienced by the characters onboard. For the protagonist, Rose, the journey coincides with her sexual awakening and transition from girlhood to sexually active womanhood – an experience traditionally confined to a heterotopia of crisis. Foucault describes this phenomenon:

> For girls, there was, until the middle of the twentieth century, a tradition called the "honeymoon trip" which was an ancestral theme. The young woman's deflowering could take place "nowhere" and, at the moment of its occurrence the train or honeymoon hotel was indeed the place of this nowhere, this heterotopia without geographical markers. (Foucault 24–25)

Rose's first sexual encounter with Jack Dawson occurs inside a car in the ship's hold, mid-Atlantic, thus doubly confined within a travelling vehicle and a heterotopia "without geographical markers" (ibid.) Jablonski further notes the ship's potential as a heterotopia of crisis in *Das Traumschiff*:

> Within the heterotopic paradigm, crisis heterotopias spatialize the kitschy pole of the idyll because they do not appear catastrophic as their purpose lies in an integrative exclusion: those who find themselves there are meant to return to the other, non-heterotopic places of society. Crisis heterotopias are thus places of temporary stay, and

> for this reason, the cruise ship also proves to be a crisis heterotopia for the vacationers.[30] (Jablonski 450)

Thus, the crisis heterotopia of the ship acts as a "kitchy idyll" that offers a form of "integrated exclusion" (cf. ibid.) allowing for temporary escape before reintegration into non-heterotopic society. The crisis heterotopia acts as a 'transit' space, offering a temporary refuge during personal crises. Beyond the ship in *Titanic* (1997, 2012), other settings such as the hospital in *Charité* (2017) and the hotel in *Das Adlon* (2013) similarly function as crisis heterotopic spaces in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century.

In *Titanic* (1997), the heterotopia of the ship represents a crisis that is temporary for the characters, yet permanent for the vessel itself. While historically the ship is irreversibly altered, the film concludes differently. In the final scene, the protagonist Rose revisits the ship in a dream, set on the First-Class staircase, where she reunites with her lover Jack. In this dream, Rose is young again and surrounded by other characters who perished, with the ship restored to its former grandeur. This setting evokes what Jablonski terms literal "dream kitsch" (Jablonski 463). Laden with sentimentality, this scene departs from the catastrophic reality, offering viewers a reconciliatory, romantic conclusion that contrasts sharply with the tragedy that unfolded after the iceberg collision, which had transformed the 'ship of dreams' into a site of crisis.

James Cameron's choice to restore the ship's locus in the film's concluding moments shifts the narrative from catastrophe back to kitsch, fulfilling the promise of a romantic happy ending. Jablonski argues that the qualities of 'kitschy' and 'catastrophic' function as binary opposites in the film's narrative, illustrating a stark contrast between idealised romance and harsh reality:

> While 'kitschy' refers to a state of idyllic, peaceful harmony, 'catastrophic' represents the dissolution of this state through its potential or actual threat in the form of an event, so that a *locus amoenus* can no longer continue to exist as an idyllic place of longing or refuge.[31] (Jablonski 419)

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[30] Innerhalb des heterotopischen Paradigmas verräumlichen Krisenheterotopien den kitschigen Pol der Idylle, weil sie insofern nicht-katastrophisch erscheinen, als ihr Zweck in einer integrierenden Ausgrenzung besteht: Den dort Befindlichen soll eine Rückkehr an die übrigen, nicht heterotopischen Orte einer Gesellschaft ermöglicht werden. Krisenheterotopien sind also Aufenthaltsorte für eine begrenzte Zeit und aus diesem Grund erweist sich auch das Traumschiff für die UrlauberInnen als eine Krisenheterotopie. (Jablonski 450)

[31] Während ‚kitschig' den Zustand einer idyllisch-friedlichen Harmonie meint, steht ‚katastrophisch' für die Aufhebung dieses Zustands durch seine potenzielle oder aber tatsächliche Gefährdung in Form

This narrative choice not only reconciles viewers with the story but also emphasises the film's thematic exploration of memory, tragedy, and the redemptive power of storytelling. It could be argued that Cameron's kitsch ending detracts from the catastrophic impact of the Titanic disaster. In the 'dream kitsch' sequence, the film reintroduces the ship as a *locus amoenus*, now more idyllic and harmonious, in the absence of any antagonistic characters who previously thwarted the protagonist's romantic destiny. Instead, the couple is met with applause from benevolent characters. The dream sequence, widely interpreted as the protagonist's death and her ethereal reunion with her deceased lover, intensifies the perception of Titanic as the ultimate *locus amoenus* – an Elysian afterlife situated in the ocean's underworld.

By presenting the ship in this manner, Cameron blurs the lines between reality and fantasy, offering a resolution that transcends the boundaries of the physical world. The transformation of the Titanic into an elysian afterlife plays up the film's thematic exploration of love, loss, and transcendence. However, this interpretation also raises questions about the film's treatment of historical events and the extent to which it sanitises the tragedy for the sake of a romantic narrative.

3.2.2 The transformative power of crises

The coexistence of kitsch and crisis is also central to the narrative of *Downton Abbey*. In its second season, the First World War is presented as a potential catastrophe for the Crawley family and their servants, particularly when the heir, Matthew Crawley, returns from battle with a spinal injury that allegedly leaves him wheelchair-bound and unable to sire an heir (2.05). However, this resurgence of the 'inheritance crisis' from the first season is already resolved by episode 2.07 when he miraculously recovers and rises from his wheelchair. This trope echoes the kitsch narrative often found in *Love Boat/Traumschiff* episodes regarding the healing powers of the cruise:

> It becomes downright absurd in the Singapore episode (episode 28), when a young woman, paralysed and confined to a wheelchair, suddenly regains the ability to walk. The categories of the possible and the probable, as elevated to the parameters of mimetic representation by Aristotelian Poetics, are so stretched by such medical miracles

eines Ereignisses, sodass ein locus amoenus nicht länger als idyllischer Sehnsuchts- oder Zufluchtsort fortbestehen kann. (Jablonski 419)

> that the series actually seems to cross the boundary into the realm of fairy tales.[32] (Jablonski 188)

Historical events in *Downton Abbey*, even catastrophic ones, have no lasting impact and mainly serve to add dramatic impetus to the series' narrative. This is evident in episode 2.08, dedicated to the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918/1919. Several characters contract the deadly virus, including the Countess of Grantham. Yet, only the minor character, Lavinia Swire (Zoe Boyle), superfluous to the narrative, succumbs to the illness (2.08). Her death acts as a deus ex machina to resolve the romantic triangle and conclude the second season. Beyond this, the global crisis of the Spanish Influenza pandemic has no further impact on the series and its characters, serving merely to facilitate plot resolution.

The treatment of the Spanish Influenza pandemic in *Downton Abbey* exemplifies what Nünning and Sicks describe as the "retrospective construction" (Nünning and Sicks 33-34) of crises in cultural history:

> This also means that incidents which are considered as 'great' events of history, as large-scale disasters, i.e. as a 'catastrophe' or a 'crisis' from today's perspective, were perhaps not necessarily already perceived in the same way from the perspective of observers at the time. Contrariwise, many former crises, catastrophes and other turning points have largely been forgotten today. (Nünning and Sicks 46)

In contrast, German reimaginings such as *Babylon Berlin* (2017-) and *The White Ribbon* (2009) focus on historical events that are retrospectively viewed as contributing factors to the rise of the National Socialist regime, marking them as pivotal moments and turning points in German collective memory.

Crises in *Downton Abbey*, however briefly or unrealistically resolved, allow characters to momentarily break free from the rigid social structures of the era. While *Downton Abbey* is not inherently a 'crisis narrative,' it frequently utilises 'crisis plots' to disrupt the tranquillity life in the country house. It could be argued that the *locus amoenus* of *Downton Abbey* occasionally 'tips over' into a *locus terribilis*, albeit briefly, before the crisis is resolved and harmony restored. An additional function of the crisis narrative is to expose underlying social issues by temporarily suspending – or even upending –

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[32] […] geradezu hanebüchen wird es in der Singapur-Folge (Episode 28), als eine durch einen Unfall gelähmte und seither im Rollstuhl sitzende junge Frau plötzlich wieder gehen kann. Die Kategorien des Möglichen und des Wahrscheinlichen, wie sie die aristotelische Poetik zu den Parametern mimetischer Darstellung erhebt, werden angesichts solch medizinischer Mirakel so sehr ausgereizt, dass die Serie tatsächlich die Grenze zum Märchen zu überschreiten scheint. (Jablonski 188)

the status quo and social order. In this sense, crises can also act as catalysts for subversion and societal change.

The transgressive and transformative powers of crises relate to the Carnivalesque, a concept explored by Michail Bakhtin (1965). Socio-culturally, **"'**Carnival' may be a concept that describes an event," while "'carnivalesque' may describe a process" which is to transgress and to celebrate "elemental chaos" against "modernity's quest for order" (Jenks 171). Chris Jenks describes Carnival as "a lasting symbol of transgression, release and a general letting-off-of-steam among the populace" (Jenks 161), embodying a "radical" space where "light and dark, good and evil, and eventually life and death" coexist (ibid.). He elaborates on the rules of Carnival:

> Within carnival circumstances are altered, albeit temporarily, while roles, status and hierarchies become inverted in a riot of pleasure, excess, misbehaviour and misrule. The conventional world is turned upside down. There are elaborate and evolving rituals that attach to the practice of carnival, which provide its poetics, and there are social structural forces and dynamics that ensure its politics. (Jenks 162)

In crises, the conventional world is "turned upside down" (ibid.). Unlike the positive, controlled chaos of Carnival, a crisis tends to suspend all rules, often with negative outcomes. *Titanic* (1997) illustrates both the liberating excess of Carnival through protagonist Rose's rebellion and its darker counterpart when the catastrophe strikes, plunging society onboard into crisis and chaos. In both the 1997 film and the *Titanic* (2012) mini-series, the sinking of the ship is portrayed as a crisis that dismantles the rigid social order onboard. Initially, societal and cultural norms are upheld, such as 'women and children first' or 'first class passengers before others,' but as the disaster unfolds, these structures begin to unravel. When the character Cal remarks that "it's beginning to fall apart" (*Titanic* 1997), referring to the chaos of the sinking, "it" also denotes the rules and regulations of Edwardian society. The previously rigid separation of classes becomes meaningless: passengers of all classes are quite literally 'in the same boat.'

In *Titanic* (1997), the protagonist Rose's identity crisis in the film's first half culminates as she performs acts that transgress societal norms. Guided by her love interest, Jack Dawson, Rose begins to challenge her prescribed role as a woman and a member of the upper class. These acts of rebellion, which escalate from spitting off the side of the ship to engaging in exuberant dancing, smoking, and drinking in the lower

decks, become increasingly physical and intimately connected to her body. The culmination is her sexual encounter with Jack, marking her ultimate challenge to societal constraints. The carnivalesque celebration of Rose's rebellion abruptly ceases, replaced by the catastrophic crisis of the ship's sinking.

Jenks observes that the "symbolism of carnival is rich; in reality, it was much more than a period of release, or even contained anarchism" (Jenks 162). This insight is echoed in Rose's defiance of societal expectations, exemplified by her rebellious actions, such as smoking a cigarette to spite her mother and making a defiant gesture with a raised middle finger to her fiancé's valet. These provocations go beyond mere expression of personal freedom; they serve as symbolic challenges to the restrictive norms and rigid structures of her social environment.

Rose's identity crisis and carnivalesque acts of social transgression can also be interpreted as a performance of adolescence and repressed puberty finally being expressed. Notably, *Titanic* was produced during the late-1990s boom in teenage-themed films, such as *She's all that* (1999), *Cruel Intentions* (1999), *10 Things I hate about You* (1999) or *Clueless* (1995), which focused primarily on themes of transgression, rebellion and the crises of puberty, especially for adolescent girls. A majority of these 'teen movies' are in fact adaptations of classic literary works, transforming Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815) into *Clueless*, Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) into *Cruel Intentions*, Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594) into *10 Things I hate about You* and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) into *She's All That* (1999). These adaptations transpose the premises and social mores of historical, literary texts into the contexts of millennial adolescent girlhood.

Conversely, *Titanic* projects the codes and conventions of the millennial 'teen movie' onto a heritage canvas. This innovative blending of genres contributes significantly to the film's international success, particularly appealing to a young audience typically not targeted by heritage content. This strategic overlay of contemporary adolescent themes onto a historical narrative broadened the film's appeal, merging the allure of historical romance with the dynamic energy of teenage rebellion.

In Michael Haneke's film *The White Ribbon* (2009), children of a village in Northern Germany on the brink of the First World War engage in increasingly troubling and transgressive acts. These incidents impact all strata of the village society, from the starving farmer to the steward, pastor, doctor, and even the local nobility. The children's actions, which remain unexplained throughout the film, plunge the village into

crisis. Notably, the primary perpetrators and ‘leaders’ of this group of children are around the age of confirmation, approximately fourteen years old, making them adolescents rather than young children. While critics often point to the parent’s abusive behaviour as a catalyst – suggesting that the children either emulate their parents or seek revenge – the element of latent and repressed puberty in *The White Ribbon* should also be considered as a driving force behind the youth’s transgressive acts. In the film, even the slightest transgressions against the strict regime imposed by the village’s adults are met with harsh punishment and methods associated with ‘poisonous pedagogy’ (cf. Rutschky 1977; Miller 1990).

Natural adolescent impulses are rigorously punished, shamed and physically restrained, as seen when the pastor’s son, Martin (Leonard Proxauf), has his hands tied to his bed at night to suppress masturbation. Unlike the positive and carnivalesque acts of transgression by Rose in *Titanic* (1997), the crisis faced by the children in *The White Ribbon* manifests in harmful and destructive acts of violence against other characters. In this film, the crisis of puberty is expressed as resentment toward adults as oppressors, frustration with the repressive moral code, and a general sense of boredom with the confines of the small village. In their attempts to control and repress the natural crisis of puberty, the parents inadvertently unleash a mysterious evil on the village. The children’s frustration and repressed anger are channelled into sinister acts that disrupt the village's tranquillity and throw the community into turmoil.

By the end of the film, the adolescent crises of the village children, along with the village's communal crisis, are overshadowed by the historical crisis of the impending First World War. Paradoxically, the war’s outbreak restores a semblance of order in the village. In *The White Ribbon,* the repressed trauma of German memory from the early twentieth century is encoded as crises of repressed puberty and generational conflict. These crises eventually break forth, disturbing the placidity of late twentieth and early twenty-first-century memory. Haneke’s reimagining of the past is unsettling, not through depictions of war, but through the abject realism of life in the seemingly idyllic Heimat-village.

3.2.3 Temporarily 'tipped over': dark episodes in *Downton Abbey*

In *Downton Abbey*, the series' typically harmonious 'intact world' idyll is occasionally disrupted by what Jablonski identifies as the "intrusion of the real into the imaginary[33]" (Jablonski 411). This represents a reversal of the typical kitsch dynamic, wherein an idyllic state is achieved through the intrusion of the imaginary into reality (cf. ibid.). Essentially, *Downton Abbey* reimagines the past by integrating such intrusions of reality into its constructed idyll, which temporarily alters the atmosphere of the setting and, by extension, the series itself. For instance, the death of the minor character Kemal Pamuk (Theo James) in episode 1.03 illustrates such a moment. He unexpectedly dies of a heart attack in Lady Mary's bed, introducing an element of surprise and subversion to what appeared to be a predictable affair plot. This incident marks an apparent 'intrusion of reality' into the idyllic setting of *Downton Abbey,* where the reality of death serves as a consistent underlying dark theme. Similarly, the historical reality of war disrupts the idyll of the summer garden party in the final episode of the first season when Lord Grantham announces the onset of the First World War (1.07).

Moreover, *Downton Abbey* frequently employs the narrative trope of "(pseudo-) catastrophes[34]" that conclude positively with "the familial harmony […] restored"[35] (Jablonski 200). This trope is also prevalent in the Heimatfilm genre, where "a resolution" ensures that "the old, God-given order is restored, and the source of the conflict is either eradicated or rendered harmless and integrated" (Ludewig 184). In *Downton Abbey*, dramatic events regularly unfold; however, once they are resolved, the series concludes on a harmonious 'feel-good' note, leaving viewers with an overwhelmingly positive impression of the era – an impression that is never permanently marred by historical realities. This pattern reflects the formula Sven Kramer identifies in commercially successful Hollywood Holocaust films:

> Commercial cinema must involve and move its audience, but it must not make them too uncomfortable. Anyone who wants to write screenplays for Hollywood must learn that, in the end, the narrative threads must be resolved. As soon as the lights come on in the theatre, the conflict must be settled. Any uncertainty on the part of the viewers

[33] Einbruch des Realen ins Imaginäre (Jablonski 411)
[34] (Schein-)Katastrophe[n] (Jablonski 200)
[35] die familiäre Harmonie ist wiederhergestellt (ibid. 200)

> that might have been caused by the depiction of trauma dissipates. The trauma is ignored, privatized, or relegated to the past – thus handed over to the typical strategies of a discourse of relief.[36] (Kramer 57)

Despite the gravity and historical significance of Holocaust themes, the Hollywood model often dictates an ending that offers 'relief' and softens the traumatic content to comfort the viewer. While this narrative pattern frequently appears in Hollywood productions concerning Holocaust survivors, the tendency to avoid lasting catastrophe and to reestablish a positive status quo post-crisis is even more pronounced in contemporary reimaginings like *Downton Abbey* or *Mr. Selfridge*. This approach can sometimes render these productions melodramatic, relating them more closely to the conventions of soap operas.

From the third season of *Downton Abbey* onwards, there are notable exceptions to the previous avoidance of harsh realities and the prevalence of sanitised, toned-down depictions of darker subjects. One pivotal moment is the death of the major character Lady Sybil from preeclampsia in episode 3.05. This scene, shocking and disturbing due to its realistic depiction of a violent death, signifies a turning point in *Downton Abbey*, marking a shift in the series' ideological approach:

> Sybil's death thus also represents a breakdown in the faith in patriarchal order, wisdom, and control, an ideology that, as represented by Lord Grantham, has reigned absolute in the first two series. (Byrne 2015b 180)

In episode 4.03 the maid Anna Bates is raped by Green, valet to a house guest, in the servants' rooms below stairs. The episode received much criticism for its depiction of sexual violence, which starkly contrasted in the usually harmonious world of *Downton Abbey*. As Byrne argues, the hitherto positive atmosphere of the downstairs kitchen "loses its usual homeliness and becomes a bare, empty gothic space" (Byrne 2015b 183) that pertains more to the horror- than the heritage genre. By 'tipping over' the key setting of the kitchen in *Downton Abbey* from a safe place of community and comfort into the site of a brutal crime, the underground world of the house is also transformed into an 'underworld' hellscape of criminal transgression and horror for the viewer. The

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[36] Das kommerzielle Kino muß die Kunden involvieren und rühren, doch es darf ihnen nicht zu Leibe rücken. Wer für Hollywood Drehbücher schreiben möchte, muß lernen, daß zuletzt die Handlungsfäden gelöst werden. Sobald das Licht im Saal angeht, muß der Konflikt entschieden sein. Jegliche Verunsicherung auf seiten der Zuschauer, die die Darstellung des Traumas verursacht haben könnte, verflüchtigt sich. Das Trauma wird ignoriert, privatisiert oder in die Vergangenheit eingerückt - und damit den typischen Strategien des Entlastungsdiskurses übergeben. (Kramer 57)

romanticised and idealised life at Downton Abbey is starkly called into question by the intrusion of the historical reality of rape and violence into the previously ‘safe space’ of the house, which had thus far also served as an emotional ‘safe space’ for viewers.

The historical realities that have been disregarded and ‘glossed over’ by the series are symbolically located in the Gothic space of the dark and deserted servants’ hallways downstairs, hidden from the view of the upper-class characters who are absorbed in a concert upstairs. Immersed in their cultured entertainment, they remain oblivious to the horrors below stairs, which come to represent a suppressed historical reality. This scene acts as a mirror for the viewer, who, like the upper-class characters, has previously enjoyed the cultural entertainment of *Downton Abbey* without confronting the darker, unseen realities of the era that the series has largely avoided until this point. The sexual assault on Anna Bates forces the viewer to confront the disturbing realities faced by women, which had been glossed over by the romanticised portrayal of life in service. The UK television network ITV received hundreds of complaints from viewers, and the media regulator OfCom was asked to launch a formal investigation into the production (cf. Plunkett 2013), highlighting the negative reception of a more realistic depiction of history in the series.

Prior to the airing of episode 6.05 of *Downton Abbey*, a viewer discretion alert was issued, warning of disturbing and graphic content and indicating a departure from the program's typically light and harmless tone. The episode features a graphic scene in which Lord Grantham suffers a burst ulcer, leading to a shocking moment where he projectile vomits blood across the dinner table and onto the other characters. Here, the familiar scene of a family dinner is abruptly ‘tipped over’ into one of abject imagery and bodily horror. Lord Grantham ultimately survives, and harmony is restored, reinforcing the pattern of momentary or temporary disruption to the idyllic and serene setting that recurs throughout the series. One could argue that the rarity of such dark and graphic moments in *Downton Abbey* enhances their impact, making them stand out as particularly memorable instances.

Subversions of audience expectations are often met with disapproval by long-term viewers who have been ‘lulled’ into seeing *Downton Abbey* as a Heimatfilm-like idyll. In this setting, severe misfortunes are typically reserved for minor or unpopular characters, and the harsh realities of life rarely intrude. Byrne refers to a ‘pact’ between Julian Fellowes and viewers, which stipulates “that the show must deliver a certain type of entertainment and moral lesson” that prioritises fictionality over realism (Byrne

2015b 181–182). This understanding means that darker turns in *Downton Abbey* are acceptable to its audience only if they affect expendable characters and if the show's harmony and idyllic state are quickly restored.

This perceived agreement between the series' creator and its viewers reflects what Jablonski terms the 'promise of kitsch-literature' (cf. Jablonski 187). According to Byrne, this promise also includes a sense of "ownership of the plot" by the audience and underscores how deeply *Downton Abbey* has become embedded in the national heritage (cf. Byrne 2015b 182). The negative reception of a "grittier feel to the previously saccharine Downton world" (ibid. 179) calls attention to a fundamental issue with the series' premise: the historically accurate representation of reality was never the goal for its devoted audience, who favour the "charmed bubble" inhabited by the Crawley family and their servants, "in which suffering and violence seldom intrude," a world the viewer longs to inhabit (ibid. 183). Like the Heimatfilm, *Downton Abbey* provides an escape from the stark realities of the present, and its audience shuns a realist depiction of the past that "resembles too closely their own" (ibid. 188). This mirrors the desire of German cinemagoers to engage with the 'intact world' of the Heimatfilm rather than confront narratives of post-war reality.

In the German three-part mini-series, *Das Adlon. Eine Familiensaga* (2013), the narrative of the first two episodes predominantly unfolds in the country house of the Schadt family, which closely resembles the British heritage house. In initial episode introduces this house as a glamorous estate akin to Downton Abbey. Yet, from the outset, the setting is imbued with ambiguous connotations. In episode 1.01, the series commences under a sinister ambiance, unfolding at night accompanied by the distressing screams of Alma Schadt (Maria Ehrich) during childbirth, while simultaneously, the servant family of the coachman is forced into a covert and hasty departure. This opening scene establishes the central scandal of the protagonist's illegitimate birth early in the narrative, setting a tone that suggests the unfolding story of *Das Adlon* will diverge from the harmonious and idyllic. However, a semblance of order appears to be restored with the return of the patriarch, Gustav Schadt, from his business ventures in the German colonies in West-Africa. His return seems to reestablish stability, and the affluent Schadt family subsequently supports the prestigious project of the Adlon family. This support implies that the success of the legendary Adlon Hotel is intricately linked to the wealth derived from German colonialism, here represented by the fictional Schadt family (*Das Adlon* 1.01).

The locus of the Schadt house undergoes a dramatic transformation later in the episode. After an ellipsis spanning several years, the patriarch Gustav Schadt returns from another expedition to the German colonies, in a scene that mirrors his earlier homecoming in episode one. However, this scene is conceptualised as a stark juxtaposition: Schadt's daughter Alma is replaced by her illegitimate daughter Sonja, and his wife, now an alcoholic, appears unkempt and frazzled. Concurrently, Gustav Schadt himself is debilitated by a mysterious tropical illness, rendering him aged and feeble (*Das Adlon* 1.01). This marks a clear downturn in the fortunes of the Schadt family.

Gustav Schadt's death signifies a pivotal turning point in the series. The atmosphere and perception of the house shift from a *locus amoenus* to a *locus terribilis* characterised by disease, demise and disintegration of the family. Unable to cope with the loss, Schadt's widow succumbs to alcoholism and ultimately drowns herself in the lake, lamenting: "The women in our family are no good.[37]" (*Das Adlon* 1.01) – a declaration that underlines her relentless belief in the patriarch's power whose absence drives her to suicide. The deterioration of the family and estate is captured in a confrontation between Alma Schadt and her daughter Sonja, marking the end of an era. These sequences are notably shot in darker colours, with muted and cold lighting, visually juxtaposing the earlier brightness and vibrancy of the setting.

The decline of the Schadt family and its colonial enterprises in *Das Adlon* visually mirrors the decline of the U.S. South, utilising visual codes and imagery commonly associated with reimaginings of the Antebellum South. The Schadt house, located outside of Berlin and characterised by its wide, open porch adorned with white flowing curtains – a frequent setting in episode 1 – recalls the appearance of a Southern plantation. Most notably, the subdued presence of the black servant Galla in many scenes evokes the historic plight of enslaved individuals on U.S. plantations. Her role as a Mammy-like figure[38] to the daughters of the house further reinforces this comparison, positioning *Das Adlon* as a coded critique of the exploitation inherent in colonial endeavours. These images suggest parallels between Germany's colonial past and the

[37] Die Frauen in unserer Familie taugen nichts. (*Das Adlon*, 1.01)

[38] From slavery through the Jim Crow era, the mammy image served the political, social, and economic interests of mainstream white America. During slavery, the mammy caricature was posited as proof that blacks -- in this case, black women -- were contented, even happy, as slaves. Her wide grin, hearty laugher, and loyal servitude were offered as evidence of the supposed humanity of the institution of slavery. […] She "belonged" to the white family, though it was rarely stated. Unlike Sambo, she was a faithful worker. She had no black friends; the white family was her entire world. Obviously, the mammy caricature was more myth than accurate portrayal. (Pilgrim 2012)

history of slavery in the United States, highlighting the exploitation of colonial subjects for the benefit of white Western affluence – also in Germany.

3.3 Anti-Heritage/Heimat and (Hyper-)realism

With their realist style, contemporary reimaginings of the twentieth century such as Stephen Moffat's *The Village* (2013-14) or Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* (2009) challenge and subvert the idyllic image of a pre-war past, favouring a more authentic and critical depiction of historical reality. It should be noted, however, that these grittier reimaginings of the early twentieth century have not achieved the commercial success and popularity of *Downton Abbey* and similar productions. Critics, including Jerome de Groot (2016), have labelled these works as 'misery drama' or 'dark heritage,' terms that emphasise the perceived negativity of these productions as 'dark' and 'misery-inducing' rather than acknowledging their subversive qualities.

Due to their subversion of tropes from the heritage and Heimatfilm genre (see chapter 3.1.3), such 'misery dramas' can also be categorised as belonging to the so-called Anti-Heimatfilm genre. Edgar Reitz' *Heimat* (1981-2012) has been cited as an inspiration for both Stephen Moffat's *The Village* (cf. Gilbert 2013, De Groot 2016) and Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* (Suchsland 2009). The genre Anti-Heimatfilm genre emerged as a response and antithesis to the saccharine world of the 1950s Heimatfilm (cf. Ludewig 2011, Von Moltke 2005), evolving in the latter half of the twentieth century. Similarly, 'dark heritage' productions such as *The Village* arise as a direct reaction to the Heimatfilm-esque *Downton Abbey*. While *Downton Abbey* functions as a dreamscape that viewers desire to experience, the reimagined pasts in *The Village* or *The White Ribbon* are portrayed as places viewers would not wish to occupy.

Although not set in the rural backdrop characteristic of the Heimatfilm or Anti-Heimatfilm genres, the German series *Babylon Berlin* can be interpreted as an example of 'dark heritage' due to its bleak and starkly realist reimagining of German society in the 1920s. *Babylon Berlin*, a loose adaptation of Volker Kutscher's historical crime novels, diverge significantly from its literary origins. The series' creators, Tom Tykwer, Hendrik Handloegten, and scriptwriter Achim von Borries, accentuate and stylise the grim and horrifying aspects of life in the Weimar Republic.

Notable changes from the novels to the screen include the transformation of character backgrounds and motivations: in the series, the protagonist Gereon Rath is depicted as a World War I veteran suffering from shell shock and morphine addiction,

whereas in the novels, only Gereon's brother, Anno, served in the war (Kutscher 2008). Moreover, the protagonist's love interest Charlotte Ritter's (Liv Lisa Vries) characterisation in the series is remarkably different compared to the novels, where she has a bourgeois background and works as a police steno typist to finance her law degree. In contrast, the series depicts her as coming from a working-class background, living in precarious conditions, and driven by economic necessity to support her family. This forces her to take on occasional jobs with the police during the day and semi-regular work as an unregistered prostitute by night.

This shift towards a darker and more realist reimagining of inter-war Germany is in line with what De Groot describes as 'misery drama' or 'dark heritage,' characterised by themes of "illness, casual violence, child labour, dirt and mud, cruelty, rape, disfigurement, death, hardship of all kinds, and terrible poverty" (De Groot 163). These themes recur throughout *Babylon Berlin* and are used to evoke a strong emotional and visceral response from the audience. Such abject imagery in contemporary reimaginings like *Babylon Berlin* effects a disruption of the complacency of nostalgic reimaginings and act as a "corrective" to the sanitised images of the past presented in heritage and Heimat productions (cf. ibid. 164).

3.3.1 Villages of the Damned: Anti-Heimat settings

Michael Haneke's film *The White Ribbon* (2009) utilises many recognisable features of the Heimatfilm genre, such as a picturesque rural setting, a village community, and the obligatory village festival. However, *The White Ribbon* does not merely appropriate these tropes; it deconstructs them to expose the darkness and terror underlying the idyllic veneer of village life at the start of the twentieth century. Michael Haneke, described by Forrest as a director of "pessimistic" and "bleak, dystopian" visions (Forrest 141), positions his works as "in fact utopian, albeit in a negative sense" because his films "challenge the audience to conceive of the degree to which things could, in fact, be very different" (ibid. 142).

This "negative utopianism" aims to "facilitate a desire for change" (ibid. 145). Haneke's approach to depicting both contemporary and historical realities resembles the approach of Anti-Heimatfilm directors:

> Within this schema, Haneke's outline for an alternative filmmaking practice is driven by a desire to shake up the commercial image of reality generated by the mainstream

> media and, in doing so, to undermine the passive, consumer-oriented mode of engagement that he associates with both mainstream television programs and Hollywood cinema. (Forrest 147)

This passive consumption, which "requires little effort on behalf of the spectator" (ibid.) is often critiqued in productions like *Downton Abbey*. Such productions cultivate a mode of engagement "shaped by the cultural industry" and reinforce "audience expectations" which have (ibid.) As a result, *Downton Abbey* faced negative reception when it attempted a more critical representation of historical realities, revealing the tension between audience expectations and the delineation of a nuanced historical narrative.

Peter Moffat's series *The Village* (2013-2014) depicts the struggles of the lower classes in Edwardian Britain, deliberately contrasting the idyllic country house setting of *Downton Abbey*. *The Village* eschews the resolution of social issues through the benign guardianship of a socially minded patriarch and his family. Instead, it presents lower- and working-class characters who grapple with financial hardships without any safety net or support. They are characterised as more disillusioned and embittered compared to their counterparts in *Downton Abbey*. One example is the character of John Middleton (John Simm), a farmer and father figure, who struggles with alcoholism and displays abusive behaviour towards his family.

Despite its rejection of the nostalgic and romanticised mode characteristic of period dramas like *Downton Abbey*, *The Village* "still closely resembles traditional period television and film" with regard to "its portrayal of the English countryside" (Byrne 2015a 149). According to Byrne, the Peak District is portrayed as "unspoilt and beautiful […] as the landscape in any heritage film." (ibid.). A similar observation applies to Haneke's *The White Ribbon*, which while "bleak in its portrayal of human lives" continuously presents the countryside as the only "positive and exhilarating presence throughout" (ibid. 149). Byrne concludes that "in period drama, Britishness and rural life are bound up together, and hence it is unsurprising that even the most anti-heritage of historical dramas cannot repress a nostalgia for, and celebration of, the countryside." (ibid. 151). Contrary to the focus on the lives of the upper classes or the upward social mobility of the bourgeoisie prevalent in much of British period drama and heritage productions, *The Village* is deeply invested in the plight of the lower classes. The series presents a "parallel version of history in which the working class occupy centre stage" (Byrne 2015a 138), not as subordinates but as principal figures who share the narrative space with, rather than being subservient to, the upper classes. Unlike the Crawleys

in *Downton Abbey*, the local landowning Allingham family in *The Village* rarely interacts with the lower classes, nor do they act as patriarchal protectors; instead, they are described as “witnesses who do not intervene” (ibid. 139). While the grand house is central and eponymous in *Downton Abbey* and similar dramas, in *The Village*, the grand house lacks the luxurious and commodifying features that attract consumers of heritage productions. The relationships between the classes in *The Village* are depicted as “remote and devoid of Downton-inspired affection or respect” (ibid.). Thus, it can be surmised that *The Village* deliberately distances itself from the sanitised, romanticised and idealised depiction of life between classes in Edwardian Britain, a portrayal that *Downton Abbey* propagates.

This negative image of authority and patriarchy is epitomised by the character of Lord Allingham (Kit Jackson) in *The Village*, whom Byrne describes as “a grotesque parody of Lord Grantham” (Byrne 2015a 141), acting as “an extreme version of the upper-class dinosaur who thinks only of the pleasures of the privileged life and is now permanently detached from the modern world” (ibid.). Unlike the benevolent, rational, and paternal figure of Lord Grantham, Lord Allingham is perceived as “a disturbingly Gothic figure to his servants and the other villagers” (ibid.). Allingham’s mental decline is mirrored in his unstable daughter Caro Allingham (Emily Beecham), who contrasts sharply with the confident, glamorous daughters of the Crawley family in *Downton Abbey*. In *The Village*, the aristocrats are not the focal point but are instead portrayed as “marginalized curiosities a world apart from the villagers” (ibid. 137). The series emphasises that there is “nothing noble or superior about aristocratic blood” (ibid. 141), instead suggesting a theme of mental and moral degeneration. This decline parallels the downfall observed in the Schadt family in *Das Adlon*, where similar themes of aristocratic deterioration are explored.

In *The Village*, besides the local nobility, other authority figures are characterised as sinister and morally dubious. The local schoolteacher, Ingham (Stephen Walters) is characterised as a warmonger, while Doctor Wylie (Jonny Phillips) abuses Caro Allingham and exerts control over the Allingham family, who “seem incapable of resisting his patriarchal power” (Byrne 2015a 142). Unlike in *Downton Abbey*, where patriarchal power serves to protect and nurture, *The Village* presents authority as inherently destructive (cf. ibid. 145). Authority in the series is not a reassuring guarantee of order but is instead described as either lost and incompetent or aggressive and destructive.

This depiction implies the general impotence and literal 'disorder' of the ancien régime, manifested in a gradual loss of power and relevance in the early twentieth century.

The White Ribbon (2009) casts authority and patriarchy in as negative a light as *The Village*. The local aristocrat and landowner in the village of Eichwald, referred to only as 'the Baron' (Ulrich Tukur), is portrayed as incapable of commanding order and respect, both within the village and his own household. Instead, order is enforced through a system of fear-mongering and brutal punishment carried out by the village patriarchs, including the pastor, the doctor, and the baron's steward. While order, tradition, and rigid structures are viewed positively in *Downton Abbey*, in *The White Ribbon*, excessive order creates a negative, stifling environment. The strict rules that govern the village "seem foreign and alienating to us rather than reassuring in the sense for 'traditions'" (Pearson 11). Eichwald represents any generic German village at the beginning of the twentieth century and emerges as a microcosm of oppression, encompassing physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, social injustices and brutal punishments for disobedience and transgression. Over time, however, order is supplanted by disorder following the onset of strange and disturbing events in the village. It is strongly implied that these incidents are perpetrated by the village's children, who have established their own system of 'order' and punishment in response to the oppression they face from the patriarchs. Functioning like an underground or counter-society, the children of the village Eichwald invert the established order, thereby exposing the dysfunctional nature of the community itself to its inhabitants.

While the Heimatfilm of the 1950s depicted the village as an inherently positive and nurturing locale, the Anti-Heimatfilm "staged the local as a site of profound social ruptures, of unreconciled hierarchies and stark class divisions, of prejudice and backwardness" (Von Moltke 206). The setting in both Heimatfilm and Anti-Heimatfilm provide a compact and straightforward tableau of characters to reflect social stratification and hierarchies, easily recognisable to viewers. This familiar range of characters typically includes village dignitaries of various professions and titles, such as clergyman, medical professionals, and landholders. Jürgen Trimborn notes the schematic appearance of characters as a key element of the Heimatfilm genre:

> The Heimat films typically feature local notables such as estate owners, lords of the manor, mayors, pastors, and foresters, as well as farmers, maidservants, and farmhands. All these characters embody the 'Heimat' feeling of belonging and represent the

> ‘natural order’ propagated in these films. Each of these rural figures accepts their supposedly ‘God-given’ place within the structure of the local way of life with a sense of fate. Any attempts to break from this rural community are doomed to failure from the outset, as are the attempts – though rarely made by the rural inhabitants – to assume a place in the social order than the one traditionally assigned to them.[39] (Trimborn 74)

Similarly, *Downton Abbey* also recreates an early twentieth-century class and social landscape through its representation of professions, titles and social positions, adding a sense of nostalgia for a ‘simpler’ and ‘ordered society’ in rural Britain. *Downton Abbey* embraces and reinforces Heimatfilm tropes with its ensemble characters: a landowning aristocrat and his family, a village doctor, a lawyer, local clergy, farmers, and stewards, all posing as an idealised tableau of a harmonious pre-war rural community. This parallel between British heritage and German Heimatfilm extends into the ‘dark heritage’ and ‘misery drama’ of *The Village* and the Anti-Heimatfilm genre. Von Moltke points out that the Anti-Heimatfilm of the later twentieth century featured a range of films by young filmmakers that included “hunters and priest, God-fearing villagers and local barons” (Von Moltke 203). Whereas *Downton Abbey* and the German Heimatfilm illustrate this hierarchically ordered society as inherently positive and desirable, the Anti-Heimatfilm criticises and subverts this idealisation of static class structures.

Michael Haneke’s *The White Ribbon* serves as a contemporary example of the Anti-Heimatfilm. In the village of Eichwald, the village dignitaries are purposefully known and addressed only by their titles or professions, such as ‘Herr Baron,’ ‘Herr Doktor,’ ‘Herr Lehrer’ and ‘Herr Pastor,’ which exaggerates this specific trope of the Heimatfilm genre. As discussed previously, these titleholders also embody the patriarchal power in the village, but they are depicted as abusing and perverting their positions of power, or failing to perform their functions in ways that benefit the community they govern. In this reimagining, the ‘natural order’ of society is connoted as negative and corrupted, leading to its disruption and perversion by the mysterious incidents occurring within the village.

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[39] Zu den Heimatpersonen, die in jedem der Filme vorkommen, zählen in der Regel die Honoratioren des Dorfes, wie Gutsbesitzer, Schlossherren, Bürgermeister, Pfarrer und Förster und darüber hinaus die Bauern, Mägde und Knechte. All diese Personen verkörpern das heimatliche Lebensgefühl und stehen für die ‚natürliche Ordnung‘, die in den Heimatfilmen propagiert wird. Jede dieser Personen aus dem ländlichen Bereich nimmt den ihr quasi ‚gottgegebenen‘ Platz im Gefüge der heimatlichen Lebenswelt schicksalsergeben ein. Versuche, aus dieser ländlichen Gemeinschaft auszubrechen, sind ebenso von vornherein zum Scheitern verurteilt, wie auch die – jedoch nur sehr selten von Seiten der Landbewohner unternommenen – Versuche, einen anderen als den ‚angestammten‘ Platz im heimatlichen Lebensgefüge einnehmen zu wollen. (Trimborn 74)

While the Heimatfilm genre – and *Downton Abbey* as a British variant – endeavour to reconstruct the dream of an idyllic pre-war society, the Anti-Heimatfilm actively deconstructs this narrative. What unites German Anti-Heimatfilms such as *The White Ribbon* and British 'dark heritage' productions like *The Village* is their "common interest in writing history from below" (Von Moltke 205). In the case of *The White Ribbon*, this perspective is not only socio-economic but also literal – offering a view from the physical 'below', that is, from the perspective of the village children. *The White Ribbon* employs the Anti-Heimatfilm framework to deliver a realist reimagining of a historical moment, focusing on the moral disintegration of a society, as evidenced by recurring crime and death. According to Lutz Koepnick, the German heritage genre since the 1990s has also explored national history "from below" (Koepnick 2002 51), diverging from British heritage films, which predominantly focus on social and financial elites. In a German context, however, the elites of the early twentieth century are inevitably linked to the National Socialist elites, who carry negative connotations, while the lower classes are depicted in a positive light.

3.3.2 Social realism and Hyperrealism

Like other contemporary reimaginings of the twentieth century, Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* scrutinises the social stratification within a village setting. This includes the aristocratic family of the Baron, the middle-class comprised of the doctor, teacher, and pastor, as well as tenant farmers living in precarity. The servant class is represented by the young nanny Eva (Leonie Benesch) and an unnamed tutor (Michael Kranz), both employed in the Baron's household to care for and educate his children. However, neither Eva nor the tutor is treated with respect or kindness. For instance, the tutor is compelled to play the flute to accompany the Baroness (Ursina Lardi) on the piano. When he struggles to keep pace, she berates him: "Otherwise, it's no fun.[40]" (*The White Ribbon* 2009), implying that his role is to provide entertainment, a task laborious for him and outside his regular duties. One could argue that by including him in her musical play, the Baroness ostensibly integrates the tutor into the family sphere. However, her commanding tone and critique suggest that she demands a service from an employee for her benefit, not his. The discordance in their music further symbolises

[40] Sonst macht es keinen Spaß. (*The White Ribbon* 2009)

the inequality and disharmony between the masters and servants, contrasting sharply with the emphatic harmony and unity displayed in *Downton Abbey*.

Following the disappearance and subsequent discovery of the Baron's son, Sigi (Fion Mutert), beaten and abused by unknown assailants, both servants, Eva and the tutor are summarily dismissed, blamed collectively for alleged neglect of their duties. Forced from the house in the middle of the night, Eva is left destitute and without shelter, which exposes the Baron and Baroness's lack of compassion and fairness toward their subordinates. The characterisation of the Baron and his family as unjust, incompetent, and ungenerous employers is shown to affect their tenant farmers, who live in poverty and constant fear of losing their landlord's favour. The precarious dependency of the workers on the upper class is further emphasised by the hazardous conditions at the local mill, which led to the fatal accident of the farmer's wife. In stark contrast to the idyllic class depictions in *Downton Abbey*, the social structure in *The White Ribbon* is depicted as broken, dysfunctional, and archaic: farmers are left to starve, workers are at risk in unsafe working conditions, and servants are exploited, distrusted, and treated as 'foreign objects' in the house (*The White Ribbon* 2009).

The harmonious and symbiotic relationship between master and servants, landowners and tenant farmers in *Downton Abbey*, illustrated by the Crawley family's care and concern for their local peasantry and servants, contrasts sharply with the reality of rural life at the beginning of the twentieth century as portrayed in *The White Ribbon* or *The Village*. In Haneke's film, the farmers' dissatisfaction with the Baron manifests in the destruction of his cabbage field, an act explained by the steward as a local tradition of ritual punishment for an ungenerous landlord. The abduction and abuse of the Baron's son, Sigi, remains unexplained, but can be interpreted as another act of retribution for his failures as a landlord, employer, and local representative of the ruling class. James Pearson notes that *The White Ribbon* "is essentially a realist film whose story happens within our own world" (Pearson 2), a statement that applies both to the film's subject matter and its style. Haneke integrates realist elements into *The White Ribbon*, which are rooted in historical facts and local traditions.

Haneke's film arguably transcends mere realism, becoming unnervingly potent when considering how the qualities of image, light, and sound in *The White Ribbon* strongly appeal to the viewer's senses. The absence of a musical score amplifies the smallest sounds – like a whisper or a creaking floorboard – which resound intensely against the backdrop many scenes' oppressive silence. Visually, the film achieves a

similar effect, as it “is portrayed starkly in a crisp black and white, an effect achieved by shooting the film in digital colour negative and draining it post-production” (Pearson 5). The grainy quality of the images evokes black-and-white photographs from the era, particularly those by August Sander, whose portrait photographs in *Antlitz der Zeit* (1929) inspired Haneke’s concept for the film’s characters, especially the children (cf. G. Stewart 40).

While realism as an art form strives for a semblance of naturality, the stylistic choices in *The White Ribbon’s* are remarkably unnatural and artificial. For example, “[its] extended shots of the countryside” are “uncomfortably and ominously still” (Pearson 5). These prolonged silences and stillness contribute to the creation of an unnerving tension within the film. The contrast between inside and outside shots (cf. G. Stewart 47), alternating between extremely bright, almost blindingly white exteriors and the darkness of barely lit interiors, forces the viewer’s eyes to adjust uncomfortably to sudden changes in lighting. In this way, Haneke engages the viewer not only mentally but also physically in the cinematic experience, as the realism in *The White Ribbon* becomes artificial itself. Ben McCann and David Sorfa note the “naturalistic precision” in “setting, costume and speech” (McCann and Sorfa 250), yet also highlight the “luminous monochrome and uses of distancing effects to undermine the realism of motive and event” (ibid.). As a result, in terms of artistic rendering, *The White Ribbon* transcends mere realist reimagining of the past and approaches hyperrealism.[41]

In contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, abject imagery and imagery of the body serve as markers of realism, contrasting starkly with the unrealistically ‘clean’ and sanitised depictions of the past. *The White Ribbon* emphasises realism through abject imagery, including gruesome injuries and the corpses of humans and animals. This is vividly illustrated when the peasant’s deceased wife is laid out and washed, her corpse surrounded by buzzing flies – a detail that suggests decay and hints at the putrid smell likely present at the scene. Garrett Stewart identifies a “fierce circuit of abjection and revenge” (G. Stewart 45) in Haneke’s work, further connected to “[p]rohibition and transgression – pollution and purification” (Lechte 10), which emerge as key themes of the film. John Lechte notes that “[a]bjection also shows its face in public in the moral domain, or rather, in the domain of amorality as seen in various forms of corruption” (ibid. 11) explaining that “[a]ll secret, corrupt behaviour is

[41] During the last decade of the twentieth century, artists began eliciting feelings of revulsion by presenting base objects as a way of making a statement. (Lechte 11)

abject, whereas open defiance is not. […] Hypocrisy, therefore, is a manifestation of abjection" (ibid.).

The corrupt, amoral and hypocritical behaviour expressed through abjection is evident in the actions and words of both adults and children in *The White Ribbon*. The abject imagery of the body in the film, reflecting the character's disturbing conduct, triggers feelings of revulsion and horror in the viewer. Abject imagery in contemporary reimaginings effectively contributes to the atmosphere and authenticity of the reimagined loci of the past. Robert Spadoni suggests atmosphere in films, can "trigger experiences akin to olfactory sensations" (Spadoni 59). Images and themes related to bodily functions or fluids, such as blood, faeces, urine, or sweat – as well as the abject imagery of a corpse – may also evoke visceral reactions in viewers, ranging from repulsion to horror. In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Julia Kristeva defines abjection as a powerful reaction and sensation of repugnance:

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful—a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (Kristeva 1)

According to Kristeva, the abject and abjection act as "safeguards" (ibid. 2) to distance oneself from that which inspires this visceral reaction and a sensation of "uncanniness" (ibid.). Abject imagery in contemporary reimaginings like *Babylon Berlin* or *The White Ribbon* ranges from what Kristeva describes as loathsome food, "a piece of filth, waste, or dung" (ibid.) to the sight of a corpse as the uncanniest image. Abjection begins with fascination that initially leads toward the abject, then separates from it (cf. Kristeva 2). It serves as a distancing device in historical productions that turns voyeuristic fascination around to horrify and confront viewers with unappetising, unsanitary, and undesirable aspects of the past. Abjection serves as a powerful tool within historical productions, where the illustration of abject elements functions to disrupt the viewer's nostalgic connection to the past. Instead of allowing for an uncritical, idealised view, these

unsettling depictions force the audience to confront the grimmer realities that often underlie historical narratives. By doing so, the viewer is compelled to reject these abject elements, aligning with Julia Kristeva's concept where the 'I' disassociates from the disturbing aspects of the subject matter: “I want none of that element” (ibid.).

This strategic use of abjection not only critiques the idealisation of historical eras but also reinforces the idea that history, when stripped of its romanticised veneer, is rife with discomforting truths about national identity. It challenges the viewer to reconsider their relationship with the past as a period fraught with complexities and harsh realities that are often sanitised in popular memory. Thus, the abject becomes a powerful narrative device, destabilising the viewer's nostalgic gaze and compelling a more critical engagement with the historical content reimagined.

Like Haneke’s film, the series *Babylon Berlin* reimagines the early twentieth century in Germany with a mixture of social realism and hyperrealism, vividly depicting the gritty and abject reality of urban life in 1929s Berlin. Throughout the series, the grime and odours of the city during this era seem almost tangible to the viewer. *Babylon Berlin* portrays the German capital in the interwar years as a nexus of vice, crime, social injustice, and misery. The unhygienic and precarious living conditions of the Ritter household, the family home of the female lead, Charlotte Ritter, starkly contrast with the era’s glamorous nightlife, which often represents the period in popular cultural memory and imagination.

Lower class precarity and misery in *Babylon Berlin* are encoded through abject imagery, as seen in the home of ‘Mutti aus Wedding,’ where piles of rotten meat are chopped in the backyard amidst pit bulls riled up by the scent of blood and decaying flesh, teeming with maggots (1.03). The imagery creates an era-specific atmosphere that is starkly unattractive to the contemporary viewer. The abject, often conveyed through sights and sounds related to the body and its functions, recurs throughout the series. A notable instance of abjection as a key motif in *Babylon Berlin* occurs during the initial encounter between the main characters, Gereon Rath and Charlotte Ritter, in episode 1.02. Charlotte, urinating in the men’s bathroom, discovers Rath lying on the floor of the adjacent stall in a puddle of his urine, suffering from a post-traumatic episode. This scene deconstructs traditional romance tropes by introducing the love interests in a situation marked by abjection.

Even more than *The White Ribbon*, *Babylon Berlin* employs abjection to an excessive degree, deliberately showcasing a range of abject imagery and subjects, including the naked body, both dead and alive, alongside the realities of bodily functions such as flatulence, urination, bleeding, vomiting, and defecation. For instance, episode 1.02 depicts the character Alexej Kardakov (Ivan Shvedoff) hiding in the pit of an outhouse, submerged in urine and faeces. The display of abjection and bodily functions in *Babylon Berlin* is consistent, suggesting that these elements are integral to the 'reality' of life, thereby adding to the stark realism of the reimagining. The series further implies that abjection and abject imagery are not confined to the working-class milieu but are prevalent across all social classes. This is illustrated in episode 1.02, when police inspector Bruno Wolter (Peter Kurth) casually passes gas in the presence of Rath and remarks "Better out than in"[42] (1.02). A similar instance occurs in episode 1.06 when the Austrian journalist Samuel Katelbach (Karl Markovics) unexpectedly breaks wind during a conversation with Rath (1.06). These moments provide comic relief for the viewer, but also lend a sense of realism and authenticity.

Flatulence, as a natural part of life, is rarely depicted in film or television, often relegated to crude comedy due to its social taboo. *Babylon Berlin*'s inclusion of the abject and visceral realities of life contrasts sharply with the polite, sanitised, and almost sterile world of *Downton Abbey,* where toilets and chamber pots are invisible, and bodily functions are neither mentioned nor depicted. This divergence in representation underlines the differing approaches to historical realism between the two series, with *Babylon Berlin* embracing an unvarnished view of the past. Furthermore, *Babylon Berlin* accentuates and expands upon a negative image of the city as an unhealthy (cf. Kahmann 58) and amoral Moloch, playing into what Müller describes as the

> the lustful (male) gaze, looking in the big city for something he cannot find elsewhere: unchecked and unpunished transgressions, or, as it is known in Anglo-American terms: sex and crime.[43] (Müller 49)

The series reinforces Berlin's mythic image as a modern Babylon, intertwining it with the volatile political climate of the Weimar Republic. According to Dominique Kalifa,

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42 Da muss raus, was keine Miete zahlt. (*Babylon Berlin* 1.02) [literal translation: If it does not pay rent, out with it.]

43 lüsternen (männlichen) Zuschauerblick, der in der Großstadt etwas sucht, was er woanders nicht findet: ungebremste und ungestrafte Grenzüberschreitungen oder, wie es auf angloamerikanisch heißt: sex and crime. (Müller 49)

Babylon symbolises “the antithesis of values underlying Western society” and represents “the space of the ugly, of vice, of the spirit of lucre, of morbid passions” (Kalifa 38). The depiction of the city as an underground realm of poverty and vice stands in stark contrast to the clean, sanitised sphere of the upper classes. Kalifa notes that “[d]irt is the omnipresent motif, as much on the social level as on the psychological or moral level. It bespeaks savagery, a depravity of places, people, and activities. Mud, muck, and garbage are everywhere” (Kalifa 21). In this sense, motifs of underground misery include “a dump, a latrine, and a slaughterhouse” (ibid.). According to Kalifa, body functions and body fluids are part of the underworld’s symbolism:

> However, it was always by filth, stench, and perversity that the lower depths were manifested. Pulled downward, this was also a world of the “bodily lower stratum,” in the sense Mikhail Bakhtin gave to this term. It was the universe of grease, dirt, excrement, the scatological. […] Hence the grotesque dimension of the lower depths was very present under the ancien régime, with the stress on orgy, prostitution, sexual perversion, and bestiality. What remains is a sense of the “residue” of everything that is expelled from the body, including blood, sperm, and excrement. (Kalifa 21)

Abject imagery in contemporary reimagining of the early twentieth century may invoke the viewer’s memory of scents to enhance realism. While *Downton Abbey* and similar productions evoke clean, attractive scents of landscape scenery, flower shows, washed fabrics, and traditional foods, productions like *Babylon Berlin* suggest the “tenacious odors […] that emanate from sex or from excrement” (Kalifa 22). Both *The White Ribbon* and *Babylon Berlin* present loci of abjection and vice, where the hypocritical façade of society is undermined by its own repressed, base underground with its crimes and transgressions.

3.3.3 The spectre of imperialism and National Socialism prefigured

Downton Abbey sanitises the history of the early twentieth century, particularly in its portrayal of British Imperialism and the existence of British colonies, which are not mentioned until the fifth season of the show (see chapter 3.1.2). In contrast, *Mr. Selfridge* actively engages with British colonial history, albeit uncritically, by featuring its so-called ‘Empire Show’ as an unironic celebration of the British Empire as a colonial power.

In the German mini-series *Das Adlon*, German colonial history is explicitly and implicitly criticised through the colonial ventures of Gustav Schadt. *Das Adlon* critically

addresses the treatment of colonised subjects, represented by the character Galla (Thelma Buabeng), an African maid. Here, the German Empire and its colonies are not merely discussed but made a visible and integral part of life in the early twentieth century. Schadt's business interests are depicted as a stronghold of colonialism. In episode 1.01, Schadt receives Lorenz Adlon (Burghart Klaußner) in his storage facilities, which are surrounded by a 'dead zoo' of taxidermy animals from the colonies. This scene is conceptualised as ominous and sinister, accentuated by a thunderstorm raging outside. Schadt's collection of exotic animals symbolically mirrors the presence of Galla, whom he brought from the colonies to serve the family. Galla's status as a possession is further confirmed when she reveals her backstory, stating she was traded by a rivalling tribe to Gustav Schadt in exchange for a hunting rifle, effectively identifying herself as a bought enslaved person in all but name (*Das Adlon* 1.01).

Furthermore, the topic of Germany as a colonial power in Africa is brought into focus during a party in the Schadt home in episode 1.01, where photographs of Gustav Schadt in Africa capture the interest of the Prussian aristocrat von Tennen. A political discussion ensues between the militaristic von Tennen family and the liberal-minded Louis Adlon (Heino Ferch), who condemns the colonial atrocities committed against the Herero tribes in German South-West Africa, now recognised to as the Herero and Namaqua genocide:

> Schadt: That's from my plantation.
>
> Von Tennen: You are familiar with our colonies in Africa firsthand, Mr. Schadt?
>
> Schadt: […] I have maintained excellent trade relations with them for several years. [The African maid Galla appears in the scene and serves drinks]
>
> Von Tennen: Then you must know best the contribution we Germans make to the education and upbringing of these people.
>
> Schadt: Well…we have done a great deal to civilise the Blacks in recent years.
>
> Louis Adlon: Right now, we're doing rather more to exterminate them.
>
> Von Tennen: Are you talking about the Hottentot uprising in German South-West Africa?
>
> Schadt: Hereros, as they're actually called.
>
> Lorenz Adlon: Our imperial protection forces are bravely trying to prevent the worst.

> Louis Adlon: By committing a bloodbath among these Hereros.
> Schadt: Louis, you're not a Socialist, are you?[44] (*Das Adlon* 1.01)

Louis Adlon is labelled as a "socialist," a designation that underscores the prevailing sentiment that any humanist critique of the colonial policies of the Empire is readily equated with socialism and 'revolution'. The scene not only draws attention to but also raises awareness of this overlooked aspect of German history in the early twentieth century, highlighting the trivialisation of colonial discourse often overshadowed by discussions related to the Second World War. The treatment of Germany's colonial past in *Das Adlon* is further complicated by the vacillating characterisation of the colonisers. The von Tennen family embodies racist and jingoistic attitudes toward colonised people. This perspective is personified by Siegfried von Tennen (Alexander Becht, Jürgen Vogel), who acts as an antagonist throughout the mini-series. He is introduced as a young Prussian aristocrat and officer eager for his upcoming service in the African colonies, enthusiastically declaring:

> I am an officer through and though, and I will ensure discipline and order in the colonies [*Galla appears in the background*] in the name of His Majesty […] The Negro tribes are impertinent. They are beginning to revolt, becoming insolent toward the White man, whom they must obey.[45] (*Das Adlon* 1.01)

In contrast, the businessman Gustav Schadt is characterised as a more sympathetic character who advocates for the respectful use of "Hereros" instead of the racist and derogatory term "Hottentot"[46]. However, his more enlightened stance does not absolve

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[44] Schadt: Das ist auf meiner Plantage.
Von Tennen: Sie kennen unsere Kolonien in Afrika aus erster Hand, Herr Schadt?
Schadt: […] Ich pflege seit einigen Jahren hervorragenden Handelsbeziehungen mit ihnen.
[Die afrikanische Magd Galla erscheint im Bild und serviert Getränke]
Von Tennen: Dann wissen Sie ja am besten welchen Beitrag wir Deutschen zur Bildung und Erziehung dieser Völker leisten.
Schadt: Nun ja…wir haben zur Zivilisation der Schwarzen in den letzten Jahren sehr viel unternommen.
Louis Adlon: Im Augenblick unternehmen wir doch eher einiges zu ihrer Vernichtung.
Von Tennen: Sie sprechen von der Revolte der Hottentotten in Deutsch Süd-West?
Schadt: Hereros, wie sie eigentlich heißen.
Lorenz Adlon: Unsere kaiserlichen Schutztruppen versuchen doch tapfer das schlimmste zu verhindern.
Adlon: Indem sie unter diesen Hereros ein Blutbad anrichten.
Schadt: Louis, Sie sind doch nicht etwa ein Sozialist? (*Das Adlon* 1.01)

[45] Ich bin mit Leib und Seele Offizier und werde auch danach in den Kolonien [Galla erscheint im Hintergrund] im Namen seiner Majestät für Zucht und Ordnung sorgen […] Die Negerstämme sind impertinent. Sie fangen an zu revoltieren, werden anmaßend gegenüber dem Weißen, dem sie doch gehorchen müssen. (*Das Adlon* 1.01)

[46] Hottentot (German: Hottentotten) is a racial term, now considered a racist slur, historically used by European colonisers to refer to indigenous African tribes.

him of participating in and profiting from a colonial system responsible for atrocities such as the Herero and Namaqua genocide. This is underlined by photographs depicting his activities in the colonies and by the presence of Galla, an African woman he purchased and imported like an exotic commodity. This contradiction between Schadt's ostensibly sympathetic character and his ownership of Galla is showcased throughout the series. It is particularly emphasised by intermittent shots of Galla silently appearing in the background, especially during conversations about the colonies. These visual cues consistently remind the viewer of the inherent contradictions within Schadt's character and the exploitative nature of his business practices.

Das Adlon offers both explicit and implicit critique of German colonialism, which is further underscored by the declining health and eventual death of Gustav Schadt from an exotic illness contracted in the colonies. This illness, caused by a mysterious virus, becomes his final colonial 'import,' adding a layer of irony and retribution for his role in the exploitation and atrocities of the colonial era. Upon Schadt's death, Galla is depicted roaming the house and chanting incantations in her native language, invoking the stereotype of the 'Magical Negro.' As an embodiment of both Schadt's guilt and, by extension, German colonial guilt, Galla's actions are ostensibly aimed at spiritually cleansing the house of ghosts and spectres, while she herself embodies the spectre of colonialism that continues to haunt the household of an imperialist tradesman.

Galla is characterised as loyal and attached to the Schadt family, reminiscent of the servants in *Downton Abbey*. Her childlike excitement when announcing "The master is back![47]" carries a layered meaning. She is simultaneously infantilised by her colonial masters and acts as a mother-like figure to the daughters of the house, Alma and Sonja. Galla's relationship with the Schadt family, particularly the daughters, resembles the 'Mammy' stereotype – a typified image of an African American slave who serves as a loyal maid and nanny to the children of the household, who cares for them with motherly affection (cf. Wallace-Sanders 2). This familial bond between the affluent white children of the house and black female servants is often romanticised and idealised within this stereotype, as famously depicted in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and its 1939 film adaptation, where the character of Mammy (Hattie McDaniel) is a well-known example.

[47] Der Herr ist zurück! (*Das Adlon* 1.01)

In *Das Adlon*, there is an implicit correlation between Schadt's 'dead zoo' on display and the silent presence of Galla as an exotic commodity in his private household. The ZDF series *Charité* more explicitly addresses the exploitation of people from the colonies, portraying them as literal exhibits of exotic commodities. Set before the turn of the century, *Charité* features one of Carl Hagenbeck's so-called 'Völkerschauen' or 'human zoos.' In episode 1.06, native people from Southeast Asia are displayed in an enclosed compound of a zoo, for the amusement of paying visitors. The attitude towards these human 'exhibits' is represented by nurse Stine (Monika Oschek), who points, shouts, and laughs at them alongside other guests. Their crude remarks about the foreigner's appearance, such as: "How ugly they are!" or "They look like they came down the chimney, black as they are!"[48] (*Charité* 1.06), appear gratingly racist to a contemporary audience. This representation of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century entertainment culture appears disturbing and alien to contemporary viewers, while simultaneously raising awareness of the racist and dehumanising nature of colonial ideology in Germany and other colonial powers.

When Rajani (Amy Mußul) one of the women in the 'human zoo' falls ill with pox, she is taken to the Charité hospital, where the nurses initially refuse her treatment. Stine, who had previously dehumanised the woman when she saw her at Hagenbeck's 'human zoo,' eventually provides care and befriends her. This narrative arc in *Charité*, whether intentional or not, draws parallels to contemporary issues in German society regarding the 'othering' of migrants and foreigners, a phenomenon that has resurfaced in recent years. At this juncture, *Charité* almost didactically imparts a message that interpersonal encounters, conversations, and deeper understanding can lead to greater acceptance and successful integration.

In *Charité,* nationalism, traditionalism, and Prussianism are personified through the 'Burschenschaften' [engl. fraternities]. These groups' jingoistic, nationalist and antisemitic attitudes are exemplified by a cohort of nameless medical students and particularly articulated by the villainous character Heinrich von Minckwitz (Daniel Sträßer), who influences the protagonist's romantic interest, Georg Tischendorf (Maximilian Meyer-Bretschneider), to join a fraternity. This affiliation causes a significant shift in Tischendorf's character, marking his transition as he begins to adopt Minckwitz' misogynist, jingoistic, antisemitic, and nationalist-conservative ideologies.

[48] Sind die hässlich […] Sehen aus, als wären die durch den Kamin gekommen, so schwarz wie die sind. (*Charité* 1.06)

This transformation is starkly illustrated in a scene where Tischendorf, as part of a drunken student mob, verbally abuses the Jewish doctor Paul Ehrlich (Christoph Bach), exclaiming: "Why don't you go back to the promised land? You won't disappear because you are parasites plaguing our German people"[49] (*Charité* 1.06). The incident escalates as the chorus of students menacingly chants, "Death and doom to all Jews! You must flee or die![50]" (ibid.), echoing the systemic antisemitism already prevalent in the late nineteenth-century Germany, encapsulated here through the nationalist and 'Prussian spirit' of the fraternity. As a result of these developments, Tischendorf becomes unsuitable as a romantic interest for the progressive, liberal-minded protagonist, Ida Lenze. This narrative choice emphasises the moral and ideological divide between the characters, mirroring broader societal tensions and the deep-rooted prejudices of the era.

In *The White Ribbon*, the strict regime enforced by the patriarchs and parents in the village embodies the 'Prussian spirit' and virtues that formed the basis of German cultural identity at the onset of the First World War. The transgressions committed by the village children – such as disobedience, idleness, or defiance to authority – are in direct opposition to the 'Prussian virtues' upheld by the patriarchs. Early in the film, the pastor's children, Klara (Maria Dragus) and Martin, are punished with beatings and condemned to wear the eponymous white ribbons for coming home late. Their neglect of the 'Prussian virtue' of strict punctuality – a trait still cited as inherently German – is punished here with corporeal force and methods of poisonous pedagogy.

Prussianism, which encapsulates militarism and authoritarianism, is also critiqued in German reimaginings of the early twentieth century. An example of this is seen in the characterisation of the von Tennen family in *Das Adlon*. Introduced as West-Prussian nobility with a country estate but dwindling wealth, they represent the decline of their class against the backdrop of the upward social mobility of the wealthy bourgeoisie, represented by the Schadt family. The von Tennen family members are portrayed as unsympathetic characters, embodying jingoist and racist views rooted in a firm belief in the superiority of Imperial Germany as a colonial power and military force. Siegfried von Tennen is introduced as a young Prussian officer and eventually evolves into a staunch National Socialist, first as a member of the SA and later the Gestapo. This trajectory is predictable and indicates the continuities between Prussian

[49] Warum verschwinden Sie nicht ins gelobte Land? Sie verschwinden nicht, weil sie Parasiten sind, die unser deutsches Volk aussaugen. (*Charité* 1.06).

[50] Allen Juden Tod und Verderben. Ihr müsst fliehen oder sterben. (ibid.)

values and Völkisch-Nationalist ideologies appropriated by the Nazi regime. Alma Schadt's rejection of von Tennen as a suitor establishes a moral distance between herself and the Prussian traditions represented by the von Tennen family, much like Ida Lenze's eventual rejection of Georg Tischendorf in *Charité*. Both romantic rejections emphasise a deliberate distancing from and rejection of authoritarian, militaristic, and essentially patriarchal values.

In German reimaginings, Prussianism is often encoded as a precursor to Fascism and National Socialism. However, Michael Haneke contests this interpretation of *The White Ribbon*, asserting that his film "is not an etiology of Nazism, probing instead the general origins of human evil" (G. Stewart 41). Despite Haneke's refutation, the narrator's voiceover at the beginning of the film suggests a deeper contextual link: he expresses hope that his recounting of the "incidents" in the village might "perhaps shed some light on some things that have occurred in this country" (*The White Ribbon* 2009) (cf. G. Stewart 41). Stewart argues that the "particular national context of *The White Ribbon* remains hard to deny" (ibid. 42). The film does not make direct political references, and the announcement of the First World War at the film's conclusion serves as the only explicit indication of the militarist and imperial power encircling the village, which is otherwise depicted as an isolated microcosm, detached from the broader currents of nationalism and politics.

In *The White Ribbon*, the village of Eichwald is depicted as existing in its own contained world, yet it still embodies the structures, traditions, and values of Prussian society and patriarchal order. According to Stewart, it is "[s]ocial pathology" that "marks the path to National Socialism" (G. Stewart 40), rather than overt political discourse. Compared to this, the traditions and social order that *Downton Abbey* and its cognates nostalgically celebrate are also 'virtues' and ideological codes from the pre-war era that strongly overlap with the traditional values of the German Empire, known as 'Prussian virtues'. These include punctuality, an excessive sense of order and cleanliness, obedience and deference to authority, discipline and industriousness, loyalty, and subordination. A similar set of British virtues underpins the harmonious and ordered world of *Downton Abbey*, where the majority of characters know their place and adhere to these values and rules.

Conversely, German productions such as *Das Adlon*, *The White Ribbon* or *Charité* often carry an underlying criticism of such Prussian 'virtues,' suggesting that

these values contribute to a social environment dominated by strict order and a pervasive fear of transgression and punishment. While German reimaginings frequently encode a prefiguration of emergent National socialism through anti-Prussian sentiments, *Downton Abbey* explicitly addresses German historical developments in its fifth season, linking the disappearance of Lady Edith's love interest, Michael Gregson, to the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich in 1923:

> Edith: Apparently, there's a trial going on in Munich of the leader of a group of thugs there.
> Robert: I read about this. They wear brown shirts and go around bullying people. The leader tried to start a revolution last year.
> Edith: That's it. It was absurd.
> Robert (scoffs): Maybe. But I'm afraid we're going to see a lot more of this sort of thing. We pushed Germany too hard with our demands after the war. (*Downton Abbey* 5.04)

Rather than explicitly naming the National Socialist party, they are hinted at with recognisable codes like 'brown shirts.' Lord Grantham's evaluation of the adverse effects of the Treaty of Versailles reflects an anachronistically informed contemporary historical assessment of the factors that contributed to the rise of Nazism. In episode 5.06, Lady Grantham first explicitly asks, "And was it this Herr Hitler?" (5.06). Lord Grantham describes the early Nazi party as a "horrid bunch from the sound of it" (ibid.) while expressing doubt that Hitler will remain in prison for long, thus anticipating future historical developments.

Downton Abbey's first account of the Nazis is deliberately unsubtle and informed by twenty-first-century perspectives, creating a clear distance between the series' characters and the era's politics. This approach effectively exonerates them from any suspicion of becoming British aristocratic Nazi sympathisers, unlike characters such as Lord Darlington (James Fox) in *The Remains of the Day* (1989) or Lady Persephone Towyn (Claire Foy) in *Upstairs Downstairs* (2010-2012).

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

In the first part of my analysis of contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, I have focused on how various settings contribute to generating specific atmospheres and impressions of the past, whether positively or negatively connoted. Of particular interest is the presentation of setting and loci as indicators of atmosphere and

emotional cues for viewers. The British and German reimaginings analysed in this thesis predominantly feature an eponymous single or central setting that serves as a thematic and functional backdrop for the narrative. This includes grand estates such as *Downton Abbey*, hotels like *Das Adlon*, or commercial spaces such as *Mr. Selfridge*'s department store. In British reimaginings, these settings often emerge as proverbial 'good places' endowed with utopian and Arcadian qualities. Conversely, in German reimaginings, the settings are frequently imbued with negative overtones that reflect the socio-historical realities of the era.

Furthermore, it can be surmised that the idyllic and Arcadian image of the past presented in *Downton Abbey* resembles the literary concept of the *locus amoenus*, a pastoral idyll that is often envisioned as a backdrop to the heritage film genre. This contrast highlights distinct cultural approaches to historical representations, where British narratives tend to romanticise and idealise, whereas German narratives may engage more critically with their historical context. However, the positive or negative connotations of these settings should not be attributed solely to aesthetic and stylistic choices; they are also contingent upon the reimagination of socio-cultural frameworks, including class relations.

For instance, the era-specific relationship between upper-class masters and their servants, representing the lower classes, emerges as a critical motif in contemporary reimaginings. While British productions such as *Downton Abbey* depict a utopian symbiosis and harmonious, family-like co-existence between the upper classes and their loyal servants, German productions like *The White Ribbon* or *Das Adlon* critically showcase the exploitative and precarious nature of working-class life both in and outside of service during the early twentieth century.

Further illustrating the hardships of working-class life, productions such as *The Village* and *Suffragette* highlight the struggles of farmers and industrial workers. Conversely, servants and salespersons emerge as the more popular representatives of the working class in the early twentieth century, particularly in narratives where their proximity to the upper-class places them in a distinguished and seemingly advantageous position. In reimaginings like *Downton Abbey* or *Mr. Selfridge*, servants benefit from the protective auspices of their employers, a depiction that contrasts sharply with the more critical portrayal of similar relationships in German narratives.

The sanitised image of class relations and working conditions presented in British reimaginings such as *Mr. Selfridge* and *Downton Abbey* can be interpreted as an

underlying dismissal of the precarious and exploitative working conditions of servants and other employees of the era. Snobbism and classism in these productions are notably toned down or addressed with humour, contributing to an impression of an underlying desire to neutralise leftist criticism of British society, both past and present. These productions, such as *Downton Abbey* and *Mr. Selfridge,* promote a sanitised and romanticised view of the past, depicting it as a 'simpler time' where a strict social order, moral codes, and traditional class and gender roles seemingly made social reforms superfluous in a society that appears to self-regulate.

As such, *Downton Abbey* and its cognates can be seen as inherently conservative, reflecting postmillennial conservative politics. These series reimagine an 'intact world' idyll, serving as an escapist fantasy to detract from contemporary realities of the late 2000s financial crisis and inviting comparisons to the popularity of the German Heimatfilm in the 1950s. In my analysis of *Downton Abbey*, clear parallels are drawn between the genres of British heritage film and German Heimatfilm, both propagating conservative values within a sanitised 'intact world' setting that engenders nostalgic pleasure.

It can be concluded that the British heritage genre and the German Heimatfilm genre employ a similar formula that facilitates the transference of genre conventions across different national and cultural contexts. This suggested kinship reveals that contemporary British reimaginings, like *Downton Abbey*, can be interpreted as Heimat-coded despite their inherent Britishness. The series' utilisation of codes and conventions from a post-war German film genre is particularly noteworthy, given that the Heimatfilm genre itself evolved from National Socialist cinema. This genre emphasised entertainment imbued with coded political and ideological content, aimed at propagating a nationalist-conservative worldview.

Examples of shared genre conventions between the British heritage genre, as exemplified by *Downton Abbey*, and the German Heimatfilm include the adoption of specific rural settings, formulaic plot structures such as the 'inheritance crisis,' and a repertoire of stock characters that depict a perfectly ordered society where characters 'know their place.' Beyond these overt generic frameworks, my analysis has delved into the underlying content of *Downton Abbey,* which further reflects its conservative coding and likeness to the Heimatfilm. The series' emphasis on presenting a sanitised and literally 'clean' world, both morally and physically, correlates with the conservative

codes shared with the Heimatfilm genre and its emphasis on ‘clean’ and sanitised entertainment. Additionally, the spatial theme of enclosure and the figure of the outsider are recurring concepts in both the heritage genre, as represented by *Downton Abbey*, and the German Heimatfilm. These thematic elements serve to reinforce the notion of an insular, self-regulating community, idealising a cohesive society while subtly critiquing or excluding disruptive external influences. This treatment not only cultivates a nostalgic ambiance but also subtly reinforces a conservative worldview, promoting stability and tradition over change and progress.

The kinship between contemporary British heritage productions and the German Heimatfilm genre extends to their inverse: the German Anti-Heimatfilm and the British ‘dark heritage’ genre. Both emerged as direct reactions and critical oppositions to the idealised and sanitised narratives presented in Heimatfilm and heritage films. These counter-genres offer alternative visions of the past, where the class system is depicted as broken, and relations between classes are dysfunctional and exploitative rather than wholesome and harmonious.

In this chapter, I have focused on German Anti-Heimat productions such as *The White Ribbon* and *Babylon Berlin* as examples of reimaginings that prioritise social realism and critique over escapism. Their emphasis on ‘reality’ is reinforced by the inclusion of abject imagery, which serves to illustrate the past as dirty, unsanitary, and unappealing. This stands in stark contrast to British reimaginings like *Downton Abbey,* where cleanliness is a recurring theme – echoed, for example, in the continuous depiction of cleaning duties performed by servant characters. This contrast not only underlines the differing approaches to historical representation but also reflects broader cultural attitudes towards the past. While British productions often sanitise and idealise historical settings, their German counterparts tend to present a more critical and unvarnished view, suggesting a deeper engagement with the complexities and inequities of historical realities.

This chapter explores the representation of significant historical events and ideological frameworks from the past, such as the First World War and the decline of imperialism and colonialism – events that shaped both the British Empire and the German Kaiserreich. *Downton Abbey*’s sanitised depiction of working conditions and class relations is indicative of the broader sanitisation of the socio-historical conditions of the Edwardian era. This includes the representation of the First World War and the notable omission of the decline of the British Empire from the series. This marked absence of

colonialism in contemporary British reimaginings points to the selective nature of memory depicted in popular cultural productions. Despite addressing other core elements of the British establishment, the cultural memory in *Downton Abbey* is deliberately confined to less controversial aspects of heritage and national identity. Furthermore, the series' reluctance to incorporate darker historical realities reflects an aversion to sacrificing its overarching theme of harmony and idyll for the sake of historical accuracy and realism. This selective portrayal is part of its appeal to viewers, offering a nostalgic escape rather than a confrontational re-examination of historical complexities. As noted in this chapter, contemporary British reimaginings engage in a form of deliberate fictional commemoration of historical events such as the Titanic disaster and the First World War. An analysis of *Mr. Selfridge*'s reveals a conscious and overt display of patriotism upon Britain's entry into the First World War.

By staging an 'Empire Show,' the series unironically and uncritically celebrates the British Empire as a colonial power. In stark contrast to *Downton Abbey*'s avoidance of the topic of colonialism and *Mr. Selfridge*'s uncritical celebration of it, German reimaginings explicitly address and critique their colonial history. For instance, in *Das Adlon*, the German Empire and its colonies are not only explicitly addressed but also given visibility and a voice through the character of Galla, the African maid. This juxtaposition highlights the differing approaches to historical representation between British and German series. While British series often lean toward a nostalgic recollection that sidesteps controversial aspects of history, German series tend to confront and critique their past, weaving complex and sometimes uncomfortable realities into the narrative. This contrast indicates the selective nature of historical memory in popular cultural productions, while also reflecting broader national differences in addressing and engaging with colonial legacies.

It can be concluded that the representation and popular cultural commemoration of the First World War in British productions is more connected to a sense of patriotism and national pride than in German reimaginings. In these German productions, patriotism and nationalism are framed negatively, associated with jingoism, militarism, and antisemitism – traits of the overriding ideology of Prussianism, which is coded as a precursor to Fascism and Nazism. This portrayal suggests that German reimaginings, such as *The White Ribbon* or *Charité,* leverage the latency of Nazism to focus on historical elements that, in retrospect, can be seen as contributing to the rise of National Socialism. These series, set before the emergence of the NSDAP, critically explore the

socio-political undercurrents of the era, highlighting how they may have laid the groundwork for the later rise of fascist ideologies in Germany.

Historical disasters and crises such as the First World War or the sinking of the Titanic are frequently employed as narrative turning points in both British and German reimaginings. In my analysis, these events serve as devices to transition the setting from a *locus amoenus* – an idyllic place – to a *locus terribilis* – a place of terror. This dynamic is vividly exemplified in the film *Titanic*, where the pivotal narrative moment of the iceberg collision dramatically transforms the *locus amoenus* of the ship into a *locus terribilis*.

Furthermore, in this chapter, I explore the Foucauldian spatial concept of the heterotopia, particularly as it applies to the ship in the Titanic narrative. Specifically, in *Titanic* (1997), the confined space of the ship functions as a heterotopia of crisis. This setting acts as a catalyst for the protagonist's personal crisis, marking her coming of age. The ship, isolated from the normal constraints of society, becomes a microcosm where conventional social rules no longer apply, allowing for transformative experiences. In my analysis of *Titanic*, the protagonist's identity crisis and acts of social transgression are interpreted as a performance of adolescence and repressed puberty, which is ultimately expressed in a positive release. Conversely, the crisis experienced by the children in *The White Ribbon* manifests in negative and destructive acts of violence. Here, the crisis of puberty is shown in resentment against adults as oppressors, sexual frustration due to a repressive moral code, and aggression towards others.

It is noteworthy that other contemporary reimaginings analysed in this chapter are also set within the transient space of a heterotopia of crisis, such as the hotel in *Das Adlon* or the hospital in *Charité*. Whether historical or personal, crisis emerges as another key theme in this analysis. I posit that the narrative inclusion of crisis often serves as a harbinger of subversion and societal change. Here, the transgressive powers of crisis are related to the carnivalesque, as seen in *Downton Abbey*, where crises enable characters to temporarily break free from the rigid social order of the era. *Downton Abbey* regularly employs 'crisis plots' to disrupt the placidity of life in the country house. Although the *locus amoenus* of Downton Abbey occasionally 'tips over' into a *locus terribilis*, these moments are fleeting before the crisis is resolved and the positive mood restored.

4 Growing and shrinking worlds: spatiality and size in contemporary reimaginings

4.1 Playing House: the (Doll's) House as key motif

As discussed in chapter 3, houses are a popular and recurring setting in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, emerging as a key motif that reflects the Zeitgeist of a historical period. Within the genre, the house serves as an essential component of the country-house murder and locked-room mystery by providing a "restricted setting" (cf. Scaggs 52) that heightens the tension and confines the narrative. This restricted environment not only intensifies the drama but also emphasises the themes of isolation, secrecy, and the underlying tensions within a seemingly orderly space. The motif of the house, according to Bachelard, functions as "an instrument of topo-analysis," (Bachelard 47) capable of being "read" from "a standpoint of philosophy of literature and poetry" (ibid. 14). It spells both familiarity and mystery. The house, therefore, becomes a character in its own right, shaping the narrative and reflecting the complexities of the social dynamics at play.

The house's inherent functionality as a locus of habitation and shelter provides "protected intimacy" (Bachelard 3) and extends beyond mere physicality to become a motif of human imagination and dreams, conveying "a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (ibid. 17). It also stimulates "memories of protection" (ibid. 6). According to Bachelard, "[w]e are constantly re-imagining its reality" (ibid. 17), a process evident across various types of fiction and media. Here, the house not only serves as a narrative backdrop but also introduces a psychological dimension, imbuing the space with symbolic power that resonates on both individual and collective levels (cf. ibid.).

Such psychological connotations are primarily located in specific parts of the house, like the attic or basement, suggesting not only a verticality but also a concentricity that is inherent to the house. This thematic exploration emphasises the multiplicity of meanings attached to the architectural spaces of the house and reflects its inherent socio-cultural and psychological undercurrents.

In contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, significant emphasis is placed on the division of the house into different functional areas. While houses may serve a variety of purposes – from basic shelter to venues for amusement, commerce or medical care – the interiors of private residences like *Downton Abbey* are

often distinctly ‘mapped out’ into spatial spheres with specific functions and qualities that evolve according to historical times, contexts and milieu.

Viewing a house from the inside and observing the activities of its inhabitants offers a unique pleasure to film and television viewers. This is particularly evident in productions like *Downton Abbey,* where the pleasure of viewing is enhanced by an element of voyeurism. The series invites viewers to pry into the intimate spaces of the house, which is ‘opened up’ to the viewer’s gaze, akin to a dollhouse with its intricate interior on display. Susan Stewart describes the dollhouse as a site of nostalgia, spectacle and play:

> Transcendence and the interiority of history and narrative are the dominant characteristics of the most consummate of miniature – the dollhouse. A house within a house, the dollhouse not only presents the house’s articulation of the tension between inner and outer spheres, of exteriority and interiority – it also represents the tension between to modes of interiority. (S. Stewart 61)

The dollhouse, stripped of its essential function as shelter, becomes a miniature image of the house’s microcosm, reflecting nostalgia and a desire for an enclosed world. In this regard, the dollhouse metaphor aptly applies to *Downton Abbey,* as the series provides viewers with full visual access to nearly every part of the house, from the attic to the basement and all spaces in between. This extensive visual access turns the fictional Edwardian house into a large-scale dollhouse, providing amusement, nostalgia, and voyeuristic pleasure.

Similar to the *slice of life* genre, the series focuses on detailed aspects of everyday life in the house and domestic scenes. From a critical perspective, the motif of the dollhouse, as seen in Henrik Ibsen’s late nineteenth-century play *A Doll’s House* (1879), is often associated with the domestication, infantilisation, and fetishisation of women. Susan Stewart elaborates on this theme, stating:

> The dollhouse, as we know from the political economy as well as from Ibsen, represents a particular form of interiority, an interiority which the subject experiences as its sanctuary (fantasy) and prison (the boundaries or limits of otherness, the inaccessibility of what cannot be lived experience). (S. Stewart 65)

Thus, the dollhouse simultaneously invites the viewer’s gaze into the house and its interiors while keeping them physically outside due to its miniature size. Although the house can be visually consumed, it remains physically inaccessible. This dynamic is

also at play in historical film and television productions, which offer viewers the pleasures of visually consuming the past, while the 'lived experience' of its settings remains unattainable. Nostalgia and a sense of historicity or 'pastness' are inherent to the dollhouse image. Stewart observes that "[c]ontemporary dollhouses are distinctly not contemporary; it is probably not accidental that it is the Victorian period which is presently so popular for reproduction in miniature" (S. Stewart 68). She suggests this popularity is not solely due to "that period's obsession with detail and materiality" but also because "Victorian modes of production presented the height of transformation of nature into culture" (ibid.).

This compliance with the 'period look' of the dollhouse extends even to modern productions like *Playmobil*'s 1990s 'Victorian House,' a plastic toy that juxtaposes the modernity of its material with its adherence to Victorian style. Gaston Bachelard considers the pleasure of the literarily imagined miniature house as an "experience of topophilia," characterised by its "interior beauty" and "inversion of perspective" (Bachelard 149). He also notes that familiarity with toys and nostalgia for childhood play are significant factors in the pleasure derived from the imagined tiny house (cf. ibid.). In relation to *Downton Abbey* and its dollhouse-like appearance, this nostalgia for childhood translates to a nostalgia for an ostensibly 'simpler time,' with simplistic values, contained in a familiar setting.

> I shall show that miniature literature – that is to say, the aggregate of literary images that are commentaries on inversions in the perspective of size – stimulates profound values. (Bachelard 150–51)

Bachelard emphasises the importance of inversions in the size perspectives for spatial relations and dynamics in literary works, arguing that "everything, even size, is a human value" (Bachelard 215) and is thus subject to human perception and evaluation. He posits that immensity represents "a philosophical category of daydream" (ibid. 183), whereas "miniature worlds" are "dominated worlds" (ibid. 161). In the context of the dollhouse, this dominance is not solely due to its size but also to its enclosed nature and inherent interiority. Susan Stewart draws a poignant analogy, stating:

> Occupying a space within an enclosed space, the dollhouse's aptest analogy is the locket or the secret recesses of the heart: center within center, within within with. The dollhouse is a materialized secret; what we look for is the dollhouse within the dollhouse and its promise of an infinitely profound interiority. (S. Stewart 61)

Downton Abbey and its cognates capitalise on the set limits of enclosed space, focusing on their "profound interiority" – the narratives that unfold *within* the house among its occupants, the family, and servants. The house in *Downton Abbey* serves as the narrative's epicentre, with external events, even significant historical and societal ones like the First World War, remaining peripheral to the safe, enclosed bubble of the country house. The show's isolation from external threats and changes may be a key factor to its popularity, as images of interiority and protected intimacy evidently attract viewers. Bachelard further elucidates this appeal of intimacy:

> I shall therefore put my trust in the power of attraction of all the domains of intimacy. There does not exist a real intimacy that is repellent. All the spaces of intimacy are designated by an attraction. Their being is well-being. In these conditions, topoanalysis bears the stamp of a topophilia, and shelters and rooms will be studied in the sense of this valorization. (Bachelard 12)

In this sense, *Downton Abbey* invokes the intimate attraction akin to dollhouses, which Stewart describes as "extravagant displays of upper-class ways of life that were meant to stop time and thus present the illusion of a perfectly complete and hermetic world" (S. Stewart 62).

Essentially a dollhouse of gigantic dimension, *Downton Abbey* operates on the tension between the inside and outside world and presents as an enclosed and protected bastion of tradition and conservative values. It signifies shelter and safety from an increasingly crisis-ridden external world, mirroring the allure and protective qualities of a dollhouse – an appeal that explains why the darker episodes were less well-received by the audience.

4.1.1 The spatial themes of verticality, concentricity and katabasis

According to function and designation, the spatial motif of the house can be explored further as divided into different spheres, locations, rooms and parts. These different segments of the house often engender distinct atmospheres, degrees of privacy, and levels of importance. For instance, in *Downton Abbey*, specific areas of the house are designated exclusively to one gender, such as the bachelor hallway, for particular age groups like the nursery, or classes, such as the servants' quarters. This division indicates the hierarchical structure within the house and simultaneously creates more specific 'safe spaces' within the overarching sheltered environment of the house.

These spatial divisions are integral to the narrative, as they reflect and reinforce the social stratifications and cultural norms of the time. Each area serves as a microcosm where interactions are defined by the social dynamics and expectations appropriate to that space. For example, the servants' quarters in *Downton Abbey* are not merely functional but symbolise the strict separation between the servants and the family they serve, emphasising issues of class and social mobility. Similarly, gender-specific areas like the bachelor hallway offer a setting to explore the gender roles and expectations within the Edwardian society depicted in the series.

The division of grand houses such as Downton Abbey into upper and lower strata, conceptualised in the 'upstairs-downstairs' dynamic popularised by the eponymous series *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1971), introduces a significant hierarchical element. Bachelard identifies "two principal connecting themes" (Bachelard 17) of the house:

> 1) A house is imagined as a vertical being. It rises upward. It differentiates itself in terms of its verticality. It is one of the appeals to our consciousness of verticality. 2) A house is imagined as a concentrated being. It appeals to our consciousness of centrality. (Bachelard 17)

In addition to its inherent verticality, the house can be interpreted as concentric. This concentricity implies that the spatial arrangement of the house also adheres to a pattern of centre and periphery. Bachelard elaborates that the house's verticality "is ensured by the polarity of cellar and attic" (ibid.) and more specifically by the "rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar" (ibid. 18). This symbolically charged polarity, which underlies the verticality of the house, mirrors the Christian dichotomy of heaven and hell. David Pike adds historical depth to this vertical conception, noting that:

> The medieval and early modern imagination of the underground had been dominated by the vertical cosmos of Christianity. To be sure, many conflicting images made their way into the capacious receptacle labeled Hell, but, at the same time, the relationship between above and below was rigidly fixed and predominately metaphysical. (Pike 7)

This vertical division is similarly echoed in the structure of the ship in *Titanic* (1997) and *Titanic* (2012), where the upper deck and below deck distinctly delineate a hierarchical 'three-tiered' order of First, Second and Third Class, spatially reimagining the Edwardian class system (cf. Koldau 32). In the 1997 film, the protagonist Rose navigates this vertical landscape, moving from the uppermost decks to the belly of the ship,

effectively guiding the viewer through the locus from top to bottom. Mark Wolf observes that

> we follow Jack and Rose through a first-class dinner *and* a steerage dance, Rose is present when one of the iceberg warnings arrives, both are on deck when the iceberg hits, and they manage to stay just a little ahead of the water as it rises deck by deck through the ship. Jack and Rose are out on the top deck along with the first-class passengers *and* are locked below in steerage; Rose both leaves on a lifeboat *and* stays on the ship as it goes underwater; and she is later left behind in the water by the lifeboats *and* is saved by them. (Wolf 217)

Rose's movements across these boundaries illustrate her unique ability to navigate these rigidly defined social spaces. Cameron's *Titanic* (1997), as Wolf argues, succeeds in convincing its audience "not only of the ship's elegance and grandeur, but also the completeness of the on-screen ship as a narrative space" (Wolf 219). Despite the recurring theme of class division that is emphasised throughout the film and other cultural representations of the ship's sinking, *Titanic* (1997) highlights the ship's sense of 'wholeness' and completeness before its catastrophic division into two parts.

In spatial terms, *Downton Abbey* demonstrates that the upper class, rather than occupying a distinct 'higher' sphere, is positioned between the attic rooms where the servants sleep and the basement where they work, effectively being surrounded by the servants. If one views the house in *Downton Abbey* as a concentric space, the upper class is positioned at the core, while their servants navigate concentric circles around them. Despite being integral to the household, the working class operates on the periphery, with their private and workspaces relegated to the outer shell of the house. The peripheral spaces of the rooftop and basement serve dual purposes as living quarters and workplaces for the servants, positioning them on the margins of the house. In this sense, they act as a buffer from the outside world, reinforcing the sense of the house being hermetic and safe for its upper-class inhabitants.

Bachelard asserts that "a roof tells its raison d'être right away: it gives mankind shelter from the rain and sun he fears" (Bachelard 18), which resonates with the placement of servants in the house's rooftop. Although inhabiting a 'higher' place, the servants must endure the heat of summer and rain (on the roof), while their employers reside comfortably at the safe centre of the house. Concurrently, the peripheral location of the servants within the house also suggests that they are kept out of sight, hidden away in a concentric parallel world that orbits the inner core of the household.

Moving discreetly through half-hidden ‘Green Baize Doors,’ within and through the walls, the servants become integrated into the very structure of the house, occupying its periphery rather than the opulent inside rooms. By standing motionless and muted in the presence of their employers, blending in as part of the furniture, they serve as silent witnesses to the activities of the upper class. This marginalisation within the house mirrors the social stratification of society outside it. However, the concentric structure of the house also endows the servants with a certain degree of power over the ruling class. Like an inverted panopticon[51], the house's structure allows the servants to potentially exert power over the masters through constant observation.

In *Downton Abbey*, the attic rooms of the house are imbued with a sense of mystery, particularly from the perspective of the Crawley family, who seldom, if ever, enter this part of the house where their servants enjoy a modicum of privacy. The issue of servants’ privacy recurs throughout the series, as exemplified in episode 1.02 when Lady Grantham unexpectedly appears in the servants’ hall and overhears her lady’s maid, O’Brien, discussing the new heir, Matthew Crawley. Lady Grantham chastises her for the indiscretion. O’Brien and Thomas Barrow later express frustration that “down here” in the basement, they should have the freedom to speak openly without oversight from their employers (*Downton Abbey* 1.02). This discussion defines the house’s basement as a ‘safe space’ for servants, where they can express themselves freely, away from the constraints of their professional roles. Given that work in service involves living in their workplace, the basement becomes a unique space where they are temporarily relieved from the constant need to perform for their employers.

In the same episode, the sanctity of the servants’ quarters in the attic is violated by members of the upper class when Lady Mary Crawley is tricked by her suitor, the Duke of Crowborough (Charlie Cox) to lead him into the attic under the guise of “exploring” the house (1.02). The discovery of Lady Mary and the duke rifling through Thomas Barrow’s private room compels Lady Mary to apologise, acknowledging the inappropriateness of their intrusion. This act of crossing into a servant’s private space

[51] The panopticon is a type of prison building designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1787 (see Figure 6.3). At the centre of the building is a tower that allows an inspector to observe all the prisoners in the surrounding cells without the prisoners knowing whether or not they are in fact being observed. According to Bentham, the panopticon is ‘A new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example: and that, to a degree equally without example’ (Bentham 1995: 31). He also believed that the panopticon design might also be used in ‘any sort of establishment, in which persons of any description are to be kept under inspection, [including] poor-houses, lazarettos, houses of industry, manufactories, hospitals, work-houses, mad-houses, and schools’ (29). (Storey 131)

is compounded by the duke's persuading her to unlock the door separating the male and female servants' quarters, representing a double transgression of both class and gender boundaries.

Such physical and conceptual transgressions underscore the theme of spatial anxieties within the house as both a motif and a setting. However, the most emphatically transgressive and anxiety-inducing space within the house is the basement. Bachelard reflects on this, noting:

> As for the cellar […] It will be rationalized and its conveniences enumerated. But it is first and foremost the dark entity of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths. (Bachelard 18)

Within the concentric structure of the house in *Downton Abbey*, both the basement and the attic are located on the periphery, signifying spaces of marginalisation. This characteristic extends to underground sites in general, which are often metaphorical underworlds not necessarily located beneath the surface. Such places frequently serve as heterotopic spaces for marginalised individuals, including "prisons, penitentiaries, hospices, asylums, or workhouses" (Kalifa 15). Conversely, facilities like jails have often been situated partially underground, akin to "dungeons and *oubliettes"* (Kalifa 17).

David Pike elaborates on the dual nature of subterranean spaces, noting that they "present a unique combination of the utterly alien with the completely familiar, of mythic timelessness with the lived experience of the present" (Pike 1). This dichotomy contributes to their enduring fascination. The underworld as a locus is "neither the polar opposite of the world above nor its unmediated and dominated reflection; it is neither wholly another world nor does it belong wholly to our own" (ibid.).

This depiction of the basement in *Downton Abbey* as a place of marginalisation within the house's concentric layout highlights the complex interaction between physical and symbolic spaces. The basement, much like the underworld in cultural mythology, operates both within and apart from the visible world, encapsulating tensions between visibility and invisibility, power and powerlessness. This analysis illustrates how the architectural and spatial configurations in the series not only mirror but also reinforce the social hierarchies and cultural narratives embedded within its narrative structure. According to Dominique Kalifa, the underworld is "an inverted world, an antiworld" (Kalifa 17-18), often depicted "as a powerful and hierarchized countersociety" (ibid. 31). This realm frequently houses those marginalised by society and the law, such as

outcasts, outsiders, and outlaws. One historical instance of such an underground locus is the “court of miracles,” which was known for harbouring a lifestyle of outcasts (Kalifa 2). In a German context, the term ‘Unterwelt’ (engl. underworld) has become “synonymous with ‘organized crime’” (ibid. 4), a theme metaphorically and figuratively explored in the series *Babylon Berlin.* Set in the criminal underworld of late 1920s Berlin, this series embodies Kalifa’s description of the underworld as “the hell down into which hordes of vagabonds, wretches, mendicants, “lost” girls, criminals, and convicts seem to be constantly dragged” (Kalifa 1).

A prominent setting in *Babylon Berlin* is the Moka Efti restaurant and club, which houses a brothel in its underground. This location combines elements of the classical underworld with Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. Lieven Ameel elaborates on Foucault’s view of the brothel:

> Foucault draws particular attention to brothels, denoting them as an “extreme type of heterotopia” […] The brothel is, indeed, a heterotopia par excellence: it is set partly outside of the traditional set of moral values which upholds the social structure of society, a place in which social interaction is regulated according to a particular set of rules and habits. Entrance into a brothel, moreover, is generally restricted, a feature which Foucault saw as one of the typical characteristics of heterotopia. At the same time, the brothel might also be said to be an ‘institution’ within society, mirroring and questioning sexual morals, ideas of family, femininity and masculinity. (Ameel 128)

In *Babylon Berlin*, the brothel both celebrates and perverts the vibrant 1920s party culture found above ground. Ameel notes that “the brothel can be seen as a travesty of a utopian image of the bourgeois home, strangely inverted and put into question” (Ameel 132). Interestingly, the brothel in *Babylon Berlin* does not mimic a bourgeois home, it mirrors the hellish social conditions of her working-class household. Charlotte’s role as an unregistered sex worker and dominatrix in the brothel serves as a “radical travesty” of her domestic life (ibid.), where she and her family endure abuse from her brother-in-law, against whom they are powerless. This contrast underlines that while Charlotte appears empowered in her role as dominatrix, she is factually exploited.

As a recurring motif in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, the underworld extends beyond the earthly underground to include the deep, lower depths of the sea. Dominique Kalifa notes several correlations between underworlds and water symbolism:

> This water symbolism is omnipresent for three interrelated reasons. The first is historical; we should not forget that the lower depths draw a portion of their imaginary from the galleys that from Antiquity to the eighteenth century banished to the ocean a substantial number of their undesirables: slaves, vagabonds, criminals, deserters. […] Second is the infernal dimension of water, long attested to in Western culture and nourished by images of the Flood and the River Styx and by tales of barbarian coasts. (Kalifa 19)

In James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997), the Atlantic Sea is symbolically coded as a mythological River Styx, welcoming the dead and moribund passengers who do not make it onto a lifeboat. This symbolism is poignantly illustrated in a scene when Fifth Officer Lowe (Ioan Gruffudd) leads a lifeboat back to the site of the sinking in search of survivors. Lowe appears as a Charon-like figure, gliding on his skiff through the eerily calm waters of a Styx-like sea of the dead, surrounded by frozen corpses.

The mournful and eerie atmosphere of the scene creates an effect that is both otherworldly and evocative of the underworld. In this context, Rose, who is rescued by the lifeboat, emerges as a Eurydice figure, albeit with a positive outcome. Initially believed to be dead and part of the 'sea of the dead', she is allowed to leave it and return to the world of the living. James Cameron's strategic inclusion of Jacques Offenbach's *Orpheus and the Underworld* (1858), played by the band on deck during the sinking and the frantic scramble for lifeboats, underlines the mythological dimension of the imagery within the film.

The mythical subtext of *Titanic* comes full circle in the film's conclusion when the elderly Rose tosses the diamond necklace, 'Heart of the Ocean,' into the sea, symbolically paying her fare to the mythical ferryman, Charon, to transport her safely into the underworld where Jack and other victims await her. The film's conclusion subverts the viewer's initial perception of the sunken ship as merely a horrifying wreck. Instead, Rose's reunion with Jack and other characters in the dream-like sequence suggests that the sunken place, the underworld locus 'below,' is envisioned as a positive, even heavenly realm.

According to Kalifa, "[f]rom Ulysses and Orpheus to Dante, the descent to the Underworld was a major metaphor of Western culture, partly governed by a katabastic imagination." (Kalifa 20). In *Titanic* (1997), this katabatic imagery is central to the film's narrative, particularly exemplified when the protagonist, Rose, descends from the world of the upper class 'above' into the 'underworld' of steerage. This act of katabasis

is further extended as Rose ventures even deeper below deck, navigating through the hell-like boiler rooms to the luggage compartments located in the belly of the ship.

Rose's journey into the ship's lower depths prefigures the Titanic's eventual sinking and its literal descent into the dark, deep underworld of the Atlantic Ocean. This narrative trajectory mirrors a prideful fall, depicted as "being pulled toward the bottom in an ever-descending movement" (Kalifa 18), and it parallels the cultural trope of the 'fallen woman.' Rose, however, subverts this trope by embracing her illicit romance with Jack Dawson and defying the social censure imposed by her peers and family.

Nina Auerbach discusses the transformative power associated with the 'fallen woman' trope, noting that a "constant element in the myth of the fallen woman, reaching back to the Old Testament and to Milton's epic recasting of it, is the absolute transforming power of the fall" (Auerbach 34). This katabatic element in Rose's narrative underscores her physical descent into the underworld of the ship, manifesting her personal transformation as a result of her rebellious actions.

The connection between katabasis and the 'fallen woman' also appears in the German series *Babylon Berlin*. In episode 1.02, Charlotte Ritter is first seen to descend into the 'underworld' of the Moka Efti club and its underground brothel, a scene that is framed as a katabatic moment. This dual quality of mythic and horrific locales is explicated by Dominique Kalifa, who notes that:

> As topographical realities, these locales derive from symbolism relating to Hell, to that *katabasis* (underworld) into which every hero since Greek Antiquity had to descend, but they also derive from the terrible places— tombs, subterranean vaults, oubliettes— that the Gothic novel popularized at the end of the eighteenth century. (Kalifa 17)

The transformative element of katabasis in these narratives connects the motif of descent into the underworld to the theme of crisis, particularly the transformative crisis of puberty and adolescence that underlies the emancipatory journeys and transgressive actions of young female characters in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century. This transformation is specifically encoded in the trope of the katabatic fall. Auerbach identifies the transformative power of the 'fall' as already manifested in the figure of the female child and its metamorphoses, exemplified in literary characters such as Alice from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)

> “Down, down, down," Alice's story begins. "Would the fall never come to an end?" In the power of the fallen woman to infiltrate Victorian England's most beloved children's story, it may seem as if the fall never did, for Alice's fall seems almost a parody of our cultural myth, though nonsense, whimsy, and sentiment defuse it. Like those of Egg's and Brown's women, Alice's fall ignites her capacity for metamorphosis; she herself mutates continually as she travels through Wonderland, growing when necessary into an object as intimidating as Hester Prynne presiding from her pedestal. Moreover, her fall transforms the readers' expectations of predictable reality, so that both Alice and our perspective are expanded by an act that seems to diminish them. (Auerbach 39)

The motif of the ‘fallen woman’ is also prominent in *Downton Abbey*, particularly in the plot surrounding Lady Mary’s ‘fall’ succeeding the affair with Kemal Pamuk. Similar to Rose in *Titanic* (1997) and Charlotte Ritter in *Babylon Berlin*, Lady Mary’s 'fall’ is transformative, empowering and ultimately leads to a positive outcome after a period of tribulation. Auerbach elaborates that “the woman's fall transfigures her, making her the God of her world, the vehicle of a potency which underlies her tribulations in Victorian fiction as well as in art” (Auerbach 39).

Rebellious acts and increased agency are integral to the crisis narrative of both the ‘fallen woman’ and the adolescent character. According to Robyn McCallum, “[…] Alice’s story is a ‘coming-of-age’ narrative in which her adventures lead to a process of growth;” (McCallum 90-91), highlighting how the katabatic world ‘down the rabbit hole’ serves as an underworld where the crisis of puberty is manifested. The localisation of both the sphere of servants and the crisis of puberty in an underground ‘countersociety’, underscores the patriarchal power wielded by the ruling class that implies an infantilisation of the lower orders. This dynamic is illustrated in episode 1.02 of *Downton Abbey* when Lady Grantham scolds her lady’s maid O’Brien reminiscent of a parental admonition:

> Sarah O'Brien: I'm sorry but *I* have standards. And if anyone thinks I'm going to pull my forelock and curtsey to this Mister Nobody from Nowhere...
> [Lady Grantham comes into the Servants' Hall. All servants stand]
> Cora, Countess of Grantham: O'Brien! Were you discussing Mr Crawley?
> Sarah O'Brien: Yes, my lady.
> Cora, Countess of Grantham: Is it your place to do so?
> Sarah O'Brien: I've got my opinions, my lady, same as anybody.
> […]
> Cora, Countess of Grantham: […] But I was *shocked* at the talk I heard as I came in.

> [*to O'Brien*] Mr Crawley is His Lordship's cousin and heir. You *will*, therefore, please accord him the respect that he is entitled to.
> Sarah O'Brien: But you don't like him yourself, milady. You never wanted him to come...
> Cora, Countess of Grantham: You're sailing perilously close to the wind, O'Brien. If we're to be friends, you will *not* speak in that way again about the Crawleys, or *any* member of Lord Grantham's family. Now I'm going up to rest. Wake me at the dressing gong. (*Downton Abbey* 1.02, my emphasis)

In this interaction, the deference expected of O'Brien due to her dependency is framed in a manner akin to children or adolescents kowtowing to a dominant parent, which subtly critiques the otherwise idealised master-servants relationship.

O'Brien and Thomas, as discussed in chapter 3.1.1, represent servants who view their lives in stark opposition to their 'upstairs' employers, rather than identifying with the house and the Crawley family as 'their own.' This contrasts with figures like the butler Carson, who perceives the Crawley family as "all the family I've got" (1.01). Dominique Kalifa suggests that the marginalised position of such a 'countersociety' below ground can foster a strong sense of group identity:

> From the Kingdom of Argot at the end of the Middle Ages up to the contemporary mafia, this countersociety is a distinctive trait of the underworld—and perhaps the only one capable of giving identity and coherence to the improbable union of all sorts of marginal people. (Kalifa 31)

While many servants in *Downton Abbey* identify strongly with the 'upstairs' family and the house above ground, others like O'Brien or Thomas Barrow exhibit indifference or even hostility toward them, viewing the 'downstairs' world as a separate entity – a second house beneath the main one. Kalifa further elucidates the nature of such societies:

> The underworld is not a universe in itself. It is always the inverse of the society above, of which it counterfeits and perverts the how that society functions. This is the reason it must necessarily be organized, hierarchized, and coded. (Kalifa 34)

The simulation of family-like structures 'downstairs' where the butler and housekeeper act as parental figures and maids and footmen engage in sibling-like rivalries, foregrounds this parallel in *Downton Abbey*.

In *The White Ribbon*, the motif of a parallel world or countersociety is manifested in the children and adolescents of the village, who establish their own social system

alongside the patriarchal order of their parents. Although not physically located underground, the countersociety of the children acts as a form of 'underworld' – both in the mythic sense of hell or Tartarus, where individuals are punished for their sins, and a criminal underworld, where they express their repressed transgressive urges.

Pike also perceives the underground as a "site of crisis" (Pike 1) or, more specifically "a displaced vision of something that poses a crisis of representation in the world above" (ibid. 2). Spatial anxiety, as encoded in the loci of the physical underground, underwater, or imagined underworlds, recurs in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century. This theme encompasses not only the return of the repressed but also the socially oppressed. It includes marginalised social classes and the figure of the repressed adolescent, whose pubertal urges are constrained by the patriarchal order.

From the perspective of psychoanalytical criticism, Pike references Sigmund Freud's "topographical model of the individual and society based on a new form of underground, the unconscious" (Pike 10). In *Titanic* (1997), this concept is explicitly mentioned when Rose challenges Bruce Ismay (Jonathan Hyde), humorously citing Freud's ideas on the "male preoccupation with size" to critique patriarchal values (*Titanic* 1997). Rose's transgressive behaviour in the 'underworld' of steerage and the cargo hold serves as a visual manifestation of Freudian theories regarding repressed sexuality. Consequently, the narrative of *Titanic* unfolds as an elaborate Freudian metaphor and social commentary on moral repression and social oppression encoded in the katabatic imagery of the protagonist, the sinking ship and the submerged iceberg hidden beneath the surface.

Anthony Easthope notes that a "sense of the uncanny can occur when we feel that the repressed has come back" (Easthope 120). This theme of "repression and return" (Von Moltke 116) is prevalent in German reimaginings of the early twentieth century, particularly within the Heimatfilm genre. In these narratives, the post-war German experience often involves "widespread repression" of the immediate past and a "political and moral paralysis" (ibid.), which have become staples of fictional representations of the period. The return of the repressed in these narratives frequently manifests as a confrontation with the unresolved traumas and collective guilt associated with Germany's history, particularly the Nazi era. This dynamic is central to the Heimatfilm genre, where the seemingly idyllic rural settings often serve as a backdrop for

exploring the underlying tensions and traumas of the past. The genre's focus on nostalgia and the romanticisation of a 'simpler' time can be seen as an attempt to escape or mitigate these repressed memories, yet the return of the repressed inevitably disrupts the idealised vision.

In productions like Haneke's *The White Ribbon* or Reitz' *Heimat*, this tension between repression and return is embodied in the characters and their environments, where the surface tranquillity often conceals deep-seated anxieties and conflicts. The uncanny emerges when the past, long buried or repressed, resurfaces in ways that disturb the present, forcing characters and, by extension, the audience, to confront uncomfortable truths. The interplay between repression and the return of the repressed serves as a commentary on Germany's historical and cultural memory and further highlights the persistent influence of the past on contemporary identity.

Moreover, this thematic focus on repression and return extends beyond the Heimatfilm genre to other German reimaginings of the early twentieth century. Productions like Babylon Berlin explore similar themes through the lens of modernity and urban realism, where the remnants of a troubled past continue to haunt the present. In this context, the return of the repressed is not only a personal or psychological phenomenon but also a socio-political one, reflecting the broader issues of a nation grappling with its history. Ultimately, the recurring motif of repression and return in German cultural productions underscores the complexity of dealing with a national past marked by trauma, guilt and moral ambiguity. It reveals the ongoing process of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' (coming to terms with the past) which remains a central concern in German historical narratives and continues to shape Germany's cultural identity and memory culture.

4.1.2 Enclosed and Contained Worlds: the shifting perception of inside and outside spaces

In contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, the house is identified not only as a crucial setting and motif – whether private, public, residential, or functional – but also, in cases of grand houses like Downton Abbey, as castle-like enclosures. These structures are fortified bastions of heritage and traditional values. As Rosalía Baena and Christa Byker argue, "[t]he English estate, 'a man's castle', is a powerful, omnipresent mental construct and a symbol of the English national heritage" (Baena and Byker 263). The legal maxim from Sir Edward Coke's that "the house of every one

is to him as his Castle and Fortress as well for defence against injury and violence, as for his repose" (Coke 1604) has colloquially evolved over the centuries into 'a man's home is his castle' or 'my home is my castle.' This evolution links *Downton Abbey*'s fortress-like appearance with its symbolic function as a monument of British traditionalism and conservatism, which is portrayed as something that needs preservation and protection.

In the narrative of films and series, the enclosed space of a setting may exhibit different qualities and meanings, which can vary for characters depending on their context, circumstances, and placement within this 'enclosed' space. In *Downton Abbey,* the hermetic enclosure creates a sense of security and safe containment, corresponding with both the metaphor of the dollhouse and the opulent size of the country house. Susan Stewart notes that "both the miniature and the gigantic may be described through metaphors of containment – the miniature as contained, the gigantic as container" (S. Stewart 71). Thus, the house in *Downton Abbey* functions metaphorically as a contained dollhouse, while its vast size serves as a container for a specific world and lifestyle. This sense of enclosure in *Downton Abbey* underlines the appeal of the 'enclosure' image in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century. Here, the enclosed space of the house is depicted as benign, safe, and 'good,' contrasting with the negative connotations of the enclosure as prison-like or perilous in works like *Titanic* or *The White Ribbon*. The ambiguous nature of an enclosed paradise is also reflected in the folk and fairy tale of Cockaigne, or Schlaraffenland, a utopia of abundance and leisure, which is sometimes depicted as surrounded by high walls.

Within the symbolism of the enclosure motif, the image of the door as a mechanism that grants and denies entry into the interior world of the enclosed space enhances the coding of spatiality and spatial anxieties in contemporary reimaginings. An illustrative example of this symbolic coding is found in *Titanic* (1997), where a wooden door serves as a raft for the protagonist to save herself at the film's end. Throughout the film, doors are seen in relation to their function of granting and denying entrance – either into upper-class society or the ship itself. In juxtaposing scenes, Jack Dawson is alternately allowed entry through a door to join the First Class or denied access on another occasion. For the protagonist Rose, the door symbolises her entrapment within an impending marriage and a stifling social environment. At the film's conclusion, the door-as-raft is symbolically recoded as an exit, a passage out of her old life, facilitated

by her love interest, Jack Dawson. Here, the door represents a liminal space, a gateway or threshold between the protagonist's old and new lives.

The liminal image of the threshold is further significant in conceptualising the house or enclosed space as a sanctuary and sacred place. As discussed in chapter 3.1, *Downton Abbey*, by name, is likened to a sacred place, treated with a reverence usually reserved for religious spaces. Harold Turner elaborates on the symbolic importance of the threshold in sacred contexts:

> Of the 'entrance' phenomena we may begin with the significance of the threshold. The various means of demarcation of the sacred precinct that were mentioned above also indicate that this meeting point must be respected and protected, and that the worshippers themselves must be safeguarded from casual or inappropriate dealings with such a centre of power. […] There must be a particular place of entrance and to cross the threshold at this point is a momentous act for it marks the transition from the everyday natural order to the place of divine power and presence that lies beyond, within the precinct. (Turner 22)

Characters entering the house *Downton Abbey* for the first time through the main entrance often react with wonderment and awe at the size and grandeur of the building as a "centre of power" (ibid.). The main entry door, guarded by its servants and respected by visitors, symbolises both exclusivity and safety, underlining its role as a pivotal element in the architecture of power and protection within the narrative.

The function and particularity of the door between the male and female servants' accommodations in *Downton Abbey* is brought up on several occasions. For instance, in 1.01, the Duke of Crowborough pressures Lady Mary to trespass into the male servants' quarters, and episode 1.04, the maid Anna opens the door to receive a tray of food from the valet Bates. The placement of the door handle solely on the female side acts as a security measure for the female staff and as a deterrent to discourage affairs between staff members. In this arrangement, the housekeeper, Mrs. Hughes, serves as a moral guardian of the female servants' 'virtue' and safety, controlling access through this door. Gaston Bachelard discusses the symbolic significance of the locked door, noting its profound psychological resonance:

> But who doesn't like both locks and keys? There is an abundant psychoanalytical literature on this theme, so that it would be easy to find documentation on the subject. For our purpose, however, if we emphasized sexual symbols, we should conceal the depth of the dreams of intimacy. (Bachelard 84)

In *Downton Abbey*, the trope of the 'locked door' serves as a symbol of sexual transgression and romantic desire, carrying both positive and negative connotations. The act of Kemal Pamuk opening the door to Lady Mary's bedroom at night is portrayed as a sinister moment in episode 1.03. In contrast, this image of the locked door is subverted and romanticised in episode 1.04, when Lady Mary opens the main entrance for Matthew Crawley, allowing him secret access the house at night. The contrasting scenes suggest that the implications of the locked door depend on the identity of the person who seeks entry—whether it's the British heir to the estate or a foreigner. The former is romanticised, the latter connoted as dark and Gothic. Although impressive in size, the hotel in *Das Adlon* and the department store in *Mr. Selfridge* do not convey the hermetic and fortress-like qualities associated with *Downton Abbey*. This distinction arises from the inherent differences between private and public spaces, symbolically represented by the contrast between the guarded door of the country house and the revolving doors in *Mr. Selfridge* and *Das Adlon*. The revolving door, apart from emphasising the public character of these establishments, also symbolises business, action, and industry. Featured prominently in the intro sequence of *Mr. Selfridge*, the constant movement of incoming and outgoing customers encapsulates dynamism, change, and the influence of commodity culture.

The revolving door in *Das Adlon* symbolises a perpetual welcome to affluent guests, representing the hotel's 'openness.' In episode 2, this accessibility is interpreted as an invitation for refuge when the Spartacists, Margarete Löwe (Katharina Wackernagel) and her husband, enter the hotel to escape the authorities during the November revolution of 1919. When confronted by her brother, the concierge, and asked to leave, Margarete retorts: "There's a revolution out there, Fritz! Haven't you noticed that here in the Adlon yet?"[52] (*Das Adlon* 1.01). This exchange highlights how the inhabitants of Hotel Adlon live within a secure 'bubble,' seemingly untouched by the social and political upheavals occurring just outside their door. The impression of the hotel as a liminal space of shelter and refuge is poignantly reinforced in episode three of the series, when the Jewish singer Tamara Lieberkoff (Nora von Waldstätten) checks into a room at the Adlon hotel, where she commits suicide to avoid deportation (1.03). Despite its public nature and ostensibly more 'open' doors, the hotel in *Das Adlon* remains a secluded and insulated space, removed from the harsh realities the

[52] Da draußen ist Revolution, Fritz! Hast du das hier im Adlon immer noch nicht gemerkt? (*Das Adlon* 1.01)

outside world. This point is underlined by the series' protagonist, Sonja Schadt (Josefine Preuß), who resides permanently in the hotel, viewing it as her personal enclosed space and comfort zone, detached from external affairs.

Her love interest, Julian Zimmermann (Ken Duken), challenges this perspective: "You're sitting here inside the Adlon, squandering your inheritance, and you have no idea what's going on out there."[53] (*Das Adlon* 1.02). His critique serves as a confrontation for both the protagonist and the viewer, highlighting a tendency to focus on the limited and often trifling occurrences within the confines of the hotel while more significant historical events unfold outside. Similarly, in *Downton Abbey*, Tom Branson, the chauffeur, repeatedly accuses Lady Sybil Crawley of being ignorant of the harsh realities of war and revolution taking place far from the isolated sanctuary of the Abbey. For instance, in episode 2.03, he expresses frustration with her lack of awareness about the Easter Rising in Ireland:

> Sybil: Why do you have to be so angry all the time? I know we weren't exactly at our best in Ireland –
> Branson: Not at your best? Not at your best! (*Downton Abbey* 2.03)

Life outside the enclosed space is described as more diverse, problematic, and 'real', providing a secure base for viewers to engage with historical events and realities that might otherwise be disturbing. Gaston Bachelard reflects on this inherent tension between the interior and world of the house and the world outside: "Come what may the house helps us to say: I will be an inhabitant of the world, in spite of the world." (Bachelard 46-47). He suggests a "dynamic rivalry between house and universe" (ibid. 47) that causes an "increased intensity" (ibid. 41) in the experience of intimacy within the enclosed space, affecting both its inhabitants and external observers. However, Bachelard also cautions against oversimplifying this dichotomy:

> Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything. Unless one is careful, it is made into a basis of images that govern all thoughts of positive and negative. (Bachelard 211)

[53] Du sitzt hier im Adlon, verprasst dein Erbe und hast überhaupt keine Ahnung, was da draußen vor sich geht. (*Das Adlon* 1.02)

Thus, whether inside or outside spaces are perceived as positive or negative varies depending on context and characterisation. In *Downton Abbey,* everything and everyone 'inside' the house is generally perceived as 'good' by merit of belonging to it. Characters whose actions deviate from this inherent 'goodness' are either removed, such as the lady's maid O'Brien, or reformed into more sympathetic figures, such as Thomas Barrow in later seasons. The community 'inside' the house often forms a united front against negative external forces, as demonstrated in episode 1.02 when the butler Carson receives support from both fellow servants and the Crawley family against the outsider Charles Grigg's (Nicky Henson) blackmail attempts. This solidarity reinforces the hermetic and fortress-like character of Downton Abbey, exemplifying what Susan Stewart describes as a 'reification of interiority':

> Yet, of course, the major function of the enclosed space is always to create a tension or dialectic between inside and outside, between private and public property, between the space and subject and the space of the social. Trespass, contamination, and the erasure of materiality are the threats presented to the enclosed world. And because the interiority of the enclosed world tends to reify the interiority of the viewer, repetition also presents a threat. (S. Stewart 68)

Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* subverts the traditional understanding of interiority as positive and preferable to the outside. In this film, the enclosed space of the house and home is negatively connoted, depicted as prison-like, stifling, and a site of physical and psychological abuse, particularly for children and female characters. Despite variations in appearance and style according to milieu, interiors in *The White Ribbon* are uniformly coded as negative, depressing, eerie, or threatening.

Haneke's choice to use high contrast black-and-white cinematography intensifies this dichotomy, creating a visual accentuation of the spaces: the bright and seemingly positive outside world contrasts sharply with the extremely dark interiors of the houses. Exterior landscapes[54] are characterised as idyllic, serving as backdrops for the film's few uplifting moments, such as the teacher's courtship of Eva and the harvest festivities. Conversely, the dark panelled interiors of the village houses – which appear gloomy by day and pitch black at night due to the absence of electric light – pose as settings for the film's most sinister scenes: beatings, sexual abuse and psychological terror that occur behind closed doors and often in darkness.

[54] Now and then the confines of the film's stultifying human world have been broken open by fixed-shot landscapes of the mercifully unpeopled countryside. (G. Stewart 47)

For viewers, the juxtaposition of light outside and darkness inside becomes a striking visual experience. The alternation between dark or dimly lit interior scenes and glaringly bright exterior shots challenges the viewer's eye, mimicking the effect of entering these shadowy historical houses. This stark contrast not only intensifies the oppressive atmosphere of the interiors but also accentuates the film's exploration of concealed social evils. Garrett Stewart points out a particularly evocative scene in *The White Ribbon* where the camera focuses on the hallway of the pastor's house, likening it to "a prison corridor before execution" (G. Stewart 41) as the son, Martin, is sent to fetch the rod for his corporeal punishment. This motif of the house-as-prison is prevalent across various reimaginings, particularly in themes related to female emancipation. For instance, in the first season of *Downton Abbey*, the maid Gwen Dawson views the safe, enclosed 'bubble' of the grand house as confining and seeks vocational fulfilment as a secretary outside of domestic service. This sentiment is echoed by other female characters in the series, such as Lady Sybil Crawley and, in later seasons, Lady Edith Crawley, who both pursue careers and lives beyond the confines of Downton Abbey. Despite its limitations, the house Downton Abbey itself is never explicitly coded as prison-like or negative.

Conversely, in *The White Ribbon*, female characters such as the Baroness and the midwife actively seek to break out from their confining spaces within the village. Haneke's film presents the aristocratic house as distinctly prison-like, particularly in a scene where the Baron commands his wife: "You stay here! You leave this room when I tell you to.[55]" (*The White Ribbon* 2009) to which the Baroness submits reluctantly.

Unlike narratives that imagine threats originating from the outside, as seen in *Downton Abbey*, *The White Ribbon* suggests a pervasive, abstract evil emanating from within the locus of the house and, by extension, from within the heart of the family unit and the community. Enclosure is coded as inherently threatening, and characters within the same household space emerge as potential threats to each other, such as parents and children or spouses. This idea generates a palpable sense of unease and discomfort throughout the film, challenging the viewer's expectations of domestic spaces as safe havens and redefining the narrative implications of enclosure. Such dynamics effectively underscore the complexities of perceived safety and the underlying tension that can transform a home from a sanctuary into a prison.

[55] Du bleibst hier! Du verlässt dieses Zimmer, wenn ich es dir sage. (*The White Ribbon* 2009)

In James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997), the protagonist Rose undergoes a profound transformation in her perception of her circumstances, evolving from feeling like a 'prisoner' of her fiancé on board the ship to emerging as a liberated individual through the ship's demise. Initially, gaining access to the 'inside' of the ship is considered as a privilege, with characters Jack Dawson and his friend Fabrizio (Danny Nucci) considering themselves the "luckiest sons of bitches in the world" to have boarded before the door is closed (*Titanic* 1997). However, following the collision with the iceberg, the ship's interior, once a symbol of luxury and safety, loses its protective allure. The ship's status shifts from a *locus amoenus*, a place of safety and comfort, to a *locus terribilis*, a place of danger and disaster. Consequently, being 'outside' of the ocean liner and 'inside' one of the lifeboats becomes the truly privileged position. As discussed in chapter 3.2, this inversion intensifies the tension between 'inside' and 'outside,' as the safely contained enclosure of the ship is compromised and begins to disintegrate.[56] This dramatic shift illustrates that perceptions of space and spatial dimensions are not only subjective but also highly circumstantial and subject to change, significantly influencing the overall effect of narrative space in audio-visual reimaginings.

4.1.3 Spatial Anxieties: intrusion and invasion as a motif

In contemporary reimaginings, threats from the 'outside' world are depicted as either concrete and physical or abstract and imagined, often portrayed as diffuse threats of modernity and change that invade the enclosed worlds of tradition and heritage in communities such as seen in *Downton Abbey*. Jürgen Trimborn points out this phenomenon, identifying the threat of modernity and progress as a central theme in the Heimat genre:

> Progress is portrayed as something that fundamentally has the potential to threaten and destroy the ordered word of the Heimat […] The intervention of the city-dweller in the existing and presented-as-functioning structure of rural village communities is generally connoted negatively.[57] (Trimborn 52-55)

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[56] In the 2007 novel *Titanic 2020* (2007) by Colin Bateman a new Titanic becomes the only "safe" space while the rest of the world is struck by a mysterious deadly disease. Here, the dynamics of inside and outside are switched around yet again, as opposite to the original Titanic, the "inside" of the Titanic 2020 is the only "good" place while everything "outside" is rendered deadly and negative.

[57] Der Fortschritt wird als etwas dargestellt, das grundlegend das Potential hat, die geordnete Welt der Heimat zu bedrohen und zu zerstören […] [Das] Eingreifen des Städters in die bestehende und als funktionierend vorgeführte Struktur ländlich-dörflicher Lebensgemeinschaft ist in der Regel negativ konnotiert […] (Trimborn 52-55)

In *Downton Abbey*, technological progress is initially met with scepticism but eventually embraced. For instance, in episode 1.01, the Dowager Countess of Grantham (Maggie Smith) complains about the "glare" of the electric chandelier and expresses concern about the safety of newly installed electricity, citing the threat of "vapours" (1.01) believed to emanate from electric plugs in the walls. Subsequent introductions of novel devices such as the typewriter (1.02), the telephone (1.07), electric toaster (3.04), and radio (5.02) occur in scenes that often serve as comedic relief, juxtaposing the characters' reactions to these novelties against the viewer's perspective from the twenty-first century. Thus, none of these symbols of modernity is connoted as negative or threatening.

However, the threat of change and modernity is personified in characters like Matthew Crawley and his mother Isobel (Penelope Wilton) from Manchester, who introduce their modern sentiments and habits into the traditional world of *Downton Abbey*. This dynamic mirrors the Heimatfilm narrative, where, as Von Moltke explains, the "closed world" of the Heimat is threatened by "intrusion by various 'outsiders' and 'others,'" who are often scapegoated for any unwelcome changes (Von Moltke 214). Similarly, hostility towards outsiders is evident in *Downton Abbey* when John Bates' arrival as the new valet in episode 1.01 is met with distrust, dislike, and doubt by other servants. This form of inter-class snobbery, where Bates is regarded as inferior due to his disability, reveals internalised prejudices and ableism among the staff. Aristocratic snobbery within the Crawley family is either downplayed or humorously exaggerated through the character of the Dowager Countess of Grantham, whose conservative views are read as benign, contributing to her popularity with viewers.

Overall, the theme of inclusion and exclusion from different social strata plays a significant role in all contemporary reimaginings analysed in this thesis, illustrating how these narratives not only reflect but also critique social dynamics and cultural anxieties related to tradition and modernity. Through their depiction of who is allowed entry into certain spaces and who is excluded, these reimaginings engage with broader societal concerns about class, privilege, and the evolving nature of social hierarchies. This focus on inclusion and exclusion serves as a lens through which these productions explore the tensions between maintaining traditional structures and embracing modern values, ultimately providing commentary on the ongoing struggle between preserving the past and navigating the complexities of the present.

In the narrative of *Titanic*, both the film and mini-series emphasise the stark demarcation lines between the social classes onboard. Unlike in *Downton Abbey*, where snobbism and social exclusion are subtly handled or with humour, in *Titanic* these themes are depicted as more pronounced and aggressive among the upper class. The experiences of Jack Dawson vividly illustrate the snobbism faced by outsiders. His temporary ascent into the first-class milieu showcases not only the condescension and hostility from figures like Rose's mother but also emphasises the superficial criteria by which the old upper classes judge inclusion.

Jack's ability to navigate through these rigid social structures is depicted through his excursion into the first class, where his appearance and mimicry of upper-class mannerisms allow him to blend in seamlessly. By dressing smartly and adopting the posture of an upper-class gentleman, Jack subverts the typical expectations placed on someone from the working class. His performance is so effective that he is praised by first-class passengers, who comment that he "could almost pass for a gentleman" (*Titanic* 1997). This inclusion through assimilation contrasts sharply with the character Margaret 'Molly' Brown (Kathy Bates), whose nouveau riche status and retention of working-class jargon mark her as an outsider among her peers, derogatively referred to as "that vulgar Brown woman" (*Titanic* 1997). *Titanic* thus exposes the snobbism of the upper class as shallow, indicating that acceptance within these circles often hinges on superficial adherence to their norms. This portrayal serves as a critique of the social exclusivity of the time, revealing that mobility within upper-class circles is possible, provided one can convincingly perform the requisite cues and appearances. The theme of social mobility and the performative aspects of class are central to the film's narrative, offering a critical lens through which to view the intersections of class, appearance, and acceptance.

Class assimilation is a central theme in *Downton Abbey*, particularly illustrated through the character of Tom Branson. His development from an Irish socialist chauffeur to a fully integrated member of the Crawley family highlights a prevailing narrative that incoming members must adapt and assimilate into the established structures rather than act as catalysts for change. Tom Branson's evolution in the series appears both unrealistic and problematic, reflecting the complexities of class mobility and identity within aristocratic settings. This transformation suggests that true acceptance within such an entrenched social hierarchy is contingent upon the abandonment of

one's original ideals and the adoption of the dominant class's values, thereby reinforcing the rigidity of the social order rather than challenging it.

Initially, Branson is depicted as a complex character, grappling with his identity, political convictions, and class affiliations. His marriage into the aristocracy (*Downton Abbey*, Season 2) and subsequent shifts into various middle-class roles – journalist (Season 3), businessman, and eventually land agent for the Downton Abbey estate (Season 4) – demonstrate a dramatic transformation from a working-class background to upper-class acceptance. Introduced as a fervent socialist, Branson's narrative arc can be viewed as a Damascene conversion, transforming him from a staunch critic of the aristocracy into an ally and defender of the very class he once opposed. Branson's easy integration into the upper class can be criticised for its lack of realism and depth in exploring the genuine struggles that such a transition would entail. This narrative choice serves to uphold the aristocracy's allure and reinforce the notion that the upper class represent a preferable and aspirational lifestyle. Such portrayals may oversimplify the complexities of class barriers, and the significant ideological shifts required to navigate these transitions genuinely. Tom Branson's evolution in the series can thus be viewed as problematic.

In *Downton Abbey*, characters like Matthew Crawley and Tom Branson initially represent liberal-minded 'outsiders' who openly criticise and ridicule the aristocracy's privileged existence and decadent habits. However, as the series progresses, both characters undergo a process of 'education,' wherein they are repeatedly lectured by members of the Crawley family about the supposed merits and legitimacy of aristocratic privilege. This indoctrination ultimately leads them to accept and support the aristocracy's claims to wealth and distinction above other social classes. For instance, Robert Crawley frequently engages Matthew in discussions that subtly frame the aristocratic lifestyle and its responsibilities as burdens that require a certain nobility of character to manage. Through these conversations, Robert gradually persuades Matthew of the inherent value and necessity of the feudal order, defining it as an essential pillar of society that must be upheld, even by those who were once sceptical.

Downton Abbey thus suggests that the upper class faces scrutiny and is subject to prejudice and hostility, almost as a form of reverse snobbery. This is evident in the earlier characterisation of Matthew and Tom, whose initial prejudices against the nobility are portrayed as misguided. Creator Julian Fellowes presents the upper classes as somewhat victimised figures – misunderstood benefactors who are unjustly vilified.

This narrative angle proposes that characters like Matthew and Tom, initially seen as harbingers of change, must themselves be transformed to integrate seamlessly into the conservative world of the estate. This portrayal effectively shifts the viewer's perception of the upper class from that of distant, possibly underserving elites to sympathetic figures burdened with undeserved prejudice. It reflects a conservative ideological perspective that not only legitimise but romanticise the aristocracy, framing their lifestyle as a necessary and beneficial order that should be preserved and protected against external influences of modernity and social change.

In *Downton Abbey*, the motif of the outside threat invading the sanctity of the home is embodied by characters like Charles Grigg (1.02), Kemal Pamuk (1.03), and Mr. Green (4.03). These characters disrupt the perceived safety and order of the house, introducing elements of chaos into its structured environment. Charles Grigg, for example, is depicted as an almost comically exaggerated 'panto villain,' a characterisation that aligns with his background as a vaudeville artist. Despite his theatrical antics, Grigg's forceful entry into the house to blackmail one of its inhabitants creates an unsettling atmosphere for the viewer. While his actions can be seen as disrespectful and invasive, Grigg's portrayal as a cartoonish villain diminishes the seriousness of the threat he poses. He is quickly disarmed by the protective powers of the patriarch, Lord Grantham, reinforcing the idea that any disruption from external forces can be effectively neutralised by the guardians of the house. This episode thus serves a dual purpose: it calls attention to the house's vulnerability to outside threats while simultaneously reaffirming the strength and protective role of its patriarchal figure, suggesting that the established order within the house is ultimately resilient to such challenges.

The motif of intrusion first intensifies in episode 1.03, where Kemal Pamuk, the son of a Turkish diplomat, exploits his status as a guest to coercively enter Lady Mary Crawley's bedroom. Pamuk becomes a symbol of the dangerous outsider or foreigner who abuses the hospitality of the house for personal gain. This theme of predation further escalates in episode 4.03 with the character of Mr. Green (Nigel Harman), whose sexual assault of Anna Bates with the confines of Downton Abbey magnifies the threat posed by external forces penetrating the sanctity of the estate. Notably, this assault is committed by another servant, complicating the inside-outside dynamics by blurring the lines between internal and external threats. Unlike Pamuk, Green is not a foreigner, yet the narrative still positions him as an outsider within the household. As Byrne argues, the incident exemplifies a deliberate avoidance of addressing "difficult

questions surrounding predatory class relations by making Anna's attacker both a servant and an outsider" (Byrne 2015b 182). This allows the series to explore the theme of intrusion and violation without directly confronting the uncomfortable realities of class and power within the aristocratic setting.

During the depiction of the First World War in season 2 of *Downton Abbey*, the house is transformed into a convalescent home for officers. Violet, the Dowager Countess of Grantham expresses her apprehension about the invasion of their private space by outsiders, which she views as a potential threat to both property and the house's female inhabitants:

> Violet: I forbid it! To have strange men prodding and prying around the house, to say nothing of pocketing the spoons! It's out of the question! (*Downton Abbey* 2.02)

Despite her warnings, the series describes this invasion not as a threat but as a patriotic duty, framing the presence of the soldiers as an honour rather than a risk. This approach agrees with the overarching narrative that upholds the aristocracy and its estate as a bastion of national pride and national duty. Thus, the war's intrusion into the private space of Downton Abbey is sanitised and managed, suggesting that the house's protective enclosure can extend to encompass even the disruptive force of war, converting it into a component of the home's ongoing narrative of resilience and service to the country. This portrayal subtly shifts the perception of internal versus external threats, presenting the home not only as a space of refuge but also as a sanctuary that can domesticise and contain larger socio-political upheavals.

Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* effectively positions the source of malevolent forces at the heart of the home, shifting the narrative focus away from external threats posed by outsiders or peripheral characters to those nestled within the closest domestic circles: the children of the village. *The White Ribbon* deconstructs the idealised notion of the family unit and domestic sphere as the safest of spaces. Within this narrative, the inside of the home is revealed as a place of oppression, violence, hatred, and humiliation, all initiated by the parents and mirrored by the children, who emulate their conduct in a cycle of cruelty and suffering.

Similarly, *Babylon Berlin* elaborates on the theme of infiltration and internal domestic threats within the household of Regierungsrat (engl. senior civil servant) August Benda (Matthias Brandt). In a dramatic plot twist, the maid Greta Overbeck (Leonie Benisch), facilitates the entry of a Nazi operative who plants a bomb that kills her employer and one of his children (*Babylon Berlin* 2.07). This act of betrayal subverts the

idealised relationship of mutual trust between employers and servants depicted in series like *Downton Abbey*. Prior to the attack, Greta Overbeck is fully integrated into the household and entrusted with the care of the family's children, as well as any confidential government business she becomes privy to. Greta is approached by Fritz Höckert (Jakob Matschenz) and Otto Wollenbach (Julius Feldmeier), two imposters, who purport to be members of the communist party, but are later revealed to be SA members, Richard Pechtmann and Horst Kessler. After Greta enters into a romantic relationship with 'Fritz,' she is set up to witness his alleged death at the hands of the government and agrees to help 'Otto' with his plans of 'retaliation.'

By allowing the Nazi 'Otto' into the house to set up a bomb and aiding in the assassination of the Jewish Benda, Greta becomes effectively complicit with the early National Socialists. This betrayal is intricately linked to broader themes of political manipulation and antisemitism, reflecting the rise of the Nazi party in Germany at the time. The assassination within the Benda household symbolises the broader socio-political infiltration of the Nazis, a theme further underscored by the replacement of Benda by the right-wing Regierungsrat Oberst Günther Wendt (Benno Führmann), who embodies the Nazi encroachment into government spheres (2.08).

Greta Overbeck's story arc in *Babylon Berlin* mirrors a tragic descent where her personal crisis – spurred by the manipulation of her grief over her lover's supposed death – leads her to commit an unfathomable act. This subplot not only serves as a gripping narrative device but also allegorises the susceptibility of the German populace to Nazi propaganda and emotional manipulation, casting Greta as a symbol for the nation's tragic complicity.

On a more covert level, this sub-plot between Greta, 'Fritz' and 'Otto' can also be interpreted within the context of the discovery of the far-right terrorist group National Socialist Underground (Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund) or NSU in 2011. Led by the Neo-Nazi triad Uwe Mundlos, Uwe Böhnhardt and Beate Zschäpe, the terror cell executed numerous bombings and close-range shootings of predominantly Turkish, but also Kurdish and Greek migrants in their business establishments all over Germany. With such parallels, whether consciously or not, *Babylon Berlin* maintains an ongoing link between the political unrest of the past and the present.

In the series, Greta Overbeck is transformed into a political tool of the Nazi party through the manipulation tactics of Otto, who claims that her Jewish employer is responsible for her lover's alleged death. His incendiary remark, "The Jew sow gave the

order"[58] (*Babylon Berlin*, 2.06), manipulates Greta into posing as a vehicle for antisemitic terror, positioning her as a metaphor for the German populace and its complicity with Nazi ideology.

Greta's transformation into a perpetrator within her own residence underlines her role as an 'invader' who breaches the safety of her domestic sphere. The Benda household is presented as the first 'safe space' for Greta since her arrival in Berlin, a place where she is protected, respectable, and comfortable after facing homelessness, destitution, and the prospect of prostitution as her only feasible occupation. Ironically, Greta herself upsets this favourable situation by becoming the element inside the house that is unsafe and threatening to its inhabitants.

Convinced to blame and hate the Jewish Benda, Greta is persuaded to participate in the assassination of him and his family. As such she prefigures the 'seduced' German nation that will scapegoat Jews and support their systematic persecution and extermination by the Nazis. Emotionally manipulated by 'Fritz' and 'Otto,' Greta becomes a longa manus of the emerging Nazi party, as she unwittingly helps them execute acts of antisemitic terror. This depiction in *Babylon Berlin* effectively deconstructs the trope of the home as a secure, inviolable space, presenting it instead as a site vulnerable to the very ideologies and forces it seeks to keep at bay. The series uses Greta's tragic manipulation to explore themes of ideological indoctrination and the dangerous potential of internal threats, reflecting broader societal anxieties about identity, belonging, and betrayal.

In *Babylon Berlin*, the home, as a place of safe comfort and Heimat idyll, becomes destabilised and deconstructed. This reflects not only the historical context but also contemporary concerns about the inability to easily identify who may sympathise with far-right ideologies, such as the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), in contemporary Germany. The depiction of these hidden dangers within familiar spaces resonates with current anxieties about growing right-wing radicalisation in contemporary society.

4.2 The gigantic: monumentality, monstrosity and permanence

The theme of size is a major common denominator in nearly all productions analysed in this thesis. As John Bonner suggests, "We see and are conscious of the size of everything that surrounds us, whether it is smaller or larger" (Bonner 8). This dynamic

[58] Die Judensau hat's angeordnet. (*Babylon Berlin*, 2.06)

and ever-changing nature of size adds a rich layer of complexity to the spatial themes in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century. The fascination with size extends beyond mere scale, encompassing its changeability, dynamism, and shifts in perspective. Objects or spaces might grow or shrink, or at least appear to do so, depending on the viewer's perspective or the context in which they are presented. This fluidity of scale and perception deepens the narrative, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the themes of power, influence, and social hierarchy within these reimaginings.

In *Downton Abbey*, the grand estate functions as a large-scale dollhouse, introducing a dual fascination with the microcosmic and the grandiose. The fascination of the contained microcosm within the miniature house opened up to the viewer's gaze is conflated with a fascination for the gigantic and ostentatious heritage house. The series effectively uses the grandeur of the estate to evoke nostalgia, employing scale as a narrative tool to enhance the viewer's engagement. Nostalgia imparted in *Downton Abbey* functions on both the level of the miniature and the level of the gigantic.

Downton Abbey introduces its main setting, the grand estate, at the beginning of episode 1.01 with a shot that conveys its size, grandeur, and significance to the story, much like how *Titanic* (1997) showcases the eponymous ship. In *Titanic* (1997), the ship's name alone conveys its monumental size, and this immensity is repeatedly emphasised throughout the film, particularly through dialogue. The protagonist Rose's dismissive remark, "I don't see what all the fuss is about. It doesn't look any bigger than the Mauritania" (*Titanic* 1997), is notably defiant, contrasting sharply with the viewer's experience. The Titanic's appearance on the large cinema screen powerfully conveys the ship's sheer enormity, making Rose's indifference even more striking. As Wolf points out:

> Elaborate fly-overs show the entire ship, displaying its length and breadth in single, unbroken shots. One such shot, involving over 200 optical or digital elements, begins with a close-up of Jack and Fabrizio standing at the end of the ship's bow and pulling back and upward as the entire ship passes through the shot, and sails into the distance, tying the small scale of the actors' faces into the large scale of the ship. The shot design, camera moves, and storyline all conspire to solidify the ship's reality and completeness for the viewers, to create an immersive experience for the audience. (Wolf 219)

Conversely, Julian Fellowes' mini-series *Titanic* (2012) opts to depict the ship in fragments, shifting the focus from the vessel itself to the personal stories of its passengers. This directorial choice diverges from the 1997 film's emphasis on the Titanic's overwhelming scale, focusing instead on humanising the disaster through the intimate details of the characters' lives.

According to Aylish Wood, Cameron's framing of the ship in *Titanic* (1997) "places a particular emphasis on the story of the technological giant" (Wood 230). This not only sets the stage for a narrative of technological marvel but also symbolises broader themes of megalomania and human hubris. In the film, the Titanic is continually celebrated as the "largest moving object ever made by the hand of man in all of history" (*Titanic* 1997), a description that foregrounds the ship's significance as more than just a vessel – it is a monument to human technological achievement and ambition. Chief designer Thomas Andrews (Victor Garber) states that "[Ismay] envisioned a steamer so grand in scale and so luxurious in its appointments that its supremacy could never be challenged" (*Titanic* 1997). The film embodies themes of megalomania and hubris in the character of Bruce Ismay, linking the grandiosity of the Titanic with notions of patriarchal power and sexual prowess. This association is further underscored by the protagonist's explicit commentary, which ties Ismay's fixation on size directly to these themes.

> Ismay: I wanted to convey sheer size, and size means stability, luxury, and, above all, strength.
>
> Rose: Do you know of Dr. Freud, Mr. Ismay? His ideas about the male preoccupation with size might be of particular interest to you. (*Titanic* 1997)

Titanic's grandeur is linked not only to physical dimensions but to an assertion of technological and competitive dominance. However, the narrative complicates this assertion of size as strength through its feminist critique, woven into the dialogue and character interactions. Rose's exchange with Ismay challenges the patriarchal equating of size with power but also frames the ship's enormity as a manifestation of male ego and overreach. The dialogue exemplifies the film's critique of early twentieth-century patriarchal values, where technological advancements and industrial achievements were often entangled with notions of masculine dominance. *Titanic* thus uses the motif of size not only as a feature of awe and spectacle but also as a critical lens through which to examine and critique the gendered power dynamics of its time.

4.2.1 The ‘gigantic’ house as monument and symbol of patriarchy and permanence

In narratives such as *Downton Abbey* that are set in a country house, the sheer magnitude of the house conveys power and demands respect. It symbolises the wealth and social status of its upper-class owners, whether they are landed gentry or nobility. The Earl of Grantham and his family, depicted as well-liked and respected by their tenants, villagers, and servants, present an uncritical perspective on the distribution of wealth and space. By contrast, the ‘Baron’ in Michael Haneke’s *The White Ribbon* is unpopular and commands little respect, highlighted by the vandalism of his cabbage field and the kidnapping and abuse of his son (*The White Ribbon* 2009). The Baron’s ‘impotence’ in controlling events in the village is further emphasised by the Baroness’ sexual rejection of him. Disillusioned and dissatisfied with her marriage, she ultimately leaves him for another man.

A connection between size, power, male virility, and potency is reiterated in *Titanic,* when Rose’s fiancé presents her with ‘The Heart of the Ocean’, a large heart-shaped blue diamond, professing that the oversized jewel is “a reminder of [his] feelings for [her]” (*Titanic* 1997), which are sexually motivated. In contrast to her blasé reaction upon first seeing Titanic, Rose describes the blue diamond as “overwhelming” (ibid.). Here, the narrative emphasises the stone’s sheer size and the hyperbole it represents. In retrospect, the narrator Rose labels the diamond a “dreadfully heavy thing” (ibid.), so grotesquely large that it appears disproportionate against her neck. The gigantic size of both the ship and the diamond symbolises male desires to be in possession and control of the gigantic, whether it be the largest ship or the largest diamond in the world.

The themes of grandeur and the gigantic in contemporary reimaginings are often linked to upper-class wealth, royalty, and even divinity. In the mini-series, *Das Adlon*, the hotel is referred to as a “Prachtbau [magnificent building]” (*Das Adlon* 1.01) and a “Palast [palace]” (ibid.), with Kaiser Wilhelm II himself declaring it more luxurious than his imperial palace. Similarly, the ostentatious ‘Heart of the Ocean’ diamond in *Titanic* (1997) is endowed with a fictitious backstory, having supposedly adorned the crown of the ill-fated King Louis XVI prior to the French Revolution. Cal Hockley, the heir to a U.S. steel tycoon, claims that the jewel is “for royalty” and declares to his fiancée, “We are royalty, Rose,” (*Titanic* 1997) suggesting that possession of the gigantic diamond is akin to an anointment. Cal’s aspiration to perpetuate the Hockley

steel ‘dynasty’ through Rose is thwarted when she vanishes with the enormous diamond, the material symbol of his patriarchal power and legacy.

The motif of size and its association with permanence and memory is powerfully illustrated by the grand scale of monuments, which encapsulate a desire to preserve and ‘freeze’ specific eras in time. This desire starkly contrasts with the reality of history as an inherently dynamic and inexorable force. For instance, while the miniature world of the dollhouse remains static, symbolising a frozen moment, natural microcosms like ant colonies or beehives are dynamic, animated, and constantly evolving. Heritage productions like *Downton Abbey* embody this juxtaposition, merging the static nature of a dollhouse with the animated characteristics of a natural microcosm. This contrast is illustrated through the series’ cinematograph. In the expansive rooms of the country house, where life unfolds slowly and appears calm and restrained, the camera is predominantly static, capturing wide shots that emphasise the vastness and static nature of the upper-class setting.

Conversely, in the cramped servant quarters below stairs, the use of a handheld camera conveys a sense of busyness and restlessness, illustrating a dynamic image of ongoing activity and change. This technique highlights the stark contrast between the static permanence associated with the tranquil life of the aristocracy and active progress depicted in the bustling lives of the servants. By employing these distinct cinematic approaches, the series not only enhances its narrative but also reinforces the thematic exploration of how different social strata experience and represent time and memory within the same physical space. This juxtaposition effectively illustrates the divergent rhythms of life for the upper and lower classes, further emphasising the social divides inherent in the setting.

Downton Abbey consistently reiterates the idea that the estate will endure, with its legacy preserved throughout the series’ six-year run and two feature films. One of the central plot elements revolves around an abstract ‘threat’ to the estate, which materialises as the entail, the war, modernity, and, most frequently, financial troubles. Despite these looming threats, each ultimately proves empty, yielding positive outcomes for the estate and its owners. The show’s theme of endurance and permanence is visually reinforced through Downton Abbey’s immense, monumental size, which suggests a fortress, bastion, and monument of British heritage.

Monuments,[59] typically associated with size and lasting quality, represent permanence, stability, and memory. As Felix Levenson notes, in the eighteenth century, the term 'monument' referred to *lieux de mémoire*, regardless of their size:

> In the 18th century CE the word monument (from Latin, monere – to admonish, to warn, to remind but not to remember) referred to sites of memory and places of remembrance. These lieux de mémoire (Nora 1989) initially had no connotation of size. The relation to an architectural structure was also not necessary. Megastructures were not included in the term until the 19th century CE when these aspects became relevant to national representation and historical legitimization […] From the beginning of the 20th century CE onward monuments were understood as communicators between past and future […]. (Levenson 19)

In the *Downton Abbey* shooting scripts, Julian Fellowes describes the estate as "a great and splendid house in a great and splendid park. So secure does it appear, that it seems as if the way of life it represents will last for another thousand years. It won't." (Fellowes 2). Although the original concept behind *Downton Abbey* was to depict the decline of "the way of life it represents," thus idea was not fully realised. Instead, Fellowes reiterates the 'averted threat' narrative repeatedly, stressing that Downton Abbey is a treasure worth preserving and guarding, inspiring viewers to care about the estate as much as about its inhabitants. This effect is reinforced through the explicit personification of the house as the Earl of Grantham's "fourth child" (*Downton Abbey* 1.01) and the portrayal of the castle under siege enhance its heroic image and the notion that it must be protected at all costs.

The concept of the 'monumental' plays a crucial role in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, significantly shaping our perception of genre.

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[59] There are several factors that need to be considered to allow something to be talked about as monumental, as Brunke et al. (2016) state. These include: Size: the spatial dimensions of the object cause it to stand out significantly visà-vis the surrounding norm. 2. Position: the object's exposed position relative to the surrounding buildings causes it to stand out, e. g. it was sited on a mound or hill or in the center of a settlement, or at a location, possibly even a peripheral location, that developed into a center as a result of the object's presence. 3. Permanence: the object dominated the surrounding area over a long period of time. 4. Investment: construction of the object involved abnormally large investment relative to the technical or economic potential (skills, knowledge, tools, cultural techniques) of the population and/or its size; construction may even have involved investments and hence risks on a level disproportionate to the population's capacities. 5. Complexity […]: the technical knowledge, the artisanal skills and the organizational and logistical effort required to construct the object exceed both qualitatively and quantitatively the levels entailed in construction of a structure reflecting the norm for the surrounding area. Thus, for example, an object that is 'large' in terms of its dimensions but that was formed through the agglomeration of many smaller objects, which themselves reflect the norm for the surrounding area, may not necessarily be 'large' in terms of the complexity of the project object, its impressive size notwithstanding.8 (Brunke et al. 2016: 255). (Levenson 23)

Gaylyn Studlar categorises James Cameron's *Titanic* among other 'monumental films' such as "D.W. Griffith's destruction of Babylon in *Intolerance* (1916)" or "C. B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1923 and remade in 1956) with the successful escape of the Hebrews from Egypt through the memorable parting of the Red Sea" (Studlar 157). These films, as "model[s] of historical representation" (ibid.), employ monumentality to deliver narratives of hubris and downfall, underscored by the large-scale structures that dominate their aesthetic landscapes. According to Studlar:

> In Cameron's *Titanic,* it is neither the cold Atlantic, nor the forces of capricious nature, nor of careless capitalism that constitute the strongest force acting upon characters. Instead, it is the *ambience* represented by the ship that takes this role of a force that elicits characters' reactions. As a result, it is not the ocean coming up, but the ship going down that threatens characters and creates the narrative. (Studlar 157)

This interpretation, however, captures only part of the story, as the looming presence of the ocean also stands as a formidable natural force juxtaposed against the mechanical giant of the ship. This tension foregrounds the central drama of the film: the transient and fragile nature of human constructs when compared to the enduring and overpowering forces of nature, emphasising their vulnerability and challenging the illusion of their lasting dominion.

According to Levenson, permanence is "one of the key aspects of monumentality," signifying "an eternally enduring process, action, or status" (Levenson 32). This theme is explored in various contemporary reimaginings within this thesis, though the outcomes differ significantly. For example, like Downton Abbey, the hotel in *Das Adlon* initially appears monumental due to its sheer size and grandeur. However, its prominent location in one of Berlin's busiest areas makes it vulnerable to the risks of wartime destruction, revealing the fragility that underlies even the most imposing structures. This contrast between perceived permanence and actual vulnerability serves to underline the inherent instability of historical memory and the physical spaces that embody it. In contrast, *Downton Abbey* benefits from its remote location, enhancing its monumental status. While the physical structure of the estate and its symbolic meaning remain intact, Julian Fellowes implies that the lifestyle and inhabitants within must inevitably evolve. As Lord Grantham aptly states, "I am a custodian, my dear, not an owner." (*Downton Abbey* 1.04).

Unlike the Hotel Adlon or Selfridge's department store, which are named after their owners, *Downton Abbey* does not serve as a monument to personal success but

rather as a testament to British heritage and tradition. The emphasis here is less on the individual and more on the broader, enduring communal identity. This is evidenced by the succession of heirs to the Downton Abbey estate, demonstrating their transient and replaceable nature, whereas the house remains unique, enduring, and permanent. This transition of heirs – from Patrick Crawley to Matthew Crawley, a miscarried male heir (1.07), again to Matthew, an impostor claiming to be Patrick Crawley (2.06), and after Matthew's death, to his son, George Crawley (3.09) – indicates the house's communal character and the expendability of its owner. As Levenson argues, "the monumental is made by the society and by the acceptance of a monument as a communal monument" (Levenson 26). Eventually, "[m]onumental structures are canonized and culturally memorized" (Levenson 27), illustrating how such edifices transcend individual ownership and embody a collective heritage that endures through generations.

4.2.2 Size and hubris

The narrative of the Titanic, as explored in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, is intricately linked to the theme of hubris through the ship's gigantic size. Unlike the boasting about the size of the Adlon Hotel or Selfridge's department store, which primarily aims to impress business partners and outdo rivals, any assertions about the Titanic's size carry deeper implications, particularly in the film. For instance, Cal Hockley's claim that "God himself cannot sink this ship" (*Titanic* 1997), takes on blasphemous undertones, extending the challenge not merely to human adversaries but to fate or divinity itself. His words are designed to resonate with viewers, casting a foreboding shadow across the narrative like a 'Menetekel', an omen of inevitable downfall. This motif of hubris is prominent in biblical and mythological stories such as the tales of Babylonian prince Belshazzar or the citizens of Babel, who were struck down by divine intervention as punishment for their hubris and conceit. Since its historical sinking, the themes of hubris, size and divine punishment have become woven into the fabric of the Titanic narrative (cf. Koldau 197).[60] Like the Tower of Babel,

[60] Das Bild von der Gottesstrafe reicht jedoch weiter zurück, nämlich zu den antiken Strafen, die über menschliche Hybris verhängt werden (…) Dadurch wurde der Glaube an die Unsinkbarkeit zum zentralen Element des Mythos: Eine solche Vermessenheit, der Anspruch, über die Natur erhaben zu sein, musste das Schicksal herausfordern! (Koldau 197) [engl. The notion of divine punishment goes back even further, to the ancient penalties imposed for human hubris (...) This belief in unsinkability became a central element of the myth: such arrogance, the claim to be above nature, had to tempt fate!]
Dieser perfekte Aufbau wird durch klassische Elemente der griechischen Tragödie gestützt: Hybris, Nemesis, Katharsis, also Hochmut, Fall und Läuterung, dazu dramatische Ironie. […] Der Mythos

the Titanic represents a gigantic man-made structure venturing into realms beyond natural human habitation.

Linda Maria Koldau notes that the “perfect narrative structure” (Koldau 198) of the Titanic story is enriched by classical elements of Greek tragedy: hubris, nemesis, and catharsis – arrogance, fall and sublimation (cf. ibid.). Additionally, the Titanic narrative is steeped in Biblical imagery, evoking not only the Tower of Babel but also Noah’s Ark, the archetypal giant vessel (Ur-ship) designed to preserve species of all kinds. The story of Noah’s Ark carries a similar theme of hubris and tragedy, particularly concerning those who mocked Noah’s efforts and failed to recognise the Ark’s essential purpose as a gigantic lifeboat.

These mythical dimensions create a cultural framework that surrounds the Titanic narrative, imbuing it with an enduring, timeless, and monumental quality that continues to captivate and resonate with audiences well into the twenty-first century. This cultural framework not only reinforces the Titanic narrative's resonance with audiences but also elevates it to a modern-day myth. Drawing on classical elements and biblical imagery, the Titanic story transcends its historical context, becoming a symbol of universal themes such as human ambition, the consequences of hubris, and the fragility of human constructs against the forces of nature. The mythologisation of the Titanic disaster allows contemporary audiences to engage with the narrative on multiple levels, seeing it not just as a historical event but as a timeless allegory that reflects ongoing human concerns about technology and the limits of human ambition against the forces of nature.

The early twentieth century witnessed a fascination with hubris and megalomania, as evidenced by the monumental and gigantic architectural endeavours of the Nazis. This era’s cultural and political framing in film and other media often reflected a deliberate use of monumental scale to project power and ideology. According to Levenson:

> This motivation is also clearly visible in the cinematography of Leni Riefenstahl’s films – especially her Olympia films which glorified the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. She

ist nunmehr in Nostalgie verpackt. Nach zwei Weltkriegen und Hiroshima, unter der ständigen Bedrohung des Kalten Krieges träumte es sich schön von einer verlorenen Zeit. […] Gegenüber Luftangriffen und Atombomben war die Titanic Katastrophe geradezu heimelig. [engl. This perfect narrative structure is supported by classic elements of Greek tragedy: hubris, nemesis, catharsis—in other words, pride, downfall, and purification, along with dramatic irony. The myth is now wrapped in nostalgia. After two world wars and Hiroshima, under the constant threat of the Cold War, people dreamed nostalgically of a lost time. [...] Compared to air raids and atomic bombs, the Titanic catastrophe seemed almost cozy.] (Koldau 198-200)

> uses the monumental structures as a frame, showing them in a specific fashion and thereby making them accessible and visible to everybody, not just to an elite that is able to be in the front rows of the Nazi-parades in Nürnberg or the Olympic Games in Berlin. It is clear that in this case there was an intentional creation of monumentality for the masses and the commoners as well as the political elites. After this instrumentalization of big architecture for political purposes, this kind of architectural expression of quoting ancient monuments and rebuilding them on an extra-large scale fell out of favor, especially in Germany. (Levenson 20)

Bodo Kahmann discusses how the architectural ambitions of the Nazi regime symbolised Hitler's and the NSDAP party's "universal claim to power,[61]" employing monumental buildings as tools of "political architecture of demonstration, intimidation, and order"[62] (Kahmann 100). The subsequent destruction of Nazi monumental architecture, along with other pre-existing monumental structures, marked a climactic resolution to the theme of megalomania and hubris related to size in the early twentieth century. This destruction serves as a symbolic denouement, underlining the impermanence and ultimate vulnerability of even the grandest human constructs when driven by authoritarian and overreaching ambitions. The significance of destroyed monuments extends beyond their physical presence, contributing to the mythology surrounding them. Sebastian Hageneuer and Syla van der Heyden note:

> After its destruction the monument was forgotten, so that at the beginning of the 20th century the Tower of Babel was only familiar thanks to the bible and the writings of Herodotus. It was not until 1912 that Robert Koldewey (1855– 1925) excavated the actual remains of the monument; ever since there has been an unending series of proposals for reconstructions (Minkowski 1959; Schmid 1995). Thus even an absent monument can be present just through the reception of the disappeared architecture" (cf. Lindemann 2008). (Hageneuer and Van der Heyden 73)

The cultural resonance of a monument can persist, or even intensify, after its physical destruction. In fact, destroyed monuments often contribute the creation of myth, with their absence amplifying the cultural resonance surrounding the myth of their destruction. While permanent and enduring monuments or gigantic man-made structures evoke a sense of stability, reliability, and order, they are less likely to be perceived as exceptional. As E.M. Rowell notes, "[s]ize only seems to call for notice when it is in

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61 universellen Machtanspruch (Kahmann 100)

62 politische Demonstrations-, Einschüchterungs- und Ordnungsarchitektur. (ibid.)

some way exceptional, perhaps when it is in excess or defect" (Rowell 322). The concept of exceptional size, whether in defect or excess, is therefore a recurring theme in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century. This phenomenon can also be observed in the context of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City in 2001, one of the tallest building complexes in the world and a symbol of Western financial power and affluence. The live broadcast of the gigantic towers' destruction has left a significant mark on cultural consciousness in recent years.

Hubris as a theme is closely tied to the human presumption of conquering the gigantic, especially in nature loci such as the ocean or outer space – non-places that are inherently inhospitable and reject human habitation. According to Susan Stewart:

> Whereas the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic, and the overly cultural, the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural. […] Our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape, our immediate and lived relation to nature as it 'surrounds' us. […] we are enveloped by the gigantic, surrounded by it, enclosed within its shadow. (S. Stewart 70-71)

In other words, nature will always be the true gigantic in relation to man-made structures. In James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997), this concept is visually articulated: the Titanic, while imposing at the dock, appears diminutive against the vastness of the ocean. This juxtaposition emphasises the ocean's true magnitude, especially when the ship encounters the iceberg, whose destructive power lies beneath the surface, unseen and foreboding.

The most imposing size of the Titanic is emphasised in shots from and around the quays, where the ship towers over humans and cars, giving a sense of its monumental scale. However, once the vessel is out on the open seas, the heterotopia of the ship, as Foucault describes it, becomes "a shaking piece of space, a space without actual place, that exists all by itself, that is enclosed and at the same time exposed to the endlessness of the ocean" (Foucault 27). In *Titanic* (1997), the true power of nature as the realm of the gigantic is most strikingly revealed in the form of the iceberg. The iceberg's uncanny effect lies in its dark and destructive 'underbelly,' hidden below the surface of human perception. This 'hidden giant' symbolises the overwhelming and unpredictable force of nature, which contrasts sharply with the human ambition embodied in the ship's grand design.

4.2.3 The monstrous gigantic in the Titanic narrative

The Titanic narrative serves as a profound allegorical tale, rich with mythological resonance, evoking the classical journey of Odysseus with its perils and trials. Much like Odysseus's nostos, or journey home, the Titanic's voyage to New York represents a modern retelling of an epic sea adventures. However, this journey is catastrophically interrupted by the iceberg, a mythical peril at sea that indiscriminately claims the lives of passengers, echoing the capricious dangers faced by ancient heroes.

The narrative positions the passengers between two immense threats: the sinking ship and the vast, icy sea. This scenario mirrors the classical dilemma faced by Odysseus between Scylla and Charybdis – two sea monsters representing unavoidable and deadly choices. In the case of the Titanic, the ship itself transitions from a marvel of human engineering to a deadly trap. As the ship begins to sink, it metaphorically transforms into a mechanical beast that not only fails to protect its inhabitants but actively contributes to the peril, threatening to pull them down into the abyss.

Simultaneously, the ocean and its iceberg represent the uncontrollable force of nature – vast, indifferent, and overpowering. This juxtaposition of human-made disaster and natural calamity highlights the theme of human hubris: the belief that human ingenuity can conquer nature's challenges, only to be humbled by the overwhelming power of the natural world. The passengers' plight, caught between these two forces, foregrounds their vulnerability and lack of control, reminiscent of humanity's perennial struggle against larger, incomprehensible forces. This mythological framing of the Titanic story adds a layer of timeless tragedy to the historical event, reflecting on the human condition and our perpetual confrontation with the forces beyond our control.

In depictions across various media, giants – whether mythological Titans or fairy tale antagonists – are often portrayed as formidable devourers of men, their immense size rendering humans diminutive by comparison. According to Susan Stewart, "The giant is frequently seen as a devourer, and even, as in the case of Cyclops, as a cannibal" (S. Stewart 86). This theme of the colossal as a consumer of humanity connects across different narratives and periods, critiquing various aspects of human endeavours and societal constructs.

Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927) presents the image of the Moloch, a gigantic industrial machine monster with a gate-sized mouth, as a literal devourer and consumer of workers, encapsulating the early twentieth-century critique of modern industry. The Moloch's image has become synonymous with urban life's "consuming and

degenerative nature”[63] (Kahmann 181). According to Kahmann, the city is often likened to a monstrous kraken in anti-urban literature:

> The comparison of big cities to an octopus or other animals and organisms with far-reaching extremities is a recurring motif in the anti-urban literature of the German Empire and the Weimar Republic. This imagery expresses the notion that big cities would ruthlessly consume the human and material resources of the country.[64] (Kahmann 177)

The Titanic, upon striking the iceberg, transition from a safe container and symbol of human ingenuity to a monstrous entity. In *Titanic* (1997), this transformation is dramatised through the ship’s physical disintegration, where collapsing funnels and the chaos of passengers being tossed about reinforce the impression of a gigantic, uncontrollable machine. The ship's final act of destruction—snapping in half and crashing down upon those struggling in the water—turns it into a deadly, mechanical beast. What once was a luxurious vessel of safety, becomes a terrifying, uncontrollable giant, lashing out at the humans around it and devouring those unfortunate enough to be caught in its belly.

Thus, Titanic itself becomes a mythic sea monster that destroys its own travellers by sea. Wood points out the sounds made by the ‘dying’ ship:

> In the final moments, where each shriek and cry is accompanied by the shudder and groan of the ship, and a precipitous fall accentuates the extreme angles of the ship in water, the human tragedy and the technological tragedy are inseparable. (Wood 231)

The perception of the gigantic as monstrous varies with context, situation, and perspective, as exemplified in Jonathan Swift’s satire *Gulliver’s Travels*, *or Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships* (1726). Here, the protagonist, Lemuel Gulliver, experiences the gigantic on his travels to Brobdingnag in the form of its inhabitants, whose gigantic proportions terrify him. One image appears particularly repulsive and monstrous to Gulliver from his point of view: the cancerous breast of a female Brobdingnagian. According to Susan Stewart, the gigantic is in this instant perceived as

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63 verzehrenden und degenerierenden Charakter des Großstadtlebens (Kahmann 181)

64 Der Vergleich der Großstädte mit einer Krake und anderen Tieren oder Organismen mit weitausgreifenden Extremitäten stellt ein wiederkehrendes Motiv in der großstadtfeindlichen Literatur des Kaiserreichs und der Weimarer Republik dar. In dieser Bildersprache drückt sich die Vorstellung aus, dass die Großstädte die menschlichen und materiellen Ressourcen des Landes rücksichtlos aufzehren würden. (Kahmann 177)

> a frightening symbol of growth and contamination. The breast turns from nurturer to destroyer. […] The breasts represent a superfluity of nature; they will swallow Gulliver in their immediateness. (S. Stewart 88)

This scene reflects broader male anxieties about female 'growth,' empowerment and development beyond man's control. The feminine sexual characteristic of the breast is connoted as monstrous due to its gigantic size and marked by illness as something degenerate. Historically, the perceived 'threat' of female empowerment and emancipation has often been condemned as unnatural, monstrous, or satirised and fetishised, as seen for example in the film *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958).

Interestingly, *Titanic* (1997) genders the ship as feminine, using "she" and "her," as well as referring to the 'maiden voyage' of the vessel. Rather than merely depicting the ship as a monstrous destroyer, Cameron intertwines this with themes of female empowerment and feminism, prevalent in the late 1990s. The film's embedded narrative concludes with Rose standing on the deck of the Carpathia as the camera pans from the face of the female protagonist to the gigantic figure of 'Lady Liberty,' a monumental statue of a woman. Redmond points out the significance of this scene:

> Near the end of the film, having been saved from drowning, we see Rose standing in the pouring rain beneath the Statue of Liberty—we know now, under this mythic sign, she will lead a new life of opportunity. (Redmond 199)

Accordingly, the Statue of Liberty, a positively connoted allegory of hope and liberation in the form of a female giant, represents Rose's personal emancipation as well as the film's underlying feminist narrative.

4.3 Growing and Shrinking worlds: resizing and perception of space

E.M. Rowell explains that size "is an intrinsic relation in an occasion, an object, or a being […]" as "the size of an inanimate object, of a plant, of an animal, is related to and proportional to its function, and cannot be altered arbitrarily without doing violence to the whole nature of the entity" (Rowell 321). Resizing an entity can thus disrupt its natural balance, yet the perception of size is highly contextual and can shift dramatically under different circumstances. This concept is illustrated by the changing perception of the size of the Titanic and its lifeboats during the sinking: before the disaster,

the lifeboats seemed to unnecessarily occupy deck space; afterward, they were perceived as woefully inadequate in size to accommodate all passengers.

Narratives, particularly in fantasy and science fiction, often explore the theme of resizing – either through the physical growth or diminution of characters or their worlds. Such transformations of growing or shrinking are not just literal but symbolic, influencing and reflecting the characters' perspectives and the thematic depth of the story. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) are quintessential examples where resizing is central to the narrative. In these stories, shifts in size, from miniature to gigantic, dramatically alter the protagonists' interactions with their worlds, shedding light on various social themes such as class, gender, age, and power dynamics.

These themes are mirrored in the spatial dynamics of literary houses and settings. In contemporary reimaginings of early twentieth-century narratives, the physical and perceived spaces within settings like houses often change in size, reflecting shifts in characters' social roles and relationships. Spaces might expand to accommodate characters gaining in power and prominence, or conversely, shrink for those whose societal roles are diminished. This resizing within the narrative framework serves as a metaphor for changing social landscapes, particularly in terms of class and gender dynamics. Through literature, both the physical and metaphorical manipulation of size serve as a profound commentary on human perception and social order, illustrating how deeply our understanding of the world is intertwined with our spatial and situational context.

4.3.1 A S(hr)inking Giant: size perception in *Titanic*

In *Titanic* (1997), the perception of the ship's size undergoes a significant transformation, especially when contrasted with the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean. Initially depicted as a monumental structure, the Titanic gradually appears smaller and less significant against the overwhelming presence of the ocean. This shift in perception is visually communicated through increasingly distant shots, reducing the ship to a mere spot of light against the dark void of sea and sky. Captain Smith's remark that the calm sea looks like a "mill pond" (*Titanic* 1997) serves as ironic foreshadowing of the looming disaster, calling attention to the Titanic's vulnerability in the face of nature's immensity.

The iceberg collision marks a pivotal moment where the grandeur of the Titanic is starkly deflated. The space once deemed excessive and unsinkable shrinks dramatically as the ship begins to sink. The lifeboats, previously criticised as “a waste of space on an unsinkable ship” (*Titanic* 1997) for occupying too much deck space, suddenly become crucial. This ironic twist calls attention to a practical re-evaluation of space and utility on the ship. As the once-majestic Titanic is reduced to wreckage, the humble lifeboats are elevated to symbols of safety and pragmatism, illustrating a shift from ostentation to necessity. The dramatic shrinking of Titanic’s safe space—from a gigantic iron ship with a monumental name to the minimal shelter offered by unsubstantial wooden lifeboats—is powerfully depicted in both the 1997 film and the 2012 mini-series.

Rose’s perception of the ship as a confining space dominated by society’s “narrow people” (*Titanic* 1997) adds another layer to the narrative. In her troubled state, she runs the entire length of the ship but cannot find enough space to put between herself and them. Her experiences aboard the Titanic are defined by a progressive constriction of space – physically and socially – as she and Jack seek refuge from the restrictive oversight of her mother and fiancé. As the disaster unfolds, Rose’s personal universe contracts dramatically, culminating in her survival on a wooden door amidst the ocean’s vastness. This door, barely sufficient to support her, becomes a liminal space and poignant symbol of her survival and a threshold to a new life.

The cinematic depiction of Rose adrift on the door, with the camera focusing narrowly on her against the backdrop of an expansive night sky, visually encapsulates the shrinking of her physical world in contrast to the expansion of her personal horizon. The image echoes Bachelard’s spatial imagery: “My bed is a small boat lost at sea” (Bachelard 28), as the core of Rose’s universe has shrunk down to the size of the door, leaving her to contemplate the vastness of the universe above in calm repose. This final image, following the sinking, ties back to the film’s feminist undertones. Rose, having survived the physical and metaphorical sinking of her old world, contemplates the infinity beyond it. Her story resonates with themes of rebirth and liberation, challenging traditional perceptions of power, size, and space.

4.3.2 Gender relations and emancipation in symbols of size

The exploration of gender and class politics through the lens of size in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century provides a compelling narrative device. One

recurring example of this is the motif of the corset as a symbol of the patriarchal preoccupation with women's size, and by extension, women's growth and agency within modern society. In contemporary reimaginings, the use of physical restraints as a means of control, often symbolises the broader societal restrictions placed on women, servants, and colonial subjects, effectively "keeping them small" and infantilised in the name of patriarchal order.

In *Downton Abbey*, the corset serves as both a literal and figurative symbol of constraint. Lady Mary, embodying conservative values, accepts the corset without question or complaint, signifying her acquiescence to societal norms. In contrast, Lady Sybil's expression of discomfort – "Golly, my corset's tight." (*Downton Abbey* 1.04) – and her request to loosen it reflect her desire for more freedom and less societal control. This progressive stance hints at broader shifts in social and gender norms of the time. Lady Edith's remark that loosening one's corset denotes "the start of the slippery slope" (ibid.) might refer to weight gain, yet the subtext suggests something deeper: loss of control over the body is equated to a loosening of morals and a departure from societal norms.

Titanic (1997) uses the corset in a similarly symbolic manner. The scene where Rose's mother aggressively tightens her corset while admonishing her to avoid "that boy" (*Titanic* 1997) functions as a coded performance of the dominant mother physically asserting power and control over the wayward daughter. Rose's mother literally 'pulls the strings' to effectively manipulate Rose into submission. Antonia Primorac explains how such scenes use tight-lacing "as a visual shorthand used to metaphorically and metonymically represent embodied Victorian female subjectivity" (Primorac 99) in historical film and serials to illustrate female subjugation, while historically tight-lacing was not practiced as commonly as fiction suggests. According to Primorac:

> Ever since that seminal waist-cinching scene in Gone with the Wind (dir. V. Fleming 1939), the image of the tightly-laced woman as representative of a Victorian Everywoman has persisted, despite the copious debunking of the myth of tight-lacing's popularity by clothes and art historians in the last couple of decades […] and is continuously used in screen adaptations and Victoriana on screen. (Primorac 101)

By forcefully tightening the corset, Rose's mother exerts power and reasserts her control over as Rose, symbolically keeping her 'small' both in waist and spirit. This act represents a broader theme in reimaginings where "the corset becomes the metaphorical cage within which a woman's sexuality and agency are imprisoned, and the

cinched waist draws the attention to the suppressed erotic feelings and restricted social avenues available for the expression of one's desire." (Primorac 103).

In *Titanic* (1997), the corset serves as a metaphorical device that underscores the protagonist's journey towards emancipation, coded through metaphors of size and space. The "narrow" world that Rose laments earlier in the film is visually and physically represented by the constriction of her body, forced to conform to the restrictive norms of her society. The film's conclusion, however, suggests that Rose's worldview and personal scope will have expanded, indicating her liberation from these constraints.

Feminism in contemporary reimaginings is symbolically coded through images of size and space. This connection is made explicit in *Downton Abbey* when Lady Sybil remarks that men "don't have to wear [corsets]" (*Downton Abbey* 1.04). Lady Edith's reaction to this complaint, quipping that her sister will soon have to be "force fed semolina" (ibid.), immediately associates the critique of the corset with feminism and the broader quest for women's suffrage. As Primorac notes:

> Steele debunks the myth that the suffragette movement was directly linked with the dress reform movement and gives evidence of how prominent suffragettes actually encouraged women, in the words of Lydia Becker, editor of the *Woman's Suffrage Journal,* to 'stick to their stays' […] Steele also shows how the conservative press and satirical cartoons came to lampoon the New Woman as the tightly-laced woman by linking tight-lacing with women's desire to control their own bodies as well as their destinies. (Primorac 102)

Natural fluctuations in the female body's size, such as those occurring with the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, or other weight changes, also pertain to the contemporary discourse on gender and body politics in the twenty-first century. In previous centuries, however, as Molloy notes, "Women's bodies were thus viewed as disorderly, in need of containment and brought to order" (Molloy 5). The corset stands as a signifying symbol of this mentality, now seen as archaic by contemporary audiences.

The corset as a restraining device and symbol of repression is mirrored in other motifs seen in contemporary reimaginings, for instance, in the physical restraint of the pastor's son, Martin, in *The White Ribbon*. To deter him from masturbating, Martin's hands are tied to the bed frame with white rags which recall both the white ribbons worn as punishment by him and his sister, Klara. The restraints imposed on Martin can be seen as a form of symbolic castration. As Garrett Stewart notes, "[w]hat matters

here is not that the bound boy is symbolically castrated but that he is bound to take out this frustration elsewhere—and otherwise" (G. Stewart 43).

This control over the body and physical restraint, while mainly associated with female characters, is also used on adolescents. For example, while seventeen-year-old Rose is tightly laced into her corset by her mother, who simultaneously forbids her from further interactions with her lover, the adolescent Martin is physically restrained from acting on his sexual impulses. The crisis of puberty, a recurring theme in contemporary reimaginings (see chapter 3.2.2), is suppressed through both psychological torment and physical restraint, ultimately finding an outlet in subversive behaviour. Rose's rebellion in *Titanic* and the destructive activities of the village children in Haneke's film can thus be understood as expressions of sublimation. This parallel between female and adolescent experiences of repression indicates a broader critique of how societal norms and expectations of the patriarchy stifle natural impulses, leading to eventual rebellion or transgressive behaviour.

In the reimaginings of the early twentieth century examined in this thesis, gender politics are intricately woven into the narratives through symbols and motifs of size and space, reflecting the evolving roles and perceptions of male and female characters. These shifts parallel the historical changes of the era, particularly around the time of the First World War, which marked significant social transformations concerning gender roles. As women's scope expanded and they began to occupy more space in the workplace and other traditionally male-dominated spheres, narratives also depict the corresponding decline of the old patriarchal order. This expansion of women's roles and the corresponding contraction of male-dominated spaces underscore the broader societal shifts of the period.

In series like *Downton Abbey* and *The Village*, this transformation is vividly depicted through the expansion of women's roles during the war. As men went to the front, women began to fill the roles that had been traditionally reserved for men, not only in the domestic sphere but also in the professional world. This expansion into what had been male-dominated spaces symbolises a broader societal shift towards greater agency and autonomy for women. Female figures in these narratives are characterised as taking on new responsibilities and exhibiting a newfound agency that was unprecedented in the pre-war era.

Conversely, male characters in these narratives are often depicted as embodying traditional roles of visionaries, pioneers, and patriarchs. Their worldviews and ambitions are characterised by grandiose and often expansionary plans. Characters like Schadt in *Das Adlon* and Gravenhorst in *Unter den Linden* are portrayed with colonialist ambitions, reflecting a continuation of nineteenth-century imperialism. However, these ambitions are increasingly outlined as anachronistic against the backdrop of changing social dynamics where more liberal and progressive politics are on the rise. As women's spaces and roles expand, the traditional patriarchal order is shown to decline, challenged by the realities of war and changing societal norms. This decline is not just a reduction in physical or spatial dominance but also a symbolic diminution of the ideological and cultural hegemony that these male characters once represented.

The thematic exploration of spatial reduction for male characters and expansion for female characters in the early twentieth century is prominently depicted in *Downton Abbey*, particularly against the backdrop of World War I in Season 2. Spatially, the narrative illustrates how the perspective and scope of men, such as the upper-class Matthew Crawley, are dramatically reduced from the vast expanse of global empires to the confined, claustrophobic space of a trench dugout. The period drama effectively uses the war as a catalyst for shifting gender dynamics, altering the perceived scope of influence and agency among its characters.

Lord Grantham's experience during the war exemplifies the contraction of male influence and prestige traditionally associated with his role. Despite his title and the grandeur of his estate, he finds himself sidelined during the war, feeling increasingly redundant in both his personal capacity and his societal role. His inability to participate directly in the war effort, coupled with his marginal role in the management of the estate turned convalescent him, which is effectively run by Lady Grantham and Isobel Crawley, exacerbates his sense of obsolescence. Lord Grantham, whose dissatisfaction lasts into the aftermath of the war, appears to 'shrink' into insignificance against the new dominance of the female characters and the younger generation.

Downton Abbey elaborates on the shrinking significance of the individual male in the larger scheme of the war, for example when the shell-shocked valet Henry Lang (Cal MacAninch) reminds the young soldier William Mason that he is as much part in the war as "a metal cog is part of a factory, or a grain of sand is part of the beach"

(*Downton Abbey* 2.03). This imagery powerfully conveys the dehumanising and belittling effect of the war on those who served, critiquing the grand narrative of wartime heroism and sacrifice.

Conversely, the war serves as a liberating force for female characters *in Downton Abbey*. The Crawley daughters, emblematic of affluent young women of their era, experience an unprecedented expansion of their social and personal choices. Baena and Byker employing the spatial metaphor, assert that "the Crawley daughters find their choices widening" (Baena and Byker 262), also in the literal sense of women's spaces expanding.

The series depicts how the war disrupts traditional gender roles, offering female characters opportunities to engage in work and responsibilities previously reserved for men. However, despite these thematic underpinnings highlighting the evolution of female agency and scope, *Downton Abbey* simultaneously adheres to traditional romance and marriage plots, thus often reverts to more conventional narrative arcs, particularly regarding its female characters, both upstairs and downstairs.

This narrative choice may be seen as a missed opportunity to more fully explore and showcase the transformative impacts of the war on women's roles in society. Rather than delving deeper into the new spaces women began to occupy – such as in politics, higher education, or diverse professions – the series often confines its female characters within the traditional boundaries of romance and domesticity. The recurring theme of upward social mobility through marriage, rather than professional achievement, underlines an intriguing tension between the representation of female empowerment and the persistence of traditional gender roles within the narrative.

While *Downton Abbey* introduces several strong female characters who display independence and professional ambitions, their story arcs frequently culminate in marriages that align them with traditional social structures, ultimately reinforcing a conservative resolution to their quests for personal growth and autonomy. This approach highlights the series' tendency to balance between progressive themes of female agency and the nostalgic allure of established social norms, reflecting a broader cultural ambivalence towards the changing roles of women in the early twentieth century.

Gwen Dawson's (Rose Leslie) narrative arc exemplifies this pattern. Introduced as a maid who seeks professional freedom as a secretary, Gwen's return to the series as someone who has 'married up' subtly reinforces the idea that her societal status,

albeit improved, is largely attributed to her marital relationship rather than her professional achievement (*Downton Abbey* 6.04.) This is a common motif in the series, where personal success for female characters frequently intersects with traditional social ascension through marriage.

Lady Edith Crawley's journey is particularly symbolic of this trend. Her evolution from a marginalised sibling to an emancipated woman running a magazine suggests a break from traditional confines. However, her marriage to the Marquess of Hexham (Harry Hadden-Paton) effectively overshadows her professional identity, as her new title within the aristocracy takes precedence in defining her societal standing. This narrative choice suggests a reversion to the normative expectations of women's roles within society, prioritising marital and social status over personal and professional achievements.

Isobel Crawley is another example of this pattern in the series. As a widow who carves out a role as a progressive voice for women's agency and professional involvement, Isobel's decision to marry Lord Merton and become 'Lady Merton' indicates a step back from the independence that defined her character. Throughout the series, Isobel serves as a progressive, modern voice of female agency, emancipation, and professionalism. However, her marriage narrative reveals a recurring pattern in the series, where upward social mobility for female characters is achieved predominantly through marriage rather than through their professional or personal accomplishments. As noted by Laetitia Kevers:

> Isobel becomes "Lady Merton," when she decides to marry Lord Merton, Mary Crawley's godfather. By doing so, she officially moves into the aristocratic circle (once again, like Matthew before her), and she also renounces her independence, a trait that made her such an emblematic and unique character. (Kevers 229)

Similarly, the housekeeper Elsie Hughes initially rejects a proposal of marriage from a suitor (1.04) in favour of maintaining her independence and career at Downton Abbey. Her later decision to marry Mr. Carson might be seen as a personal triumph in her romantic life, but it also fits the pattern of defining women's achievements in terms of their marital relationships rather than their professional roles.

Lady Mary Crawley's storyline further reinforces this pattern. As a widow, from Season 4 onwards, she initially takes a significant step toward breaking traditional gender roles by managing the estate. However, her story arc quickly veers back towards

romance and remarriage plots, subtly shifting the focus from her capabilities as a businesswoman back to her role as primary romantic lead in the series.

Thus, *Downton Abbey*, despite suggesting the possibility of expanding the female characters' roles in society, ultimately reinstates and even reinforces traditional gender roles. Regardless of brief excursions into the world outside the country house idyll, *Downton Abbey* keeps its female characters located within the domestic sphere and emphasises the dominance of the romance narrative over any feminist subversion of traditional gender tropes. Their narratives collectively underline a critical observation about *Downton Abbey*: while the series offers a progressive glimpse at the expanding roles and competencies of women during a transformative historical era, it ultimately conforms to traditional romance frameworks. This conservative bending in character arcs suggests a limitation in the portrayal of female autonomy, tying women's ultimate societal success and fulfilment back to conventional marital and social status, rather than fully embracing and sustaining their professional and personal independence.

Here is a marked contrast between German reimaginings and British productions like *Downton Abbey* regarding cultural approaches to depicting female autonomy and professional aspirations in historical dramas. German series such as *Das Adlon* and *Charité* appear more inclined to prioritise career and individual development over traditional marriage plots for their female protagonists, suggesting an emphasis on feminism in these reimaginings.

In *Das Adlon*, Sonja Schadt's evolution from a radio host to managing the prestigious Adlon Hotel post-World War II underscores a narrative commitment to showcasing women's professional success independent of their marital status. Similarly, *Charité* concludes with Ida Lenze leaving Berlin to study medicine in Switzerland, implying that, rather than becoming a doctor's wife, she becomes a doctor in her own right, positioning her as a pioneer for women in the medical profession.

The divergence in narrative strategies might reflect differing societal values or historical perceptions between British and German media. British period dramas exhibit a tendency to romanticise and preserve traditions, leading to a stronger emphasis on maintaining established social norms, including those related to gender roles. In contrast, German narratives might focus more on the tumultuous historical changes Germany underwent in the twentieth century, which could influence a portrayal of more radical shifts in social and gender norms, thus allowing for more progressive and feminist interpretations of women's roles.

4.4 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, my analysis focuses on the themes of spatiality and size underlying British and German reimaginings. The house, already established as a central setting in this thesis, is considered a key motif that reflects the topological stratification of society and contemporary spatial anxieties. Grand and opulent houses, such as the eponymous *Downton Abbey*, evoke the grandeur of the ancien régime, while their imposing size invokes a sense of stability, impermeability, and permanence.

Drawing on Gaston Bachelard's interpretation of the house and its different parts, I examined how grand houses in *Downton Abbey* and other reimaginings are divided into distinct spheres assigned to various class and gender groups. While the idealised symbiotic relationship between servants and masters in *Downton Abbey* suggests a sense of wholeness and unity within the house, the pervasive theme of class division implies a fragmentation of space. This fragmentation is evident in other narratives, such as *Titanic* (2012), *Das Adlon* (2013), and *Unter den Linden* (2006). Although the vertical division of the house into 'upstairs' and 'downstairs' dominates the spatial perception of the heritage house, I propose an alternative spatial reading of *Downton Abbey* as concentrical, with servants encircling the upper class at the core of the house.

Contemporary reimaginings often employ the cultural dichotomy between the 'upstairs' world and the 'downstairs' underworld, where the underground or underworld functions as a form of carnivalesque countersociety. In my analysis, crises, particularly those related to adolescence in young characters, as seen in *Titanic* and *The White Ribbon*, are further coded in motifs of repression, restraint, and katabatic imagery. Psychological repression due to etiquette and order, as well as physical repression through devices like the corset, symbolically underline the connection between the repression of the younger generation and the oppression of the lower classes by the patriarchal order.

Enclosure and containment emerge as key themes in my analysis of spatiality in reimaginings of the past. The castle-like enclosure of the grand house in *Downton Abbey* or the contained space of the ship in *Titanic* serve as examples of an emphasis on enclosed spaces. The image of *Downton Abbey* as an impregnable fortress suggests an isolated 'last bastion' against outsiders, intruders and the influence of modernity and social progress. The clerical connotation in the name *Downton Abbey* marks

the house as a sacred place, enclosed and ordered like a monastery or cloister, implying it is a sanctuary of British tradition and the privileges of the white Christian patriarch.

In contrast to the enclosed space of *Downton Abbey*, which represents the British heritage house, the hotel in *Das Adlon* and the department store in *Mr. Selfridge* are notably 'open' buildings due to their public rather than private nature. This openness is foregrounded by the image of the revolving door, featured prominently in both the British series and the German mini-series. This literal 'open door' policy of *Das Adlon* characterises the house as a place of refuge and shelter in times of crisis, such as during revolution and war. By contrast, the enclosed world of *Downton Abbey* would be reflective of a desire for interiority and isolation rather than an extended welcome to strangers.

Downton Abbey's focus on interiority and nostalgia for a contained and enclosed world invites comparison to the motif of the dollhouse, which allows the viewer a voyeuristic gaze into the house's interior while keeping them physically outside due to its miniature size. This parallels the experience of historical film and television productions, which offer visual consumption of the interior while the 'lived experience' of the location – and indeed the historical era it is set in – remains inaccessible. Akin to a large-scale dollhouse, the fictional Edwardian house in *Downton Abbey* provides similar amusement, nostalgia, and voyeuristic pleasure. However, underlying this imagery is the dollhouse's association with domestication, infantilisation, and the fetishisation of women. *Downton Abbey* thus combines the scopophilic pleasure of the heritage film with the voyeuristic and nostalgic gaze afforded by the dollhouse.

In this chapter, I further consider the motif of the dollhouse and its interiority as indicative of the inherent tension between the inside and the outside worlds of the fictional grand house. Notably, British imaginings such as *Downton Abbey* glorify interiority, as everything inside the house is connoted as positive, 'good,' and in need of guarding and preservation against perceived threats from the outside. These threats are both abstract, such as the fear of change, and concrete, such as the figure of the outsider or intruder, both of which threaten to upset the idyllic interior world of the house. The coding of inside as good and outside as bad is indicative of contemporary spatial anxieties and latent xenophobia.

In the series *Babylon Berlin*, this theme is expanded on with the infiltration of the home by the maid Greta, who plants a bomb in her employer's house. This act

represents an extreme subversion of the idealised master-servant relationship depicted in *Downton Abbey,* which is founded on mutual trust. The invasion and infiltration of the Jewish Benda household in *Babylon Berlin* can be interpreted as a political and historical analogy for the invasion of Nazism and fascism into German society at the time. The double trauma of infiltration by the National Socialists from within German society and the more recent memory of Stasi infiltration of the home can be seen as socio-historical contexts behind this underlying fear of an internal threat.

Within my analysis of the theme of spatiality, I have also added size as a significant factor in the perception of space in contemporary British and German reimaginings. Size pertains to the historical contexts of expansionist and imperialist politics, which are tied to patriarchal power. This connection between size and power is further linked to the interplay of size and gender politics in contemporary reimaginings, which are coded in a perceived growing and shrinking of gendered spaces. Patriarchal oppression is further coded in spatial dimensions and size, for example in the corset as a symbol of patriarchal control over the female body and its size. Notably, both German and British reimaginings emphasise the growing space and scope of female protagonists and characters, whose spheres expand from domesticity into the working and business worlds.

British reimaginings such as *Downton Abbey* frequently depict a form of 'temporary' emancipation, where female characters ostensibly choose a career before reverting to the domestic role of wife and mother, indicating a preference for romance and marriage plots over stories of independence and emancipation. Conversely, in German reimaginings such as *Charité*, *Das Adlon,* or *Babylon Berlin*, female protagonists actively choose a career over matrimony. At the same time, male-connoted spaces in reimaginings metaphorically shrink due to the decline of imperialism and the patriarchal order, as the figure of the patriarch grows smaller and less significant, reflecting a gradual loss of power and control.

The intersection between gender, size and space in contemporary reimaginings is most emphatically represented in the concept of the gigantic and the monumental, which are connoted positively or negatively depending on the cultural contexts of the production. In *Titanic,* the visual exaggeration of the enormous ship is explicitly and implicitly criticised as grotesque representations of hubris, megalomania, and systemic patriarchal oppression. The gigantic is further coded as a monstrous devourer in the *Titanic* narrative, as the sinking ship disintegrates into a deadly trap rather than a safe

space of containment. Similarly, the gigantic city in German reimaginings such as *Babylon Berlin, Charité* or *Das Adlon*, is likened to a monstrous giant, a Moloch, devouring its inhabitants, within the context of social precarity and political conflict during the interwar years and the Second World War when Berlin was under siege. Within a German context, the gigantic and exaggerated size, especially in architectural structures, is inherently tied to National Socialist ideology. Propaganda films, such as the works of Leni Riefenstahl, demonstrate the effect of size, perspective, and monumentality for populist purposes. The Titanic disaster effectively deconstructs early twentieth-century megalomania and hubris manifested in gigantic man-made structures. By contrast, *Downton Abbey*, reconstructs the ideological link between the gigantic and monumental architecture as positively connoted and removed from the controversial memory of the monumental in NS architecture. The gigantic in British heritage imagining denotes permanence and endurance, while the monumental adds a layer of historical commemoration. Gigantic fictional architecture such as *Downton Abbey* thereby functions as a fictional site of memory.

5 Chorus of the Elderly: character-coding and the fictional contemporary witness as narrator and performer of memory, guilt and trauma in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century

5.1 Fictionalised historical figures, archetypes and character coding

In this chapter, I analyse the appearance of fictionalised historical figures and the recurring character types and personifications that contribute to the underlying themes and motifs in contemporary reimaginings. Additionally, I explore the content underlying these characterisations and instances of character coding to assess their reflection of contemporary political and cultural attitudes. When fictionalised historical figures are incorporated into contemporary reimaginings, they often serve dual purposes. First, they provide a bridge between the audience and the historical context, offering familiar touchpoints in an otherwise foreign landscape. Second, these characters allow creators to explore modern themes under the guise of historical narrative, thereby engaging with contemporary issues through the safe remove of the past.

The recurrence of specific character types across different narratives can reveal common thematic or ideological threads in contemporary media. For example, the archetype of the ‘strong leader’ or the ‘corrupt politician’ often appears in narratives that explore themes of power, corruption, and morality. In examining these recurring types in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, I consider how their characteristics and story arcs are shaped by postmillennial ideas – for instance, how notions of heroism and leadership have evolved in response to global political changes or social-political movements.

Character coding is a crucial area of analysis, as it involves the ways in which characters’ identities (gender, race, class, etc.) are constructed to convey specific messages or critiques. This coding can often be subtle, manifesting in costume design, dialogue choices, or narrative arcs. For example, the way female characters in period dramas navigate the restrictions imposed on them can mirror contemporary debates about gender roles and equality. Similarly, the depiction of minority characters can provide insight into current discussions around diversity and representation.

5.1.1 Original characters and fictionalised historical figures

While some contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century integrate both original characters and fictionalised historical figures, such as *Mr. Selfridge*, *Das Adlon*, *Charité*, the miniseries *Titanic* (2012), and the *Titanic* (1997) feature film, others, like *Downton Abbey* and *Babylon Berlin*, feature only brief appearances of historical characters within a predominantly original cast. It seems that milieu influences character composition: upper-class characters are more likely to be portrayed as fictionalised historical figures or, if they are original characters, to interact frequently with historical figures including royalty, politicians or socialites of the era, as exemplified in *Downton Abbey*. Conversely, reimaginings set predominantly in a lower-class environment are less likely to depict historical figures. This obscurity is poignantly acknowledged in productions such as *The Village*, where the protagonist Bert Middleton introduces himself as "the second oldest man in Britain" (*The Village* 1.01) to assert his only claim to fame. This distinction indicates a disparity in historical relevancy and remembrance between classes: while characters of rank and name often represent the upper classes, the lower classes are depicted as an obscure, homogenous mass, which contemporary narratives must retrospectively imbue with diversity through fictional characters who lend a face and name to groups of people that are underrepresented in popular cultural memory.

In Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* (2009), obscurity is a set element in the characterisation of the film's cast. Most adult characters are referred to only by their titles or profession, such as 'der Baron,' 'der Pastor,' 'die Hebamme [the midwife],' 'der Verwalter [the steward]' or 'der Arzt [the doctor].' This intentional omission of personal names not only renders the characters anonymous and generic but also relates the film to folk or fairy tale traditions. According to Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), such tales often feature formulaic stock characters identified solely by their titles and roles, such as 'the king,' 'the soldier,' 'the princess,' 'the tailor,' or supernatural figures like 'the witch' or 'the devil.' Haneke's approach thus evokes the German literary tradition, further underscored by the film's subtitle, *Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte* [engl. A German Children's Tale], inferring a relation to fairy tales or children's literature.

Moreover, the ensemble's focus on generic occupations and anonymity is reminiscent of medieval collections of episodic stories, such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1400). This work features a cast of pilgrims identified by their titles

and occupations, such as the Plowman, Miller, Parson, Physician, Monk, Knight, Prioress, Squire, Cook, Shipman, and Wife of Bath (cf. Chaucer c. 1400). Chaucer provides a cross-section of the social strata of the Middle Ages. Similarly, Haneke's film delineates the social layers of a German Village prior to World War I.

In *Titanic* (1997) and the miniseries *Titanic* (2012), the representation of social classes through historical figures and the theme of obscurity in remembrance are pronounced. These narratives condense and magnify issues of class inequality and social injustice within a single space, intensified by the singular event of the ship's sinking. First Class passengers like Margaret Brown, John Jacob Astor, and Benjamin Guggenheim are recurring, recognisable characters in nearly every fictional depiction of the disaster. In contrast, passengers from the second and third classes are often represented by original characters, reimagined by writers and frequently depicted in accordance with stereotypical views of lower-class passengers, such as the Irish.

In the 1997 film, characters from Second Class and the ship's staff are notably absent, whereas in the 2012 miniseries, these groups are represented by original fictional characters. In *Titanic* (1997), steerage is primarily represented by the character Jack Dawson, whose obscurity is explicitly acknowledged multiple times, as "no record exists" of him (*Titanic* 1997). The narrator, Rose, reflects that: "Now you know there was a man named Jack Dawson […] He exist now only in my memory" (*Titanic* 1997). This moment in the film critiques the phenomenon that non-historical figures are not remembered and preserved in collective memory but only in the personal memories of individuals like the protagonist.

A similar critique is implied in the film *Suffragette* (2015), which addresses the visibility of prominent suffragists such as Emmeline Pankhurst and Emily Davison in contrast to the obscurity of lower-class women, who were equally pivotal to the Women's Suffrage movement yet remain largely unrecognised in cultural memory today. The fictional protagonist, Maud Watts (Carey Mulligan), represents this anonymous collective of middle- and working-class women whose contributions were crucial to the movement's success but whose names have not endured. In the film, Inspector Arthur Steed (Brendan Gleeson) articulates this disparity:

> And do you think anyone listens to a girl like you? That anyone cares? They don't. You're nothing in the world. I grew up with girls like you, Maud. People who sacrifice life for revenge and a cause. I know you. And so do they. They know how to draw on girls like you. Girls without money or prospects who want things to be better. They primp

> and they preen and they fluff you and they tell you - you are the foot soldiers of the cause. But you're only fodder - for a battle none of you can win. (*Suffragette* 2015)

This dialogue implies that lower-class women like Maud Watts will be forgotten, unlike historical figureheads such as Emmeline Pankhurst (Meryl Streep), who appears briefly to deliver a rousing speech. The scene illustrates the contrast of the social strata within the ranks of the Suffragettes: the camera angle, adopting Maud's perspective from below, emphasises Pankhurst's elevated position above the other women. Pankhurst's fleeting appearance and phantom-like disappearance from the narrative emphasises the elusive nature of historical figures in reimaginings, who are often enveloped in an aura of mystery and mythification.

This thematic portrayal of historical figures also finds resonance in *Downton Abbey*, where the inclusion of historical figures is initially sparse due to the series' remote setting in a fictional Yorkshire village, distanced from significant historical events and personas. However, as the series progresses and due to the Earl of Grantham's high social standing, it becomes plausible for historical figures to make appearances and interact with the series' fictional characters, thereby weaving historical authenticity into the narrative fabric of the show.

The German series *Babylon Berlin* takes a different approach by reimagining original fictional characters based on actual historical figures. Notable examples include the ominous character Otto Wollenbach, an alias for the SA man Horst Kessler, who is recognisable to the viewer as a fictionalised version of the historical figure Horst Wessel.[65] Additionally, the Nyssen AG, led by Anne Marie Nyssen (Marie Anne Fliegel) and her son Alfred Nyssen (Lars Eidinger), is an identifiable fictional version of the Thyssen and Krupp steel dynasties. Furthermore, the Jewish-Austrian character Samuel Katelbach can be interpreted as inspired by Carl von Ossietzky. As such, the initial impression that historical characters are only seen in brief appearances in *Babylon Berlin*, such as Gustav Stresemann or Paul von Hindenburg, is deceptive. Historical figures are present throughout the series but coded in original characters who resemble them. This characterisation technique allows for a greater artistic licence with historical figures while simultaneously lending some authority and historicity to fictional characters.

[65] Horst Wessel was a member of paramilitary Nazi Sturmabteilung (SA) who was murdered by two members of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1930. Subsequently, the Nazi Party elevated Wessel into a martyr and his death inspired the Nazi anthem 'Horst-Wessel-Lied'.

In the *Downton Abbey* Christmas Special, *Downton Abbey*: *The London Season* (2013), the main setting shifts to London for Lady Rose MacClare's (Lily James) debut in Buckingham Palace, where she is presented to King George V (Simon Jones) and his consort Mary of Teck (Geraldine James). In the same episode, the Prince of Wales (Oliver Dimsdale), later Edward VIII, makes an appearance at Lady Rose's debutante ball, which he opens with her. The episode's main plot involves the Royal family rather than the Crawleys, featuring the historical figure Freda Dudley Ward (Janet Montgomery) and a fictionalised scandal surrounding a compromising letter from the Prince of Wales. Dudley Ward is given a more prominent role as a particular friend of Lady Rose McClare. Notably, the royal scandal is averted by the Crawley family, who recover the letter and emerge as secret heroes of the monarchy.

The series' explicit and implicit monarchism is further developed in the feature film *Downton Abbey* (2019), which centres entirely around a royal visit to Downton Abbey. The earl and his family are again characterised as champions and literal saviours of the monarchy when Tom Branson and Lady Mary Crawley foil an assassination attempt on King George V by a member of the IRA. Like the mystery surrounding the letter in the Christmas Special (2013), this plot involving the historical royal family is entirely fictitious and merely serves to characterise the Crawley family as loyal and heroic monarchists. The 'royal visit' trope is not original to *Downton Abbey* but was first featured in the *Upstairs Downstairs* (1971-75) episode 2.05 'Guest of Honour,' where King Edward VII dines with the Bellamy family at No. 165 Eaton Place. This plot was later replicated in the German series *Unter den Linden* (2006) in episode 1.06, titled 'Der Kaiser kommt,' in which Kaiser Wilhelm II visits House Gravenhorst. As a historical figure, the German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II appears frequently in German reimaginings of the early twentieth century. A young Kaiser Wilhelm II (Lucas Prisor) appears in *Charité* (1.02), where his visit to the hospital is awaited with awe and reverence. Here, Kaiser Wilhelm II is characterised by his militarist zeal. Characters such as Heinrich von Minckwitz praise him for being "twenty-eight and full of drive for action. And nationalist. That's what matters."[66] (*Charité* 1.01). In *Das Adlon*, an older Kaiser Wilhelm II (Michael Schenk) inspects the newly established Hotel Adlon, admiring the luxurious amenities such as the elevator and modern plumbing. This interpretation of the historical figure appears overdrawn and cartoonish, with boorish, brash and stereotypically militarist mannerisms (*Das Adlon* 1.01). Negative or critical characterisations of

[66] Achtundzwanzig und voller Tatendrank. Außerdem national. Das zählt. (*Charité* 1.01)

historical figures in contemporary reimaginings function as a critical assessment of their legacy from a twenty-first-century perspective.

One example is the presence of Neville Chamberlain on *Downton Abbey* during a dinner scene in episode 6.05. Chamberlain (Rupert Frazer) visits the house in his role as Minister of Health whilst on an "inspection tour of the North" within the narrative. The appearance predates his later career as Prime Minister and his failed 'appeasement politics' with Adolf Hitler, a controversial legacy that prefiguratively colours his guest appearance on *Downton Abbey.* This is symbolically underscored when a burst ulcer causes Lord Grantham to projectile vomit blood all over the dinner table, including in the direction of the politician. The graphic nature of the scene necessitated a viewer discretion announcement prior to the airing of the episode. The presence of Chamberlain in this gruesome scene frames his appearance as negative and symbolically code – as steeped in blood – contrasting with the positive and uplifting impressions of other historical figures, such as the royal family. In addition to the graphic scene that undercuts Chamberlain's presence, the dialogue is littered with hints towards his political destiny:

> Dowager Countess: Yes, well, I always say, let the past stay in the past.
> Neville Chamberlain: That's what I always say.
> […]
> Dowager Countess: Don't you enjoy a good fight?
> Neville Chamberlain: I'm not sure I do, really. (*Downton Abbey*, 6.05)

The underlying subtext of the dialogue is subtle enough to go over the head of viewers unfamiliar with Chamberlain's attempts to appease Hitler in the 1930s and his misjudgement of the National Socialist threat.

Contemporary historical assessment is also evident in the interpretative characterisation of historical figures in *Babylon Berlin*. Statesmen like Gustav Stresemann (Werner Wölbern) in episode 1.05 and Paul von Hindenburg (Günter Lamprecht) in 2.06 add a sense of gravitas and ponderousness to the narrative of the declining Weimar Republic and the gradual rise of Nazism in 1920s Berlin.

In the German series, like other reimaginings, foreshadowing and prefiguring underlie the narrative and characterisation of historical figures. In episode 2.06, Reichspräsident Paul von Hindenburg arrives at a press conference for a trial of the fictional paramilitary monarchist organisation 'Schwarze Reichswehr' [engl. Black Imperial Army] and declares the proceedings terminated and the suspects released:

“Well, then I suppose we should inject a bit of Prussian spirit into this matter. In other words: common sense.”[67] (*Babylon Berlin* 2.06). Lacking a viable argument for the innocence of the suspects, Hindenburg invokes the “Prussian Ur-spirit” which he equates with common sense.

It is noteworthy that Hindenburg’s brief but impactful appearance functions as a deus ex machina. This higher power leaves everyone present in awe and unable to question or contest the decision of the highly respected senior statesman. The gravity and portent attached to the figure of Paul von Hindenburg and his interference in the justice system foreshadow his fateful historical decision to appoint Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of Germany in 1933. His role in enabling the rise of Nazi Germany is thus prefigured in one brief scene and one single action with lasting consequences. The other characters’ reactions to Hindenburg’s appearance underline the cult of personality that surrounds this historical figure, also foreshadowing the cult of personality that will surround Adolf Hitler, who is not yet a substantial presence in the narrative of the series.

5.1.2 Archetypes and stock characters

In addition to the recurrent use of historical figures, it is important to consider the role of stock characters and archetypes within the genres, settings, and themes of contemporary reimaginings. Narratives set in upper-class households often feature stock characters and archetypes such as the loyal servant, the exacting butler, the belligerent cook, the simple-minded scullery maid, the rebellious daughter of the house who engages in an affair with a staff member, the scheming lady’s maid, and the devious footman. These character types are prevalent in *Downton Abbey*, *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Unter den Linden*, *Gosford Park*, and other 'house' narratives.

The central theme of spatial anxiety regarding the safety, integration, and intimacy of the ‘inside’ (see chapter 4) is manifested in the archetype of the journalist, who is frequently characterised in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century as an ‘invader’ of privacy in their hunt for newsworthy stories or gossip. As such, the figure of the journalist is often negatively connoted. For example, in *Downton Abbey*, Lady Mary’s erstwhile suitor, Richard Carlisle (Iain Glen), is introduced as “a hawker of newspaper scandal” (*Downton Abbey* 2.01) and threatens to expose the scandal of her affairs with Kemal Pamuk. In *Mr. Selfridge*, the newspaper editor Frank Edwards

[67] Ja, dann wollen wir wohl ein bisschen preußischen Urgeist in diese Angelegenheit fließen lassen. Will sagen: gesunden Menschenverstand. (*Babylon Berlin* 2.06)

(Samuel West) plays a crucial role in the initial success of Selfridge's but also represents the darker side of the press and its power to influence public opinion. This ambiguity is also addressed in *Das Adlon*, during a confrontation between the fictionalised historical characters Hedda Adlon (Marie Bäumer) and Billy Wilder (Arndt Schwering-Sohnrey), a young journalist who auditions for a job as taxi dancer in the hotel. The patroness rejects the journalist's application with the words, "Discretion is key. We certainly won't be inviting the gutter press into our house."[68] (*Das Adlon* 1.02), indicating that the figure of the journalist acts as an unwelcome intruder who may compromise the safety and discretion of the hotel.

While the disdain expressed here is primarily aimed at tabloids and the red-top press, the figure of the investigative journalist emerges as a hero, one who gleans and distributes vital information to the public at a time of rising political oppression. In *Das Adlon*, the fictionalised Billy Wilder is reimagined as a colleague of the character Julian Zimmermann at the newspaper *Vossische Zeitung*, writing in opposition to the politics of the rising Nazi regime. Notably, the historical Billy Wilder and his fictional counterpart Julian Zimmermann are Jewish, thereby doubly affected by the Nazi party's attempt to purge the press and public media of dissenting voices. Unlike in British reimaginings, the figure of the journalist in this context is not reduced to scandalmongering but characterised as positive, antifascist, heroic and martyr-like in their quest against the regime of the National Socialists.

The character Samuel Katelbach in *Babylon Berlin* appears as a fictional interpretation of Wilder and Carl von Ossietzky (cf. Mayer 2020). Katelbach is an Austrian Jew who writes critically about the political climate of late 1920s/early 1930s Berlin. Initially characterised as an "Austrian fop"[69] (*Babylon Berlin* 1.02), he presents as a chaotic, unreliable bohemian who uses his proximity to Rath to gain information for his professional advancement. However, his investigation into the goings-on in the police and the transition of the Weimar Republican state into the Third Reich also characterises him as a sympathetic figure and moral compass for the protagonist Gereon Rath, whose motives and entanglements in the political landscape he questions and challenges. Unlike Katelbach, Rath is more passive, reluctant, and unsure where to position himself politically.

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[68] Diskretion ist das A und O. Da werden wir uns ja nicht die Journaille ins Haus holen. (*Das Adlon* 1.02)

[69] Österreichischer Schnösel (*Babylon Berlin* 1.02)

In German reimaginings, the figure of the journalist often represents a voice of dissent, embodying a twenty-first-century critique of the political developments of the early twentieth century. The historical context of the National Socialist regime, with its right-wing denouncement of the free press as an enemy, resonates with the current wave of postmillennial populism and the vilification of the press in today's post-factual climate. This is explicitly addressed in episode 3.02 of *Babylon Berlin* when the Nazi character Oberst Günther Wendt refers to the so-called "Lügenpresse [engl. lying press]" (3.02), a term that has resurged as a popular catchphrase of right-wing movements such as PEGIDA, AfD supporters, and other right-wing proponents since the 2010s (cf. Detering 2019). As a recurring archetype in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, the journalist embodies differing attitudes towards the press and its role in cultural memory and politics. The trope of the journalist in opposition to fascism also appears in *Downton Abbey*, albeit off-screen, when Lady Edith receives information that her love interest, Michael Gregson, a British journalist, was beaten to death by "a gang of toughs" who "wore brown shirts" and "preached the most horrible things" on a trip to Munich in 1923 where he "took exception to what they were saying" (*Downton Abbey* 4.09). It is strongly implied that Gregson died in a fight against the emergent Nazis in Munich in the time surrounding the Beer Hall Putsch, casting the figure of the British journalist as a heroic early opponent to Nazism and a martyr.

A notable female archetype that recurs in all contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century analysed in this thesis is the figure of the widow. Due to consecutive disastrous events at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as the sinking of the Titanic, followed by the First World War, the widow emerges as a prominent figure in cultural representations of the era. In *Titanic* (1997), the archetype of the 'merry widow,' represented by Margaret 'Molly' Brown, who enjoys her husband's fortune, is juxtaposed with the protagonists' mother, Ruth de Witt Bukater (Frances Fisher), who exemplifies the precarious side of widowhood, being left without financial security and only "debts hidden behind a good name" (*Titanic* 1997). The protagonist Rose, though never married to Jack Dawson, adopts a mourning widow-like persona on board the Carpathia when she assumes her lover's last name as an alias and thus the new identity of a widow. For this she willingly trades in financial security in exchange for freedom, subverting her mother's negative outlook on widowhood.

In *Babylon Berlin,* the archetype of the widow is recurring throughout the narrative, notably in relation to the protagonist Gereon Rath. He is in a relationship with his

brother's widow, Helga Rath (Hannah Herzsprung), who occasionally speaks at commemorative events, representing war widows of World War I (*Babylon Berlin* 2.07). In the first series, Gereon Rath also has an affair with his landlady, Elisabeth Behnke, another war widow, who rents out rooms for a living. Unlike the elegant Helga Rath, the widow Behnke is characterised as a careworn and lonely woman hoping for a new marriage. Parallel to the protagonist's relationships with these widows, the female lead character Charlotte Ritter is also associated with this archetype. Her mother, Wilhelmina 'Minna' Ritter's (Hildegard Schroedter) widowhood has left the family destitute, forcing the widow to work in a slaughterhouse and Charlotte into prostitution. The youngest daughter, Antonia 'Toni' Ritter (Irene Böhm), takes on the occasional child labour instead of attending school, while the predominantly female household is terrorised by the eldest daughter's unemployed and increasingly violent husband.

In a parallel world to the chaotic household of the widow Ritter, Charlotte's 'second home' is the underground brothel of the Moka Efti, efficiently managed by a madam nicknamed 'The Widow' (Gabriele Völsch). In contrast to the widow Ritter, 'The Widow' is financially secure, prosperous, and commands respect within her sphere. Whether the figure of 'The Widow' is truly a widow or merely affecting the title is left unclear:

> As Rita Täuber notes, dressing as war widows was a clever strategy used by actual prostitutes in wartime Berlin "to conform to the changed face of the street but, at the same time, to attract more attention through the appealing combination of mourning clothes and makeup." On the other hand, Ian Buruma argues, the violence of war also produced real widows who turned to prostitution just to get by. (Smith 16)

Babylon Berlin operates on the "blurring line between widows and cocottes" (ibid.) as a way of showcasing "how desire and gender roles were altered by war and what strategies women used to survive it" (ibid.). Charlotte Ritter exemplifies these strategies as she fluctuates between the respectable but precarious locus of the home and the disreputable yet prosperous underground of the brothel. She feels more 'in power' in the latter, where she takes on the role of a dominatrix, while she increasingly loses power and agency to her violent brother-in-law and embittered sister at home.

The juxtaposition of the Ritter household and the Moka Efti brothel is underlined by the contrast between the two widows and mother figures in Charlotte's life. The German term for a madam, "Puffmutter" [literally 'brothel mother'], characterises the figure of 'The Widow' as the nightlife counterpart to Charlotte's mother at home. The

glamorous and, at times, surreal ‘underworld’ of the Moka Efti brothel serves as an inverted mirror to the starkly realist life of Charlotte above ground. The drab and dingy household of the widow Ritter who is inadequate as a supporter and manager of her family, is set against the glittering fantasy world of the Moka Efti and its brothel, which is ruled by a confident and successful widow who manages her finances as efficiently and strictly as she manages the goings-on in her establishment.

It is implied that the business world, even within a brothel, was more preferable and profitable for women at the beginning of the twentieth century than the precarious domestic situations often faced by single mothers and widows, despite the latter living a life of respectability. This irony is further punctuated by the fact that ‘The Widow’ in the brothel thrives, while the respectable Widow Ritter dies of syphilis (2.01), a disease associated with prostitution and promiscuity.

5.2 Stranger Danger: the outsider as a figure of anxiety and assimilation

I have selected the archetype of the outsider or foreigner as a recurring figure that underscores the prevalent theme of spatial anxiety and intrusion in contemporary reimaginings (cf. chapter 4). This analysis focuses on how this figure relates to the underlying themes of spatial anxiety, intrusion, and xenophobia in early twentieth-century reimaginings. The outsider or foreigner often reappears in these narratives, either as a perceived threat (see chapters 3 and 4) or as someone who is assimilated and integrated into the narrative world. This chapter explores specific characterisations of the foreigner, examining how they reinforce or subvert stereotypes and the underlying political implications of character coding in contemporary reimaginings.

5.2.1 The ‘Oriental’: Kemal Pamuk in *Downton Abbey* and ‘The Armenian’ in *Babylon Berlin* as Muslim-coded villains

In the series *Downton Abbey*, the archetypal foreigner is represented by the minor character Kemal Pamuk in episode 1.03, introduced as “an attaché at the Turkish Embassy […] the son of one of the sultan’s ministers” (*Downton Abbey* 1.03) and described as “rather a dandy” (ibid.). He is regarded with positive interest by most characters because of his attractive appearance and charming manner. Kemal Pamuk pre-

sents himself as a 'Western'-styled, fashionably dressed gentleman who speaks flawless English without a foreign accent. Played by the British actor Theo James, Pamuk 'passes' as English and notably outperforms other upper-class men in gallantry and British gentlemanliness. At this point, the character appears to defy stereotypical images of Turks and 'Orientals,' subverting expectations and assumptions made by characters beforehand.

Overt stereotypes about foreigners are explicitly addressed when Lady Mary Crawley first inquires about Pamuk, anticipating a "funny little foreigner with a wide toothy grin and hair reeking of pomade" (ibid.). Lady Mary demonstrates the functionality of stereotypes, which "trigger a more or less preprogrammed actualization of associations" (O'Sullivan and Immel 13-14). The characters' expectations and the image generated for viewers are subsequently juxtaposed with the appearance of Kemal Pamuk in English hunting gear. Despite the Turk's presentation as indistinguishable from British characters, his appearance and conduct fascinate various characters throughout the episode, including the maids:

> Gwen: He doesn't look Turkish at all.
> Anna: Well, he doesn't look like any Englishman I've ever met, worse luck. I think he's beautiful. (*Downton Abbey* 1.03)

As part of the general exoticisation and fetishisation of the foreign character, the homosexual footman Thomas Barrow makes advances to Pamuk, who rebukes his presumption: "That will teach you to believe what the English say about foreigners" (ibid.). Barrow's confidence in assuming the Turkish guest to have homosexual inclinations indicates the prevalence of stereotypes about foreigners and so-called 'Orientals' still prevalent at the time. In his seminal work about *Orientalism*, Edward Said delineates the English heterostereotype thus: "The Oriental is irrational, depraved, (fallen), childlike, 'different', thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (Said 40). Said further refers to the

> Theses of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality most easily associated themselves early in the nineteenth century with ideas about the biological bases of racial inequality. (Said 206)

Downton Abbey's initial subversion of 'Orientalist' stereotyping of the Turk is overturned over the course of episode 1.03 when Kemal Pamuk intrudes into Lady Mary Crawley's bedroom at night and coerces her into submitting to his sexual advances.

The scene does not read as a romantic seduction but has sinister undertones. An impression which is emphasised by ominous music, dark lighting and dubious consent, framing the scene as Gothic. In Pamuk, the stereotype of the sexually voracious 'Oriental' is compounded with the archetype of the Gothic villain stealing the virtue of an English maiden, here an Earl's daughter. The setting of the castle-like Downton Abbey adds to the Gothic scene, invoking the Vampire horror genre in which a monstrous Gothic 'Other' overpowers the maiden in her bed. According to Catherine Spooner, the identity of literary horror figures such as Nosferatu or Dracula is connoted "as variously Semitic or colonial other" (Spooner 78), that is, as foreign, exotic, or racially 'other.' James Procter and Angela Smith further refer to the ambivalence of the image:

> The Orient was not simply Other in this context, but a projection of the repressed desires of the European self. To be savage, black, animal or wild in orientalist terms was not necessarily negative then, but frequently a site of ambivalent (often sexual) desire, eroticism/exoticism and fantasy. (Procter and Smith 97)

By characterising the Turk Kemal Pamuk as a sexual predator who preys on the innocence of the white Western female, *Downton Abbey* plays on the stereotype of the depraved, decadent and sexually devious 'Oriental,' while simultaneously involving the image in the underlying spatial theme of anxiety and fear of invasion. Read within a twenty-first-century context, the character Kemal Pamuk is not merely coded as an 'Oriental' or Gothic villain, but a Muslim foreigner who invades the intimacy of the traditional British household and endangers the safety, 'morality,' and sense of security of its inhabitants.

Pamuk, as an 'Oriental' villain, is a problematic characterisation on several accounts. On the outside, he adopts the image of a Westernised European man, indistinguishable from his British counterparts in looks, mannerisms, fashions and language. He speaks perfect Oxford English with no accent, has impeccable manners, is groomed and dressed in the current Western fashion, and participates in country sports, such as an English hunt. On an interpretative level, the character Pamuk emerges as a representation of a well-integrated, assimilated Muslim foreigner, who is eventually revealed as an invader and sexual predator, who coerces Lady Mary to give into his advances. This characterisation of one of the few foreigners on *Downton Abbey* is coded in politically controversial terms that implicitly support negative stereotypes about Muslim migrants and Islamophobic sentiments in contemporary Britain.

In the German series *Babylon Berlin*, the principal antagonist, Edgar Kasabian (Mišel Matičević), known as 'The Armenian' in the first two seasons, can be identified as a similarly Oriental- or Muslim coded villain, akin to the character Kemal Pamuk in *Downton Abbey*. The Armenian is characterised as the leader of Berlin's underworld and is original to the ZDF adaptation. As a figurehead of organised crime in Berlin, The Armenian does not exist in Volker Kutscher's novels, where the underworld is represented by the crime ring 'Berolina' instead (cf. Kutscher 2008). Like Kemal Pamuk, The Armenian is only identifiably 'foreign' by name and presents as a German businessman.

The location of the Moka Efti restaurant and club establishment, which he owns, reflects the double identity of The Armenian: its Western façade with modern Art Deco décor camouflages the underground brothel, which seems to be exclusively frequented by patrons of the restaurant, including influential and high-ranking men of society and represents The Armenian's involvement in the organised crime scene of Berlin. However, the least public and most revealing space that characterises The Armenian is his office in the Moka Efti building. Richly decorated with 'Oriental'-style furnishings, such as Persian carpets, brass oil lamps, and other items that appear to have been imported from the Near East, the character's office overtly pertains to his ethnic background and identity as a foreigner. The Armenian, like Kemal Pamuk, is characterised as an 'Oriental'- or Muslim-coded criminal who conceals his 'true' nature behind a façade – mirroring the façade of his establishment that hides a brothel beneath the surface. According to Maryam Jameela:

> For contemporary audiences, Muslims are the painfully obvious choice for designations of enemy, and specifically of internal enemies when those Muslims are situated in the West. […] It is an expression of notions of white supremacy to position certain, white, bodies as emblematic of safety and trust and to label deviations from this line as 'enemy.' (Jameela 102)

Regardless of the image of the 'Oriental' at the time in which these reimaginings are set, the reinforcement of negative stereotypes of Muslims as organised crime lords and sexual offenders as presented in *Downton Abbey* and *Babylon Berlin,* reflects underlying contemporary attitudes of anxiety and xenophobia towards Muslims in twenty-first century Britain and Germany as "the enemy within" (Jameela 102). This negative image has been dominant in many Western countries and media since the Islamist terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, gaining new momentum since the

Refugee crisis of 2015, which brought an influx of migrants, many with a Muslim background, into European countries.

Consequently, the narrative and recurring image of the 'Oriental' or Muslim as an enemy figure who 'invades' Western society have been reiterated in contemporary conservative and right-wing populism (cf. Detering 2019). According to Edward Said: "Whatever change occurs in knowledge of the Orient is found almost exclusively in manifest Orientalism; the unanimity. stability. and durability of latent Orientalism are more or less constant" (Said 206). Muslim-coded villains such as Pamuk or The Armenian are examples of latent Orientalism in contemporary reimaginings, as well as of underlying xenophobia and Anti-Muslim sentiment.

5.2.2 Racialisation and race coding of Irish and Jewish characters

In contemporary British reimaginings of the early twentieth century, the colonial 'Other' is also represented by Irish or Irish-coded characters. It is notable that these characters often replace figures from the British colonies or BIPoC characters, who are otherwise absent from these narratives. Irishness as a leitmotif and stylistic element in *Titanic* (1997) has been variously discussed by critics, such as K.J. Donnelly, who argues that

> the Irish in the film occupy a bizarre position: firstly they constitute a colourful background, and secondly they embody a charged symbolism in the film, where dramatic (and other) concerns have obliterated representational concerns." (Donnelly 205)

Although only minor characters are explicitly Irish, the film utilises many codes and motifs that refer to Irish culture or 'Irishness' as imagined by international filmmakers. Examples include the Irish Catholic priest who "give[s] the ship last rites as it upends before its final sinking" (ibid. 205) or a stereotypically red-haired family in steerage who await death while the mother calmly narrates: "And so they lived happily together for 300 years in the land of Tír na nÓg, land of eternal youth and beauty" (*Titanic* 1997), conjuring the image of a utopian world in Irish mythology. Here, the idea of Irish suffering and forbearance and the passing from one world to another is mythicised and enshrined in Irish cultural, mythical, and religious codes.

The film's music score serves as the most conspicuous use of what Donnelly refers to as *Titanic*'s partaking in "international commodification of Irish culture" (Donnelly 205). Donnelly sees the internationally successful *Riverdance*[70] as a direct influence on the Third-Class party scene in steerage (Donnelly 211), while the use of the Uilleann pipes creates a sense of mysticism popularly and stereotypically associated with Celtic culture. The Irish party in the Third Class, despite its uplifting and positive 'excess' constitutes a collection of negative Irish stereotypes as hard-drinking, brawling and 'wild,' – in stark contrast to the reserved, quiet elegance of the First Class.

Stereotypical 'Irishness' in *Titanic* is also manifested in the character Tommy Ryan (Jason Barry), who befriends Jack Dawson. Throughout the film, Tommy Ryan is characterised as outgoing and talkative, with a dry sense of humour and a penchant for drinking. Furthermore, he is described as someone who brawls, getting into physical altercations during the Irish party in steerage and later punching a staff member of the White Star Line, a scene that works as a brief comic relief during the tense second half of the film. Tommy Ryan also presents as a proud Irishman who explains to Jack Dawson and, by extension, the viewer that Titanic is "an Irish ship" built by "15.000 Irish hands" (*Titanic* 1997).

However, despite the inclusion of an Irish character, the political conflict between imperial Britain and British-ruled Ireland is notably absent from the film. Instead, the character Tommy Ryan channels his resentment through class-based frustrations, particularly regarding the treatment of Third-Class passengers on board. He emerges as a leading figure in resisting the crew's attempts to lock passengers in steerage, declaring: "You can't keep us locked up in here like animals – the ship's bloody sinking!" (ibid.). While the character's actions are not overtly political, Tommy Ryan's rebellion, culminating in his being the only person shot by a British officer on board, visually prefigures the Easter Rising, revealing an underlying political and historical coding of the Irish character.

Apart from being rebellious and dissenting, boisterous and easily provoked, the character Tommy Ryan emerges as the only character in the film who uses swear words such as "shite" or "arse" (*Titanic* 1997) and is therefore perceived as a figure that provides humour and comic relief. In that sense, his characterisation approaches

[70] *Riverdance* was first performed as an interval act during the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest at the Point Theatre in Dublin. The musical score, composed by Bill Whelan, was performed by the ensemble Anúna, with Jean Butler and Michael Flatley leading the traditional Irish dance performance. Due to the great success of the act, *Riverdance* evolved into an internationally acclaimed theatrical dance show. At the time *Titanic* was being produced, the show was touring the United States.

the Irish stereotype of the 'stage Irish,' which is defined as "garrulous, boastful, unreliable, hard-drinking, belligerent (though cowardly) and chronically impecunious" (Welch et al. 534-5). These Irish stereotypes are positively connoted here, as Tommy Ryan is generally perceived as sympathetic, likable and relatable to a contemporary audience.

Downton Abbey, by comparison, employs a similar characterisation with the introduction of Tom Branson's brother, Kieran Branson (Ruairi Conaghan), who appears in episode 3.07. Tom Branson describes Kieran as a "rough diamond" (3.07) and he fulfils rather than subverts negative expectations regarding his character, thereby also tapping into the stereotype of the 'stage Irish': he likes to drink, entertains the servants downstairs with crude jokes, and is otherwise characterised as rude, unreliable, ill-mannered, and standoffish with the 'upstairs' family. Negative stereotypes about the Irish are compounded in the characterisation of Kieran Branson as a drunken, belligerent buffoon. When he refuses to meet the Crawleys, he is chastised and treated like an unruly child by his younger brother Tom, who is embarrassed by his conduct. This portrayal of Kieran's character is particularly problematic. According to Patrick Brantlinger:

> In his study of the Victorian stereotyping of the Irish, L. P. Curtis notes that a common feature of anti-Irish bigotry was to accuse the Irish of being childish (and not just childlike) […] Childishness means emotional instability […] (Brantlinger 143)

Kieran Branson's characterisation is not only juxtaposed with the genteel Crawley family but also with the well-integrated Tom Branson, who is in the process of assimilating into the British aristocratic family he married into. It is important to note that the Tom Branson was previously characterised as more in line with his brother's attitude towards the British upper class, as a fervent socialist with a rebellious spirit, passionately advocating for Irish home rule, women's suffrage, and social reforms in the first and second series.

His revolutionary zeal, however, is portrayed as moderate rather than extremist and backed by education as Lord Grantham observes, "You should see what he [Branson] reads, it's all Marx and Ruskin and John Stuart Mill, I'll ask you." (*Downton Abbey* 1.06). While this character trait of Tom Branson is not connoted as strictly negative but rather as balancing the otherwise conservative tone of the series, 'Irish rebelliousness' was, according to Brantlinger, considered "an Irish character flaw" (Brantlinger 138) by the English who "[…] also argued that the Irish were guided more by passion than reason, more by sentiment than calculation. In short, they were deemed irrational and

therefore childlike and feminine as a race" (Nelson 31). It follows that both *Titanic* (1997) and *Downton Abbey* employ explicit and implicit traits of "systemic stereotyping" (ibid. 136) of the Irish in their portrayal of Irish characters in contemporary reimaginings that have been "persistent features" in English culture since the Middle Ages (ibid.).

Though the issue of racism is not explicitly addressed in contemporary reimaginings such as *Downton Abbey* or *Titanic* (1997) regarding Irish characters, it ought to be considered a factor in the conception and characterisation of Irish people in the early twentieth century. The "racialization of the Irish – the reduction of a culturally and biologically diverse people to a monolithic whole and the designation of their racial or national characteristics as the antithesis of Anglo--Saxon virtue" (Nelson 17) is rarely addressed in contemporary British reimaginings that include Irish characters. According to Brantlinger, the reasons behind this racialisation of the Irish were "institutional rather than biological" (Brantlinger 136), yet "Irish attitudes and behavior were typically attributed to race" (ibid.), which by the Victorian era, led to "a widespread view in England of the Irish or Celtic 'race' as brutes, savages, degenerates, white apes, noxious weeds, overpopulating rabbits, drunken beggars, and so on" (ibid.). Likened to "savages," the Irish were denigrated within the context of Social Darwinism (cf. Nelson 34):

> These developments in the realm of science were reflected in a wider, more random discourse through which elite and popular commentators linked the Irish with black Africans and African Americans in a shared stereotype that alleged laziness, irrationality, and an incapacity for self--government as essential characteristics of both races. (Nelson 40)

This link has also been identified in the characterisation of Jack Dawson in *Titanic* (1997) as Irish American-coded but also African American-coded. For example, Redmond notes:

> Firstly, he is Irish American (he dances the jig, has Irish companions, plays cards, drinks Guinness, and has a stereotypical free and easy manner). It should be noted here that the Irish have often been encoded as simian in appearance.6 fact the star DiCaprio, heavenly white and blonde-ish in the film) the coding at least works to put him outside of the bourgeois whiteness that dominates in first-class. When we are first introduced to Jack at the beginning of the film, playing cards in a harbour bar, he says 'when you've got nothing, you've nothing to lose'. This type of aphorism is also the type of phrase ascribed to down-and-out-blacks in American sociological studies of the

> 1960s (black respondent: ‘I’ve been down so long, that down don’t bother me’). (Redmond 200–201)

Redmond furthermore points out the complete lack of BIPoC or African American representation in the film, as “all the people on Titanic” are united by “their white, whitish skin” (Redmond 199). This is ironically punctuated by the protagonist Rose’s comment that Titanic appeared to her like “a slave ship, taking me back to America in chains” (*Titanic* 1997), by which the film compares the inhumane experience of the Middle Passage to the journey of an affluent white woman, while simultaneously omitting the presence of BIPoC characters on the ocean liner. Here, the British-American production projects an element of British colonial and American racial history onto a white, affluent member of the upper class to suggest an intersection between race and gender that is neither supported nor further elaborated in the film. Instead, the character Rose is presented as the white female to the colonial ‘Other’ encoded in her love interest Jack Dawson. According to Redmond:

> Jack is ‘other’ because of the way he is perceived as a (sexual) threat that needs to be incarcerated by the figures of power in the film. […] Perceived as immigrant Irish Other, Jack, in the eyes of the upper-class males, has thus symbolically had inter-racial sex with Rose. The greatest hyper-white taboo has been broken. (Redmond 201)

The relationship between Rose and Jack Dawson is mostly perceived as a transgression of social boundaries in relation to class and financial background. However, the ethnic coding of Jack Dawson as Irish American also codes the relationship as ‘interracial’ in the socio-cultural perception of the era. *Titanic* employs the so-called ‘permission plot’ (cf. Rubinfeld 2001) cited by Gilad Padva and Nurit Buchweitz as a popular motif in fiction that “retell[s] the story of forbidden love, a romantic love that transgresses social boundaries of class, ethnicity, and/or race” (Padva and Buchweitz 188). In her work on the romance film genre, Anette Kaufmann refers to the category ‘Rassenschranke’ [colour bar] (cf. Kaufmann 75-78) as a subcategory of the ‘forbidden love’ plot in popular romance films, especially within an American context. The degree to which the concept of the ‘colour bar’ also applies to racially coded characters is questionable and ought to be examined further.

The ‘permission plot’ is a popular motif in historical fiction and recurs in several contemporary reimaginings analysed in this thesis. One example occurs in the German

series *Unter den Linden* (2006), where the daughter of the house, Friederike Gravenhorst (Nina Bott), entertains a relationship with the family's coachman, Herman Pikeweit (Tom Wlaschiha). Here, the transgressive element of the relationship is solely due to class division, with no ethnic or racial coding, unlike the 'permission plot' of Tom Branson and Lady Sybil in *Downton Abbey*. Here the interracial coding of the relationship is implied in their infant daughter, Sybil 'Sybbie' Branson, born in episode 3.04, who is explicitly referred to as a "Fenian grandchild" by Lord Grantham when the pregnancy is announced (*Downton Abbey* Christmas Special 2011) and called a "wicked little crossbreed" (4.01) by Nanny West (Di Botcher), who looks after the Crawley grandchildren and mistreats the infant on account of her Irish heritage. The term 'crossbreed' could refer to the child being of mixed class and half-Irish, as 'breed' is a term used in both class and racial contexts. For American viewers, the term might carry more racialised connotations, while for British viewers, it may be more associated with class and notions of 'good breeding.' Padva and Buchweitz note the "American cultural context" in which "the story of forbidden love between 'black' and 'white' protagonists brings to the fore the problematic social discrimination between them […]" (Padva and Buchweitz 188), suggesting that the 'permission plot' with racial coding may be adaptable to different national and cultural contexts, depending on historical background and a nation's history of discrimination.

Notably, *Downton Abbey* actually introduces an interracial permission plot in the fourth season involving Lady Rose MacClare (Lily James) and the BIPoC character Jack Ross (Gary Carr), a jazz singer. This permission plot, however, is cut short when it transpires that Lady Rose "mostly wants to shock her mother" (*Downton Abbey* 4.08) by marrying a man of colour:

> Lady Rose: I want to see her face crumble when she finds out. (ibid.)

Concurrently, the series never intended to introduce a permission plot with explicit racial diversity, as Lady Rose merely weaponises her love interest's racial background to spite her mother. The character Jack Ross does, however, introduce the topics of race and colonialism to *Downton Abbey*. Characters' reactions to the BIPoC character range from Lady Edith questioning whether it is "suitable" that "this man" was brought to the house (*Downton Abbey* 4.06) to the butler Carson making offensive conversation, framed as humorous by the series:

> Carson: Have you never thought of visiting Africa?
> Ross: And why should I go to Africa, Mr. Carson? I'm no more African than you are. Well, not much more. My people came over in the 1790s. We won't go into why or how.
> Carson: Oh. Better left unsaid.
> Hughes: Mr. Ross, you've uncovered something about the past that Mr. Carson doesn't approve of. Well done.
> Carson: Not so fast, Mrs. Hughes. We led the world in the fight against slavery. Remember Lord Henley's judgement of 1763? 'If a man sets foot on English soil, then he is free.' (*Downton Abbey* 4.06)

The butler's stance reflects the series' postcolonial discourse, specifically through its decision to ignore or "leave unsaid" the "why or how" Africans were brought to Britain and its American colonies. Instead of addressing the issues of colonial exploitation and imperialist atrocities, *Downton Abbey* – embodied here by Carson – emphasises the positive contributions of British abolitionist politics to mitigation this instant of postcolonial criticism. The brief inclusion of the character Jack Ross as a token of BIPoC representation also pertains to these attempts at mitigation.

The racism Jack Ross faces in the series is notably unspoken, conveyed through coded and subtle cues such as shocked or perturbed facial expressions and the unspoken agreement among all white upper-class characters to discourage Lady Rose from pursuing an 'unsuitable' courtship with Ross. This silent disapproval represents Carson's, and by extension Julian Fellowes', philosophy that racism in the otherwise harmonious world of *Downton Abbey* is "best left unspoken" (ibid.) and therefore unaddressed.

In episode 5.08, Lady Rose marries Atticus Aldridge (Matt Barber), son and heir of the Jewish-British peer Lord Sinderby (James Faulkner), whose ancestors were driven out of Russia by the Odessa pogroms (*Downton Abbey* 5.05). While the pairing with Jack Ross tapped into the 'colour bar' plot, the 'permission plot' with the Jewish Atticus Aldridge is racially coded through expressions of explicit and implicit antisemitism in the series. Examples include the Russian refugee Count Rostov (Christopher Rozycki) who insists that Atticus' ancestors were "not Russian" (5.05) or Lady Rose's mother, Susan Flintshire (Phoebe Nicholls), who makes antisemitic remarks and attempts to sabotage the wedding (5.08). The plot reiterates some elements of the 'permission plot' between Lady Sybil and Tom Branson in earlier seasons, whereby the series repeats a pattern of utilising racially coded prejudice and hostility – in the form of anti-Irish racism and antisemitism – to construct a 'permission plot' yet aborts the

interracial romance between Lady Rose and Jack Ross. Like Cameron's *Titanic*, *Downton Abbey* appropriates racial coding without critically reflecting on its implication. The romanticisation of the racially coded 'permission plot' works only insofar as the characters face minor resistance, which is eventually resolved, at least in British reimaginings.

In German reimaginings of the early twentieth century, the 'permission plot' of romance and prohibition also manifests in constellations involving Jewish and Non-Jewish characters. These relationships are interracially coded on account of the anti-semitic and racially motivated persecution of Jews during the Nazi era and the time leading up to it. Films such as *Aimée und Jaguar* (1999) or the more recent mini-series *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* [engl. title *Generation War*] (2013) employ romance plots between Jewish and Non-Jewish German characters, which, according to Von Moltke exemplify how "Jewish figures play a seminal role in the heritage cinema's strategies of consensus and nostalgia" (Von Moltke 234). A 'permission plot' involving a Jewish and Non-Jewish character also serves as the central romance in *Das Adlon,* between the protagonist Sonja Schadt and the Jewish musician and journalist Julian Zimmermann, who have a daughter together. The relationship is coded as interracial and discriminated against, actively punished and sabotaged by the National Socialist regime.

As previously argued in chapter 5.2.1, the image of the 'Other' as sexual transgressor has often been connoted as 'Oriental', Semitic or BIPoC characters, representing a colonial 'Other' that invades and compromises the 'whiteness' of the coloniser. In contemporary reimaginings, the Irish emerge as a more conservatively coded representative of this trope to apply to an interracially coded permission plot without involving BIPoC characters and contemporary racial discourse. As a widower, the character Tom Branson develops from an outsider to a loyal member of the Crawley family. He begins to empathise more with them and identify more with their values and beliefs than with members of his own class, family or nation. Through a process of indoctrination and assimilation, Branson gradually transitions from a critic of the aristocracy to an advocate of their lifestyle, representing the fantasy of converting a liberal into a conservative, as imagined by Julian Fellowes.

In the second and third series of *Downton Abbey*, Tom Branson is characterised as more rebellious and active in revolutionary causes. He refers to the Easter Rising in episode 2.03 and declares that his cousin, who was randomly "walking down North

King Street one day," was shot by an English soldier, who assumed that "he was *probably* a rebel" (2.03). His plans to make a statement of protest against the British army when he is conscripted and on parade are foiled when he is diagnosed with a "pansystolic murmur" (2.03), which exempts him from military service. Following this, Tom Branson plans to make a political statement by upending a soup tureen full of "oil and ink and a bit of a cowpat, all mixed with sour milk" (2.03) over General Sir Herbert Strutt, who inspects the Downton Abbey convalescent home. Before he reveals the contents of the tureen, the scene is framed as an assassination attempt, heavily implying that Branson hides a weapon in the tureen to shoot the Senior representative of the British armed forces.

The series lampoons the image of the Irish rebel who commits assassinations in the name of revolution by 'defusing' the alleged bomb as a mere farce, revealing that Branson's sole aim was to cause discomfort, embarrassment, and an unpleasant smell: "He'd have needed a bath right enough, but not a coffin" (ibid.). Like his plan to stage a protest at a military parade, Branson's act of rebellion is yet again foiled by the intervention of fate or other characters. According to Brantlinger, inefficiency is part of the Irish stereotype propagated by the English:

> Irish rebelliousness usually ended in defeat, so it was not just savage, cowardly, and secretive, but also ineffective, yet somehow natural—the outcome of inferior race and character—and therefore to be expected despite the good intentions and generosity of the English. (Brantlinger 141)

The character's ineffectiveness as an Irish rebel is further played out in the third series when the Bransons move to Dublin, where Tom Branson works as a journalist and becomes embroiled in Fenian activities, though he professes that he was "always against any personal violence" (*Downton Abbey* 3.04). It is noteworthy that Branson is shown as being only passively involved or having merely witnessed the burning of an Anglo-Irish estate, an action for which he expresses regret and abhorrence: "The sight of it was worse than I expected. […] when I saw them turned out, standing there with their children, all of them in tears watching their home burn…I was sorry" (ibid.). Branson thus appears 'cured' of his interest in the Fenian cause. His affiliation with it is broken as the couple flees to England and seeks political refuge at Downton Abbey from the consequences of Branson's failed revolutionary endeavours, which have exiled him from his home country as a form of indirect punishment. Once again, it is the

protective power of the British patriarch Lord Grantham, who intervenes to prevent further prosecution of his Irish son-in-law.

Lady Sybil, though having no previous association with the Irish cause or interest in Ireland beside it being the home of her husband, is characterised as taking an active role in the rebellion as authorities, according to Lord Grantham, fear "they could have another Maud Gonne on their hands, or Lady Gregory, or worse if they're not careful" (ibid.). Notably, Lady Sybil initially remains in Dublin while her husband flees to Downton Abbey in episode 3.03. Here, the series implies the fortitude of the Englishwoman fighting for Irish independence as comparable to Irish female icons of the cause. Julian Fellowes thereby romanticises, demonises and lampoons the Irish War of Independence, presenting Downton Abbey as a 'safe haven' and sanctuary from the troubles of rebellion.

In consecutive seasons, the series suggests that the inefficient revolutionary and rebel Tom Branson is 'tamed' and groomed by the Crawley family into an assimilated member of the British upper class. Characterised as working class, socialist, Catholic, and Irish, Tom Branson represents the narrative of an outsider who becomes a liminal character, stunted 'on the threshold' between classes and between nations. From the third season onwards, Branson's political interests are only touched upon to confirm the shift in his personality and allegiances, as he disavows the more radical ideas of fellow Socialists, including a potential new love interest, Sarah Bunting (Daisy Lewis), whom he encounters at a political meeting in episode 4.07. Sarah Bunting is characterised as a confident, outspoken schoolteacher and fervent socialist, echoing Tom Branson's political convictions earlier in the series. Unlike Branson, however, Bunting, expresses outright contempt for the aristocratic Crawley family, stating: "As a rule, I don't really warm to their type" (*Downton Abbey* 4.08). She expresses her dislike and lack of deference toward the Crawleys through rude and provocative behaviour, particularly directed at the Earl of Grantham (5.01). The character explicitly serves as a contrasting foil to Tom Branson, who, through his interactions with Bunting, realises that he no longer identifies with her political zeal and resentment for the upper class. Sarah Bunting represents a negative projection of contemporary left-wing supporters, as envisioned by the conservative peer Julian Fellowes.

The process of Tom Branson's class assimilation and 'anglicisation' comes full circle in the *Downton Abbey* (2019) feature film when the Irishman uncovers and foils

an assassination attempt on King George V, despite claiming not to be “a fan” (*Downton Abbey* 2019) of the monarchy. Branson has evolved from an ineffective rebel, whose attempts at political insurrection are consistently foiled by fate or intervention, into a hero of the Crown, literally keeping the monarchy alive. It is ironic that while Branson's rebellious efforts were always foiled, he now finds himself thwarting the rebellious activities of other Irishmen. Branson’s anglicisation serves as a subtle reminder of his status as part of a colonised and subjugated nation. When read within a twenty-first-century context, he represents the image of the ‘ideal’ foreigner who becomes fully assimilated and integrated into British society. This process is fully actualised when Branson marries an English heiress in the second feature film *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022). According to Donnelly:

> Celticism is offered as an ‘alternative’ heritage, especially in England but also internationally, having only an arguable threat to power relations, but definitely signifying power relations through making what it present as a vanquished and subaltern culture a fashionable consumer choice. (Donnelly 212)

Tom Branson as a character applies to the commodification of Irishness in popular culture as an exciting but identifiable ‘otherness’, whose eventual ‘taming’ and integration into the British establishment reads as a compelling character arc in *Downton Abbey*, despite its problematic political implications. As a tame rebel and sedate revolutionary who prefers the British aristocracy to his Irish home, he embodies a British fantasy of neutralising Irish resentment and memory of British colonial rule and oppression. Tom Branson’s gradual assimilation and anglicisation are explicitly and implicitly coded, for example, in episode 3.08 at the annual cricket match between the inhabitants of Downton Abbey and the Downton villagers. Branson batting for the team of the Earl of Grantham and contributing to the win metaphorically underlines the character’s assimilation, illustrated in the last shot of the episode that shows him arm in arm with Lord Grantham and Matthew Crawley, celebrating their victory over the villagers and Branson’s integration into the family.

5.3 Witness and Follower: The leitmotif of guilt and the figure of the *Mitläufer* and contemporary witness in contemporary reimaginings

In this chapter, I analyse the key theme of guilt in relation to culpability and traumatic memory in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century. Matthias Grotkopp refers to "an immense array of cultural forms of 'guilt awareness,' ranging from religion to legal philosophy to psychology and psychoanalysis"[71] (Grotkopp 98). Different forms of guilt, such as criminal guilt or religious guilt, appear as manifestations of the central theme of collective guilt within the historical context of the twentieth century, especially in German productions. Guilt as a central theme is also coded in characterising figures who either embody collective guilt or function as personifications of national guilt and trauma.

5.3.1 Crime and Punishment: German guilt coded as criminal guilt

In German reimaginings of the early twentieth century, guilt appears in the form of criminal guilt and culpability. In Haneke's *The White Ribbon* (2009), the mysterious incidents that occur in the village Eichwald over the course of the film form a cycle of crime and punishment in which the boundaries between guilty perpetrators and victims are not clearly delineated. Thus, Stewart argues, the film "finds a different way to deflect its emphasis from detective plot toward parable" (G. Stewart 40), suggesting that the narrative's point in *The White Ribbon* is not a 'whodunnit' (cf. Pearson 10) but rather a commentary on a dysfunctional community that reflects national anxieties and trauma.

A recurring motif in *The White Ribbon* is that of the 'confessional,' when one character is questioned or interrogated by another character in a position of power. Martin, the son of the village pastor, is interrogated on several occasions: once by his father, the pastor, who suspects him of masturbation and forces a confession; another time by the village teacher, who demands to know why Martin took a dangerous walk on top of a bridge; and later again when the teacher suspects Martin to be complicit in the incidents terrorising the village. Although the village is Protestant rather than Catholic, the film weaves religious elements into its themes of confession and penance. Morality and pious guilt are compounded with criminal guilt, as Garrett Stewart notes

[71] ungeheure Menge an kulturellen Formen des ‚Schuldwissens', von der Religion über die Rechtsphilosophie bis zur Psychologie und Psychoanalyse. (Grotkopp 98)

that the ritual of the Eucharist in the confirmation scene serves as a form of "white-washing" that offers "absolution without confession" (G. Stewart 43). This blurring of spiritual and moral absolution with the absence of genuine repentance adds a layer of irony and critique to the film's exploration of guilt and innocence, suggesting that true absolution is elusive without sincere contrition.

The children in *The White Ribbon* are rigorously punished for any small or perceived transgression or 'sin' within the system of law and righteous behaviour installed by the adults. Conversely, they are not implicated or made culpable for the grave and serious crimes committed in the village. The closest that the children come to confessing their guilt is when Erna (Janina Fautz), the steward's daughter, confesses to having a prophetic dream prior to the violent attack on the midwife's disabled son, Karli (Eddy Grahl). Consequently, Erna is subjected to a sharp cross-examination by two police officers who have arrived to investigate the strange incidents. It is implied that Erna uses the device of the 'dream' as a vehicle to confess and alleviate her guilty conscience. Her confession under duress stands in contrast with the silence practised by the other children when questioned about their possible guilt. When interrogated by the teacher, the pastor's children, Martin and Klara, calmly deny any involvement in the mysterious crimes, relying on the adults' directive to practice silence – a commandment they weaponise as a shield against the teacher's inquiries. This adherence to a culture of silence foreshadows the taboo surrounding the subject of collective guilt in the aftermath of the Second World War and the atrocities committed or condoned by the German populace.

Individual guilt is given less relevance than collective guilt in Haneke's film. The futile search for an individual perpetrator of the crimes committed in the village can be considered within the historical discourse of German atrocities during the Second World War and the shifting of guilt towards Adolf Hitler as a major individual culprit against the burden of collective blame. In the film, collective guilt is intrinsically linked to collective punishment. For example, the pastor informs Klara and Martin that the entire family will go to bed hungry in collective punishment for their transgression.

The seemingly arbitrary acts of violence and vengeance in the village are committed by the group of children in collective guilt and presumably as measures of collective punishment of the adult characters who abuse them. As Pearson argues:

> As we grapple to understand Eichwald's rules—and the shocking penalties for breaking them—we recognize the culpability of the community in producing children with a desire

> to take justice into their own hands, a deep sense of duty and loyalty to each other, and an unshakeable belief that their own judgments are beyond reproach. (Pearson 11)

The White Ribbon is not the only reimagining in this thesis that may be read as an allegory of German guilt. As previously analysed in chapter 4, the character Greta Overbeck in *Babylon Berlin* emerges as a key figure in a plot to assassinate the Jewish Regierungsrat, August Benda, at the hands of National Socialists. Seduced by her lover 'Fritz,' a Nazi posing as a Socialist, Greta Overbeck is duped and instrumentalised to assist in the bombing of August Benda's house.

Like a Faustian Gretchen figure, Greta Overbeck is characterised as a naïve and gullible victim manipulated by her lover. Grief-stricken, she becomes complicit in a murder, leading to her incarceration and execution in episode 3.12 of *Babylon Berlin*. Greta Overbeck's unreflective belief in the manipulations of 'Fritz' and 'Otto' can also be interpreted as the motivations of a so-called *Mitläufer*, a term applied to mostly young and naïve followers of the Nazi regime who were implicated by passive conformity rather than active participation. The side plot surrounding Greta's seduction and manipulation into aiding in the assassination of the Jewish character Benda functions as an allegorical narrative of German culpability and guilt within the series *Babylon Berlin*.

Female allegories of German guilt and victimhood are firmly ingrained in the twentieth-century German literary and cinematic imagination, especially within a post-war context. Von Moltke points out the use of this trope in the Heimatfilm genre of the 1950s. In *Rosen blühen auf dem Heidegrab* (1952), the female character Dorothee (Ruth Niehaus) is sexually assaulted, a plot that directly reflects the experience of rape among German women during the Occupation period as an allegorical treatment of German victimhood (cf. Von Moltke 111). Von Moltke, however, argues that the "allegory of Dorothee as a victimized Germania" (ibid. 108) is complicated by the discourse about German guilt, which is visualised in the film as well: feeling ashamed and traumatised by the assault, Dorothee lures her rapist into the swamp where they both sink into the bog. Pulled out at the last moment, "Dorothee's ghost-like reemergence from the dark waters of the swamp performs a striking return of the repressed" (Von Moltke 110).

This 'repressed' can be understood in the context of German victimhood or German guilt, both of which have been widely suppressed by German society in the aftermath of the Second World War. According to Von Moltke:

> What makes this film so interesting to this day is rather the co-presence of these two images, which do not cancel each other out: German victimhood and the memory of German guilt are in a sense superimposed on one another. (Von Moltke 111)

Babylon Berlin and *The White Ribbon* employ female allegories that unite the memory of German victimhood and guilt. As mentioned above, the character Greta Overbeck exemplifies the allegory of a seduced and victimised Germania, duped by the National Socialists into taking on the guilt of their atrocities. In *The White Ribbon,* Pearson notes how the "moon-faced Klara" functions as the "reluctant, monosyllabic spokeswoman" (Pearson 8) of the village children. Klara stands out from the otherwise nondescript group of children through her height and the gravity of her presence. As a representation of the collective, she functions as an allegorical figure, similar to the female allegories of Germany often depicted in the Heimat genre, such as Maria (Marita Breuer) in Reitz' *Heimat* (cf. Von Moltke 224).

Significantly, the gang of children in *The White Ribbon*, with Klara as their figurehead, is characterised as victims of the patriarchal system of punishment and abuse in the village while at the same time committing brutal crimes as either acts of retribution or emulation. As such, they are not only victims but also guilty parties. Klara, who appears as the brainchild and driving force behind these acts, is also a figure of vengeance. This is made explicit when, in an act of individual revenge on her father, the village pastor, she sneaks into his study and impales his pet bird on a pair of scissors. Placing the dead animal on his desk in the figure of the crucifixion, Klara 'personalises' the punishment in reference to her father's title, profession and standing in the village, by which she implicitly characterises herself as a particularly creative mind behind the mysterious incidents in the village.

Haneke's film bears some resemblance to Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *Der Besuch der alten Dame* [engl. The Visit] (1956). Like *The White Ribbon*, Dürrenmatt's work could be categorised into the Anti-Heimatfilm genre, conceived in stark contrast to the Heimatfilm boom of the 1950s. While Haneke's deconstruction of the Heimat genre appears minutely realist, Dürrenmatt's play and its film adaptations (1959; 2008) are purposefully overdrawn and satirical, with elements of surrealism and the grotesque. Haneke's tale of a doom-laden village rotting and festering from within, led by a group of corrupt dignitaries, is comparable to Dürrenmatt's tragicomic play, in which many characters are also referred to by their titles: 'Der Bürgermeister [the mayor]', 'Der Pfarrer [the priest]', 'Der Lehrer [the teacher]', 'Der Arzt [the doctor]' or 'Der Polizist

[the policeman],' indicating their generic function in the small-town community of Güllen. The titular old lady's entourage is given fantasy nicknames such as Toby, Roby, Koby and Loby, which are diminutive and reminiscent of the children's names in *The White Ribbon*: Anni, Karli, Kurti or Sigi. The name of the titular old lady, who exerts revenge on her Heimat place Güllen, is also Klara. As implied in their name, both Dürrenmatt's Klara/Claire and Haneke's Klara shed 'light' on the corrupt and abusive nature of the patriarchal society they grew up in by exacting their revenge.

Der Besuch der alten Dame is allegorical in both its narrative of guilt and repressed truth, embodied in the figure of Klara Wäscher/Claire Zachanassian, who descends on her Heimat place like a Nemesis to put the town Güllen 'on trial' for its past. The triple connotation of victimhood, guilt and retribution is a recurring element in female allegories of Germany found either in the post-war Heimatfilm, like *Rosen blühen auf dem Heidegrab*, the Anti-Heimat genre in literature and film like Dürrenmatt's *Der Besuch der alten Dame,* and contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century such as Haneke's *The White Ribbon* with Klara and *Babylon Berlin's* Greta Overbeck. The ambiguity of who is victimised by whom and who is the guilty party in these productions adds to the complexity of the German historical context and subtext found in these reimaginings. Female allegories of Germany often serve as representatives of an anonymous, often silent, collective. In this role, they both embody and implicate the broader population, reinforcing the concept of collective guilt. This representation challenges the viewer, making it difficult to clearly distinguish between victims and perpetrators, thereby involving the audience in the moral ambiguity of the narrative.

The subject of guilt inscribed in the figure of the German *Mitläufer*[72] is integral to the reimagining of the early twentieth century in Germany and is therefore found in numerous productions, such as Traudl Junge in *Der Untergang* [engl. title *Downfall*] (2004), Friedrich Weimer in *Napola - Elite für den Führer* [engl. title *Before the Fall*] (2004), and the four lead characters in *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* (2013). Harald Welzer contends that

[72] The term *Mitläufe*r is difficult to translate. It literally refers to a follower or tag-along and denotes a person who is part of an (often negative) activity, who is not actively involved but passively condones said activity. The term has a specific meaning in the context of German post-war Denazification, when it served as a category to assess perpetratorship.

> Spectators, followers, even those who were seduced […] are assigned a relatively harmless role – their wrongdoing is limited to not having intervened (enough) and thus not preventing worse from happening.[73] (Welzer 36)

The ambiguous guilt of the *Mitläufer* allows for a sympathetic characterisation of Germans in contemporary reimaginings that blurs the lines between perpetrators and victims, casting them into the role of co-victims rather than co-perpetrators of the Nazi regime. In *Das Adlon*, for example, the protagonist Sonja Schadt is characterised as a *Mitläufer* in episode 1.03. In her work as a radio host during the Olympic games of 1936, Sonja is instrumentalised and coerced into aiding the National Socialist propaganda machinery. The mini-series, however, frames the protagonist's guilt in supporting the NS regime not as a voluntary act but as a complicated entanglement and conspiracy by the antagonistic character Sebastian von Tennen (Johann von Bülow) and his brother Siegfried (Jürgen Vogel), who are depicted as fervent Nazis. Their plot is revealed during a trial in episode 1.03, and Sonja Schadt's name is cleared of all guilt. This, in turn, undermines the point of intergenerational conflict that had been established when the protagonist is confronted with her guilt by her estranged Jewish daughter.

The figure of the *Mitläufer* engenders feelings of sympathy in the viewer, who follows the narrative and can attest to the character's motivations and naivety, ignorance, or even innocence. Citing the example of the film *Rosen blühen auf dem Heidegrab* (1952),[74] Von Moltke identifies the "co-presence" of two images in the German Heimatfilm, "which do not cancel each other out: German victimhood and the memory of Germany guilt are in a sense superimposed on one another" (Von Moltke 111). The reimagining of German characters as "a victim *of* the Germans rather than as the German victim" (ibid.) is not a recent phenomenon in cultural productions.

The characterisation of the two von Tennen brothers in *Das Adlon* presents both reinforcement and diversion from Nazi stereotypes. While the overtly racist and jingoist Siegfried von Tennen is characterised as a stereotypical Nazi whose villainy is upfront and explicit, it is the mild-mannered Sebastian von Tennen who emerges as the driving force of the conspiracy against the protagonist. Sebastian von Tennen is introduced

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73 Zuschauer, Mitläufer, gar Verführte bekommen […] eine vergleichsweise harmlose Rolle zugewiesen – ihr Fehlverhalten beschränkt sich darauf, nicht (genug) eingegriffen und somit Schlimmes nicht verhindert zu haben. (Welzer 36)

74 In the film, the character Dorothee is raped by a rejected suitor, causing her to appear as a German victim at the hands of other Germans and an allegorical figure of German victimhood. (cf. Von Moltke 111)

as sympathetic and progressive in contrast to his politically extremist brother. He presents himself as a *Mitläufer* who is less convinced by the NS ideology and mainly interested in profiting from the NS system for his own personal gain, for example, by removing his romantic rival, the Jewish Julian Zimmermann.

In essence, Sebastian von Tennen represents the shadowy mass of Germans who may not have internalised the NS ideology yet profited from the oppression of others, akin to Germans who received the homes or properties of Jewish citizens after their deportation. *Das Adlon* juxtaposes two different faces of Nazism in the characters of the von Tennen brothers: the stereotypically raving Nazi and the more docile, allegedly harmless *Mitläufer* who profits from the zeal of other, more aggressive NS supporters. This suggests that the most significant threat is not posed by the outspoken zealot but by the silent majority of covert Nazis and sympathisers operating behind the scenes. This idea resonates with contemporary anxieties about internet anonymity and the covert radicalisation of political ideologies online.

5.3.2 Catholic guilt in *Babylon Berlin*

In contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, the pervasive theme of guilt is frequently coded in the recurring motif of Catholicism. In the series *Babylon Berlin*, Catholicism emerges as a leitmotif, for example, represented in the juxtaposition of the ‘sinful’ city Berlin with the Catholic city Cologne, the hometown of the protagonist Gereon Rath. Cologne's underlying ‘presence’ is manifested in the names given to the protagonist and his brother: Gereon Rath is presumably named after Saint Gereon of Cologne, a Christian martyr from the fourth century, while Anno Rath (Jens Harzer) is likely named after Anno II, an Archbishop of Cologne. Here, the motif of Catholicism is interspersed with the theme of history and medievalism.

In the series, the minor character Josef Wilczek (Frank Künster), known as ‘Der Heilige Josef’ (engl. Saint Josef) a hitman disguised as a priest, who operates in the Berlin underworld. He embodies a perverted Catholicism, reinforcing the image of Berlin as a dark inversion of Catholic Cologne – a recurring juxtaposition in the series. Throughout the series, Gereon Rath’s Catholicism and Catholic guilt are interwoven with feelings of guilt surrounding the death of his brother Anno, whom he abandoned in No Man’s Land during the First World War, as well as the affair he entertains with his brother’s wife, Helga Rath. A flashback in episode 1.01 reveals the protagonist’s memory of kneeling in prayer in a Catholic church in Cologne, dressed in a soldier’s

uniform on the day of his brother's wedding to "the woman [Rath] love[s]"[75] (*Babylon Berlin* 1.01). The brief insight into Rath's character and psyche introduces the omnipresent theme of guilt that permeates the series. Rath's guilt is multifaceted, combining religious and sexual guilt over his affair with his sister-in-law with survivor's guilt for having abandoned his brother on the frontlines.

The complicated question of Rath's guilt is made pertinent again in episode 1.06 when he is invited to mass in a Catholic church in Berlin by Regierungsrat August Benda. While Benda himself is Jewish, his wife is Catholic and importunes Rath to go to confession. In the confessional, Rath confesses his affair with his sister-in-law and indicates his guilt about the loss of his brother. Here, the sacrament of confession functions as what Foucault calls the "self-examination in Christianity" (Foucault 212) and a gentler version of Rath's regression therapy sessions with 'Dr. Schmidt' that recur throughout the series. The emotion of guilt is encoded and shrouded in the mysticism and ritual of religion that offers relief for the psyche in the form of penitence and absolution. Catholicism is connoted as a more benign vehicle to impart and express the feelings of guilt and trauma in the protagonist Gereon Rath that are otherwise repressed.

5.3.3 Survivor guilt and traumatic memory

The first and second series of *Babylon Berlin* are bookended by the frame narrative of Rath's regression therapy with 'Dr. Schmidt' as a scientific and medical version of the confessional. Here, it is revealed that Rath's 'confessed' version of events is a false or purposefully falsified memory. In this false memory, the protagonist had attempted to save his brother before being taken prisoner, whereas a flashback in episode 2.08 reveals that he ran away, consciously leaving his brother to die. The false memory is thus shown as a coping mechanism for dealing with feelings of survivor guilt and shame about abandoning his brother in the trenches. The fictionality of Rath's memory also implies the unreliability of contemporary witnesses as narrators, particularly within the context of trauma and survival.

Rath narrates his story convincingly in episode 1.07 at a gathering in the home of his colleague Bruno Wolter, commemorating the First World War battle of Zillebeke. Rath acts as a contemporary witness for the viewer and the characters to whom he

[75] Die Frau, die du liebst (*Babylon Berlin* 1.01)

relates his experience of the not-so-distant history of the First World War. Gathered around a long table, with Rath at its centre, a scene is reminiscent of both Leonardo DaVinci's *The Last Supper* (1495-98) and the image of the professional storyteller amid his audience. He narrates his false memory as a tragic, heroic tale, which is reflected in his audience's reaction, who empathise with him. At this point in the series' narrative, the viewer is as much part of Rath's audience, trusting his account to be truthful.

The false and embellished memory of the protagonist can be interpreted as a form of 'Lebenslüge' (engl. sham existence), internalised to the point of denial of actual events, which can only be extracted under hypnosis and great physical and psychological strain. In episode 2.08 of *Babylon Berlin*, Dr. Schmidt/Anno Rath's adjurations, "You will open your eyes and finally overlay the images of the truth onto the lie […] but you must first remember the image of truth"[76] (2.08), culminate in the climactic reveal of Rath's true memory and the doctor's revelation of his identity as the missing Anno Rath. The ominous character of Dr. Schmidt embodies the return of the repressed as he coaxes buried memories out of Rath, simultaneously emerging as a personification of the guilt at the core of the protagonist's trauma. Much like Macbeth seeing Banquo's ghost, Rath is haunted by the spectre of his repressed guilt, which manifests through the presence of Dr. Schmidt, deepening the psychological torment that drives the narrative.

This thematic exploration suggests that Gereon Rath's struggle with trauma, guilt, and distorted memory is not just a personal narrative but a broader reflection of Germany's ongoing confrontation with its historical legacy and memory culture. The central theme of guilt and guilty memory in contemporary German reimaginings of the early twentieth century appears as a prefigurative manifestation of the difficult, controversial, and still ongoing process of 'Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung' [engl. working through the past] or 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' [engl. coping with the past]. The adjuration to "put the truth over the lie" acts as a critical reminder, urging society to resist the temptation to sanitise, romanticise, or otherwise distort the past and its historical realities. This approach to memory work underscores the importance of facing uncomfortable truths as a necessary step in the collective process of understanding and processing historical trauma, which remains a crucial aspect of German memory culture today.

[76] Du wirst die Augen aufmachen und endlich die Bilder der Wahrheit über die Lüge legen […] Aber du musst das Bild der Wahrheit schon erinnern. (*Babylon Berlin* 2.08)

5.4 Mediating and mitigating the past: the (fictional) contemporary witness as a key figure

The contemporary witness emerges as a key figure in the framing and narration of the past in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century. A prominent figure in historiography and memory culture, the contemporary witness is, according to Martin Sabrow

> not identical with the eyewitness, who makes a witnessed, distinct event as comprehensible and assessable as possible through their account for the purpose of police or legal investigation. Nor is he to be equated with the historical expert, who appears in court or in early television productions on Nazi history as an authoritative figure, providing offscreen validation to confirm and comment on events and assessments.[77] (Sabrow 14)

The term contemporary witness or German 'Zeitzeuge'[78] [literally 'time witness'] blends and expands on the concepts of the eyewitness and that of the contemporary (cf. Sabrow 13). Though witness accounts of historical eras and its events have always existed in some form, in text or oral culture, the contemporary witness of the early twentieth century carries a particular status as a historical and cultural icon due to the development of audio and visual media that enable the recording of contemporary witness accounts in a more immediate and affecting way. Not only the words of the contemporary witness are transferred and recorded, but the person comes into focus as a representative of the past who embodies the narrated history. Relic-like, contemporary witnesses are physical evidence of the past still existing in the present, and as such, they are revered and valued. In a sense, they embody a commodification of rare knowledge and experience that also underlies the use of the contemporary witness in fictional productions.

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77 nicht identisch mit den Tatzeugen, der ein miterlebtes abgrenzbares Geschehen durch seine Darstellung zum Zweck der polizeilichen oder juristischen Ermittlung so präzise wie möglich nachvollziehbar und beurteilbar macht. Er ist auch nicht gleichzusetzen mit dem historischen Fachexperten, der vor Gericht oder in den frühen Fernsehproduktionen zur NS-Geschichte aus dem Off als beglaubigende Instanz auftritt, um Ereignisse und Einschätzungen zu bestätigen und zu kommentieren. (Sabrow 14)

78 In den ersten nachweisbaren Verwendungen des Begriffs – 1975 durch den Romancier Hans Hellmut Kirst und 1977 durch den Historiker Hagen Schulze – bezeichnet er einen unbestechlichen Chronisten, der wie Erich Kuby ein aufschlussreiches Kriegstagebuch geführt oder wie Arnold Brecht die Weimarer Republik in kritischer Distanz begleitet hat. [In the first documented uses of the term—by the novelist Hans Hellmut Kirst in 1975 and by the historian Hagen Schulze in 1977—it refers to an incorruptible chronicler, who, like Erich Kuby, kept an insightful war diary or, like Arnold Brecht, observed the Weimar Republic with critical distance.] (Sabrow 14)

In *Titanic* (1997), the figure of the contemporary witness is coded as a hidden treasure, reimagined in the link between the contemporary witness Rose DeWitt Bukater and the 'Heart of the Ocean' diamond. The film's frame narrative, in which treasure hunter Brock Lovett seeks a gem "worth more than the Hope diamond" (*Titanic* 1997), but instead retrieves the invaluable memories of contemporary witness Rose, underlines the theme of historical preservation. Rose's willingness to share her story transforms her into a metaphorical 'hidden treasure' or rare diamond, symbolising the immense value of firsthand testimonies for historical understanding and cultural memory. While Rose, the contemporary witness in *Titanic,* is an entirely fictional character, and the narrative does not depict a professional contemporary witness testimony, her presence serves as a poignant reminder of the urgency to locate and interview real-life contemporary witnesses while they are still available. This narrative choice emphasises the irreplaceable nature of personal accounts in enriching our collective memory and understanding of the past. According to Martin Sabrow

> A specially developed 'contemporary witness test' is intended to help those who have been silent carriers of history become aware of their treasure-like memories in order to join the stock of contemporary witnesses.[79] (Sabrow 13)

The enduring fascination and special status of the contemporary witness in German historiography and culture are appealed to, for example, in the controversial Public Service Announcement campaign *Zusammmen gegen Corona #besonderehelden* which was launched in November 2020 by the German Federal Government (Presse und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung) to encourage compliance with rules and regulations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A series of video advertisements featured imagined interviews in the future with fictional contemporary witnesses recounting their experiences during the pandemic. While intended as a humorous commentary on the current crisis, the campaign has sparked controversy due to its satirical approach and the implied comparison to the Second World War. Nevertheless, the use of the contemporary witness figure as a persuasive tool to encourage adherence to Covid-19 regulations highlights the special status this figure holds in German cultural and historical consciousness. The contemporary witness emerges as an emblematic figure of crisis, drawing attention to the sig-

[79] Ein eigens entwickelter ‚Zeitzeugentest' soll helfen, dass bisher stumme Träger von Geschichte sich ihres Schatzes bewusst werden und sich der Zeitzeugenbörse anschließen. (Sabrow 13)

nificance of their testimonies and the potential loss of such firsthand accounts. By featuring these fictional witnesses, the campaign positions the Covid-19 pandemic alongside other major crises in German history, for which contemporary witnesses have provided valuable insights.

The contemporary witness is generally considered a figure of contention and controversy regarding their authenticity and authority as oral historical sources. Harald Welzer, for instance, criticises that

> Often, contemporary witnesses reproduce exactly those stereotypes that should actually be dispelled in the interest of educating about history, and moreover, contemporary witnesses rarely provide information beyond what can be derived from other sources.[80] (Welzer 33)

According to Christoph Classen, the contemporary witness embodies the subjective and biographical part of the "memory paradigm" (Classen 314), and Rainer Wirtz observes the "very significant problem today is that we blindly trust the contemporary witnesses."[81] (Wirtz 21). Important here is the question of subjectivity and one-sidedness, as the story of a contemporary witness is always personal, biased, and prone to inaccuracies or falsification, given the selective and changeable nature of memory. This is illustrated in *Babylon Berlin* with the false or falsified memory of the protagonist's experience at the front (see Chapter 5.3.3). The issue of perspective is also implied in *The White Ribbon*, where the teacher narrates past events in a voiceover but can only provide a limited viewpoint. Herein the film reinforces the omission of the perspective of minorities and minors.

The contemporary witness is primarily a figure of oral history and thus related to the oral tradition of storytelling. Fictional contemporary witnesses in reimaginings of the past, therefore, incorporate both the role of the narrator in a narratological sense and that of the storyteller as a physical representation of oral culture. The inclusion of the contemporary witness in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century draws attention to the innate subjectivity of oral history and communicative memory. Even the most authentic-seeming testimonies have elements of embellishment, bias, and fictionality.

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[80] Oft reproduzieren Zeitzeugen genau jene Stereotype, die man eigentlich zugunsten der Aufklärung über Geschichte auflösen sollte, und im Übrigen liefern Zeitzeuginnen und Zeitzeugen nur höchst selten Informationen über das hinaus, was aus anderen Quellen erschließbar ist. (Welzer 33)

[81] sehr große Problematik heutzutage. Dass man den Zeitzeugen blind vertraut. (Wirtz 21)

Rainer Gries regards the appearance of fictional contemporary witnesses played by professional actors as a sign of an ongoing dramatisation of the contemporary witness figure (cf. Gries 50):

> Recipients might take the fiction of a drama as literally as the facts of a documentary. This raises fundamental historical-educational, societal, and political question of whether the dramatized portrayal […] shapes the historical understanding of certain audiences more enduringly, than a documentary with the memories of a contemporary witness.[82] (Gries 62)

This phenomenon can be seen, for example, in Oliver Hirschbiegel's film *Der Untergang* (2004) which is bookended by footage of a real contemporary witness interview with Hitler's secretary Traudl Junge from the 2002 documentary *Im toten Winkel – Hitlers Sekräterin* [engl. title *Blind Spot: Hitler's Secretary*] (2002). This framing device, according to De Groot, makes the film "both more truthful and less truthful" (De Groot 209), a paradox that sums up the dilemma of the figure of the contemporary witness in memory culture. Here, the fictional contemporary witness is at least removed from the question of real-life historical authenticity. If anything, the fictional contemporary witness, such as Bert Middleton in *The Village,* emulates the appearance of authenticity through the set-up of the interview situation, reminiscent of popular documentaries like ZDF's *Zeugen des Jahrhunderts* (1979-2004;2014-).

5.4.1 The Narrating I/Eye Witness: the figure of the contemporary witness as narrator and storyteller in the frame narrative

From a narratological point of view, the figure of the contemporary witness in contemporary reimaginings appears as a frame character who relates to the embedded narrative of the film or series through an overarching frame narrative (cf. *Titanic* 1997, *Das Adlon*, *The Village*) or in voiceover (cf. *The White Ribbon*). As such, the contemporary witness fulfils the function of an overt narrator, who is an aural and sometimes visual presence in the narrative. Commonly, the contemporary witness appears as a homodiegetic or autodiegetic narrator who recounts their own story and the fates of other characters within the narrative. The contemporary witness as a narrator is essentially

[82] Die Rezipienten nehmen möglicherweise die Fiktionen eines Dramas ebenso für bare Münze wie die Fakten einer Dokumentation. Es stellt sich also die geschichtsdidaktisch, gesellschaftlich und politisch grundlegende Frage, ob die dramatisierte Darstellung […] das Geschichtsbild bestimmter Publika nicht nachhaltiger prägt als eine Dokumentation mit Erinnerungen einer historischen Zeitzeugin. (Gries 62)

an older version of the protagonist within the embedded narrative, functioning as the 'narrating I' to the 'experiencing I' of the younger character in the story. Examples of this narrative technique include Rose DeWitt Bukater in *Titanic* (1997), Sonja Schadt in *Das Adlon*, Bert Middleton in *The Village,* and the teacher in *The White Ribbon* (2009).

The Interplay between the aged 'narrating I' – such as the ninety-seven-year-old in *Das Adlon*, the one-hundred-and-one-year old in *Titanic,* or the "second oldest man in Britain" (*The Village* 1.01) – and the young 'experiencing I' serves to accentuate the temporal distance between the events of the embedded narrative and the reflective frame narrative. Such juxtapositions are achieved, for example, by framing the older narrator with technological innovations of the late twentieth century, such as the elderly Rose in *Titanic* watching television and flying in a helicopter or the older Sonja Schadt answering her mobile phone as an introduction (*Das Adlon* 1.01). Additionally, the visual juxtaposition of the aged body of the 'narrating I' and the youthfulness of the 'experiencing I' creates a stark contrast between the contemporary witness in the frame and the protagonist in the embedded narrative. The fact that different actors and actresses embody the same character, according to their age, further emphasises the notion that the 'narrating I' must be distinguished from the 'experiencing I', as Vera Nünning and Ansgar Nünning explain:

> The narrating I and experiencing I are the same person, but they are often separated by temporal, and sometimes also moral, distance, as the narrator has gone through a process of reflection and maturation in the meantime. (Nünning and Nünning 111)

On the one hand, the contemporary witness as narrator conveys wisdom through distance and reflection. On the other hand, they must be considered as unreliable narrators, more so the longer the time span between the testimony and the related events. Pearson points out the unreliability of the voiceover narrator in *The White Ribbon*:

> More important than his potentially unreliable memory is that he was not present at every event; some scenes are reconstructed on the basis of others' testimony. […] Moreover, upon meeting the narrator as a young man (Christian Friedel), we realize that he was scarcely more than a teenager himself, and more affable than assiduous as an observer. […] He is awed by the various authority figures populating the village in which he has taken his first job, and becomes personally distracted from investigating the mystery by a love affair. (Pearson 5)

In *The White Ribbon*, the 'narrating I' looks back on events of his youth with the knowledge and experience of retrospection and introspection, allowing him to examine more closely those characters and events that the 'experiencing I' was too naïve and inexperienced to assess critically. His acquired knowledge of historical events "to follow" is, by his own estimation, a factor to consider in the teacher's narration, as he actively challenges his audience to draw their own conclusions and forge certain connections to historical events (cf. Pearson 5). As an overt homodiegetic narrator, the teacher not only renders the narrative selective and less reliable but also dictates perspective:

> Coupled with the narrator's claim that a lot of the story 'is still obscure' and that 'many questions remain unanswered,' we soon understand that successful interpretation will require our labour. We have been challenged to make sense of events that continue to perplex the narrator. (Pearson 5)

Through this connection, the main focus remains on the contemporary witness as a character in the story, in the frame, and in the embedded narrative, thus forcing the viewer to engage primarily with them, their fate, and their point of view rather than those of other characters.

Considering the fictional contemporary witness in reimaginings as an overt narrator, the question arises who is addressed by them in the narrative. Whereas the narrator in *The White Ribbon* communicates directly with the viewer through voiceover, other reimaginings such as *Titanic* (1997) or *Das Adlon* provide the contemporary witness with an audience in the narrative who effectively take over the role of the narratee in fiction. Their role is primarily to prompt and motivate the contemporary witness as narrator to impart their stories. Examples include the female hotel porter in *Das Adlon* or the treasure hunter Brock Lovett in *Titanic* (1997).

In contemporary reimaginings, the recurring theme of guilt often places narratee characters in a 'confessional' role, such as priests, policemen conducting interrogations, or doctors and therapists. While a professional interviewer would typically conduct a contemporary witness testimony with pre-prepared questions, fictional contemporary witnesses are often prompted by an untrained audience. For example, Lovett in *Titanic* seeks information for his investigation, while the female porter in *Das Adlon* shows a sympathetic interest in the character's life story. In these scenarios, the fictional contemporary witness is encouraged to unburden themselves about the past,

particularly concerning feelings of guilt and trauma, without the formality and professional distance of a structured interview.

The fictional contemporary witness as a narrator forges a bond with their audience, which extends from the narratee characters within the story to the audience outside the story world. This connection positions the fictional contemporary witness as a storyteller in the oral tradition. Much like professional storytellers who establish a connection with their audience, the fictional contemporary witness engages with their listeners on a deeply emotional level. This engagement encourages the viewer to interact with the historical period or event in a more active and reflective manner, rather than merely consuming it passively and voyeuristically. By framing the contemporary witness as a storyteller rather than a strict historical source, the narrative acknowledges its fictional nature, thereby suspending concerns about reliability and embracing the story as a narrative construct.

Invoking the mythical figure of Clotho, one of the three Moirai,[83] the Greek goddesses of fate who spin the thread of human life, the contemporary witness characters in *Titanic* and *Das Adlon,* for example, also suggest the image of 'spinning' a story or yarn (dt. Seemannsgarn). Akin to the mythological crones, the contemporary witness as storytellers in *Titanic* and *Das Adlon* 'spin' the yarn of their story and thus relate the different fates of the characters in the narrative. As such, the fictional contemporary witness in reimaginings of the early twentieth century functions as a narrator and as a storyteller and 'spinner' of stories. This underlines the performative element of the contemporary witness, which has been pointed out by critics like Frank Bösch, who notes the "return to premodern forms of oral historical tradition, where the simplified statements of contemporary witnesses replace the professional interpretation of historians."[84] (Bösch 52). The fictional contemporary witness appears in films and series as both personified and performed memory, that is, as memory performers.

As an overt narrator in frame narrative and voiceovers, the contemporary witness in reimaginings simultaneously approximates and distances the viewer from the

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83 The representation of the Fates evolved through time, and it seems that it often depended on the medium through which they were portrayed. Thus, in the visual arts, they were usually depicted as handsome women, but in literature, they are often imagined as both old and ugly. Any case, they are almost always pictured as weaving or binding thread. Sometimes, one – or all – of them can be seen reading or writing the book of fate. (www.greekmythology.com/Other_Gods/The_Fates/the_fates.html)

84 Rückkehr zu vormodernen Formen der mündlichen Geschichtstradierung, wobei die vereinfachten Aussagen der Zeitzeugen die professionelle Deutung der Zeithistoriker ersetzen. (Bösch 52)

narrative of the past. Interruptions by the narrator prevent full immersion in the embedded narrative, while the affecting story of the contemporary witness engages the viewer emotionally. According to Sabrow, the contemporary witness's ultimate function is that of the mediator between the world of the past and the present (cf. Sabrow 25) as "in them, the present reassures itself of its direct access to the past"[85] (ibid.). The fictional contemporary witness helps to create an emotional link with the past and to make it accessible by providing information and explanatory commentary.

In *Titanic* (1997), the character Rose serves as both a contemporary witness and a critical voice that provides ongoing commentary on the social and cultural milieu of the early twentieth century. Through the dual lenses of the 'narrating I' – the older Rose reflecting on her past – and the 'experiencing I' – her younger self living through the events on the Titanic – the film offers a nuanced critique of the patriarchal structures that dominated society at the time. Rose's observations are not only astute and informative but also imbued with a critical awareness that transcends her era. For instance, when she explains to Jack that the men of First Class will "retreat into a cloud of smoke and congratulate each other on being Masters of the Universe" (*Titanic* 1997), she reveals an acute understanding of the gender dynamics and the self-congratulatory nature of patriarchal power, thus reinforcing the feminist subtext of the film.

This line and others like it position Rose as a feminist figure, whose consciousness of her societal constraints is both acute and rebellious. Her commentary often carries a sharp, reflective, and occasionally anachronistic tone, which marks her as a woman who is 'ahead of her time.' This characterisation aligns Rose with the feminist sentiments of the 1990s, particularly the 'girl power' movement associated with Third-Wave Feminism. The film was created during a period when feminist discourse was actively challenging traditional gender roles and promoting female empowerment, and Rose's character reflects these contemporary ideals.

5.4.2 Contemporary witnesses and choral characters in the function of a Greek Chorus

One specific function of the fictional contemporary witness is that of the commentator, who supplies information and challenges the viewer's perception of the narrative, encouraging them to reflect on certain aspects of the story, a specific scene or character.

[85] in ihm versichert sich die Jetztzeit ihres unmittelbaren Zugangs zur Vergangenheit. (Sabrow 25)

In that sense, the fictional contemporary witness works as a mediator between the fictional past and present, making the past more accessible and easier to 'navigate' for the viewer. The commentary function of the fictional contemporary witness serves to provide information about the historical era, its customs, contexts and traditions that may not be apparent to the viewer.

For example, in *Das Adlon,* the elderly Sonja Schadt, as a contemporary witness, repeatedly disrupts the narrative to present historical information and context about the time:

> I was ten years old when the troops marched through the Brandenburg Gate. As heroes, confident of victory, they jubilantly headed to the front. 'We'll be home by Christmas,' they shouted. But the war lasted four terrible years. Those who were lucky enough to survive, returned physically and mentally crippled. The war was lost, the Kaiser in exile. My grandfather's world no longer existed. You could see the misery on every street corner. Unemployment and hunger made people angrier and angrier. Scapegoats were sought, and everyone found them somewhere: the Jews, the capitalists, the socialists, the military, the workers, the unemployed, the politicians, and again, the Jews. In Russia, the revolution brought the communists to power, and they found many supporters here as well. The war continued in the streets.[86] (*Das Adlon* 1.01)

The monologue is undercut with black-and-white footage of described events, such as soldiers leaving for the front, injured soldiers and footage of protests and rogue militia in Berlin after the war. Here, the narration is inflected as factual and sober rather than critical or interpretative. In instances, when the contemporary witness Sonja comments on her family history, rather than national history or political events, her tone is noticeably more judgmental and assessing:

[86] Ich war zehn Jahre alt, als die Truppen durchs Brandenburger Tor marschierten. Als siegessichere Helden zogen sie jubelnd an die Front. Weihnachten sind wir wieder daheim, riefen sie. Doch der Krieg dauerte vier schreckliche Jahre. Wer das Glück hatte, ihn zu überleben, kehrte körperlich und seelisch verkrüppelt zurück. Der Krieg war verloren, der Kaiser im Exil. Die Welt meines Großvaters gab es nicht mehr. Man sah das Elend an jeder Straßenecke. Arbeitslosigkeit und Hunger machten die Menschen immer zorniger. Schuldige wurden gesucht und jeder fand sie woanders: die Juden, die Kapitalisten, die Sozialisten, das Militär, die Arbeiter, die Arbeitslosen, die Politiker und nochmals die Juden. In Russland brachte die Revolution die Kommunisten an die Macht, die auch bei uns viele Anhänger fanden. Der Krieg ging auf den Straßen weiter. (*Das Adlon* 1.01)

> I believe my parents knew all too well that our future was not in their hands. The generation of founding fathers and patriarchs ruled, like gods, over the fates of families.[87] (*Das Adlon* 1.01)

The contemporary witness takes on the role of an educator to the viewer, helping them bridge the gap of knowledge between the past and present. Contemporary witnesses frequently speak in schools for educational purposes (cf. Sabrow 16), which is particularly evident in *The White Ribbon* as "[the] film opens in darkness with a voiceover narration by an old Schoolteacher (Ernst Jacobi), positioning the spectator as a learner" (Pearson 5). In their function as narrators and commentators, the contemporary witness in reimaginings of the past must again be considered as a subjective source of information, whose didacticism can easily take on a 'preaching' mode in their evaluation of the past.

In their role as commentators, fictional contemporary witnesses annotate the narrative for the viewer and serve as a choric voice that supplies informative, critical or even ironic commentary on the drama of the narrative. The teacher in *The White Ribbon* literally acts as a choirmaster when he leads and conducts the children's choir at the end of the film. As Stewart points out:

> Here at last the embodied choric voice of the film's own narration stands forth in his internal role as choirmaster: a figure marginal in its upper corner, yet still facilitating not only the known hypocrisy of the children's hymn but the strength they draw from raising their voices in public. (G. Stewart 47)

The voicelessness of the children is not alleviated in this scene since it is the adult teacher who leads the chorus, underlining his role as the authoritative voice throughout the film.

In classical Greek drama, the chorus, including the 'Chorus of the Elderly,' serves as a commentating device, providing insights and reflections on the characters and events within the play. As defined by Patrice Pavis, the chorus is "a homogeneous group of dancers, singers and narrators who speak collectively to comment on the action in which they are involved in various ways" (Pavis 53). This classical concept of the chorus finds a parallel in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, where fictional contemporary witnesses as narrators often assume a similar function.

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[87] Ich glaube, meine Eltern wussten nur zu gut, dass unsere Zukunft nicht in ihren Händen lag. Die Generation der Gründerväter und Patriarchen herrschte, Göttern gleich, über die Schicksale der Familien. (*Das Adlon* 1.01)

These narrators, or choric voices, in voiceover, mediate between the narrative of the past and the viewer in the present, offering commentary that guides the audience's understanding of the story. This mode of mediation is not limited to productions with a narrator or a frame narrative; it can also be observed in films and series where no explicit narrator is present.

In *Downton Abbey*, for instance, multiple characters take on the role of choral figures, providing explanatory commentary about the era's social mores, customs, and historical contexts. The dialogues and polylogues often involve one character, who acts as a stand-in for the viewer, asking questions or expressing ignorance about a particular subject. Another character then 'educates' them, thereby educating the audience as well. In episode 1.01, the scullery maid Daisy, who is stereotypically characterised as simple-minded, wonders, "Why are the papers ironed?" (1.01), prompting an explanation for the benefit of the audience. Other comments, such as "Girls can't inherit" (ibid.) explain and simplify the complex issue of the entail that drives the series' plot, while comments such as "Gentlemen don't work, not real gentleman" (ibid.) further contextualise the class differences and societal expectations of the upper class for the viewer. Realistically, most of these facts would be known to characters of the time but not a twenty-first-century audience. Therefore, the series' dialogue is tailored to cater to viewers for whom the past is rendered more accessible.

This technique allows the series to seamlessly integrate historical, social, and political information into the narrative without breaking the flow of the story. By having characters discuss or question the norms of their time, *Downton Abbey* offers viewers a deeper understanding of the period's complexities. Through their function as modern-day choruses, the series' characters help to contextualise the social, political, and cultural nuances of the period. In doing so, they render the historical setting more relatable and comprehensible to a contemporary audience and ensure that viewers remain engaged and informed. In addition to providing informative commentary, however, these choral characters also engage in gossip, judging and evaluating the actions of their upper-class employers. The servants of Downton Abbey thereby adopt the role of the Greek chorus by dancing in concentric circles around the 'upstairs' characters, while they observe and offer an ongoing commentary on their actions.

Similarly, the character of the Dowager Countess of Grantham (Maggie Smith) functions as a choral character, whose sharp and astute observations, often delivered with dry humour, have become a staple of the series and a source of entertainment for

the viewer. As an elderly character who is frequently present but rarely involved in plot or action, the Dowager Countess of Grantham appropriates the role of the observant commentator whose wisdom, life experience and knowledge exceed that of other characters. Significantly, the Dowager Countess is characterised as a contemporary witness within the narrative, as she points out in episode 5.09 when she refers to herself and her contemporary Isobel Crawley: “Remember, we were the Edwardians” (*Downton Abbey* 5.09), defining them as members of a different generation.

5.4.3 The fictional contemporary witness as mitigator, expiatory figure, and embodied and performed memory

In their function as narrators, mediators and choral figures, fictional contemporary witnesses in contemporary reimaginings help to contextualise the past, making it more accessible, comprehensible, and presumably more relatable for consumers of historical films and series. Additionally, the presence of a contemporary witness in these reimaginings can have a mitigating effect, making the past more ‘bearable’ by providing emotional guidance, reassurance, and cathartic relief. The interruption of the film or series narrative by the narrative voice of the contemporary witness can be perceived as disruptive and prevent a complete immersion into the narrative of the past. Conversely, the overt presence of the contemporary witness as a narrator can provide emotional relief and comfort during tense or uncomfortable scenes. In *The White Ribbon*, for example, the long, protracted silences in the film feel oppressive and tense.

Here, the calm, sonorous voiceovers of the elderly teacher provide a respite by pulling the viewer back to the fact that the disturbing narrative is not immediate but in the remote past. Within the context of German memory culture, the contemporary witness is frequently elevated to an expiatory figure of guilt who, akin to a Christ-like redeemer, takes on the ‘sins’ of the past to enable the viewer’s enjoyment of the fictionalised past without guilt.

> The interest of the historical experience society indeed venerates the historical artifact elevated to a relic but does not long for the past itself. This very fact frees it from the nagging suspicion of nostalgia that, in the 1970s, still stigmatized the reflection on the past as a reactionary yearning for the good old days.[88] (Sabrow 27)

[88] Das Interesse der historischem Erlebnisgesellschaft verehrt zwar das zur historischen Reliquie erhobene Relikt, aber sie sehnt nicht die Vergangenheit selbst zurück. Eben dies befreit sie von dem

Any voyeuristic pleasure derived from witnessing the disasters of the First World War, the sinking of the Titanic, or the grim realities of early twentieth-century society may be mitigated by the presence of the contemporary witness. This figure often expresses guilt or shame for their passivity, silence, or inability to prevent these tragic events, thereby channelling and reflecting the viewer's own discomfort in deriving entertainment from such historical tragedies.

The motif of guilt is thus also encoded in the recurring figure of the contemporary witness. Feelings of guilt, loss, and trauma are frequently cited as driving forces and motivations for them to share their memories in the first place. Rose DeWitt Bukater in *Titanic* is characterised as a contemporary witness plagued by survivor guilt and trauma, which motivates her to communicate her guilty conscience and traumatic memory. As a reward for this, the character experiences catharsis and peace at the film's end. After unburdening herself by breaking her silence after more than eighty years, the cathartic act of throwing the diamond necklace into the ocean above the site of the sinking reads as a mythological entrance fee into the underworld and a last rite. Rose's testimony as a contemporary witness serves as the last confessional before she presumably dies peacefully to be reunited in a dream sequence that marks her arrival in the realm of the dead. In her conclusive monologue, the protagonist uses the vocabulary of Catholic guilt to impart the sense of guilt that survivors and witnesses of the disaster would experience: "Afterward, the seven hundred people in the boats had nothing to do but wait. Wait to die, wait to live. Wait for an absolution, that would never come" (*Titanic* 1997). As part of the contemporary witness's audience, the viewer is placed in the role of a confessor, actively participating in the moral dilemma of whether to grant or withhold absolution for the witness's actions or inactions.

The subject of guilt and absolution is even more pronounced in contemporary German reimaginings like *Das Adlon*, where the protagonist and contemporary witness, Sonja Schadt, is confronted by her estranged daughter, Anna-Maria Zimmermann (Mathilde Bundschuh), on the question of her guilt and culpability as a *Mitläufer* during the NS regime. Anna-Maria reacts with sarcasm to her mother's attempts to explain herself: "You Germans are all innocent"[89] (*Das Adlon* 1.03) and relays her own feelings of guilt as a German-born and half-German Israeli:

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bohrenden Nostalgieverdacht, der die Rückbesinnung auf die Vergangenheit in den 1970er Jahren noch als reaktionäres Sehnen nach der guten alten Zeit brandmarkte. (Sabrow 27)

89 Ihr Deutschen seid alle unschuldig. (*Das Adlon* 1.03)

> When I stood at the port in Tel Aviv and saw the ships that brought the survivors from Europe to us – their camp numbers tattooed on their arms – I felt guilty. Because I am German. And I thought of you and asked myself: What kind of person are you?[90] (*Das Adlon* 1.03)

These accusations are explicitly aimed at Sonja Schadt but implicitly extend to Germans in general, including the viewer. Regardless of Sonja Schadt's exculpation through Siegfried von Tennen at his trial, the protagonist and contemporary witness figure still have to undergo a process of punishment and sublimation for her youthful passivity and naivety. She receives her 'absolution' later in life in the form of a belated happy ending. Here, too, the process of guilt, punishment, and catharsis is encoded in the figure of the contemporary witness. According to Sabrow, the contemporary witness also represents the cathartic element of German historical 'Aufarbeitung' [engl. historical reappraisal]: "On the one hand, this reflects the cathartic tendency of the current era of coming to terms with the past, which is focused on creating distance"[91] (Sabrow 27).

This relates directly to the qualification of the contemporary witness as a spokesperson in memory culture, depending on their characterisation as a victim or perpetrator:

> In the simple question of whether perpetrators can or should be allowed to be contemporary witnesses, the tension between the authoritative and the cathartic role of the contemporary witness is clearly.[92] (Sabrow 28).

As a figure of guilt and trauma, the fictional contemporary witness in film and serial reimaginings of the early twentieth century embodies the central themes of German memory films in particular, which have to include "warnings, memories, reckonings, and always at the same time also repressions, excuses"[93] (Grotkopp 123). These films, as Grotkopp argues, also function as "monuments of self-pity"[94] (ibid.). According to

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90 Als ich in Tel-Aviv am Hafen stand und die Schiffe gesehen habe die die Überlebenden aus Europa zu uns brachten - die Lagernummer in den Arm tätowiert - da habe ich mich schuldig gefühlt. Weil ich eine Deutsche bin. Und ich habe an dich gedacht und mich gefragt: Was bist du für ein Mensch? (*Das Adlon* 1.03)

91 Es ist dies zum einen der kathartischen, auf Distanzierung bedachte Grundzug der gegenwärtigen Aufarbeitungsepoche. (Sabrow 27)

92 In der simplen Frage, ob Täter Zeitzeugen sein können oder dürfen, liegt die Spannung zwischen der auratorischen und er kathertischen Bestimmung des Zeitzeugen offen zutage. (Sabrow 28)

93 Mahnungen, Erinnerungen, Abrechnungen und immer zugleich auch Verdrängungen, Ausreden. (Grotkopp 123)

94 Monumente des Selbstmitleids (ibid.)

Sabrow, perpetrators or passive followers are undesirable as contemporary witnesses in memory culture:

> It is unimaginable that such a contemporary witness would still present himself in the studio as part of that which he testifies to. A professed Nazi, a fervent Communist, do not make suitable contemporary witnesses. Unlike them, the contemporary witness not only builds the bridge between the present and the past but also integrates the past into the present and serves as a mediator between the two. To serve as a traveller between these worlds, he takes from the past its memory and from the present its values, the cultural framework within which he recalls the past and simultaneously updates it.[95] (Sabrow 27)

By this logic, fictional characters in contemporary reimaginings are more likely to be either victims, co-victims, or naïve followers of the Nazi regime rather than staunch supporters or active perpetrators. In *Das Adlon*, the protagonist and contemporary witness Sonja Schadt is characterised as a *Mitläufer* who is framed by the antagonist as a perpetrator and later redeemed as a naïve co-victim of the Nazis. She fits into the categories of onlookers, followers and 'seduced' people, whom Welzer refers to as 'harmless' Germans, often depicted in contemporary media (cf. Welzer 36).

In recent years, reimaginings set in the Nazi era, focus on narratives that blur the lines between German guilt and victimhood. Examples include the film *Napola* (2005) and the mini-series *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* (2013), where young protagonists are portrayed as staunch National Socialists who willingly participate in the Second World War and yet emerge as both co-victims and perpetrators in the narrative, similar to the group of children and adolescents in Haneke's *The White Ribbon*. The international reception of *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* was remarkably negative, with creators accused of revisionism and adopting of the wrong perspective:

> As in all film portrayals of the Nazi era, in this one too, support for the Nazi state, enthusiasm for Hitler, radical nationalism, the National Socialist conviction itself, and the

[95] Unvorstellbar, dass ein solcher Zeitzeuge sich im Studio immer noch als Teil dessen darstellt, von dem er zeugt. Ein bekennender Nazi, ein eifernder Kommunist taugen nicht als Zeitzeugen. Anders als sie stellt der Zeitzeuge nicht nur die Brücke zwischen Heute und Damals her, sondern passt auch die Vergangenheit in die Gegenwart ein und dient als Mittler zwischen beiden. Um als Wanderer zwischen diesen Welten dienen zu können, übernimmt er von der Vergangenheit die Erinnerung, von der Gegenwart aber die Wertmaßstäbe, das kulturelle Rahmenformat, in dem er das Vergangene memoriert und zeitgleich aktualisiert. (Sabrow 27)

> fervent hope that 'we' might win the war, cannot be depicted, or only as a shallow caricature.[96] (Herbert 2013)

This backlash against *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* echoes the criticism aimed at Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Der Untergang* for its sympathetic depiction of high-ranking Nazis, including Albert Speer (Heino Ferch), Adolf Hitler (Bruno Ganz), and his secretary Traudl Junge (Alexandra Maria Lara), whose perspective is shared with viewers of the film. Real footage of Junge's testimony as a contemporary witness frames and bookends the film, where she casts herself as a young and naive *Mitläufer*. De Groot notes that "[films] exploring moments of national trauma often sit at odds – or in parallel with – popular crowd-pleasing work" (De Groot 210). This assessment can be extended to include reimaginings that reproduce ambiguous characterisations and blur the lines between victims and perpetrators.

According to Sabrow, the contemporary witness must undergo a process of purification to be accepted as a figure of memory and remembrance (cf. Sabrow 27). They must adopt a critical view of the past and avoid a nostalgic or revisionist stance. Consequently, the figure of the contemporary witness, especially in fictional depictions, is intrinsically linked to the motifs of guilt and memory. As physical embodiments of cultural memory, contemporary witnesses are personifications of memory itself, or as Sabrow and Frei describe them, 'living lieux de mémoire':

> The contemporary witness as a living 'lieu de mémoire' redeems us from the contradiction om which the desire for direct encounter with the past stands in simultaneous critical distance from it. His true cultural power lies in the fact that he not only mediates between the past and the present but also reconciles the pleasure and the burden of remembering.[97] (Sabrow 28)

Therefore, fictional contemporary witnesses are coded as personifications and performers of twentieth-century memory. By acting as mediators and expiatory figures for a contemporary audience, they enable the reimagining of a time the audience has no

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96 Wie in allen NS-Verfilmungen, so kann auch in diesem die Zustimmung zum NS-Staat, die Begeisterung für Hitler, der radikale Nationalismus, die nationalsozialistische Überzeugung selbst und die heiße Hoffnung, „wir" mögen den Krieg gewinnen, nicht oder nur in einer schalen Karikatur gezeigt werden. (Herbert 2013)

97 Der Zeitzeuge als lebender Erinnerungsort erlöst uns von dem Widerspruch, in dem die Sehnsucht nach der unmittelbaren Begegnung mit der Vergangenheit zur gleichzeitigen kritischen Distanzierung von ihr steht, und seine eigentliche kulturelle Leistungskraft liegt darin, dass er nicht nur zwischen Vergangenheit und Gegenwart vermittelt, sondern zugleich auch Lust und Last des Erinnerns miteinander versöhnt. (Sabrow 28)

memory of themselves. Actual contemporary witnesses emerge as guardians of memory and figures of monition to avoid a repetition of past mistakes, and their gradual disappearance leaves a void. Here, the fictional contemporary witness, though inferior to the gravitas and impact of real witness accounts, can at least supply a sense of narrative guidance and emotionalisation in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century that simultaneously remind, exhort and connect with viewers.

5.5 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused my analysis of underlying and coded content in contemporary reimaginings on character types and character coding. It can be argued that the employment of original fictional characters alongside fictionalised historical characters leads to more representation of the middle and lower classes, who often remain obscure in cultural memory compared to the upper classes. For example, in series like *Downton Abbey* or *Babylon Berlin*, historical figures only appear briefly as elusive characters of historical import. These fictional representations of historical figures overtly and covertly propose a critical assessment of their legacy from a twenty-first-century viewpoint.

In *Babylon Berlin*, for instance, the brief appearance of Paul von Hindenburg is characterised as a foreshadowing of his role as the enabler of Adolf Hitler's rise to power. The appearance of Neville Chamberlain in *Downton Abbey* is connected to a dramatic and gruesome moment in the series, implying a negative impression of the character in line with the legacy of his failed appeasement politics. This technique of prefiguring the legacy of fictionalised historical figures is mainly subtextual and coded, necessitating the viewer's understanding and knowledge of historical contexts. Contemporary reimaginings, rather than explicitly challenging a historical figure's memory, employ a coded criticism through subtext, symbolism, and foreshadowing.

I have focused on examples of character tropes or archetypes that frequently appear in both British and German reimaginings as representatives of the socio-historical and political climate of the time as well as figures of political or ideological character coding. To this end, I have analysed the figure of the journalist and other representatives of the press and media as an ambiguous figure in contemporary reimaginings. These characters are often vilified as intruders of privacy, scandalmongers, or political agitators, yet in other instances, they are coded as heroes of free and critical speech,

in opposition to conservative or right-wing politics, especially in the context of the emergent National Socialist regime.

Additionally, I have selected the archetype of the widow as a recurring figure symbolising mourning, trauma, and social precarity. At the same time, she is coded as a feminist figure of emancipation and economic independence in the absence of men. Furthermore, in my analysis of characters in contemporary reimaginings, outsiders and foreigners emerge as key figures embodying a perceived threat to the 'intact world' of the heritage house and the Heimatfilm-like idyll, as seen in productions like *Downton Abbey*. In *Downton Abbey*, the figure of the outsider is predominantly characterised as an intruder or invader and a corrupting force, often connoted as foreign and ethnically or racially 'other.'

Examples include the Turkish character Kemal Pamuk, initially characterised as a subversion of Orientalist stereotypes of Turks and Muslims. However, this subversion is overturned when he is revealed as a sexual predator, propagating a negative image of foreigners, specifically Muslims, as a threat. Similarly, the German production *Babylon Berlin* introduces an Oriental- or Muslim-coded villain in the character of 'The Armenian,' head of Berlin's criminal underworld. This can be seen as a reflection of the organised crime scene connected to family clans from predominantly Muslim countries in contemporary Germany. The underlying political coding of these characters caters to xenophobic and right-wing populist ideas that resonate with a broader contemporary discourse on migration.

This analysis indicates how contemporary reimaginings are not merely about depicting the past but also about engaging with current social and political issues through the lens of history. The portrayal of outsiders and foreigners as threats or corrupting forces reveals underlying anxieties and tensions within contemporary society, reflecting and potentially influencing public attitudes toward immigration and diversity. Moreover, the figure of the outsider in contemporary reimaginings exemplifies the underlying political theme of assimilation as a prerequisite for integration into the exclusive microcosm of the house or community, and by extension, the nation. While the performative nature of assimilation is satirised in *Titanic* (1997), the process of assimilating and conforming to the rules and traditions of the upper class is idealised in *Downton Abbey*.

In my analysis, I focus on the Irish character Tom Branson as an example of the transformative nature of assimilation, changing the character from a proud Irish socialist, critical of the establishment, to a supporter and defender of the British aristocracy and upper class. Tom Branson further exemplifies the notion of a 'welcome' foreigner, where his Irish 'otherness' is not exotic or 'Oriental' but still fetishised and romanticised as 'wild' and foreign. In contemporary British reimaginings, Irishness is frequently commodified, with Irish music and Irish or Irish-coded characters often employed to evoke emotion and provide either pathos or comic relief. For instance, this is seen in the minor characters Tommy Ryan in *Titanic* (1997) and Kieran Branson in *Downton Abbey*. Although these characters are generally depicted in a positive light, they still exhibit traits of the 'stage Irish' stereotype, which derogatorily characterises the Irish in a superficial and often ridiculous manner.

The shooting of Tommy Ryan, who is seen to rebel against the treatment of third-class passengers in *Titanic*, pulls the character briefly out of the stage Irish stereotype by foreshadowing the Irish War of Independence, coding the character as prefiguring the image of the fallen Irish rebel. This turn from a comical figure to a symbol of political conflict is reversed in *Downton Abbey*, where the character Tom Branson starts out as an earnest supporter of political change and revolution, whose revolutionary actions turn out to be comical failures. This casts him as a blundering, ineffective rebel whose activities lampoon the political causes of revolution and Irish rebellion.

In *Downton Abbey*, Tom Branson's initial fervour for Irish independence and social change is progressively diluted as he becomes integrated into the Crawley family and their circles. His transformation from a critical outsider to a loyal insider illustrates the series' endorsement of assimilation and the status quo. This idealisation suggests that acceptance and success within the British aristocracy require the abandonment of one's original identity and beliefs.

Moreover, the depiction of Irish characters in both *Titanic* and *Downton Abbey* indicates a broader tendency in contemporary British reimaginings to commodify and romanticise Irishness. This commodification serves to entertain and engage the audience while simultaneously neutralising any serious political implications of Irish identity in relation to British colonial history.

The representation of the Irish as either comical or tragic figures further exemplifies the simplification of complex historical and political realities in contemporary reimaginings. Through these characterisations, contemporary reimaginings reflect and

reinforce existing societal attitudes towards outsiders and foreigners. The emphasis on assimilation as a path to acceptance highlights a broader cultural narrative that values conformity and the maintenance of established social hierarchies. By presenting assimilation as desirable and necessary, these narratives contribute to a conservative vision of social order and integration.

In this chapter, I have examined the representation of Irish or Irish-coded characters in British reimaginings as a form of racial coding and 'othering' that compensates for the lack of diversity and representation of foreigners and BIPoC characters. This practice of racially coding white characters in place of actual BIPoC representation highlights several issues. By projecting the narrative of the racial 'other' onto white characters, these productions further diminish the already limited representation of BIPoC people in historical fiction.

While explicit reference to the racialisation and discrimination of ethnic and cultural groups raises awareness of this issue and its representation in cultural memory, racial coding as a narrative trope undermines this. Anti-Irish racism in *Titanic* or *Downton Abbey* is not explicitly addressed but is subtly implied through the treatment of Irish or Irish-coded characters. In contrast, German reimaginings explicitly confront antisemitic racism against Jewish characters, where racialisation is also used as a fictional trope. Both British and German reimaginings employ racial coding as a component of the so-called 'permission plot,' a romance trope that involves relationships between members of different, often opposing, social groups, classes, or races.

The 'permission plot' often involves romantic relationships that transgress social boundaries, typically foregrounding the tension and eventual reconciliation between different groups. In *Downton Abbey*, the relationship between Tom Branson and Lady Sybil is an example of a class-based 'permission plot,' while the brief romance between Lady Rose and the black jazz singer Jack Ross introduces a racial element. However, Ross's relationship with Lady Rose is quickly dismissed and serves more provide dramatic impetus than to genuinely explore issues of systemic racism. This fleeting inclusion of a BIPoC character, without a substantive engagement with his experiences or the social realities of race, underscores the series' reluctance to address racial inequality and discrimination.

The treatment of Irish characters in these narratives similarly skirts around the deeper implications of their 'otherness'. Instead of addressing the historical realities of anti-Irish sentiment and its impact on Irish immigrants, *Downton Abbey* and *Titanic*

tend to use Irish characters to evoke a sense of quaintness or rebelliousness, often romanticising the historical plight of the Irish without critically engaging with the underlying social and political issues. Tom Branson's transformation from a fervent Irish nationalist to a compliant member of the British aristocracy illustrates this tendency to neutralise and assimilate the 'other' into the dominant culture, thus avoiding a direct confrontation with the challenges of cultural integration and diversity.

In contrast, German reimaginings often foreground antisemitic racism and the persecution of Jewish characters, directly engaging with the historical and social realities of discrimination. For instance, *Babylon Berlin* and *Das Adlon* include Jewish characters, who face explicit antisemitism and persecution, reflecting the historical context of rising Nazism. This direct treatment of racial issues, while still embedded within the broader narrative, demonstrates a willingness to confront the uncomfortable truths of history more openly than their British counterparts.

The reliance on racial coding in British reimaginings also perpetuates a form of narrative convenience, where the complexities of race and discrimination are simplified and projected onto white characters. This practice can dilute the significance of genuine racial representation and diminish the impact of these stories on contemporary audiences who are increasingly aware of and sensitive to issues of racial diversity and inclusion. By using racial coding in place of actual diversity, these narratives miss an opportunity to expand cultural memory and understanding, instead reinforcing a limited and sanitised view of history.

Moreover, I have identified another key theme that defines major characters in contemporary reimaginings: the theme of guilt, both in the sense of literal culpability and as an emotional burden brought on by a perceived transgression. It is important to note that the theme of guilt has emerged as a recurring motif in German cultural productions since 1945, including in popular media. The popularity of the crime genre in German media since the mid-twentieth century can be seen as a reflection of post-war German guilt, encoded in fictional representations of criminal guilt, punishment, and retribution in German film and serial productions.

Within this context, my analysis of the crime and 'whodunnit' plot in Michael Haneke's film *The White Ribbon* can be interpreted as a manifestation of this German historical guilt, coded in tropes of the crime genre. The film's setting in a Protestant village and its narrative of mysterious and unresolved crimes reflect a broader commentary on a dysfunctional community that mirrors national anxieties and traumas.

The characters' transgressions and the oppressive atmosphere of the village symbolise a collective guilt that resonates with Germany's historical culpability.

The theme of 'German guilt' is further explored in the series *Babylon Berlin*, where it intertwines with the survivor guilt of the protagonist Gereon Rath, criminal guilt, and overarching motifs of culpability in the historical crime series. *Babylon Berlin* moreover uses Rath's Catholic background to frame his guilt not only in terms of his war experiences and personal failures but also in a broader moral and spiritual context. His struggle with guilt is depicted through his interactions with other characters and his participation in the ritual of confession, emphasising the ongoing burden of his perceived sins. Guilt, coded as religious sin, is similarly used in the Protestant village in *The White Ribbon*, where criminal culpability and collective guilt are framed alongside Protestant guilt. The rigid moral framework of the village, coupled with the harsh punishments meted out by the adult authority figures, reflects a society grappling with its own sense of guilt and sin. The children's mysterious actions and the cycle of crime and punishment within the community reinforces the pervasive sense of guilt that haunts the village.

In German reimaginings, the theme of German historical guilt is embodied in the figure of the political *Mitläufer*, a term referring to those who passively followed the Nazi regime without actively resisting or participating in its crimes. This theme is implicitly foreshadowed in the character Greta Overbeck in *Babylon Berlin* as an early version of the Nazi *Mitläufer* and is explicitly represented in the protagonist Sonja Schadt in *Das Adlon*. Greta Overbeck's manipulation and eventual involvement in an antisemitic bombing plot illustrate how ordinary individuals could be seduced into complicity with the Nazi regime. Her character arc underscores the moral ambiguity and the ease with which personal and collective guilt can intertwine. As an embodiment of German guilt, the figure of the *Mitläufer* in German reimaginings can be interpreted as an allegorical figure personifying Germany as a seduced victim, raising complex questions of German victimhood and perpetration in fictional representations of the past. Sonja Schadt's character in *Das Adlon* encapsulates this duality. Initially depicted as a passive follower, she becomes entangled in the propaganda machinery of the Nazis. However, her subsequent exoneration and reconciliation with her estranged daughter suggest a narrative of redemption and absolution, reflecting the complex interplay between guilt and forgiveness in the context of German memory culture.

In these reimaginings, the *Mitläufer* is not only a symbol of passive complicity but also a figure through which the narratives explore the broader themes of seduction, coercion, and the moral responsibilities of individuals within a corrupt system. The nuanced portrayal of guilt and victimhood encourages viewers to reflect on the historical and moral complexities of the past, and how these continues to resonate in contemporary society. Through these characters and narratives, contemporary German reimaginings address the enduring legacy of historical guilt, the complexities of memory, and the process of coming to terms with the past. These themes are crucial for understanding how contemporary media engages with history, offering insights into the ways in which the past is continually reinterpreted and renegotiated in the present.

Lastly, I have focused my analysis on the fictional appropriation of the contemporary witness, who emerges as a representation of oral history and embodied memory in twentieth-century memory culture. In this chapter, I have pointed out the frequent inclusion of fictional contemporary witnesses as frame characters and narrators that fulfil an approximating and distancing function in film and serial productions, serving as mediators between narrative and viewer. The fictional contemporary witness is often employed as an overt homodiegetic or autodiegetic narrator whose character is split into a 'narrating I' in the frame narrative and an 'experiencing I' in the embedded narrative. This narrative technique can be seen, for example, in *Titanic* (1997), *Das Adlon*, *The Village,* and *The White Ribbon*, where the mature, elderly 'narrating I' provides retrospect commentary on events, character's emotions and thoughts, and the socio-historical background of the story. The fictional contemporary witness as narrator thus functions as a contextualising and annotating guide to the past, mediating the alien social-historical background and filling gaps in historical knowledge for the viewer.

In *Titanic* (1997), Rose DeWitt Bukater appears as a contemporary witness, recounting her experiences aboard the doomed ship. Her narrative provides context and depth to the historical event, transforming it from a distant tragedy into a personal and relatable story. Similarly, in *Das Adlon*, Sonja Schadt acts as a contemporary witness who narrates the history of the Adlon Hotel and her personal experiences within it. Her commentary bridges the gap between the past and the present, offering viewers a more informed understanding of the historical and cultural significance of the hotel. By sharing her personal memories and observations, Sonja provides a humanised and intimate perspective on broader historical events. *The Village* employs the character Bert Middleton as a contemporary witness, whose narrative provides a personal lens

through which to view the social and economic changes in a rural English village. His retrospective narration allows viewers to understand the impact of historical events on individual lives and communities, emphasising the continuity and change experienced over time. In *The White Ribbon*, the schoolteacher serves as both a contemporary witness and a choric voice, offering a reflective and often critical perspective on the events unfolding in the village. His narration frames the story as a parable, highlighting the moral and social decay within the community.

The use of fictional contemporary witnesses as narrators in these reimaginings not only provides historical context but also engages viewers on an emotional level. By presenting history through the eyes of characters who have lived through it, these narratives create a sense of immediacy and relatability. The contemporary witness's reflections and insights help to humanise historical events, making them more accessible and meaningful to modern audiences.

Furthermore, the fictional contemporary witness also embodies the theme of guilt, particularly in German reimaginings. Characters like Sonja Schadt in *Das Adlon* and the schoolteacher in *The White Ribbon* grapple with their own complicity and moral responsibility, reflecting broader questions of collective guilt and historical memory. Their narratives serve as a means of exploring and processing the complex legacy of the past, offering a form of catharsis and understanding for both the characters and the viewers.

In conclusion, the fictional contemporary witness in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century serves as a crucial narrative device that bridges the gap between the past and the present. By providing context, commentary, and emotional resonance, these characters help to make historical events more accessible and engaging for modern audiences, while also addressing themes of guilt, memory, and moral responsibility. Through their narratives, contemporary witnesses facilitate a deeper understanding of history and its ongoing impact on the present.

Akin to the Greek chorus in drama, the fictional contemporary witness in reimaginings serves as a choric voice, offering commentary that can be judgmental, omniscient, ironic, or critical. In productions with an overt narrating authority, this voice is often explicit, guiding the audience's interpretation of events. However, in reimaginings that lack a distinct narrator, such as *Downton Abbey*, this choric function is embedded within the narrative itself. Here, other choral characters take on the role of providing

informative, educational, or critical commentary through dialogue with other characters, thereby fulfilling a similar function. This method allows these characters to subtly educate or critique within the story, simultaneously informing the viewer and enhancing the narrative's depth.

In oral history, the contemporary witness is often viewed as a controversial figure, frequently criticised for being an unreliable and subjective source. However, the accusations of fictiveness and storytelling directed at contemporary witnesses also emphasise their role as performers of memory and interpreters of the past, rather than merely providers of factual historical accounts. This dual nature is particularly evident in the depiction of fictional contemporary witnesses in British and German reimaginings, where they assume a performative role that transcends the boundaries of traditional historiography. These characters often fulfil a dual function: they serve as narrators in voiceovers and as visible storytellers within the frame narrative. This portrayal emphasises the inherent subjectivity of memory and the interpretative aspect of recounting history, reflecting the complexities of how the past is remembered and conveyed in popular culture. Thus, oral history and the oral tradition of storytelling conflate in the figure of the fictional contemporary witness, who also appears as a nexus between the personification and performance of memory. In line with storytellers of the oral tradition, the fictional contemporary witness is shown to forge an emotional bond with their audience in the frame narrative and the viewer outside the narrative.

In *Downton Abbey*, for example, the absence of an overt narrator is compensated by characters like the Dowager Countess of Grantham, whose sharp, witty observations often serve as commentary on the social mores and historical context of the era. Her dialogues provide a critical perspective and background information that help viewers understand the dynamic of the period. Other characters, such as the servants, also fulfil this role by discussing and explaining aspects of life in the early twentieth century that might be unfamiliar to modern audiences. The fictional contemporary witness as a choric voice also appears in *Titanic* (1997), where the elderly Rose narrates her past experiences. This narrative framework allows her to provide insight and context, guiding the audience through the historical and emotional landscape of the story. Her reflections are not just a recounting of events but a personal interpretation, filled with emotional nuances that deepen the viewer’s engagement with the narrative. In *Das Adlon*, Sonja Schadt’s role as a contemporary witness similarly bridges the gap between the past and the present. Her storytelling is interwoven with historical context

and personal anecdotes, creating a rich tapestry that conveys both factual information and emotional truth. Her narrative voice serves to educate the audience while also connecting them emotionally to the characters and events of the past.

The fictional contemporary witness, therefore, serves multiple functions in contemporary reimaginings. They are not merely passive narrators but active interpreters of history, whose personal involvement and emotional depth add layers of meaning to the narrative. This performative aspect underlines their role as mediators between the past and the present, shaping the viewer's understanding and emotional response to historical events. By embodying the dual roles of narrator and storyteller, fictional contemporary witnesses emphasise the subjective nature of memory and the interpretive process of recounting history. They underline the importance of personal experience in shaping historical narratives and acknowledge the complexity of viewing individual memory as national memory.

In conclusion, the fictional contemporary witness in contemporary reimaginings serves as a critical, informative, and emotionally engaging choric voice. Their dual role as both narrators and storytellers bridges the gap between past and present, offering context, commentary, and personal insights that deepen the viewer's understanding of historical events. The knowledge and memories of the contemporary witness, despite their potential inaccuracies or subjectivity, are often viewed as valuable commodities. In twentieth-century cultural memory, the contemporary witness is elevated as a guardian of 'hidden treasures,' with their memories being rare and highly coveted. This is reflected in the figure of the fictional contemporary witness, whose memories are symbolically coded as valuable treasures in their own right.

The memories and narratives provided by contemporary witnesses are often depicted as crucial pieces of history that need to be preserved and cherished. In *Titanic* (1997), the elderly Rose's recounting of her story is portrayed as a precious gift to the treasure hunter Brock Lovett, who initially seeks the physical treasure of the 'Heart of the Ocean' diamond but ultimately gains a deeper appreciation for the intangible treasure of Rose's lived experience of the disaster. Rose's memories transform from mere recollections into a valuable narrative that offers insights into the personal experience of historical events.

Finally, the fictional contemporary witness represents the communicative memory of the twentieth century, embodying a drive to actively engage with the past rather than merely consume it passively and voyeuristically. Their role extends beyond

simple storytelling; they involve the audience and encourage an active dialogue about history, memory, and identity – prompting viewers to reflect on historical events and their lasting influence on the present, which is particularly significant within postmillennial political contexts.

In conclusion, the figure of the fictional contemporary witness in contemporary reimaginings functions as a mediator and narrator who bridges the gap between the past and the present. Their memories are coded as valuable treasures, emphasising the importance of personal narratives in our understanding of history. By actively communicating their experiences, they foster a deeper engagement with the past, encouraging viewers to reflect on historical events and their significance. Through their stories, fictional contemporary witnesses embody the communicative memory of the twentieth century, offering valuable perspective on history that transcends passive consumption and promotes active reflection and dialogue.

6 Contemporary Reimaginings of the Early Twentieth Century in British and German culture: A Conclusion

In conclusion, my analysis of British and German contemporary reimaginings of the twentieth century has led to the identification of overarching concepts, genre conventions, and cultural codes that adhere to contemporary political contexts underlying their content. Through a close reading of implicit images and themes in these reimaginings, which are often latent rather than consciously employed, I have focused on the settings and topological conceptualisations that generate an atmosphere and impression of the past as either positively or negatively connoted. For instance, the house emerges as a popular setting and central locus that evokes an era-specific atmosphere and serves as a conventional backdrop for narratives set in the past. It can be concluded that British settings are predominantly connoted as proverbial 'good places' in landscapes coded as Arcadian pastoral idylls, invoking the literary concept of the *locus amoenus*.

In suggesting a utopian symbiosis between the working class and the upper class, British reimaginings, such as *Downton Abbey*, sanitise the historical reality of exploitative and precarious working conditions. In contrast, German reimaginings explicitly address the socio-historical realities of working-class misery and class inequality. The sanitised and romanticised image of the early twentieth century, as reimagined in popular British films and series, reflects a desire for escapism into a fictional 'intact world' and 'simpler time' that inherently glorifies strict social order, class divide, and traditional gender relations. Within contemporary reimaginings of the twentieth century, crises narratives often signal a divergence from the placid rigidity of the country house idyll. For example, in *Downton Abbey*, crisis plots temporarily 'tip over' the setting of the *locus amoenus* into a *locus terribilis*. However, these 'Scheinkatastrophen' (engl. pseudo catastrophes) are quickly and reliably resolved, reestablishing the status quo with little to no consequences for the story world. Crisis narratives thus function as narrative turning points and harbingers of subversion and social change in contemporary reimaginings.

It can be concluded that the conservative political coding of contemporary British heritage productions, such as *Downton Abbey*, allows comparison to the German Heimatfilm. This genre has come under similar scrutiny for its propagation of conservative values embedded in a sanitised and nostalgic 'intact world' setting that provides escapist entertainment. In this thesis, I have pointed out a shared formula between

British heritage productions and German Heimatfilm, based on similarities in setting, recurring plots, and stock characters. The heritage genre's kinship to the Heimatfilm is particularly interesting, given that the latter has its roots in German National Socialist cinema. *Downton Abbey*'s underlying political coding, seen, for example, in its affirmative propagation of conservatism and traditionalism, is therefore comparable to the German Heimatfilm and by extension also to productions of the National Socialist film industry, with its use of entertainment to implicitly impart a conservative ideology for propagandist purposes.

The kinship or 'cousinship' suggested between British heritage productions such as *Downton Abbey* and the German Heimatfilm genre is further underlined in my analysis of German Anti-Heimatfilm productions like *The White Ribbon* and British 'dark heritage' productions, such as *The Village*, which are explicitly compared to the German Anti-Heimatfilm genre. Tropes and genre conventions of the Heimatfilm and heritage genre are consciously employed yet subverted in these productions to present a realist alternative to the sanitised idyll of the Heimatfilm and heritage genre. Additionally, contemporary German reimaginings such as *Babylon Berlin* or *The White Ribbon* can be interpreted in contrast to the clean and sanitised setting of *Downton Abbey* and its cognates, due to their emphasis on stark realism and imagery of abjection and bodily horror.

Contemporary British reimaginings often sanitise the socio-historical background of the Edwardian era in popular cultural memory. Depictions of the First World War and the decline of the British Empire are either toned down or omitted. This deliberate reduction or revision of controversial aspects of British heritage and national identity can be interpreted as an unwillingness to undermine the overriding theme of harmony, idyll, and patriotism, as well as an underlying aversion to critically engage with national history. While British reimaginings, such as *Downton Abbey* or *Mr. Selfridge,* include instances of fictional commemoration of historical events, they often lack critical reflection and sometimes covertly, or even overtly, celebrate imperialism, colonialism, and patriotic zeal.

In contrast, German reimaginings frequently address and critically engage with colonial atrocities, as seen in productions like *Das Adlon* or *Charité,* where patriotism and nationalism are also connoted negatively and often tied to jingoism, militarism and antisemitism. These reimaginings draw on the ideology of Prussianism, which is depicted as prefiguring fascism and Nazism in the decades leading up to the NS regime.

It can be concluded that German reimaginings consciously focus on such aspects of the past that can be retrospectively interpreted as contributing to the emergence of the Nazi era as an all-pervasive part of German history and memory culture.

By closely analysing the settings and loci of contemporary British and German reimaginings of the early twentieth century, I have focused on spatiality and the dimensions of size as significant underlying themes that reflect a contemporary preoccupation with space and spatial politics. Having established the house as a central setting in this thesis, it can be concluded that grand and opulent houses, such as the eponymous *Downton Abbey*, confer a sense of grandeur, stability, impermeability, and permanence by their imposing size alone.

While the utopian class relations in *Downton Abbey* suggest a sense of wholeness and unity within the house, the pervasive theme of class division implies a division and fragmentation of the house into different parts and spheres designated by class and gender. The vertical division of the house into 'upstairs' and 'downstairs,' as seen in most reimaginings set in a house, appears to be the dominant reading. However, I suggest a different spatial reading of the house in *Downton Abbey*. With a focus on the masters being constantly surrounded by their servants, the series offers a concentrical reading of the house where the upper class is at the centre and the servants are on the periphery, enveloping rather than subordinating.

The positive connotation of the house as a safe and sacred place in British reimaginings is coded in images of enclosure and containment, suggesting a castle-like bastion against outsiders, intruders, and the forces of modernity and progress. Contemporary anxieties about invasion and intrusion of other cultures can be interpreted as underlying political concerns implicit in the preoccupation with spatiality and boundaries. Reimaginings like *Downton Abbey* subtly play on anxieties about loss of cultural identity and tradition, wrapped in a sense of nostalgia. Viewed within the context of the 2016 Brexit referendum and the United Kingdom's exist from the European Union in 2020, the series' romanticisation of pre-war Britain not only reflects a desire for enclosed interiority in contemporary British consciousness, but also a nostalgia for pre-EU Britain.

The motif of the dollhouse and its focus on interiority has served as a symbol of the heritage house's tension between the inside and outside world. In *Downton Abbey*, everything inside the house is connoted as inherently good and positive, and thereby

in need of preservation against any perceived threats from the outside world. The glorification of the interior and vilification of the outside further reflects contemporary political discourse about migration and xenophobia. Conversely, German reimaginings challenge this spatial reading of an outside threat to the safe interior by reversing the coding of this dichotomy. In *The White Ribbon*, *Das Adlon* and *Babylon Berlin,* for example, the threat emerges not from external forces but from the existence of evil within the house, the family unit, and the community itself. This inversion emphasises the internal flaws and corruptions within seemingly secure and familiar spaces, thereby critiquing the notion that threats originate solely from outside sources.

In my analysis of spatiality and spatial dimensions in contemporary reimaginings, I have also examined the theme of size as a symbol of patriarchal power and gender politics, which are coded in the growing and shrinking of spaces. While there is an emphasis on growth and expanding spaces for female characters and protagonists, the spaces of male characters appear to be shrinking as the status of the patriarch diminishes and becomes less relevant in both British and German reimaginings. It can be concluded that the intersection between gender, size, and space is coded in the image of the gigantic and the monumental. Representative of human hubris and patriarchal power, the gigantic is negatively connoted and coded as a monstrous and out of man's control. Monumental architecture of exaggerated size, seen in the grand house or the structure of the modern city, is imbued with underlying political connotations linking size and monumentality to patriarchy, populism and fascist ideology, which is explicitly and implicitly criticised in the destruction of the gigantic structures that predominantly pose a setting for contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century.

In the last part of my analysis of underlying content in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, I have focused on character types, characterisation and character coding. Overall, it can be concluded that both British and German productions tend to favour original fictional characters as protagonists over fictionalised historical figures. This approach allows for greater representation of the middle and lower classes, groups that often remain obscure in the cultural memory of the era. When fictionalised historical figures are included, they typically appear as elusive guest characters who carry significant socio-historical weight. Their presence invites an assessment of their legacy, often through coded and implicit criticism. This form of subtextual critique requires an understanding of historical contexts to fully appreciate the

symbolic coding and prefiguring of the characters' political and historical destinies in the twentieth century.

For my analysis, I have selected specific archetypes and figures to examine more closely in relation to their underlying cultural, political, and ideological character coding, such as the controversial figure of the journalist coded as a hero of free speech and an early opponent of the National Socialist regime, or the archetype of the widow as a complex figure of mourning, trauma, and social precarity, who is also coded as a symbol of feminist emancipation and female agency. In this analysis, the figure of the outsider or foreigner, who embodies a perceived threat to the harmonious world of the heritage house and its Heimatfilm-like idyll presented in contemporary reimaginings, has emerged as a prominent and poignant example of covert politicisation. In *Downton Abbey*, for instance, the figure of the outsider is often connoted as foreign and ethnically or racially 'other,' while predominantly characterised as an intruder and a corrupting force. Examples include the Turkish character Kemal Pamuk in *Downton Abbey*, initially characterised as a subversion of Orientalist stereotypes but later revealed as a sexual predator and villainous character, propagating a negative image of foreigners, specifically Muslims, as a threat. The underlying political coding of this character caters to xenophobic and far-right populist ideas prevalent in contemporary discourse surrounding migration and rising antimuslim sentiment. The German production *Babylon Berlin* similarly introduces an Oriental- or Muslim-coded villain in the figure of 'The Armenian,' the head of the Berlin criminal underworld. This character reflects contemporary sentiments in Germany about organised crime linked to migrants, Muslims in particular, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of negative and xenophobic stereotypes of migrants in contemporary media discourse.

I have furthermore analysed the figure of the outsider and foreigner as assimilated, with the example of Tom Branson in *Downton Abbey*. Characterised as a former socialist and failed Irish rebel, Branson is connoted as a foreigner whose Irishness and 'otherness' is fetishised and romanticised as 'wild' and in need of taming. It can be concluded that Irishness in British reimaginings is frequently commodified and employed to evoke emotion or provide comic relief, adhering to the stereotype of the 'stage Irish.' In my analysis of Irish or Irish-coded characters in British reimaginings such as *Downton Abbey* or *Titanic,* I further conclude that the racialisation of Irishness is implicitly used as a form of race coding in British heritage productions to include the concepts of racial 'otherness' and distract from a lack of diversity in their exclusion of

colonial subjects and BIPoC characters. While the narrative of the racial 'other' is projected onto white characters, the issue of anti-Irish racism in British reimaginings is not explicitly addressed but remains implicit in the characterisation and treatment of Irish and Irish-coded characters. This can be contrasted with German reimaginings where antisemitism against Jewish characters is explicitly and extensively addressed as race-coded and a consequence of the racialisation of Jewishness in antisemitic discourse. Notably, the racialisation of Jewish characters in German productions like *Das Adlon* serves to engender narrative tropes like the race-coded 'permission plot' between Jewish and Non-Jewish characters, which is mirrored for example in the racialisation of Irish or Irish-coded characters in British reimaginings. It can be concluded that race coding is purposefully employed in both British and German productions as a device to romanticise and fetishise 'otherness,' racialisation, and persecution.

As an example of an overtly politicised figure in contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century, I have focused my analysis on the figure of the *Mitläufer* as embodying the theme of guilt, which emerges as a leitmotif in German cultural productions set before, during, or after the National Socialist era. As an embodiment of German historical guilt, the figure of the *Mitläufer* in German reimaginings also functions as a female allegory personifying Germany as a seduced, naïve victim, duped into endorsing and aiding the National Socialists. Therefore, the figure of the *Mitläufer* can be interpreted as controversially blurring the lines between the narrative of victims and perpetrators. The popularity of the *Mitläufer* as protagonist and sympathetic character in contemporary reimaginings can be seen as promoting a revisionist image of German *Mitläufer* as co-victims rather than co-perpetrators. At the same time, the leitmotif of German guilt is latent in reimaginings set before the NS era, coded in other forms of guilt, namely criminal culpability and religious expiation. It can moreover be concluded that character coding in contemporary reimaginings is essentially a performance of contemporary, sometimes anachronistic, ideas and politics transferred into and projected onto figures of the past. The figure of the *Mitläufer* appears as a performer of German historical guilt, often coded as a female allegory of Germany, representing an increasingly blurred distinction between the figure of the victim and the perpetrator in postmillennial discourse. Complex characterisation removes the clear-cut moral categories of victims, perpetrators, or resistance fighters, making the morally ambiguous figure of the *Mitläufer* a popular trope in German reimaginings.

Lastly, in my analysis of character types in contemporary reimaginings, I have focused on the fictional appropriation of the contemporary witness as a representative of oral history and personification of the communicative memory of the twentieth century. In both British and German reimaginings, fictional contemporary witnesses appear as characters and overt homodiegetic or autodiegetic narrators who mediate between the narrative set in the past and the viewer in the present. The figure, it can be concluded, thereby fulfils both an approximating and a distancing function. The contemporary witness appears in reimaginings as a performer of memory and interpreter of the past rather than as factual historical source. By emphasising the performative nature of the contemporary witness account, they appear as storytellers, representing the nexus between oral history and the oral tradition of storytelling. As an embodiment of the communicative memory of the twentieth century, the figure of the contemporary witness is moreover coded as a keeper of rare and elusive treasures, whose memories are commodified goods. As a presence in voiceover or a frame narrative, fictional contemporary witnesses provide a contextualising and annotating commentary on events, characters, and socio-historical realities within the embedded narrative, akin to a Greek chorus.

In the absence of a contemporary witness character, for example, in *Downton Abbey*, traces of this choric voice can be found in characters within the narrative who provide informative or critical commentary for the benefit of other characters and the viewer. Reimaginings like *Downton Abbey* have no narrative authority to mediate or act as a mitigating and expiating figure but rather allow the viewer a voyeuristic glance into the intimate spheres of the dollhouse-like setting of the past, casting the viewer in the role of a direct ‘witness’ to the past. However, the ‘memory’ reimagined in *Downton Abbey* is as embellished, subjective, and falsified by nostalgia as that of a contemporary witness account. The fictional contemporary witness carries the burden of memory as an object of commemoration, guilt and trauma, allowing viewers to enjoy the past as entertainment in the position of an audience to a storyteller.

At the beginning of this thesis, I posed the overriding question of how contemporary reimaginings of the early twentieth century are informed by and coded in post-millennial political and cultural contexts. Assuming that current political discourse is both explicitly and implicitly inscribed in popular cultural productions set in the past, I have focused on latent narrative content indicative of a conservative political turn. These elements may be apparent to some viewers while remaining imperceptible to

others. One example of this is the coding of gender politics and feminism in reimaginings of the past. In James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) the topic of feminism is both coded and explicitly addressed, indicating the overt influence of Third Wave feminism on 1990s popular culture that informed the film's original writing. Titanic's deconstructive coding and critique of patriarchal structures projected onto the historical setting exemplifies a pre-millennial approach to heritage and historical reimagining. In contrast, contemporary reimaginings like *Downton Abbey* adhere to a postfeminist trend in popular cultural productions that reinforce traditional gender roles and prioritise romance and marriage plots over narratives of women's emancipation.

At the end of my close analysis of settings, narrative frameworks, imagery, stylistic devices, and subject matters that drive the story and characters in these film and series productions. I conclude that while British reimaginings are confident in their romanticisation and santisation of historical reality, such romanticisation or nostalgic idealisation is prevented in German reimaginings by adherence to the historical reality of emergent National Socialism. The roots of fascism and Nazism are, for instance, prefigured and foreshadowed in Prussianism as an ideological background that informs German reimaginings like *Das Adlon*, *The White Ribbon,* or *Charité*, and functions as a shorthand for villainy and coded prototypical fascism.

Despite evident differences in the selection of memory and historical reality presented in British and German reimaginings, several shared conventions and cultural codes can be observed in both British and German productions. For example, shows such as *Downton Abbey* employ stock settings, characters, and plots that are identifiably similar to the formulaic and schematic plots and characters of the German Heimatfilm genre. Since *Downton Abbey* and its cognates can be categorised as part of the British heritage genre, I have also analysed possible intersections and likenesses between the British heritage film and the German Heimatfilm genres, based on the premise that genre-specific and nation-specific codes of the heritage and Heimatfilm genres are ingrained in contemporary reimaginings of the twentieth century.

The shared cultural codes in British and German reimaginings encompass, for example, moral codes. There is a notable similarity between the so-called 'Prussian virtues' – order, punctuality, loyalty, and stoicism – and the values and 'virtues' upheld as inherently 'British' in reimaginings, connected to the concept of the 'stiff upper lip' as a marker of British stoicism. While these virtues are positively connoted in British reimaginings, such as in *Downton Abbey*, as a past moral code that prizes loyalty,

order, and stoicism, the ‘Prussian virtues’ are negatively connoted in German reimaginings, linked to harbingers of militarism and proto fascism.

It can be surmised that the shared cultural codes in British and German reimaginings often follow simplistic patterns of binary oppositions or dichotomies, connoted as positive or negative, including culturally coded mythic loci like heaven and hell, Arcadia and Hades, and the *locus amoenus* and *locus terribilis*. Additionally, both British and German reimaginings employ cultural codes that pertain to spatiality within the house, where the vertical dichotomy between heaven and the underworld is coded as ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs,’ which also underscores the delineation between that which is on the surface and what is repressed. The presence of the repressed in coded and latent content of contemporary reimaginings reflects both what is historically repressed about the past and what is repressed in contemporary political discourse. Aleida Assmann’s reference to the latency of the unspeakable past as fully repressed yet remaining under the surface of collective memory (cf. Assmann 44) can be cited as a connection between the spatial coding of the repressed in contemporary reimaginings and the presence of historical guilt, trauma, and memory beneath the surface of popular cultural representations of the past, where the subtext is often located in subterranean spaces of ships or basements. Furthermore, the culturally coded dichotomy between inside and outside emerges as a central motif to reflect contemporary political and socio-cultural anxieties regarding a desire for enclosure and fears of invasion and contamination, particularly in a British, but increasingly also in a German context.

Finally, it can be concluded that contemporary British and German reimaginings, whether deliberately or not, utilise underlying content, cultural codes, and character coding, to project present-day political and socio-cultural issues onto an era set in the past. The crises of the early twenty-first century, such as the Great Recession of 2007-2009, the subsequent European debt crisis, and the refugee crisis of 2015, can be discerned in both spatial and character coding in films and series set a century ago. The rise of Islamophobia and antimuslim sentiment since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, along with prejudice against migrants from Africa and the Near East, is evident in the portrayals of outsiders and foreigners as villains, predators, and criminals in both British and German reimaginings. In British reimaginings like *Downton Abbey*, the emphasis on interiority, self-sufficiency, and insulation from external forces reflects the ongoing conflicts of interest between the United Kingdom and the European Union, culminating in the Brexit referendum in 2016 and the UK’s departure from the European

Union in 2020. While it is strongly suggested that the success of *Downton Abbey* is a product of a pro-Brexit Britain, it is also worth speculating whether the UK's decision to leave the EU might be, in part, a by-product of a post-*Downton Abbey* Britain.

The influence of current events and contemporary political contexts on reimaginings and popular cultural productions is evident. The question of whether and how these productions and their reinterpretations of the past may affect contemporary politics, socio-cultural mindsets, and collective memory has become increasingly relevant in today's climate of resurging populism. The German series *Babylon Berlin* frequently forges both overt and underlying connections between the history of the Weimar Republic and the social-political realities of present-day Germany. The integration of politicised buzzwords like 'Lügenpresse' in the historical dialogue of the series resonates strongly with contemporary audiences who recognise this phrase from government-critical and far-right protests in recent years. Conversely, it remains to be assessed whether and how *Babylon Berlin* may influence contemporary popular memory of the Weimar Republic, an era that saw the rise of National Socialism.

On December 7, 2022, members of the Patriotic Union (Patriotische Union) – a far-right group comprising members of the so-called 'Reichsbürger' movement, far-right activists, a former AfD MP, and former military and police personnel – were charged and arrested on suspicions of conspiring to carry out a coup d'état to overthrow the German government and reinstate the German Empire of 1871, with Heinrich VIII, Prinz Reuß as its leader. This 'Reichsbürger putsch' is strikingly reminiscent of the plot in *Babylon Berlin* (episode 2.06) involving a fictionalised coup attempt by the 'Schwarze Reichswehr' to overthrow the Weimar Republic and reinstate the German Kaiserreich. Although this plot is largely fictional and set in 1929, the actual Küsterin putsch by the Schwarze Reichswehr took place in the pivotal year of 1923 and may also have inspired the Reuß Group's plans exactly 100 years later, in 2023. Naturally, it can only be speculated whether the fictionalised Schwarze Reichswehr putsch in *Babylon Berlin* and its reimagining of the Küsterin putsch served as inspiration for the Reichsbürger movement and its coup d'état fantasies. However, such parallels demonstrate the growing influence of fictionalisation of historical reality and its perception in contemporary political consciousness, which may, in turn, inspire populist revisionist fantasies.

Contemporary reimaginings reflect a noticeable resurgence in conservative, right-wing and even far-right politics, often coded through a celebration of traditionalism, nationalism, and patriotism. Accusations of revisionism in the reimagining of the early twentieth century weigh particularly heavily on German history-themed productions. The portrayal of Germans as naïve *Mitläufer* and co-victims in these reimaginings contribute to a distorted perception of German culpability and responsibility in discourse surrounding the Holocaust and Second World War within popular cultural memory. The gravity of this issue is highlighted by instances such as AfD politician Alexander Gauland's 2018 speech before the Bundestag, in which he claims that "Hitler and the Nazis are a mere bird dropping in our 1,000-year-long history."[98] Gauland's controversial statement highlights the growing problem of dismissing Nazi atrocities and the increasing acceptance of the National Socialist past in German society. This trend towards revisionism, and even positive identification with the NS era, parallels the rise of far-right movements like Pegida and the growing representation of the AfD party in German parliaments. The AfD's significant success in the 2024 state elections in Saxony and Thuringia, where they won 30,6% and 32,8% of vote respectively, further evidences the rising tolerance and support for the far-right party and its populist and xenophobic politics.

Following a series of far-right riots in Dublin in late 2023, the United Kingdom experienced a summer of far-right violence, rioting, and public unrest in July and August 2024. These events were incited by false claims that a knife attacker was a Muslim asylum seeker, when in fact, the individual was a 17-year-old British citizen of Rwandan descent. Incidents like this underscore the prevalence of xenophobic and antimuslim prejudice, which is perpetuated by current media, including social media and popular cultural productions like *Downton Abbey,* with their emphasis on enclosure and the portrayal of outsiders and foreigners – such as the Turkish character Kemal Pamuk – as criminals, villains and predators.

In German reimaginings, the blurring of lines between German victimhood and perpetratorship through the figure of the *Mitläufer* seems to encourage a muddling of the historical assessment of the NS era, which plays into the hands of far-right proponents. Conversely, the *Mitläufer* figure serves as a timelessly relevant character re-

[98] Aber, liebe Freunde, Hitler und die Nazis sind nur ein Vogelschiss in unserer über 1000-jährigen Geschichte. (afdbundestag.de/wortlaut-der-umstrittenen-passage-der-rede-von-alexander-gauland/)

flecting anxieties about the large number of covert far-right supporters who have enabled the rise of the AfD party in recent elections. The increasingly diluted and softened criticism implicit in the ambiguous and sympathetic portrayal of *Mitläufer* and even Nazi characters as co-victims rather than perpetrators in contemporary reimaginings aligns with the revisionist narrative propagated by AfD politicians like Björn Höcke. In a 2017 speech, Höcke alleged that due to the "systematic reeducation" after 1945, "there were no more German victims, only German perpetrators."[99] He further criticises the negative portrayal of German history in education and memory culture, claiming that "German history is being maligned and ridiculed."[100] Höcke dismisses the efforts of German memory culture and Vergangenheitsbewältigung (engl. coming to terms with the past) as "stultifying"[101] and calls for a "180 degree turning point" in German cultural memory politics that would prioritise "the great accomplishments of our ancestors" over the responsibility for two world wars and the Holocaust.

As one of the most vocal figures of the newly emergent far-right in Germany, Höcke appeals to members of the Junge Alternative (Young Alternative) in Dresden, proclaiming, "Yes, I want you all as new Prussians," and urging a return to "Prussian virtues."[102] This rhetoric affirms the link between Prussianism and far-right ideology, serving as a coded shorthand for Nazism in many German reimaginings. Höcke also praises the rebuilding of the former imperial palace (Stadtschloss) in Berlin, viewing it as the emplacement of "the spirit of a new, honest, vital, deeply rooted and self-confident patriotism,"[103] while simultaneously denigrating the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europa as a "monument of shame."[104] German history and sites of memory are thus to be reappropriated and reframed to suit the narrative of the new far-right to

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99 Und zusammen mit der dann nach 1945 begonnenen systematischen Umerziehung hat man das auch fast geschafft. Deutsche Opfer gab es nicht mehr, sondern es gab nur noch deutsche Täter. (www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/gemutszustand-eines-total-besiegten-volkes-5488489.html)

100 Und anstatt unsere Schüler in den Schulen mit dieser Geschichte in Berührung zu bringen, wird die Geschichte, die deutsche Geschichte, mies und lächerlich gemacht. (ibid.)

101 Die Vergangenheitsbewältigung als gesamtgesellschaftliche Daueraufgabe, die lähmt ein Volk. Liebe Freunde, Recht hatte er, der Franz Josef Strauß! (ibid.)

102 Ich möchte, dass ihr euch im Dienst verzehrt. Ja, ich möchte euch als neue Preußen. Ja, liebe Freunde, ich weise euch einen langen […] aber die preußischen Tugenden, die tun uns allen gut, egal ob wir Thüringer sind, Brandenburger sind oder Bayern sind. (ibid.)

103 Es geht darum, den neu entstandenen Fassaden, hier in Dresden, aber auch Potsdam, und in Berlin wird gerade auch das Stadtschloss wieder aufgebaut – Gott sei dank wird es wieder aufgebaut – es geht darum, diesen neu entstandenen Fassaden einen neuen, würdigen Geist einzuhauchen. Es ist der Geist eines neuen, ehrlichen, vitalen, tief begründeten und selbstbewussten Patriotismus. (ibid)

104 Wir Deutschen – und ich rede jetzt nicht von euch Patrioten, die sich hier heute versammelt haben – wir Deutschen, also unser Volk, sind das einzige Volk der Welt, das sich ein Denkmal der Schande in das Herz seiner Hauptstadt gepflanzt hat. (ibid.)

re-tell the story of Germany in the early twentieth century into a fictitious tale of heroism, greatness and self-victimisation.

While contemporary German reimaginings portray the pre-NS era as starkly realist, crises-ridden, and fraught with conflict and political unrest – thus resonating with contemporary audiences and their anxieties – this approach may also lead to the perception of history as an inevitable, repetitive cycle. The hubris of the 'Reuß Group,' for instance, appears rooted in the assumption that present-day Germany mirrors the Weimar Republic's era of upheaval, during which paramilitary groups had a realistic chance of overturning the political system and reverting democracy to an authoritarian Kaiserreich.

Fictional engagements with the past, such as the contemporary reimaginings analysed in this thesis, illustrate how a society or nation's outlook on historical events and realities can shape its popular cultural portrayals of history. More pertinently, this outlook is, in turn, shaped by contemporary political and ideological forces that influence the creation as well as the reception of these productions. Keeping a closer look at the shifting dynamics that underlie both British and German memory culture – particularly as influenced by popular cultural media in the current climate of growing populism and historical revisionism – will become increasingly vital in the twenty-first century. While both Brexit advocates, like *Downton Abbey* creator Julian Fellowes, and AfD politicians emphasise the importance of heritage and 'Heimat' values as a panacea for the social and political ailments of the postmillennial era, their nostalgia for a bygone time of simple structures and patriarchal order can and must only exist within the realms of historical fiction and revisionist fantasy.

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