LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

The Shifting Geography of Masculinity in *Death and Venice* and 'The Dead'

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Abstract:
This article suggests that both James Joyce's 'The Dead' (1914) and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912) can be read as explorations of 'geographies of masculinity' and 'imaginative geographies' shaped by imperialist and patriarchal cultures prior to the First World War. These classic modernist literary texts reveal how closely the gender identities / performances of their central male characters are related to their deeply engrained, culturally conditioned imaginative, emotional as well as political geographies. They also trace the developing identity crises of the central characters in terms of gender, geography, politics, and the natural environment. The similarity in the descriptions of landscape and seascape at the conclusions of the two stories point to similar resolutions of the crises of these middle-aged men involving similar shifts in both geographical and political outlook. This may be seen as part of the wider changing landscape of gender in the early twentieth century and of the gradual collapse of a modern, *male*, bourgeois sense of self, shown in these pieces of fiction to be subtly but intricately related to a sense of human *and* environmental geography and a *Weltanschauung* based on mastery and the maintenance of (illusory) boundaries.

Keywords: Joyce's 'The Dead'; *Death in Venice*; geography of masculinity; cultural imperialism; gender and environment.

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Introduction

It is perhaps a strange coincidence that when Thomas Mann was finding inspiration for his most famous novella, *Death in Venice,* in Venice in the Summer of 1911, James Joyce was living not too far away in Trieste, and that his most famous long short story 'The Dead', completed a few years earlier, also refers to death, love, and geography. Both writers explore the subtle, shifting, intellectual and emotional landscapes of their central male characters. Joyce's subject is a self-conscious, middle-aged inhabitant of a provincial capital within the British empire; Mann's focus is on an equally self-conscious, conflicted scion of the German imperial establishment of the early twentieth century. 'The Dead' and *Death in Venice* have also, of course, both been adapted for the screen in extraordinarily evocative films by renowned directors, depicting, respectively, the cultural milieu of lower-middle-class early-twentieth-century Dublin and the seaside resort of wealthy international tourists on the Venice Lido of the 'belle époque' (Huston 1987; Visconti 1971). If the screen versions evoke above all a sense of nostalgia for a bygone age from the perspective of the late twentieth century, the original fictional stories written by Joyce and Mann before the First World War perhaps reveal more of the complexities of the time and of the central male characters, specifically in relation to the 'geography of masculinity' (see Riley 2021). The early-twentieth-century fiction can be read as explorations of imaginative geographies, emotional geographies, *and* environmental geographies of men shaped by empire and patriarchy (see Connell 2005; Daniels 2011; Latour 2018; Little 2019; Said 1978).

The fact that the conclusions of both these great stories describe natural environments (the snow 'general all over Ireland' and the mist-covered waters of the Adriatic) where boundaries are significantly dissolved may indicate some similarity in the individual stories of these middle-aged, middle-class men. They could both be said to be undergoing a kind of mid-life crisis – as Edith Bauer (2015: 22) suggests in the case of the hero of *Death in Venice.* What is especially interesting is that these crises are related in both stories to the men's changing senses of geography, of the natural environment and of their place in it. Their stories can be read as part of an ongoing questioning of a nineteenth-century, patriarchal model of masculinity concerned with mastery and control of both self and environment (see also Cheng 2006; Connell 2005; Kane 1999; Kiberd 1985; Mishra 2018; Showalter 1992; Theweleit 1980).

Geography is clearly relevant in both stories particularly in the sense of Edward Said's notion of imaginative geographies (cited by Daniels as significant for human geographers in their study of the geographical imagination) (Daniels 2011; Said 1978). Both central characters are shown to be subtly informed by (and reproducing) such imaginative geographies shaped by the ideologies of imperial powers prior to the First World War. The spaces in which these men have matured are spaces 'produced' (in Lefebvre's sense) by empires and their outlook *and* very sense of orientation (a 'comprehension of spaces now subordinate to the master space […] of the Empire and the world') reflects that (Lefebvre 1991: 111). It is clear, for instance, that they both have underlying ideological assumptions about simple points of the compass: the West of Ireland could be said to function in Gabriel's imaginative geography in 'The Dead' rather as the South and East in Aschenbach's in *Death in Venice.* The similarity results from parallel attitudes shaped by

empire. For just as, in Said's words, 'European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self' (3), British imperialist culture tended to regard Ireland similarly, assigning Ireland the role of 'England's unconscious' (Kiberd 1996). That these characters' imaginative geographies are not just political and ideological but also 'emotional geographies' (see Little 2019) and deeply personal is borne out in the great, subtle, detailed literary explorations of the subjectivities of these fictional male characters produced by (and producing) these spaces at a particular historical juncture.

The passages at the end of both stories relating scenes of the natural landscape or seascape to the shifting emotions of the characters suggest there has been a close connection between their imaginative and emotional geographies and a certain attitude to the natural environment. Aspects of Bruno Latour's critique of modernity in terms of attitudes to space, the environment and to human beings are drawn on here as relevant to the situations of the modern fictional characters. Latour (2018) clearly puts the contemporary climate crisis in the context of a modern attitude to the earth / soil itself as well as a history of imperial conquest and 'land grabs' the part of 'the peoples who had decided to "modernize" the planet', subjecting others to the 'impact of the "great discoveries," of empires, modernization, development, and finally globalization' (7). It will be suggested that just as the 'imaginative geographies' of the two fictional characters have been shaped by histories of empires, so also have their own environmental geographies that are shown to shift in the course of the stories.

Mark Riley opened a recent article referring to the 'burgeoning scholarship on the geographies of masculinities' highlighting 'the complex and nuanced ways that masculinities are (re)constructed in relation to other entities, such as material places and artefacts, social norms, and particular geographical contexts' (2021: 420). This is indeed precisely what this article will explore in relation to James Joyce's story 'The Dead' and Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice*. The conclusions of the two stories perhaps even bear out Riley's point that while masculinities are often seen as 'developed relationally to places and other people', they are also 'relational' to 'natural and non-human rhythms' (431). The especially rhythmic final sentences of 'The Dead' could be said to indicate an acceptance of this relation.

The study of masculinities and of masculinities in literature has, of course, a long history going back to the 1980s and 1990s very often inspired by the rise of feminist and gender studies (see Boone and Cadden, 1990, Connell 2005; Connell and Pearse 2015; Kiberd 1985; Maugue 1987; Showalter 1992). The focus has frequently been on the cultural construction of masculinities in particular geographical and historical contexts such as late-nineteenth-century imperialism or the rise of fascism in Germany (see Kane 1999; Kaplan 1990; Michel 2019; Mosse 1985; Phillips 1995; Theweleit 1980). As Connell succinctly puts it, 'masculinities are not only shaped by the process of imperial expansion, they are active in that process and help to shape it' (2005: 185). This essay follows in this tradition, understanding masculinities (and identities) as culturally, socially, historically and geographically constructed and indeed shaped by as well as shaping the 'process of imperial expansion'. Gender and identity are also, as Butler (1999) pointed out, *performed* and

repeatedly performed. It is worth noting that the central characters of these two stories are both in their own ways literally *performers* (Gustav as established writer / artist, Gabriel as intellectual speechmaker) as well as uneasily attempting to maintain certain performances of masculinity. This article will demonstrate how the cultural construction and performance of masculinities are revealed to relate to geography in these two early-twentieth-century pieces of short fiction.

In the following the two stories will first be looked at separately in terms of the treatment of geography and masculinity; the focus will then turn to the similarities in the ends of the stories and what may be drawn from these.

Gabriel Conroy changes direction

To (rather blasphemously) alter the often-repeated phrase of Seamus Heaney, 'The Dead' could be said to be a story in which Joyce makes *gender* and *geography* rhyme. It might not seem so obvious in a story all set in Dublin on one winter's evening, but geography, gender and tourist travel feature here – and significantly. One might say the whole story turns around the question of where Gabriel Conroy wants to go on holiday and reaches its climax in a hotel room. A great deal hinges on points of the compass and the particular direction of the journey planned. Geography, as Ingersoll writes, 'takes on gender implications' here (1996: 151).

For while the entire story is set during and just after a musical evening on the feast of the Epiphany in turn-of-the-century Dublin, other places figure in Gabriel's imagined geography. His attitude to the West of his own country is shown to change as a result of something he learns from his wife, Gretta, whose memory has been stirred by a particular song about the West of Ireland heard at the end of the party.

Early in the story, Gabriel's dancing partner, Miss Ivors, having just accused Gabriel of being a 'west Briton', suggests that he and his wife might go to the Aran Islands in the West of Ireland for their holiday, but Gabriel replies that he is more interested in a trip to France, Belgium or Germany, 'partly to keep in touch with the languages' (Joyce 2006: 164). Miss Ivors asks him: 'And haven't you your own language to keep in touch with, Irish?' (164). Her questions and her accusation that he was a 'West Briton' are, of course, pointedly political in the context of the Irish cultural revival and early-twentieth-century Irish nationalism, which amounted, after all, to an attempt to change the then map and geography of the British Empire. Gabriel becomes increasingly irritated in his replies, declaring first 'if it comes to that you know, Irish is not my language' and then bursting out with 'O, to tell you the truth, […] I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!' (165).

Gabriel's travel plans are in keeping with his sense of himself as a cosmopolitan intellectual, a man of the world trapped in a provincial backwater – and chime with the sense we get of the young Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as well as of the young Joyce himself. Just before the end of that novel, Stephen, about to depart full of confidence for continental Europe, writes scathingly in his journal of a fellow student's trip to the West of Ireland and his meeting with an old man there who spoke Irish. Stephen's tone changes rather suddenly as he writes of his 'fear' of this figure: 'I fear him. I fear his redrimmed horny eyes. It is with him I must struggle all through this night

till day come, till he or I lie dead, gripping him by the sinewy throat till....' (Joyce 2007: 223). The violence of the emotion expressed is, as Kiberd rightly suggests, 'near hysteria' (1996: 333); it is extraordinary and abrupt, rather as Gabriel's sudden angry outburst to Miss Ivors in 'The Dead' also in relation to the West of Ireland. Richard Ellmann comments:

> during most of the story [of "The Dead"], the west of Ireland is connected in Gabriel's mind with a dark and rather painful primitivism, an aspect of his country which he has steadily abjured by going off to the continent. The west is savagery; to the east and south lie people who drink wine and wear galoshes (1983: 248).

Travel for Gabriel, as Ingersoll writes, 'is a metaphor for the pursuit of power, here the power of civilization in the dominant culture' (1996: 149). Gabriel is only interested in travelling 'eastward, toward the realms of power and sophistication'. His outlook in fact seems to epitomise a certain widespread understanding of what it meant to be *modern* that Bruno Latour neatly sums up thus: 'To progress in modernity was to tear oneself away from the primordial soil and set out for the Great Outside […]' (2018: 71). One could forget the Aran Islands, then.

Gabriel's wife, Gretta, however – like Joyce's own partner, Nora – comes from the West of Ireland herself and is interested in a trip back. It is the singing of a song about the West ('The Lass of Aughrim') at the end of the musical evening that brings back Gretta's memories of her past in Galway and of the boy who died for the love of her. And it is hearing Gretta's story about her past in the West and her emotional life before (and separate from) Gabriel that finally shatters Gabriel's self-confidence, based so much, it seems, on denial and repression – of Gretta's otherness, of the past, of the rural West of Ireland, of real emotional connections with others around him, and of death, including his own human mortality. As Ingersoll writes, the West for Gabriel appears to signify 'the precivilized, the natural, the "feminine," perhaps even Freud's "dark continent," cited by Irigaray, given that there lie powerlessness and vulnerability' (1996: 149).

Gabriel's sense of identity as man of the world, his sense of his place in the world *and* in the small community gathering on the Feast of the Epiphany of turn-of-the-century Dublin, is shown in the story to be somewhat shaky from the start. It is related not only to his own personal sense of geography (a political sense of what parts of the world are more important than others), but to his gender performance too, which is also revealed to be less assured than he would like to admit. If his arrival is so eagerly anticipated by his elderly aunts hosting the party so that he appears as the star of the show (the man everyone seems to look up to, the man to carve the goose and to give the all-important, genial after-dinner speech) his confident masculine exterior is shown to be a rather thin-skinned mask that is easily bruised and pierced – especially in his encounters with some of the women at the party. From his 'colour[ing]' at the failure of his awkward attempt at condescending small talk with Lily, the maid, to his irritation with Miss Ivors, to the final blow in his conversation with Gretta, it is, as Marilyn French puts it, 'women who confound Gabriel throughout "The Dead"' (1978: 466; see also Ingersoll 1996: 146 and Norris 2003).

Yet his sense of himself appears to largely consist in a sense of superiority over all around - and this is the role he attempts to perform and maintain. He 'must be superior or he is nothing,' French writes. Gabriel may indeed be intellectually superior to those around him, but he has 'come to equate intellectual superiority with human superiority', which is, of course, a mistake, for, as French so pithily remarks, 'there is no such thing as human superiority' (1978: 466). However, this is how Gabriel apparently needs to see himself as a man, stereotypically equating masculinity with power - and power, by implication, over a feminized other. He feels called upon to demonstrate that superiority from the moment of his arrival at the dinner *almost* to the end. Even the touching moment when Gabriel gazes up admiringly at Gretta standing on the stairs - listening so intently to the 'distant music' of 'The Lass of Aughrim' being sung inside and thinking of how he might paint her 'if he were a painter', of what she might be 'a symbol of' and giving the scene a title '*Distant Music*' - can be seen as continuing the 'Western patriarchal tradition' of the 'aesthetic objectification of women as art and symbol, as object rather than subject' (Cheng 2006: 357; see also Norris 2003: 219). If imagining himself performing the role of a painter is how Gabriel experiences and expresses (to himself) his love, the more lustful aspect of his sexual identity is expressed later, once they get to the hotel bedroom, in a desire to be 'master' of his wife's 'strange mood', to 'crush her body against his, to overmaster her' (Norris 2003: 189; on this see Cheng 2006: 361).

In fact, Gabriel's faltering attempts to perform a role of confident, masculine superiority, control and mastery throughout can be said to reveal an interest in maintaining power over the (feminized) other that is not only stereotypically patriarchal, but a feature of imperial rule too. Having reminded readers of Joyce's own critical attitude toward all kinds of power (social as well as political, imperial and religious), Vincent Cheng (2006) suggests Joyce was offering in 'The Dead' a critique of both empire and patriarchy and gives a reading of Gabriel Conroy as an unwitting colonial collaborator in both, 'a well-meaning patriarch who is *almost* a domestic tyrant […] a potentially oppressive patriarch in symbolic collaboration with the ruling masters of the English colonial empire' (348). Gabriel did not know how to respond to Miss Ivors' charge that he was a 'west Briton' and even declared that he was 'sick of [his] *own* country' after all. His attitude to the West of Ireland, to the Irish language, to his own country, to those around him, to the women around him, and to his wife are all of a piece with an interest in identifying with (and maintaining) power, superiority, mastery, an interest that is of course shared – and inculcated - by both empire and patriarchy.

In such ideological regimes mastery and superiority are to be demonstrated / performed not just over the other, but over the 'self' being shaped ('disciplined' in Foucault's term) by the regimes concerned. Just as patriarchy trains 'boys' *not to be* 'girls', empire forcefully encourages colonial subjects (as well as its own subjects) to deny and repress at least half their potential as human beings (and project that upon the other). Furthermore, collusion in any system of power and domination involves domination perhaps first and foremost of the potential self /selves. One might thus argue that Gabriel in 'The Dead' has, in Frantz Fanon's phrase, been taught to renounce 'his blackness, his jungle' (2008: 9). Gabriel, the colonial intellectual, in fact exemplifies the situation Fanon describes:

> Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (2008: 9)

Fanon's insight is surely precisely what is suggested by the end of Joyce's great story, where the dead of 'The Dead' come to evoke all that 'local cultural originality' Gabriel has been trained to regard as inferior and to *kill* within his *own* consciousness.

He is a colonial subject who has been divided against himself along the lines Fanon suggests are typical. Indeed, in an article on 'Postcolonial Masculinity and Gender Trauma' in Joyce's work, Christine van Boheemen-Saaf refers to W.E.B. Du Bois writing about the 'double-consciousness' of the American Negro as she explores the complications of the 'contradictory gender situation of Irish subaltern subjectivity' (2001: 223). Joyce's characters exemplify the 'peculiar alienated or self-conscious situation of the masculine colonial subject who always, simultaneously sees himself from two perspectives' (224). Gabriel in 'The Dead', she suggests, becomes aware of his 'alienation from himself' towards the end of the narrative. The actual end may however indicate something more than a 'study of failing masculinity' (226), a term van Boheemen-Saaf applies to both *Dubliners* and A *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The end of 'The Dead' appears to offer some resolution of the tension of the divided consciousness of Gabriel Conroy.

In Gabriel, Joyce could be said to critique, as Mooney writes, 'Irish masculinity's easy reliance on an illusory superiority supplied by patriarchy' (2017: 243); Gabriel is indeed one of the male characters in *Dubliners* who 'have lazily drawn on a colonialized model of the English gentleman' (243). But if 'the demands of performing as a gentleman, in keeping with English standards of muscular Christianity, are repeatedly shown [in *Dubliners*] as too steep for his middling, middle-class Irish men' and 'their colonial status and Catholic subservience impede fulfilling expectations of heroic manliness' (220), perhaps one could say that Gabriel's story ultimately subverts all expectations (whether English or Irish) of 'heroic masculinity' altogether.

Gabriel is no real domestic or colonial tyrant. He is portrayed much more sympathetically than that. Readers get an insight into his vulnerability as well as his irritability through Joyce's use of free indirect discourse. His mask of genial superiority mastery and control has been shown to be slipping all along, right from his sense of failure in his encounter with Lily at the start. His lustful desire to 'master' his wife's 'strange mood' and 'overmaster' her is completely dissipated by Gretta's revelations about the sources of that 'strange mood' – her memory of Michael Furey, the boy she thinks died for love of her in the West of Ireland before she met Gabriel. It was that she was reminded of as she listened so intently to 'The Lass of Aughrim' (Aughrim being not only a town in Galway, but also, as Cheng points out, the site of the defeat of the Irish 'a year after the battle of the Boyne that finally sealed English domination of Ireland' [359]). All sense of power, superiority, mastery and control dissolves as Gabriel comes to finally recognise Gretta as another independent human being with a mind and a past of her own, not to be 'mastered'

at all. It is of course also appropriate that her story relates to the West of Ireland, the very 'jungle' – to use Fanon's word again – over which Gabriel had thought to maintain his superiority.

From an initial sense of 'vague terror […] as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world' (191) his emotions shift into a much gentler state. The famous closing paragraphs of the story reflect *his* 'strange mood' as Gretta falls asleep and Gabriel apparently relinquishes all that interest in mastery, superiority, and control as well as the repression of the self, of association with the West and his 'own country', of the feminine, the past *and* 'the dead' that characterised his earlier self. For he had previously, as Christine van Boheemen-Saaf puts it, 'patronizingly project[ed]' the 'suppressed consciousness of his own provincialism' on his 'environment' (2001: 228). If he had formerly attempted to define himself by declaring what he was *not* ('provincial') and by drawing clear boundaries between himself and that 'other', this new mood involves a different sense of personal *and* geographical space.

Gabriel's shifting sense of space is personal, emotional and related to his sense of gender identity, but it is also political in terms of his attitude to the nation *and* environmental, as it involves a shift in his attitude to the natural, rural environment of the West of Ireland on the part of a would-be modern, cosmopolitan city slicker.

One could perhaps compare Gabriel's disorientation and re-orientation to Bruno Latour's discussion of a contemporary (early-twenty-first-century) shift in the sense of the space of the earth and in attitudes to the natural environment. Latour outlines the disorientation involved in the contemporary sense of space and geography thus:

> 'One could distinguish between "physical" geography and "human" geography as if it were a matter of two layers, one superimposed upon the other. But how can we say where we are if the place "on" or "in" which we are located begins to react to our actions, turns against us, encloses us, dominates us, demands something of us and carries us along in its path? […] As long as the earth seemed stable, we could speak of *space* and locate ourselves within that space and on a portion of territory that we claimed to occupy.' (Latour 2018: 41)

That claim to 'occupy territory' and the accompanying attitudes to the earth / soil have also historically so often had a significant gender component, as has been pointed out by so many feminist thinkers (Latour 2018: 72).

It may seem a bit of a leap from Joyce's *Dubliners* to Latour's *Down to Earth*, but Gabriel Conroy's disorientation and re-orientation at the end of 'The Dead' is not just distantly analogous to the contemporary environmental situation: it is a small part of a long, slow process of shifting attitudes to power, mastery, gender, human, social, *and* physical geography, to the natural environment and the earth itself that is, of course, very much still relevant. It is thus entirely appropriate that 'The Dead' concludes with an evocation of a natural landscape, and one that is not surveyed from any position of mastery.

As Gabriel thinks of his wife's dead lover, the foreseeable death of his elderly aunts, of death in general as well as his own mortality, his 'soul […] approach[es] that region

where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. […] His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling' (194). As he sleepily becomes aware that snow is falling outside the window and thinks of newspaper reports of snow being 'general all over Ireland', stretching all the way beyond the 'dark mutinous Shannon waves' to the West, it seems as if the snow-covered landscape reflects his new sense of everything (the West and the East, the living and the dead) being connected. He seems to have arrived at a simple awareness of his own modest part in the world, and that this part has nothing to do with mastery. What is 'disintegrating' here is indeed, as Ingersoll suggests, a certain 'fiction of masculinity' and 'illusion of mastery' (161; see also Cheng 2006: 362) that equated masculinity with dominance. The repetitive references to the image of the snow are accompanied by the alliterative repetition of sounds and the repetitive rhythms of phrases to reinforce and make almost palpable Gabriel's modest acceptance that everything is connected, that there is no mastery, 'no such thing', as French wrote, 'as human superiority'. Gabriel has finally been 'humble[d]' into 'human sympathy' (469). That 'human sympathy' is also a sympathy that relates to the rural land west of the river Shannon and a coming 'down to earth', to cite the translated title of Latour's *Où atterir? Comment s'orienter en politique?*

Gustav von Aschenbach on holiday

There are many parallels between Joyce's story 'The Dead' and Thomas Mann's novella, *Death in Venice*, not just the reference to death in the titles. Mann's novella also involves a treatment of the topics of travel, geography, and gender in the period before the First World War; it also depicts a significant shift in the central character's sense of himself *and* how he relates to his environment, transforming his earlier personal understanding of geography and gender.

If Gabriel's geography was established early on in the apparently incidental discussion of possible holiday destinations with Miss Ivors, the whole plot of *Death in Venice* is more obviously centred on a tourist trip abroad involving the actual crossing of geographical frontiers as well as the re-drawing of a personal (and political) map of the world where boundaries are not so clearly defined.

But then, that was what Gustav von Aschenbach, the middle-aged, established, respected writer *and Bürger*, fully expected to find over the border. The vague, fuzzy geographical area where boundaries are not so fully defined is also aligned with *death* and *the underworld* early on. In other words, this story is concerned not just with boundaries in horizontally conceived space, but with different levels (the vertical stratification of space) – and this on many different levels, as we shall see. Aschenbach's journey abroad is inspired by the brief sighting of an ominous, foreign-looking figure outside a graveyard in Munich – and it seems that Aschenbach [literally 'stream of ashes'] is being irresistibly drawn on by *der Tod* from the start. The lips of the strange foreigner appear not to be long enough to cover his teeth and gums, giving him a skull-like grimace. At the same time this supposedly real figure, with his broad-brimmed hat and stick, is, we may gather, on some level a stand-in for Hermes, *guide to the underworld*, messenger, god of travellers as well as of thieves, *of*

transitions and border crossings, and of literature, poetry and music, and many other things besides (see Kurzke 1991: 122). No grim reaper, Hermes was a young god, often depicted as an attractive, athletic, almost naked youth, in a relaxed, graceful pose, wearing little but a broad-brimmed hat.

Having spotted the Hermes look-a-like outside the graveyard in Munich, Aschenbach first vaguely daydreamed of travelling to some distant, Eastern, exotic, "tropisches Sumpfgebiet" (tropical marshland) (Mann 1977: 9). However, Aschenbach does not need to travel anything like as far as that to experience that exotic sinking feeling that is imagined as the antithesis of upright, everyday, Western, bourgeois, conventional society. For the good German *Bürger* of the early twentieth century, Venice and Italy were exotic enough; the all-important boundary between East and West as well as North and South lay somewhere on the Brenner pass. Beyond this, it seemed, anything could happen, particularly things that were subject to repression at home. Venice is not only closer than the tropics, but it is also, like the marshland of his daydream, somewhere where the boundaries between land and water are somewhat blurred and where 'all that is solid' appears about to melt into *water* (perhaps akin to the 'melting into air' Berman [2010], citing Marx, characterizes as the 'experience of modernity'). It is during his stay in this particularly watery city that the German bourgeois writer-artist comes to an awareness and acceptance of the fluidity of conceptual boundaries, the proximity of supposed opposites and the interplay of different levels. Hermes, the god of transitions, has led him into this. At the same time (and on a different level, one might say) with subtle ironic detachment, Thomas Mann exposes Aschenbach's self-delusion about his ability to maintain some dignified, bourgeois balance in the midst of this disorientating awareness. Mann's irony maintains a delicately balanced critical, yet sympathetic, distance from (and lofty height above) his character's 'decadence' and his fall from respectable bourgeois grace. That was Mann's great subject, after all, since writing *Buddenbrooks* (1901), subtitled *Verfall einer Familie* (*The Decline of a Family*).

Much of the opening of *Death in Venice* is used to impress upon the reader the exaggerated extent to which Aschenbach's whole life up to his trip to Venice has involved the deliberate maintenance of personal 'Selbstzucht' (self-discipline) (10), working to a strict routine and achieving mastery in his art by *mastering* himself. His almost military 'Zucht' is something he is conscious of having inherited from his father's side of the family, from men who had been 'Offiziere, Richter, Verwaltungsfunktionäre,' who 'im Dienste des Königs, des Staates ihr straffes, anständig karges Leben geführt hatten' (11; ['military officers, judges, and government administrators; men who had spent their disciplined, decently austere life in the service of the king and the state.' Mann 1988: 200]). On the other hand, 'rascheres, sinnlicheres Blut' (quicker, more sensual blood) had entered the family with the arrival of his significantly non-German, and literally Bohemian mother with an equally significantly musical background. It is, of course, doubly (or triply) significant that the 'rascheres, sinnlicheres Blut' (clearly more passionate and less disciplined 'blood') is here associated with the foreign and the feminine as well as with music, and by extension with the arts in general. The boundary lines for the moment are clear: the sensual, the realm of feelings and passions *and* the foreign *and* the feminine (as well as the musical) all belong

together in the inferior territory on the far side of the boundary; on *this* side lies true, disciplined, rational, *bürgerlich* German military masculinity.

Indeed, Aschenbach's understanding of masculinity could perhaps be compared with the 'heroic masculinity' of his contemporary, Hans Meyer, the German colonial geographer who 'conquered' Mount Kilimanjaro for Germany and the Kaiser. Meyer, according to Michel, was supremely conscious of his role as a representative of 'German ethos and German civilization' in Africa, and this involved demonstrating a 'strict regime of time and conduct that disciplines and regulates the body and the mind and castes [sic] out all signs of excess and carelessness' (2019: 501).

One might also note the contrast between a strictly *bounded*, austere, heroic masculinity implied above by the word 'straff' (taut, strict…) and the *unbounded* fluidity of the 'rascheres […] Blut' associated here with the feminine, as well as more widely with the watery environment Aschenbach is now being drawn to. Much the same opposition featured prominently in the thinking of conservatively minded German military men around the time of the First World War, as Klaus Theweleit demonstrated in great detail in *Männerphantasien* (1980) (see especially Vol 1: *Frauen Fluten Körper Geschichte*). That association of femininity with fluidity and boundlessness is also a leitmotif of Western patriarchal dualistic thinking that goes back a very long way indeed: the Pythagorean philosophers associated 'the female' with 'darkness', 'plurality' and 'the unlimited' (Guthrie 1967: 36. See also Bourdieu 1998; Cixous 1989; Kane 1999).

Quite in keeping then with this patriarchal geography, shortly before the end Aschenbach condemns himself and all artists as '*Weiber' and* corrupt (66). That is how geography has coincided with gender (and class) in Aschenbach's consciousness heretofore. At one level this has enabled him to know where he supposedly stood and how to orient himself; at another, it has divided him *against himself* and disoriented him. Aschenbach's contradictory situation is thus surely rather similar to Gabriel Conroy's positioning of himself in relation to geography and gender (and class and power) and *his* alignment of the rural West of Ireland and the feminine in his attempts to establish his own *mastery* in 'The Dead'.

If Aschenbach's life up to now has involved the maintenance of strict boundaries and the projection of anything that might distract from the work and the discipline beyond those boundaries (understood as personal, gender and national), his journey *abroad* is really a journey into the underworld, into his own private Venice, the other side, and underside, of his *self*. Mann himself explained, after all, in 1925, that the story 'came into being under the direct influence of Freud' (cited by Beauchamp 2011: 391). That which his hero was inclined to project upon the other – lack of discipline and lack of clear boundaries – is the self he has denied, repressed, mastered, pushed down as well as pushed out, *and* that which he hopes and fully expects to find by foreign travel. Yet, perhaps on a different level of this complex, irony-laden narrative, Mann seemingly redraws those boundaries, endorsing Aschenbach's self-condemnation for erring on the wrong side of the border and succumbing to 'decadence'.

What Aschenbach finds in Venice, of course, is Tadzio, the apparently divinely beautiful, young Polish boy that he falls for on first sight (played in the film version by the now rather angry Björn Andrésen – see Gilbey 2021). It is this fourteen-year-old child who

leads the established and so disciplined, bourgeois writer to rediscover that boundless territory. At one level, Aschenbach is aware that his growing obsession with the boy is quite a transgression, a crossing of a boundary in terms of 'Männlichkeit' (52), of which his respectable bourgeois ancestors might not have approved; on another he attempts to justify it, and on yet another he does not appear to have much difficulty with it at all.

The great, middle-aged writer's desire is portrayed as no matter of simple, if illicit (in terms of *both* Tadzio's gender *and* age), sexual lust. In fact, it is certainly not portrayed in terms that are in any way simple. The irony of the narration adds layers of complexity and ambivalence to Aschenbach's story. Yet, while the narrative is laced with ironic humour undermining its hero, it is no comedy either. This is rather grand tragedy – or even a very modern 'grand tragi-comedy', a contradiction in terms perhaps evoking that of the position of the *Bürger* in the times and surely that of Thomas Mann, the 'problematic bourgeois', to use the title of Hugh Ridley's book (1994). The (anti-)hero's desire is all-consuming (and irrational, intensely un-*bürgerlich*) in its power. In Visconti's 1971 film version, the sheer intensity of Gustav von Aschenbach's passion (if not of the irony undercutting it) is conveyed by the juxtaposition of Dirk Bogarde's steady gaze as he is transported across the waters of Venice to the accompaniment of Gustav Mahler's fifth symphony. The famous Adagietto in particular evokes the deeply passionate and exquisitely tender emotional life of a very private, quiet man.

Aschenbach idealizes and idolizes the young boy to an extraordinary degree. He views his own literally fatal attraction to the boy as inevitable, given his artistic devotion to pure beauty. He even identifies himself with Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus* (43). At one level, this is sublime, but at another - as the reader sees a rather pompous, overdressed, middle-aged, bourgeois German pursuing a fourteen-year-old Polish boy around early-twentieth-century Venice - ridiculous. At yet another level it is, of course, also *shocking* [see Willis 2017]). Aschenbach's infatuation *is* in fact constantly ridiculed in the novella through Mann's ironic touch. Having lost all sense of proportion, he remains in what he eventually learns is a disease-ridden city, becomes contaminated by the corrupt air all around and eventually sinks into it completely. Aschenbach at the end is not simply the victim of some 'foreign' corruption and disease; he is at one with it, just as Tadzio, in the closing scene, seems to melt into the water and the mist on the beach. The reader may be left wondering how (on what level) to take this and to interpret it.

Readers may also be disoriented by the sense that there is more than one mythical figure from ancient Greece hovering at some strange, indeterminate level around the story. Not only does one suspect that the death-like stranger in the graveyard in Munich at the outset is, at one level, the figure Hermes, the guide to the underworld: another Greek god, Dionysus, hovers around Mann's Venice. Dionysus features particularly in Aschenbach's nightmare towards the end, where he is referred to merely as 'der fremde Gott' (61) (the foreign god). The thinly veiled references to Dionysus in the novella were derived from Mann's knowledge of Nietzsche's discussion of the Dionysian and Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) (see Beauchamp 2011; Heller 1981; Kurzke 1991: 124; Clay 2013 suggests the source was Heine's *Les dieux en exil* [1852]). Nietzsche's Dionysus figures not just as one of the two gods of music and tragedy and associated with intoxication, but as one representing the irrational, disorder, and the dissolution of the so-called 'principium

individuationis'. Clear distinctions and boundaries between individuals and things were dissolved under the intoxicating influence of Dionysus. Having devoted himself for so long to 'Selbstzucht' (self-discipline), it seems (once readers have become aware of this level of reference) that Aschenbach is suddenly developing an interest in the wildly Dionysian, and that his journey to Venice is not just an excursion into the underworld, but into a Dionysian realm without boundaries, where the 'principium individuationis' has been abandoned. And he only has a one-way ticket.

Aschenbach's passage into the Dionysian can only mean one (or two) thing(s): decadence and death. It would be hard to remain a strait-laced, eminently respectable *Bürger* in the midst of a Dionysian orgy such as the one around 'der fremde Gott' that features in his extraordinary dream / nightmare shortly before the end of the story (61) (see Beauchamp 2011: 399). As the very antithesis of bourgeois '*Selbstzucht',* the Dionysian dissolution of boundaries is the meaning of decadence itself (and disease and death) for the conservative masculine *Bürger*. It can only mean the collapse of a particular sense of self, *and* of a particular geography with it. By the end of his nightmare, Aschenbach is one with this 'grenzenlose Vermischung' (boundless mixing) and 'kostete *Unzucht* [my italics] und Raserei des Unterganges' (62). (Trans. by Luke, 257, as: 'limitless coupling' and 'his very soul savored the lascivious delirium of annihilation'. 'Unzucht' is more clearly the opposite of Aschenbach's earlier 'Zucht'.)

The nightmare comes very soon after Aschenbach has heard the truth about the rapid spread of disease and death in Venice as a result of a cholera outbreak that began, significantly for the imagined geography of the story, in India. The actual disease and the corruption of the city authorities in covering it up to save the tourist trade appear to Aschenbach himself to be in keeping with his own new decadent sense of himself as well as his feeling that this is the result of a foreign invasion of his self.

The collapse of the highly respected, bourgeois German writer on a Venetian beach is, at one level, portrayed by Thomas Mann as a moral warning of the dangers of decadence and the Dionysian for bourgeois masculinity, *his* bourgeois masculinity ('die Kultur seines Lebens' (61)) and the whole old bourgeois order. His collapse is clearly understood by Mann in the context of the widespread turn-of-the-century discussion of decadence and degeneration that had been his great topic since *Buddenbrooks* (1901). This particular death in Venice before the First World war appears as emblematic of the decline of a dualistic, patriarchal, bourgeois civilization (and geography) which based its sense of self on "Selbstzucht" (self-discipline), involving a strict sense of boundaries between self and other, masculine and feminine, *Bürger* and non-*Bürger*. Mann's novella further illustrates how these conceptual boundaries coincided in the 'imagined geography' of the conservative German *Bürger* with boundaries between native and foreign, the solid and the fluid, West and East, North and South, centre (of power) and periphery, rational and irrational, healthy and diseased, proper and improper and so on.

The thing is that while Thomas Mann's conservative, bourgeois self directed the sharp, critical point of his irony at Aschenbach for his decadent loss of boundaries, he also clearly sympathized and identified with his writer (anti-)hero. It was, after all, a very personal, almost autobiographical tale (see Adair 2001; Tóibín 2021: 96-103). The irony, with which the story is laced, is in part an expression of Thomas Mann's ambivalence with

regard to his own sexual desires (see Wilper 2013) as well as to all the other conflicting aspects of his self. The reader may be left, as a result, wondering how to understand the story at all. Is it a story of a great, tragic passion of an aging artist for beauty and of a true 'rebel in the name of beauty,' ('Revoltierend im Namen der Schönheit') to use the phrase Mann later applied to both Wilde and Nietzsche, bravely breaking with all safe bourgeois convention (cited by Wilper 2013: 3)? Or is it the story of the scandalous, sordid desires of supposedly respectable, but self-deluding, decadent hypocrite? Or can it be both? At the same time, the irony expresses a wider sense of ambivalence. On one level, Aschenbach's story is a moral tale on the dangers (from a conservative, bourgeois point of view) of 'decadence' seen as a Dionysian dissolution of boundaries and collapse of dualistic distinctions and the geography that went with that. On another level, it is a tale of discovery, revealing the Nietzschean truth of Dionysian disorder behind the mask of Apollonian bourgeois order (as well as the Freudian truth of the anarchy of desires lurking beneath the conventional forms of civilization). There are at least 'Two orders of Myth in Death in Venice', to cite the title of Beauchamp's article (2011), as there are several levels at which the story operates.

At the end of the tale Aschenbach may predictably fall victim to death in Venice, but the last that is seen of Tadzio is of an almost ethereal figure hovering tantalizingly, perhaps smiling, perhaps waving, 'dort draussen, im Meere, im Winde, vorm Nebelhaft-grenzenlosen' (68) (out there in the sea, in the wind, against the misty boundlessness [my trans.]). While undercut by Mann's ironic touch in the story as a whole and in the report of Aschenbach's undignified demise, the scene, as seen by Aschenbach himself, seems to evoke Diotima's description in Plato's *Symposium* of the lover of beauty coming at last to gaze 'upon the vast ocean of beauty,' rather than just individual examples thereof, and to achieve supreme wisdom in the contemplation of eternal, absolute beauty (Plato 1951: 93). Socrates gives a similar narrative of the progress of the lover from admiration of individual examples of (male) beauty to great wisdom in the *Phaedrus* dialogue, which Aschenbach directly recalls in his imagination twice (42f. and 65f.; Clay 2013). There Aschenbach could find justification for his abandonment of all restraint, after all, in the speech of Socrates, 'proving' that the 'madness' of love is a *good* kind of madness and even 'the greatest benefit that heaven can confer on us' (Plato 1973: 48).

Yet Aschenbach had completely rewritten in his imagination Socrates' speech to Phaedrus the second time around (see Wilper 2016: 62), apparently condemning the lover of the beautiful (and art and artists) as inevitably corrupt '*Weiber*'. The throwaway misogyny of the latter word perhaps strangely echoes Gabriel Conroy's irritated private reference to his aunts as 'only two ignorant old women' (167), and the similarity may reveal both characters' anxious concern with maintaining gender boundaries. They are both conflicted, full of tension and in need of some kind of resolution.

'Out there' in Aschenbach's ocean (the Adriatic) the distinctions between home and abroad, the native and the foreign, the masculine bourgeois and its 'Other', the proper and the improper, as all distinctions, seem to dissolve into the hazy blue yonder, which could on one level indicate the kind of wisdom Socrates equated with a 'good kind of madness', if for the *Bürger* it simply means dissolute decadence, and for Gustav von Aschenbach it means actual death.

Conclusions

'The Dead' ends in a passage that in a way is strikingly similar to the end of *Death in Venice*. In the darkened hotel room Gabriel thinks of the snow, that, according to the newspapers, 'was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves' (194). Rather as Aschenbach sank into his chair on the beach watching Tadzio melt into the sea and mist, Gabriel seems himself to sink into sleep and merge into a landscape whose boundaries are being erased by the all-covering snow. Indeed, just as Mann's seascape may, as so much else in that novella, be classically inspired, Joyce's description of the falling snow appears to have been inspired by a passage in Book XII of Homer's *Illiad* (Ellmann 1983: 251). In Joyce's story, the rural West of Ireland that Gabriel, the cosmopolitan man about town, had repressed (and sought to keep at bay by drawing a line between himself and it) is no longer perceived as so far and so different from his self. Everything merges into one under the 'general' 'softly falling snow'. This seems to be the over-riding sense evoked in the famously atmospheric (and alliterative) last lines: 'His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead' (194). Even that final frontier, it seems, has been erased. Not long before this final line Gabriel had realized himself that 'The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward'.

The fact that the conclusions of both these great stories evoke a landscape (or seascape) where boundaries are dissolved has to do not just with the theme of death featuring in both, but with the two central characters letting go of their own boundaries as middle-aged, middle-class men formed by late-nineteenth-century cultures of masculinity. They are also letting go of what they had repressed so forcefully, as a result of what they have experienced over the course of the stories. While for Aschenbach this inevitably means literal death, 'letting go' for Gabriel could be the beginning of a new attitude to his country, to his wife, to life, to the past, to all those perceived as less powerful and important and, of course, to the dead.

Both Gustav and Gabriel have travelled far. They have both apparently moved from a carefully bounded territory to a boundless region, beyond all boundaries, perhaps beyond repression. *Death in Venice* and 'The Dead' could be said to depict the collapse of a nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century, *male*, bourgeois sense of self together with a whole geography and *Weltanschauung* based on a sense of mastery (of self, others and environment) and the maintenance of (illusory) boundaries. While the conservatively minded Thomas Mann appears (at one level) to reject this collapse as 'decadence', Joyce portrays it as leading to the arrival of a modest kind of wisdom. The stories may be depictions of men in mid-life crises, as Bauer (2015) suggests in relation to *Death in Venice*. But these mid-life crises are not merely individual: they give some insight into the crises of a whole historical, patriarchal (human, social, political *and* physical, environmental) geography, especially when the stories are read together and with other literature of the early twentieth century (see Boone and Cadden 1990; Bourdieu 1998; Kane 1999; Kaplan 1990; Kiberd 1985; Latour 2018; Maugue 1987; Phillips 1995; Showalter 1992; Theweleit 1980, etc.).

The similarities in the stories of the two men, it has been suggested, are the result of the combined influences of patriarchy and empire, a 'gendered enterprise from the start', as Connell (2005: 187) puts it. Initially, at least, both men have been shaped by and orient themselves on the basis of these twin influences; both literally have loaded ideological assumptions about points of the compass (the West [of Ireland] for Gabriel; the East and South [beyond Germany] for Gustav). While Mann's character travels to Venice with the cumbersome cultural baggage of a highly intellectual and conflicted scion of the German imperial establishment of the early twentieth century, Joyce's protagonist is rather a colonial inhabitant of a provincial capital within the British empire, whose cultural baggage and imaginative geography are equally cumbersome, complex, and strangely comparable. Putting the two stories together may serve to highlight the nature of the imaginative geographies in the cases of both men and contribute to the interpretation of each individual work of fiction, but it may also serve to draw attention to wider trends in the imaginative geographies of the day and the relation between such geographies and histories of imperialism.

That these two male characters in early twentieth-century fiction are not just individually interesting (which they surely are) nor of 'purely' literary and historical interest is suggested by the fact that they can be interpreted in the context of the ongoing explorations of the social, cultural, and historical and geographical construction of masculinities ('toxic' or otherwise) and of gender (see Connell 2017; Darcy 2019; Ging 2013; Meaney 2011; Mishra 2018; Riley 2021). Understanding that contemporary masculinities are the products of particular cultural histories and geographies rather than simply 'essences', and investigating those contexts is, after all, vital if one is ever going to find a *Sortie*, a way out, as Cixous put it, of the space she called the 'Phallocentric Performing Theatre' (Cixous 1989: 104).

The similarities in the symbolism of the closing references to the natural environment in the stories also suggested they could be interpreted in relation to the contemporary urgent reassessment of the relationship between human beings and nature in the Anthropocene (Lewis and Maslin 2015; Latour 2018; Schmidt 2019) and the examination of what Lynn White (1967) long ago referred to as the 'historical roots of our ecological crisis'. One of the many interesting things about these two stories is how they chart the relationship between the masculinities of these early twentieth century fictional men and the natural as well as the geopolitical environment, indeed as some of what Riley (2021: 420) refers to as 'the complex and nuanced ways that masculinities are (re)constructed in relation to other entities'.

Perhaps fiction provides ideal material enabling one to examine that '(re)construction' as it occurs in tandem with the process of the 'production of space' Lefebvre referred to, along with the imaginative and emotional geographies referred to earlier. Fiction, after all, may not only give us pleasure; it also may permit 'spatial criticism', in Tally's words, to examine 'literary representations not only of places themselves, but of the experience of place and of displacement, while exploring the interrelations between lived experience and a more abstract or unrepresentable spatial network that subtly or directly shapes it' (Tally 2020: viii).

The argument in the foregoing suggests that the drama in 'The Dead' and *Death in Venice* has much to do with the male characters' initial deep awareness of geographical, conceptual and gender boundaries not to be crossed as well as of depths not to be revealed *and* their subsequent border crossings and revelations despite themselves. What lies over the apparent border, under the surface, is a blurring of all boundaries, the prospect of the dissolution of a whole very political masculine geography in the time leading up to the First World War, and perhaps just the beginnings of a new geography of gender in the mist of the Venetian lagoon and in the snow 'general all over Ireland'.

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