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PASSPORT PLOTS

B. TRAVEN'S *DAS TOTENSCHIFF* AND THE CHRONOTOPE OF MOVEMENT CONTROL

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This article analyses B. Traven's 1926 novel *Das Totenschiff* in view of its persistent references to the emerging international passport system of the Interwar period. Building on Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, understood in this context as a principle of narrative organisation, I argue that these references can be analysed productively as a 'chronotope of movement control' – that is, an interface linking a specific historical movement control regime and a specific mode of literary expression. Pursuant to this idea, I provide an overview of contemporaneous passport and movement control practices and proceed on this basis to demonstrate how these practices are not merely documented in Traven's novel, but activated as a means of articulating its spatial, narrative and thematic dimensions. By way of conclusion, I offer a broader characterisation of the novel's chronotopical strategy of emplotment while at the same time sketching its place within a hitherto unacknowledged tradition in European literary history of actively engaging with movement control as one of the defining institutions of modernity.

Dieser Artikel analysiert B. Travens Roman *Das Totenschiff* (1926) bezüglich seiner beharrlichen Verweise auf das neue internationale Passregime der Zwischenkriegszeit. Ausgehend von Bakhtins Begriff des Chronotops, hier verstanden als Prinzip der narrativen Organisation, wird gezeigt wie diese Verweise produktiv als 'Chronotop der Bewegungskontrolle' ausgewertet werden können – als Vermittlung eines bestimmten historischen Passregimes und eines bestimmten literarischen Ausdrucks. Gemäß dieser Idee bietet dieser Artikel einen Überblick über das zeitgenössische Passwesen und demonstriert wie Travens Roman die Praktiken der Bewegungskontrolle nicht nur belegt, sondern sie zudem als Artikulationsmittel seiner räumlichen, erzählerischen und thematischen Dimensionen aktiviert. Der Schlussabschnitt versucht Travens chronotopische Strategie des Erzählens zu erörtern, und zeigt dabei wie der Roman eine literarische Tradition der aktiven Auseinandersetzung mit Bewegungskontrolle als einer der prägenden Einrichtungen der Moderne angehört.

Since its first appearance in 1926, *Das Totenschiff* – B. Traven's surreal tale of identity loss and social exclusion – has met with considerable fascination among both academic readers and the public at large. This fascination is due in part to the mys-

tique surrounding its pseudonymous author,¹ yet it owes perhaps even more to Traven's strikingly original analysis of the migrant condition in an age of nation-states, borders, citizenship laws and passport requirements. In this paper, I pursue the novel's numerous references to the international passport regime that emerged in the aftermath of the First World War. My claim is not merely that this passport regime is *reflected* in Traven's novel, or that it forms a *context* within which the novelistic action receives its true meaning and import. Rather, I argue that the constant attention to movement control practices effectively transcends the dichotomies of text/context, poesis/mimesis, and even fact/fiction. It achieves this by making real-world passport systems the starting point of a mimetic process through which historical facts are not just recorded, but activated as constituent elements of the novel's overall structural design. As the paper argues, this narrative 'emplotment' of the passport places Traven's novel in a unique position to explore and critique a development of key significance in twentieth-century history: the establishment of an effective system of international movement control.²

As these initial remarks make clear, the paper brings together two distinct yet complementary interests: On the one hand, it aims to provide a fuller understanding of Traven's novel by uncovering its productive exchanges with the Interwar passport regime. On the other hand, it frames this analytical interest with a broader discussion centred on the passport motif and its coupling of historical representation and narrative functionality. With regards to this second interest, my aim is to initiate an investigation of the relationship between fictional literature and the successive historical regimes of movement control. The question I am asking is this:

in what ways has the passport system as a favoured instrument of modern governance changed the historical basis of the novel, and how has the novel responded by adapting to and incorporating the new modes of controlling mobility?

To elucidate the nexus between the passport and the novel, we need to consider first the role of free mobility in traditional novelistic discourse. As Mikhail Bakhtin has argued, the novel of antiquity and early modernity depended to a large extent on the protagonists' ability to move about their fictional worlds without restrictions. Bakhtin studies this dependence through the conceptual medium of the 'chronotope', understood both as a specific literary configuration of time and space and a principle of narrative organisation. Tracing what he calls the 'chronotope of the *road*' through centuries of literary history, Bakhtin particularly draws attention to the narrative potential of the 'open road' as opposed to the more lawful and stationary space of the town. In the pre-modern novel, the road serves as a means of staging unexpected encounters, bridging social distances and initiating episodes or adventures; and by virtue of this narrative potency, it proved an almost indispensable resource for the novel through all of its early history.³ Yet, as Bakhtin notes, the chronotope of the road seems to have fallen out of fashion around 1800 where it was gradually (albeit never completely) replaced by chronotopes of a more domestic nature such as those of the parlour, the salon and the provincial town.⁴

My contention in this regard is that the narrative eclipse of the road should be seen in relation to the introduction of systematic movement control regimes as of the late eighteenth century, particularly during the French Revolution and the post-

Napoleonic Restoration.⁵ In fact, the latent antagonism between the passport system and the traditional novel was first identified at exactly this historical juncture by Friedrich Schlegel in his 1812 lectures on ancient and modern literature.⁶ In the context of a discussion of the Spanish novel of the *siglo de oro*, Schlegel speculates that the gradual perfection of the passport system will lead to the demise of the novel as a genre, 'weil alsdann gar nichts im wirklichen Leben vorkommen könnte, was dazu irgend Veranlassung, oder einen wahrscheinlichen Stoff darbieten würde'.⁷ This (ironical?) scenario obviously never materialised. However, the fact that the emergence of modern passport control coincided historically with the decline of the road as a literary motif does seem to be more than a coincidence. Further, it is plausible on this basis that the introduction of systematic movement control not only helped undermine the narrative predominance of the road, but also ushered in what I propose to call the 'chronotope of movement control'. Exemplified in German literature by classic works from Kleist to Herta Müller, this chronotope is defined by the fact that it references a specific historical movement control regime while at the same time using this regime as part of a literary strategy of representation and narration.

My argument in relation to Traven is that the chronotope of movement control, while originating in the early 1800s, reappears with reintroduction of passport requirements during and after the First World War. This new framework of mobility forms the narrative crux of *Das Totenschiff*. Focusing on an American sailor, Gales, who gets marooned in Europe without his indispensable 'Seemannskarte', Traven's novel is deeply preoccupied with the intricacies of contemporary move-

ment control; from the opening pages to the final catastrophe, the action springs from Gales's futile attempts to re-establish his identity as well as from the miseries he suffers as a *sans-papier* in a world where passports are paramount. Yet, as I demonstrate in this article, the chronotope of movement control is not simply a question of the textual prominence of passport control. Rather, my contention is that this chronotope establishes an interface between a specific historical movement control regime and a specific mode of literary expression, thereby transforming the passport system from a background feature into a literary strategy informing the novel's design across three interconnected dimensions: space, plot, and theme.

The following discussion consequently has two main parts: it begins with a short overview of the new international passport system of the Interwar period and proceeds to analyse how Traven activates this system as a means of articulating the novel's spatial, narrative, and thematic dimensions. By way of conclusion, I offer a broader characterisation of the novel's chronotopical strategy of emplotment while at the same time sketching its place within a literary tradition of engaging productively with the modern institutions of movement control.

The Interwar Passport Regime

Austrian writer and dramatist Stefan Zweig was ideally placed to take stock of the Interwar movement control regime. A cosmopolitan liberalist, Zweig lamented the new emphasis on borders and passports, and his antagonism was further heightened by the trauma of having his Austrian passport and citizenship annulled after

the *Anschluß*. Writing in *Die Welt von Gestern* (1942), the author interprets the establishment of the international passport system as a threshold moment in twentieth-century history, which sets apart a 'before' of seemingly unlimited freedom and an 'after' characterised by universal suspicion and control. In Zweig's mournful account of the age, the proliferation of passport requirements serves as proof that the antebellum world of liberty and happiness is irrevocably lost:

[N]ichts vielleicht macht den ungeheuren Rückfall sinnlicher, in den die Welt seit dem ersten Weltkrieg geraten ist, als die Einschränkung der persönlichen Bewegungsfreiheit des Menschen und die Verminderung seiner Freiheitsrechte. Vor 1914 hatte die Erde allen Menschen gehört. [...] Es gab keine Permits, keine Visa, keine Belästigungen; dieselben Grenzen, die heute von Zollbeamten, Polizei, Gendarmerieposten dank des pathologischen Mißtrauens aller gegen alle in einen Drahtverhau verwandelt sind, bedeuteten nichts als symbolische Linien, die man ebenso sorglos überschritt wie den Meridian in Greenwich.⁸

Even though his account is marred by nostalgia and naivety, Zweig is on firm historical ground when eulogizing the insignificance of passports in the pre-war period. Having served as a key instrument of power for absolutist governments in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the vogue of economic and political liberalism in the second half of the 1800s led to the abolishment of movement control across the Western world. However, following a period of more than half

a century in which domestic and international travel had been almost completely free, the outbreak of the First World War triggered a wholesale reintroduction of passport requirements as a means of protecting the integrity of national borders. These efforts to control mobility were originally touted as temporary measures to remain in place only for the duration of the war.⁹ In reality, movement control had come to stay. This was partly due to issues directly associated with the end of the war, such as the perceived need to protect domestic labour markets and control the post-war flows of migrants and refugees from Eastern Europe. In a more general sense, however, the new passport system had proved to be a highly capable instrument of power, enabling governments to 'embrace' the individual citizens and rendering them 'available for governance' to a higher degree than ever before.¹⁰ As governments across Europe had discovered during the war, the passport regime could be used effectively as a means of harnessing administrative resources, thereby transforming the state into a modern 'power container'.¹¹

Even though the wartime passport requirements had often been established simply by reactivating mothballed legislation of the nineteenth century,¹² the new system differed markedly from that of the past. Apart from the vastly increased scope and efficiency, the main difference was this: while the old system had been an undertaking of individual nations and had concerned itself equally with internal and external travel, the new system was founded on the assumption that the issue of movement control exceeded the capabilities of any single country. In the course of the 1920s, the League of Nations therefore sponsored a series of conferences with the aim of establishing a regulatory framework for international mobility. One

notable outcome was the adoption of the modern passport format with its 32 numbered pages, the national emblem on the front cover, and a page dedicated to personal details and photographic identification.¹³ More importantly, these efforts fulfilled their stated purpose of facilitating international mobility, albeit at the price of considerably strengthening the passport system as an instrument of surveillance and control.

Importantly in the context of *Das Totenschiff*, the League of Nations also fostered international cooperation to address the problem of stateless persons and refugees in the wake of the First World War. By far the largest individual group, comprising as many as 1.5 million people, were former Russian nationals who had fled the 1917 Revolution, later to be summarily stripped of their citizenship. However, many more were displaced or deported with the collapse of the great multinational empires of Central and Eastern Europe and the subsequent attempts to establish ethnically homogeneous nation-states in their place. As a consequence, Europe of the Interwar period hosted millions of refugees who, having no legal citizenship and no valid proof of identity, were barred access to basic rights and prevented from supporting themselves through work. In order to alleviate their misery, the League Nations and its High Commissioner for Refugees, Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen, invented a special passport offering stateless persons a chance to settle legally and find employment in a new country. This initiative was a success, and by the end of the 1920s the refugee problem had largely been solved.¹⁴ However, as Traven makes clear in the narrative of Stanislaw Koslowski,¹⁵ a 'Nansen passport', or similar documents identifying the bearer as

‘stateless’, occasionally had the opposite of its intended effect, perpetuating rather than ending the bearer’s social exclusion.

Beyond the special situation of the *sans-papiers*, it is worth recalling that the international passport system amounted to a radical restructuring of Europe’s political and mental landscape. Whereas movement control regimes of the past had preferentially targeted special groups of ‘suspicious people’, typically defined in socio-economic, religious or ethnic terms,¹⁶ the new system was built around a universal obligation to obtain a valid passport and visa prior to departure; and at the same time it was backed by more sophisticated technologies and administrative practices as well as by drastically improved border security. For most travellers, this modernised movement control regime was nothing more than a slight inconvenience. However, for the less fortunate who desperately needed to cross the border so as to escape oppression or poverty, yet were unable to produce the required identity papers, it was a formidable and anxiety-provoking obstacle. As the plight of the German and Austrian Jews in the 1930s would demonstrate once again, the access to passports and visas was in many cases the only factor deciding between successful escape on the one hand, and persecution and death on the other.¹⁷

Spaces of Movement Control

On the basis of this outline of the passport regime of the Interwar period, I propose to return to *Das Totenschiff* to examine how this novel turns the contemporary topicality of movement control into a major literary strategy. This literary impact

of the passport system can be discerned at several levels. First and foremost, it is prominently involved in the articulation of the novel's fictional space. The passport motif highlights the fact that the scene of the action is a geopolitical universe compartmentalised into national enclosures. Moreover, it sets up a fundamental rule governing agency within this universe, namely that cross-border mobility is contingent on the possession of a valid passport serving as proof of personal and national identity. While borders and passport requirements were institutions of key importance in Interwar Europe, Traven further heightens their prominence by making them all-powerful determinants of the novel's fictional space. In this sense, the novel exaggerates for satirical and didactic purposes, yet nevertheless offers a detailed representation of the contemporary European system of movement control.

The spatial dimension of the passport motif is most immediately visible in the novel's political geography, which is essentially that of the Interwar system of nation-states. In a manner similar to Stefan Zweig, Traven's protagonist regards the First World War as an historical watershed separating an age of freedom from an age of movement control. However, Gales goes much further than Zweig when claiming hyperbolically that the war itself was waged with the *unique* objective of introducing universal passport requirements:

Ich bin sicher, der Krieg is nur geführt worden, damit man in jedem Lande nach seiner Seemannskarte oder nach seinem Paß gefragt werden kann. Vor

dem Kriege fragte niemand nach der Seemannskarte oder dem Paß, und die Menschen waren recht glücklich. (29)

In Gales's view, the 'Seemannskarte', or the passport as its land-based counterpart, is 'der Mittelpunkt des Universums' (ibid.). This is certainly true of the novel's own, fictional universe. As witnessed by the several occasions where Gales is deported from one Western European nation to the next, the passport system serves to circumscribe the individual countries externally. However, passport practices also define these countries internally insofar as they are represented almost exclusively via government institutions tasked with the handling of the inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms of the nation-state: border crossings, police stations, passport and records offices, consular missions, prisons. Gales does at times interact with non-officials, whether when taking up temporary work for a farmer or patronising a harbour prostitute. These mostly positive exchanges suggest a charitable and civil society-based alternative to the ruthlessness of state power, and as such they are important in setting out the implied political utopia of the novel, which centres on individual exchanges rather than collective systems. Yet, these exchanges are seen as rare, taking place purely as aberrations within a space that contracts around anonymous institutions of control.

At a more fundamental level, Traven also uses the passport system to establish a distinction between what is seen as the totalitarian world of the nation-state and the extra-juridical world of the open oceans and the death ships. The protagonist imagines that the entire land mass of the planet has been enclosed by an insur-

mountable wall. Those on the inside live as in a prison and are constantly being counted and controlled by the state. Those on the outside have lost their legal identity and live in a limbo from which there is no escape. As a space outside the law, the outside offers a refuge from state persecution, yet this modicum of freedom is paid for by a loss of name, citizenship, human and civil rights and ultimately life itself. In this sense, the line between land and sea sets apart zones of inclusion and exclusion, which, characteristically, are seen as equally insufferable places: the nation-state is a 'Zuchthaus' (166) catching the individuals in fine-meshed webs of biopolitical power, while the death ship, in the parlance of Giorgio Agamben, reduces the individual to the exposed and expendable state of 'bare life'.¹⁸

At an even more fundamental level, the spatial centrality of movement control is extended metaphorically as a means of articulating the novel's vertical topography. Thus, the threshold between diesseits and jenseits is envisioned by Gales as a national border, while Saint Peter is cast as a border police officer who prevents anyone from entering heaven without proper identity documents. When the unfortunate Stanislaw muses that Paradise would be an unbearable place for him, Gales retorts that neither of them will be granted entry anyway:

Wir haben ja keine Papiere. Und kannst dich heilig drauf verlassen, die verlangen da oben auch Papiere von dir, Pässe und Taufzeugnisse und gute Führungszeugnisse. [...] Wird dir jeder Pfaff erzählen, daß der Torwächter da oben ein großes Bund mit Schlüsseln hat. Wozu? Zum Abschließen der Türen,

damit nicht doch vielleicht einer ohne Visum über die Grenze schleichen kann.
(206-7)

In this way, the passport motif in *Das Totenschiff* serves to establish three distinctions of fundamental importance to the novel's spatial organisation: between individual nation-states, between land and sea, and between the physical world and the afterlife. Just as important as these dichotomies, however, are the ways in which the passport system shapes and defines the individuals who come within its grasp. This is evidently true of its target groups. As is pointed out numerous times throughout the novel, the modern state equates the identity of the individual with the 'documented identity',¹⁹ which means that losing one's passport is tantamount to losing one's entire civic existence as well as all rights associated with it. At the same time, the novel offers a trenchant analysis of the 'subjectivisation' that the passport system effects among its own officials. It is true, as Frank Nordhausen has argued, that the protagonist's frustration is mainly directed, not against 'hartherzige Individuen', but against 'das hinter den Charaktermasken stehende bürokratisch-inhumane System'.²⁰ However, the novel also posits that the system creates its own administrators and in this sense collapses the individual/system dichotomy. As often in German literature, the 'Beamten' are seen as loyal and unquestioning agents of the state, devoid of any individual characteristics. Always a radical, the protagonist of *Das Totenschiff* goes one step further, claiming that their subjectivity is entirely a function of their position within the bureaucracy:

Alle Konsuln sind in dieselbe Form gegossen wie alle übrigen Beamten. Sie gebrauchen wörtlich denselben Redeschätz, den sie bei ihren Prüfungen vorweisen mußten, sie werden würdevoll, ernst, befehlshaberisch, devot, gleichgültig, gelangweilt, interessiert und tieftraurig bei denselben Gelegenheiten, und sie werden heiter, lustig, freundlich und geschwätzig bei denselben Gelegenheiten, ob sie im Dienste Amerikas, Frankreichs, Englands or Argentinien stehen. (41)

Only rarely does a remnant of humanity shine forth through the carefully moulded exterior of the passport officials; the narrator describes this metaphorically as a brief laying bare of the 'inner Haut', which is then immediately covered again by a scab (41). The passport system has no need for human beings. In this light, the occasional ticks of humaneness serve not so much to exonerate the individual officers, but rather to highlight the capacity of the system to craft its own servants like 'Figuren aus Papiermaché' (25) or 'Automaten [...], die ihre Arme, Beine, Augen, Lippen, Herzen und Gehirnzellen genauso bewegen, wie es der allmächtige Götze Staat haben will' (177).

Passport Narratives

In the scholarly literature, Gales as a protagonist has repeatedly been associated with fictional characters defined by their restless and unrestricted wandering: Odysseus²¹, the *pícaro*²² or the hero of the adventure novel.²³ In reality, however, free mobility of this type is not available in the thoroughly regulated political space

of Traven's novel, and this has profound consequences at the level of narration. Barred from using, like novels since antiquity, the free mobility of the protagonists as an instigator of narrative events and 'adventures', this novel is forced instead to draw its momentum from the recurring conflict between the individual and the passport system. The result is a narrative that is stuttering and circular rather than progressively linear.

The central identity document in *Das Totenschiff* is the protagonist's 'Seemannskarte' – a sailor's passport providing the personal details and employment history of the bearer and allowing him to disembark in foreign ports.²⁴ In the opening chapter, Gales is granted shore leave when his ship, the American cargo vessel 'Tuscaloosa', calls at Antwerp, yet the ship departs earlier than scheduled, and Gales is consequently stranded in Belgium without money, personal possessions and, crucially, identity documents. The novel's first book details how Gales, being unable to obtain a replacement passport, is stripped of his national and personal identity and repeatedly deported from one Western European country to the next. This opening event remains crucial to the novel's plot until the very end. The 'death ship' with the morbid name 'Yorikke',²⁵ which is the scene of the novel's second book, is precisely a vessel of last resort for *sans-papier* sailors unable to provide documentary evidence for their identity and right to employment, and the horrors onboard this mythical vessel, described by the narrator in graphic detail, illustrate the fall of the individual from citizenship to a state of absolute social exclusion.

In this way, the overall plot of *Das Totenschiff* traces a progress from ostracization to death set in motion by the dehumanising rigour of the international passport system. Through references to the *Divine Comedy* at the beginning of the second book and in the novel's final paragraph, this progress is presented as an inversion of Dante's tripartite account of the afterlife, moving downwards from relative harmony through states of increasing torment to a concluding death stripped of any redemptive significance. In this sense, the novel shares a typically modernist preoccupation with experiences of crisis and cultural loss. However, like Zweig in *Die Welt von Gestern*, Traven places the responsibility for this latter-day fall of man, not simply with modernity in the abstract, but specifically with the modern state and its reliance on movement control as an instrument of power.

This overall plot trajectory is mirrored in three inserted narratives of the novel's second book, each of which, by means of their identical structure, serves to imbue Gales's seemingly exceptional story with an aura of historical representativity. Whereas the misfortunes of the narrator-protagonist appear to derive simply from the contingency of 'bad luck', the stories of his friend Stanislaw Koslowski and two deceased shipmates on the 'Yorikke' known as Paul and Kurt are closely interwoven with the geopolitics of the Versailles Treaty. All three individuals hail from territories ceded by Germany as a result of the peace settlement: Stanislaw is a German from the province of Posen, which in 1919 became part of the newly-founded Second Polish Republic; Kurt, likewise an ethnic German, is a native of Memel, which in 1923 was absorbed by Lithuania; and Paul, a Frenchman, was born in the German Imperial territory of Elsass-Lothringen, which after the war

reverted to French control under the name of Alsace-Lorraine. Being sailors, and, in the case of the latter, a journeyman coppersmith, these three men were abroad when the Central European map was redrawn and were therefore unable to respond when the populations of the affected territories were called upon to choose their future nationality. Prevented by bureaucratic impediments from reclaiming their birthright citizenship, they became stateless persons and were eventually, like Gales, forced to enlist on the 'Yorikke'. In this way, these novella-like insertions conform to the novel's master narrative of individuals caught up in the passport system, while at the same time anchoring this narrative in a historically accurate (albeit highly German-centric) analysis of the problem of statelessness.

Each revolving around a failed quest to obtain valid identity documents, the various narrative strands make evident the extent to which movement control practices determine the novel's plot. The subplots exhibit the same spatial contraction around passport institutions as the main narrative, and Stanislaw's story in particular moves in circles between the 'Seemannsamt', the 'Polizeipräsidium', the 'Hauptmeldestelle' and the Polish consulate, while at the same time involving a drawn-out correspondence with the Polish authorities in his native city of Poznan (154-63). In each case, the efforts are in vain. The passport institutions are not only intransigent and uncaring, but subject to an absurdist logic whereby the pursuit of identity documents is repeatedly brought to an impasse by unsolvable paradoxes seen as native to the system itself. Thus, the protagonists repeatedly face the bureaucratic conundrum that the evidentiary requirements for obtaining a replacement passport can only be fully satisfied by presenting the original passport (163)²⁶

– a circularity later explored by Joseph Heller as a ‘Catch-22’. The height of absurdity is reached when the American consul in Paris suggests to Gales that the fact of his birth is perfectly deniable as long as he is unable to prove it by means of a birth certificate (46-7). Here, as everywhere in this novel, the person is reduced to a more or less insignificant appendage to the identity document.

At the level of narrative, the totalising power of the passport regime entails that the confrontations between the individual and the system always remain unresolved. Whereas the chronotope of movement control in other novels often allows the protagonists to outmanoeuvre the authorities,²⁷ the passport system in this novel has no loopholes. Thus, the passport system brings narrative development to a standstill, replacing linear progression with circular repetition as Gales and his fellow sufferers proceed pointlessly from one government office to the next. Moreover, it effects a disempowerment of the subject who is reduced from an agent to an object of agency on the part of the control regime. Unlike the protagonist of the picaresque novel, Gales is precisely not moving freely through the fictional space, but is shifted around by the institutions of movement control.

Passports, Politics and Representation

As a final step in my analysis of *Das Totenschiff*, I want to highlight how the spatial and narrative functions of the passport motif are complemented by a third function, namely that of articulating a complex thematics of individuality, freedom and state control. Traven’s novel is evidently political in the sense that it attacks what is seen as the injustices of capitalism and modern ‘governmentality’ – what the pro-

tagonist refers to as 'der Staatsgedanke' (169). Much scholarly attention has been devoted to this political dimension. Attempts to identify the exact nature of Traven's politics have situated the novel within the German radical left in early years of the Weimar Republic and typically cast the author either as an anarchist or an idiosyncratic communist.²⁸ While both these interpretations find support in the text, they tend to obscure that Traven's main concern is technologies of power rather than political ideologies. Far from being imposed dogmatically from the outside, the political dimension of this novel emerges out of a narrative critique of contemporary movement control and its ruinous consequences at the level of the individual. For this reason, an analysis of the novel's politics must begin with the passport system.

In a sense, *Das Totenschiff* undertakes such an analysis itself by interlacing its narrative parts with political commentary in the form of extended diatribes against the modern state. These essayistic outbursts are mostly prompted by Gales's difficulties with the passport authorities, and in this way the passport system becomes the focal point for wide-ranging discussion of the incongruity of state control and individual freedom. One half of Gales's political outlook is radical brand of anti-statism that represents the modern state as inherently totalitarian; as the narrator contends, the First World War, even though it was supposedly fought for freedom, only led to the replacement of dynastical tyranny with that of the democratic nation-state: 'Tyrrannen und Despoten wurden besiegt, und der Sieger wurde das Zeitalter einer größeren Tyrannei, das Zeitalter der Landesflagge, das Zeitalter des Staates und seiner Lakaien.' (138) As the necessary corollary of this idea, the pro-

tagonist embraces an equally radical individualism casting the individual both as the victim of state violence and the starting point of a future anarchist revolution:

Die Freiheit des Menschen ist zu urwüchsig mit seinem ganzen Dasein und Wollen verknüpft, als daß der Mensch irgendeine Tyrannei lange ertragen könnte, selbst wenn die Tyrannei in dem sammetweichen Lügenmantel des Mitbestimmungsrechtes erscheinen sollte. (40)

As a technology of power, the passport system fulfils the purpose of extending state power at the level of the individual; it renders individual citizens 'available for governance'. As such, this system forms the direct antithesis to Gales's anti-statist individualism. The novel therefore represents movement control, not simply as an illustration of more general issue, but as the overriding political problem of the age – or indeed of any age. Gales makes this point in the form of a characteristic philosophical generalisation:

Die intimsten, die ursprünglichsten Gesetze der Natur können ausgewischt und abgeleugnet werden, wenn der Staat seine innere Macht vergrößern und vertiefen will auf Kosten des einen, des einzelnen, der das Fundament des Universums ist. Denn das Universum ist aufgebaut aus Individuen, nicht aus Herden. [...] Und es bricht zusammen, wenn die freie Beweglichkeit der einzelnen Individuen beschränkt wird. Die Individuen sind die Atome des Menschengeschlechts. (59)

At the centre of Gales's philosophy is a mock Heraclitan cosmology according to which individual freedom of movement is the basic law of the universe. Against this background, the movement control measures of the modern state appear as an unhinging of nature itself. If this vision of mobile individuals brought to a standstill by the state is emblematic of the novel's anarchist politics, it is also a cogent commentary on the fate of the traditional novel in the age of passports: dependent on the free mobility of its protagonists, this type of novel precisely 'breaks down' in the face of systematic movement control, giving way to a narrative mode predicated instead on the unavailability of free mobility.

However, Gales's explicit statements aside, the novel's spatial and narrative representation of the passport system itself serves as a distinctive mode of political critique. It would be meaningless to ask whether this narrative politics is more important than the novel's layer of political editorialising; the two strands complement each other, with the latter offering a sort of running commentary on the former. Whereas Gales's tirades against 'der Staatsgedanke', however hyperbolic, are ultimately instances of discursive reasoning, the novel's implied politics is based on an emplotment of passport control – that is, a narrative representation that reconfigures contemporary movement control in terms of plots, characters, actions and settings. Rather than attacking the passport system from the point of view of its legislative design or its incompatibility with basic human and civil rights, it seeks to undermine this system by showing its effects at the level of the individual migrant; and it further multiplies this individual vantage point by sup-

plementing Gales's story with those of other stateless persons whose experiences with the passport system are equally catastrophic. In this way, Traven's novel offers a multifaceted critique of movement control 'from below', inflected through the various experiences of individuals caught in the grips of modern state power.

The Chronotope of Movement Control

As I have argued in this article, the chronotope of movement control holds considerable potential for an analysis of *Das Totenschiff* and particularly makes it apparent how the passport system is used productively in this novel as a means of articulating its fictional space, plot and major themes. By virtue of this emplotment, Traven's novel is able to reflect the contemporary resurgence of movement control as a political strategy while at the same time mobilising the representational resources of narrative against it. However, viewed in a broader, historical context, the chronotope of movement control is also important in that it connects the novel to a longstanding tradition in European literature of engaging actively with the modern institution of movement control. While this literary tradition deserves a fuller investigation, I want to conclude by offering a few points of orientation and thereby at the same time present an alternative contextualisation of Traven's novel.

The chronotope of movement control is linked historically to the introduction of the first modern movement control regimes in the late eighteenth century. However, the chronotope itself predates this event, making its first appearance in utopian fiction, from the classics of More and Bacon to a late German manifestation such as Schnabel's *Insel Felsenburg* (1731-43). In these works, social order is

seen as depending on strict control of mobility within and across the borders of the utopian community. In the case of Schnabel's novel, the obsession with border control effectively prevents the harmonious and aptly named island of Felsenburg from serving as the scene of novelistic plots,²⁹ which instead have to be 'imported' from Europe at regular intervals – an early illustration of Schlegel's idea of an antagonism between the novel and the passport system.

In the early nineteenth century, the chronotope of movement control responds to the increasingly strict passport requirements adopted in the aftermath of the French Revolution and forges a new narrative potential out of the conflict between the individual traveller and the passport system. Featuring most prominently in Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839), it is also of key narrative importance in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and in the German context it appears famously in Kleist's *Michael Kolbaas* (1810) in which the protagonist's violent rampage is triggered by arbitrary passport requirements at the border between Saxony and Brandenburg; significantly, this catalytic use of the passport is Kleist's own addition and does not feature in the historical sources on which the novella is based.³⁰ Later in the century, the gradual abolishment of passport requirements after 1848 is documented by Jules Verne in *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* (1873); here, Phileas Fogg's passport serves simply to evidence his itinerary, and the now outmoded institutions of movement control are repeatedly ridiculed in the name of individual freedom.³¹

After virtually disappearing in the second half of the nineteenth century, the chronotope of movement control reappears with a vengeance in twentieth-century

literature of migration and exile. This is true of Postwar and contemporary literature where specific borders and passport regimes become focal points for literary explorations of the migrant experience: the Iron Curtain in Herta Müller's *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* (1986), the US-Mexican border in T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* (1995), the Mediterranean as border between the Arab World and Europe in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Partir* (2006), and the Berlin Wall in the extensive German *Mauerliteratur* from 1961 to 1989 and beyond.³²

However, the crucial phase in the present context is the Interwar period. Here, the diaspora of refugees from Central and Eastern Europe was met with a strong literary response in the form of narratives analysing the precarious situation of migrants and stateless persons, often with a strong emphasis on the new institutions and practices of movement control. *Das Totenschiff* is no doubt this period's most extreme instance of narrative emplotment of the passport system. Yet, due to Germany's geographical situation as well as the fateful importance of passports and visas in the Nazi era, this preoccupation was prevalent in contemporary German-language literature. Alongside the later parts of Zweig's *Die Welt von Gestern*, Bertolt Brecht's *Flüchtlingsgespräche* (1940/44), with its satirical claim that 'Der Paß ist der edelste Teil von einem Menschen', is a prominent example.³³ However, the closest parallels to Traven are novels such as Anna Segher's *Transit* (1944) and Erich Maria Remarque's *Die Nacht von Lissabon* (1962). In both these works, the situation of German refugees from Nazism is conveyed via the conflict between the visa requirements of the potential recipient countries and the attempts on the part

of the characters to subvert these requirements through forgeries or misappropriated identity documents.

What *Das Totenschiff* shares with these works is above all the activation of the passport system as the cornerstone of a comprehensive strategy of representation and narration. As I have argued, the chronotope of movement control is precisely more than just a literary motif or a 'reality effect'. Rather, it should be seen as an interface mediating between a specific historical mode of controlling mobility and a specific mode of novelistic discourse. As a strategy of representation, this chronotope involves a punctual realism which, rather than aiming to capture the social or cultural totality, foregrounds the passport system as a single, yet emblematic aspect of historical reality. As a principle of narrative organisation, it is situated at the intersection of individual biographies and passport control practices, using this juncture as a means of structuring the literary text with regards to its space, plot, and major themes. Drawing on the sense-making and individualising capabilities of narrative, the chronotope of movement control in this way enables fictional literature to reflect, respond to and challenge the proliferation of movement control as a constituent feature of modernity and modern state power.

References

¹ In this article, I leave aside Traven's personal history, even though this much-debated issue does have a bearing on the theme of migrancy and identity in *Das Totenschiff*. The most exhaustive biographical study is still Karl S. Guthke's *B. Traven. Biographie eines Rätsels*, Frankfurt/Main 1987.

² For the concept of emplotment, cf. Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, 3 vols., Paris 1983-85, I, pp. 85-129.

³ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel. Notes toward a Historical Poetics', in *The Dialogical Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (tr. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist), Austin 1981, pp. 243-5.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 246-8. For a corroborating account, cf. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, 'The Roads of the Novel', in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti, 2 vols, Princeton & Oxford 2006, II, pp. 630-5.

⁵ Cf. John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 21-56. Hannelore Burger, 'Das Paßwesen', in *Grenze und Staat. Paßwesen, Staatsbürgerschaft, Heimatrecht und Fremden gesetzgebung in der österreichischen Monarchie 1750-1867*, eds. Waltraud Heindl & Edith Saurer, Wien, Köln & Weimar 2000, pp. 3-25.

⁶ Burkhardt Wolf touches upon Schlegel's remark in a recent article on *Das Totenschiff*, albeit in a different context and with different conclusions. Cf. "Es gibt keine Totenschiffe". B. Travens Sea Change', *DVjs*, 80 (2006), 448.

⁷ Friedrich Schlegel, *Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur* (1812), in *Kritische Schriften und Fragmente*, ed. Ernst Behler, 6 vols, Paderborn 1988, IV, p. 154.

⁸ Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern* (1942), Frankfurt/Main 2007, p. 463.

⁹ John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*, p. 111-14.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 10-13.

¹¹ Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, Cambridge 1985, p. 13.

¹² Cf. Egidio Reale, *Le Régime des passeports et la Société des Nations*, Paris 1930, pp. 39-44.

¹³ Martin Lloyd, *The Passport*, Stroud 2003, p. 121.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁵ B. Traven, *Das Totenschiff* (1926), Hamburg 1999, pp. 161-3. Further references to Traven's novel appear in the text.

¹⁶ Cf. Hannelore Burger, 'Das Paßwesen', pp. 85-7.

¹⁷ John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*, pp. 131-43.

¹⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen), Stanford 1998, pp. 1-12.

¹⁹ Cf. Jane Caplan & John Torpey (eds.), *Documenting Individual Identity*, Princeton & Oxford 2011.

²⁰ Frank Nordhausen, 'B. Travens Anfänge: Die "Urfassung" des Totenschiffs', *GQ*, 65 (1992), 385.

²¹ Burkhardt Wolf, "'Es gibt keine Totenschiffe". B. Travens Sea Change', 448-9.

²² Thorsten Czechanowsky, 'Die Irrfahrt als Grenzerfahrung. Überlegungen zur Metaphorik der Grenze in B. Travens Roman Das Totenschiff', *Mauerschau*, 1 (2008), 50-52.

²³ Manfred Keune, 'Being as Adventure. *The Death Ship* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* as Novels of Adventure', in *B. Traven. Life and Work*, ed. Ernst Schürer & Philip Jenkins, University Park & London 1987, pp. 83-100.

²⁴ Martin Lloyd, *The Passport*, pp. 196-8.

²⁵ As Ernst-Ullrich Pinkert has noted, the name of the ship not only refers to *Hamlet*, but also to Yorick, the passportless traveller in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*. Cf. 'Travens Mär vom "einfachen Erzählen". Zu den intertextuellen

Bezügen in dem Roman *Das Totenschiff*, in *B. Travens Erzählwerk in der Konstellation von Sprachen und Kulturen*, ed. Günter Dammann, Würzburg 2005, pp. 28-30.

²⁶ Cf. Thomas Collmer, 'Identität und Selbstorganisation in *Das Totenschiff* und *Die Baumwollpflücker*', in *Neue "BT-Mitteilungen". Studien zu B. Traven*, eds. Mathias Brandstädter & Matthias Schönberg, Berlin 2009, pp. 189-90.

²⁷ Cf. below, pp. 24-25.

²⁸ Wendula Dahle, 'B. Traven, *Das Totenschiff*. Die Destruktion anarchistischer Argumente in der Rezeption', in *B. Travens Erzählwerk in der Konstellation von Sprachen und Kulturen*, ed. Günter Dammann, Würzburg 2005, pp. 63-82; Jan Berg et al., *Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur von 1918 bis zur Gegenwart*, Frankfurt/Main 1981, pp. 213-14.

²⁹ Joseph Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, München 2002, p. 190-1.

³⁰ Cf. Christian Schöttgen & George Christoph Kreysig, *Diplomatische und curieuse Nachlese der Historie von Ober-Sachsen und angrenzenden Ländern*, 3 vols., Dresden & Leipzig 1730-33, III, pp. 528-41.

³¹ Jules Verne, *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* (1873), Paris 2000, p. 30, pp. 44-47.

³² Cf. Doris Libermann, 'Die Berliner Mauer in der deutschen Literatur', in *Die Berliner Mauer in der Kunst*, eds. Anke Kuhrmann, Doris Libermann & Annette Dorgerloh, Berlin 2011, pp. 199-327.

³³ Bertolt Brecht, *Flüchtlingsgespräche*, in *Werke*, ed. Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Detlef Müller, 33 vols, Berlin, Weimar and Frankfurt/Main 1988-2000, XVIII, p. 197.