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## **Cosmopolitans as National Treasures?**

*How the British Charles Dickens Museum and  
the German Buddenbrookhaus Represent and Remember  
their World-Renowned Writers*

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## **Abstract**

Literature museums, as writer's house museums, have caught many literary scholars' attention. Less has been said on them from a historical perspective. In this text I am looking at how two museums exhibit their protagonists, that is Charles Dickens in the museum of the same name in Doughty Street, London, and Thomas and Heinrich Mann in the Buddenbrookhaus in Lübeck, or its current exhibition in the close-by Behnhaus. I am particularly considering the representation of these writers' interference in international affairs, of their cosmopolitan side. Subsequently I will assess how Dickens and Mann are integrated into national remembrance cultures in the museums, and what interplay can be observed between museal exhibition and remembrance culture. My focus lies on the current permanent exhibitions and the analysis is inspired mainly by museological theory, as by more specific research on writer's house museums. Special attention is paid to the cultural integration of the writers. I argue that Charles Dickens Museum and Buddenbrookhaus have different emphases: While the Buddenbrookhaus is a highly structured, "museum-like" museum with a humorous but intellectual touch, the Dickens Museum shows characteristics of a literary memorial as well and makes strong use of the authenticity of its house. It has a more light-hearted tone and frames Dickens as a hero while making him come across as a local and national spokesperson. The Buddenbrookhaus on the other hand is orientated strongly towards Europeanism. I also tentatively question if all writer's house museums that have a physical connection to the writer's biography (i.e. used to be inhabited or at least frequented by the writer) are intent to create a magical place built around the mystery of the author and his aura. The case studies here show that there are very different ways to deal with and exhibit in authentic places.

# Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction: Writers Who Made History                           | 1  |
| 2. Sources and Methodology: The Observant Visitor                   | 6  |
| 3. Case Study: Buddenbrookhaus                                      | 13 |
| 3.1. History of the Institution                                     | 13 |
| 3.2. The Interims Exhibition in the Behnhaus                        | 15 |
| 3.3. Exhibition Analysis  | 22 |
| 4. Case Study: Charles Dickens Museum                               | 26 |
| 4.1. History of the Institution                                     | 26 |
| 4.2. The Permanent Exhibition                                       | 28 |
| 4.3. Exhibition Analysis  | 37 |
| 5. Discussion: Appreciation Comes in Many Ways                      | 42 |
| <i>German Memory Culture and Thomas Mann</i>                        | 43 |
| <i>English Identity and Charles Dickens</i>                         | 46 |
| <i>The Local, the National, and More:</i>                           |    |
| <i>Competing Ways of Representing and Remembering in the Museum</i> | 49 |
| <i>Writer's House Museums and the Nation</i>                        | 53 |
| 6. Summary  | 57 |
| 7. Sources and Literature   | 58 |
| 8. Appendix   | 64 |

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## 1. Introduction: Writers Who Made History

The German language knows the expression of “making history” – “Geschichte machen”. In English this would translate to “going down in history”<sup>1</sup>, and thus refer to an event or a date that came to be remembered for its exceptional circumstances, or also to certain people and their extraordinary life and work. A thing or a person that goes down in history is one that creates a remarkable echo, which reverberates in our society’s memory to this day. For example, one could say that English physician John Snow went down in history as a founder of epidemiology when he correctly identified the source of a cholera outbreak in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century London (only half an hour walk away from the then house of Charles Dickens, by the way). The German expression could however also be read in a literal sense, as in “creating history”, or a particular version of history. To make matters even worse, the German “Geschichte” means both history and story, so that one could just as well think of writing, or “making (up)” a story when hearing the expression.

This text will be engaged with the field that unfolds between these terms. It is a text about men who made stories, went down in history together with these, and whose life and work are nowadays being remembered in museums dedicated to them. These museums, lastly, make and convey their own history of the writer’s life, but, or so I think, also of the writer’s times. Because literature is rarely unmoored from the historic backdrop it was written against and often bears witness to the time in which it was created. Author Thomas Mann acknowledged this when he talked about his book “*Der Zauberberg*” to Princeton students in 1939. He described the novel as a “historical” one in its aim to sketch a portrayal of pre-war Europe, adding that the book could not have been written nor read had it been published before the First World War, since: “It had required the experiences the author had in common with his nation, and which he betimes had to render sufficiently mature for art, to [...] come forward at an auspicious moment.”<sup>2</sup>

Just like literature reflects its temporal origin, some of its writers rise to be iconic figures of their times, which explains a museum’s interest to make a statement about their place in the broader picture of history. This is also true for the two writers whose museums shall be analysed here: The just introduced Thomas Mann (1875 – 1955), and the above-mentioned Londoner Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870). The former museum is also dedicated to Thomas’ brother

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<sup>1</sup> The more equivalent expression of “in die Geschichte eingehen” is common in German as well.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (Stockholm, 1950 [first 1924]), XXIII and XXI. Curiously the script of the speech, which Mann originally held in English, is only available in German now. There, the passage reads: “Sicher war, daß die beiden Bände auch nur zehn Jahre früher weder hätten geschrieben werden noch Leser finden können. Es waren dazu Erlebnisse nötig gewesen, die der Autor mit seiner Nation gemeinsam hatte, und die er beizeiten in sich hatte kunstreich machen müssen, um mit seinem gewagten Produkt, wie schon einmal, im günstigen Augenblick hervortreten.” (See *ibid.*, XXI.)

Heinrich, who was a writer as well.

Apart from perhaps Shakespeare and Goethe, these two are certainly among the most illustrious and famous characters of their national literary histories. Though I must concede that, while Charles Dickens' name resonates with people all over the world, it is not unusual that even fellow Europeans frown when being asked about Thomas Mann or another member of his family; at least judging from my experience. Whereas Charles Dickens immediately rouses images of poor orphan boys, sly criminals, the gloomy lanes of London, and frequently of Christmas, Thomas Mann, for many, does not evoke such a clear scenery of pictures, perhaps also because his books are not tied to a specific place in the way Charles Dickens is inextricably tied to the city of London.<sup>3</sup> Germans might rather have a picture of the writer himself in mind when they think of Thomas Mann, a sternly looking, moustached man in a suit, than the actual scenery of books like the "Buddenbrooks" or the "Zauberberg".

Dickens and Mann lived their lives in quite different time periods, and Dickens had already passed – if only shortly before – when Thomas and his oldest brother were born in the 1870s. However, the two men also had some things in common aside from being famous and popular writers. They both lived quite cosmopolitan lives, travelled a lot and (both) stayed in Italy, Switzerland, as well as the United States for a longer time, though Thomas Mann's sojourn in the latter two countries lasted a lot longer as he had been forced there after the Nazis had taken over in his home country. This is also why Thomas Mann is closely linked to the German emigrant community of the 1930s and 40s, not least since he arguably was their main spokesperson, while Charles Dickens is a figurehead of Victorian London, the place where he spent most of his life.

Such introductory remarks show that Dickens and Mann not only hold a prominent place in literary history, but also one in history in general. Naturally much research has been conducted on these two writers' work and lives, and I will not add to it here. Instead, I want to look at their aforementioned museums and ask how the museal exhibitions *represent* the writers these days. As Thomas Thiemeier has pointed out, a museal exhibition can perfectly function as a historical source if we ask what questions it poses and what narratives it tries to convey. The exhibition is obviously based on historical sources as well, but it reflects a current version of history which can be viewed as part of a greater national remembrance culture.<sup>4</sup> And this is what the second

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<sup>3</sup> Of course Charles Dickens' material has also been the basis for a number of popular film productions that contributed to making his work known among a broader audience, which cannot be said of Thomas or the other Manns. Though several film adaptations of Mann novels exist, their (international) popularity can most likely not be compared to Roman Polanski's "Oliver Twist", for example.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Thiemeier, "Geschichtswissenschaft: Das Museum als Quelle", in *Museumsanalyse: Methoden und Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfeldes*, ed. Joachim Baur (Bielefeld: 2010), 73-94.

part of my enquiry hints at: What, if any, do the museal representations of Charles Dickens and Thomas Mann (and his family) tell about the way these writers, and their countries' histories, are *remembered* in England and Germany today? How do these men fit into the national remembrance culture? In other words: What does, according to the museums, Thomas Mann mean to German society, what Charles Dickens to the British? And are they merely depicted as nationally significant figures, or are their relations towards other countries and their interference in world affairs considered, too? Ultimately the discussion of these questions will also allow for a judgement of the institutional character of both houses (see also next chapter).

Though many studies on writer's museums in Britain, Germany, Italy and other Western countries exist at this point, no comparison between the British and the German museums has been drawn.<sup>5</sup> A comparison between Britain and Germany is intriguing because whereas Britain's historical *Fluchtpunkt* is the empire, Germany's is National Socialism and the Shoah, which is strictly negatively coded in public memory.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, both countries have been profoundly changed through immigration since World War II, and it will be exciting to see what this means for the museums.

Naturally, one does not always find what one initially expects when venturing forth on such a journey of questions. As the title suggests, I was mainly interested in representations of national belonging at first, and in how the cosmopolitan character of great writers plays a role in the museums these days. Along the way other themes, like the writers' wives and questions of gender, began to take up more space. Nonetheless, these too help in drawing a comparison between the British and German museal remembrance.

The text that tempted me to sally out into this particular direction was Linda Young's tellingly titled "Literature, Museums, and National Identity, or: Why Are there So Many Writer's House Museums in Britain?", in which she suggests that the popularity of these museums does not derive from the fact that people are so fond of the writers' literature but can rather be explained through the writers' status as figures of identification for the nation, or their status as national heroes.<sup>7</sup> In the same way, Young views writer's house museums as a subcategory of "heroes' house museums", which also comprise houses dedicated to other kinds of artists and individuals who are attributed national significance.

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<sup>5</sup> An author who juxtaposes, if not systematically compares, North American and British institutions is Alison Booth, *Homes and Haunts: Touring Writers' Shrines and Countries* (Oxford, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> In Britain, a debate about the more unpalatable, brutal side of the Empire has only begun recently, unlike in other European countries. See for example <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/uk-more-nostalgic-for-empire-than-other-ex-colonial-powers>, accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Linda Young, "Literature, Museums, and National Identity; or, Why are there So Many Writers' House Museums in Britain?", *Museum History Journal* 8, no. 2 (2015), 229-246.

In any case, a writer's house museum is not a "typical" historical museum. It is mostly pre-occupied with portraying an individual writer's biography; and does not aim to retell and explain grand historical events or changes, though, as we will see, some heavily focus on the *Lebensgefühl*, or general feeling, of a historical era. Writer's museums differ from historical museums in their underlying aspirations, and thus it can seem difficult to extract historical narratives from them. Therefore I think that taking a brief look at a selection of works from historical and literary studies will help map the field, clarify terms, and identify approaches that will come in handy in a more historical analysis of the Dickens Museum and the Buddenbrookhaus.

It is convenient to begin with Anna Rebecca Hoffmann's "An Literatur erinnern" because what Hoffmann set out to do greatly overlaps with my intentions, and because she proposes a detailed definition and classification of writer's house museums. She departs from the umbrella term of the literature museum (again a subcategory of the cultural history museum) which first, and in its generic sense, can refer to a museum which specifically exhibits literature itself instead of a particular author (an example would be the literature museum in Marbach<sup>8</sup>). On the other hand, literature museums also cover the subcategory of the writer's museum which is dedicated to usually one writer, and focuses on the person. In most cases, the category of "writer's museum" is identical to the of "writer's house museum", which implies that the museum is housed in a writer's former home, or at least a building that the writer was somehow connected to (thus both Dickens Museum and Buddenbrookhaus would be writer's house museums, which will be discussed in more detail later). Therefore, for Hoffmann a writer's house museum ranges between the two institutions of museum and memorial, at times leaning to the former, at times to the latter.<sup>9</sup>

A part of the houses Hoffmann analyses would fit the concept of the "writer's house museum" as proposed by Nicola J. Watson, who has a different emphasis. For Watson, these writer's house museums usually have certain commonalities: "All are dedicated to displaying what is not there, although it once was there – the author. They all construct 'a writer' by evoking a writer's life and writings through objects located in pseudo-domestic spaces. Such objects and spaces speak of the absence, or (more accurately) of the once-but-no-longer presence of the author's body 'at home'."<sup>10</sup> The quote shows that Watson distinguishes between the writer and the author. For her, someone is only a writer through the act of writing. The author on the other

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<sup>8</sup> This museum again partially exhibits literature using original manuscripts, which could be understood as personal belongings of the authors as well.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Rebecca Hoffmann, *An Literatur erinnern: Zur Erinnerungsarbeit literarischer Museen und Gedenkstätten* (Bielefeld, 2018), 30-37.

<sup>10</sup> Nicola J. Watson, *The Author's Effect: On Writer's House Museums* (Oxford, 2020), 11.



hand refers to a bigger entity: the whole mystified persona of the literary creator, the genius in his or her whole existence from head to toes.<sup>11</sup> This authorial spirit is supposed to be entangled with the house, even if the author did never write in the house at all; it is shown to be reflected in the author's personal belongings, bodily remains, and grounds.<sup>12</sup>

The spelling of the "writer's house museum" in exactly this way is very important to Watson, as she shows how these museums are about materialising the act of writing, and the writer, and presenting the house as belonging and homestead – thus the importance of the apostrophe.<sup>13</sup> She also affirms, however, that ultimately the writer's house museum might be not so much about the staging of the writer, but even more so of the readers (and the act of reading) in their imaginary encounter with him or her at this mystic place.<sup>14</sup>

Watson points to another characteristic of the writer's house museum when she sums up the intention of her book, saying that it "describes the ways that different types of authorial remains, possessions, and spaces came to evoke the simultaneous materiality and immateriality of the author, and how this in turn affected place, most often conceived as national".<sup>15</sup> Not only does the foundation of many writer's house museums coincide with Romantic nationalism, to this day they are tools to assert a national cultural identity.<sup>16</sup>

It has to be shown if Dickens Museum and Buddenbrookhaus can ultimately fulfil the conditions discussed here as well. They certainly match the criteria for museums given in the ICOM definition of museums, which lists collection, research, and exhibition as their fundamental characteristics, and Hoffman's requirement of being set in a building which can be linked to the writer's biography.<sup>17</sup>

Turning back to Hoffmann's book, there is one more aspect which is valuable to my own research: that is how she goes on to identify the narratives which different museal exhibitions are built around,<sup>18</sup> guided by the question of how the writers are construed as important figures

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., concisely on 227-228.

<sup>12</sup> Like in the case of H.C. Andersen's Hus in Odense which also displays Andersen's later study that he used while living in Copenhagen, "because the museum argues that his career as a writer of fairytales flows directly from his birth and childhood". See *ibid.*, 109. Also her example of Mark Twain's boyhood home, *ibid.*, 134-138.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 228-229.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, particularly the very last pages, 229-231.

<sup>17</sup> "A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment." See <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>, accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Though an exhibition can also be designed in a more open way which lets the visitor choose from different thematic modules, Hoffmann shows that the bulk of writer's house museums are constructed along a coherent narrative about the author which guides the visitor through the museum. See Hoffmann, *An Literatur erinnern*, 284-292.

in cultural memory. This aspect of how people are exemplary integrated into a country's memory is what interests me, and a similar aspect captured historian Vincent Regente's attention, who researched how the escape and expulsion of Germans towards the end of the Second World War are being narrated and exhibited at different museal sites.<sup>19</sup> Unlike Hoffmann, Regente starts his analysis with a clear thematical focus – as he is primarily looking at the depictions and narratives of escape and expulsion in museums –, and he is not too concerned with individual personalities either. Regente focuses on an event, and its experience, but similarly to Hoffmann he wonders how museums embed this specific something into cultural memory, and how different national societies ultimately talk about this fragment of their past.

Hoffmann, the literary scholar, and historian Regente mark the poles between which I intend to move: Asking how the Charles Dickens Museum and the Buddenbrookhaus inscribe their protagonists into their epochs and what role they assign them in the present; looking at writer's house museums but maintaining a stronger historical perspective which puts the focus away from the discussion of individual things and questions of atmosphere (which play a big part in literary scholars' analyses of writer's house museums). But like Hoffmann, I will rather move along with what the writer's house museums are offering instead of, like Regente, only regarding sections of the exhibition which cover a specific topic. Although some parts of the museal exhibitions address questions of nationality and cultural home more directly, only the full thematic spectrum of the exhibition allows to assess the writers' standing in remembrance culture.

In the next chapter, I will describe in more detail my sources and how I aim to tackle them, by drawing on some more practical examples of museum analyses. I will then plunge into the museums – beginning with a brief overview on the historic background of the institutions, followed by a tour of the exhibition put to paper, and a more thoughtful analysis of it. Useful insights from other researchers will be weaved in on the way but be given more room in the final chapter, where I will try to give an answer to the questions I posed here. The final chapter will also look at the memory cultures of Britain and Germany, in order to then reflect on the wider role of writer's house museums in British and German society.

## **2. Sources and Methodology: The Observant Visitor**

The museal exhibition as a historical source presents the researcher with some peculiarities. Unlike any textual document, an exhibition is to a larger part composed of objects. On top of

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<sup>19</sup> Vincent Regente, *Flucht und Vertreibung in europäischen Museen: Deutsche, polnische und tschechische Perspektiven im Vergleich* (Bielefeld, 2020).

that, an exhibition is also an experience: Part of it is the act of traversing the different rooms, imbibing the atmosphere of the surroundings – listening to the sounds, smelling the scents –, and, in the case of a writer’s house museum, feeling the shadow of the writer’s presence linger over the place. It is for these reasons Thiemeyer suggests that analysing a past exhibition which is no longer shown comes closest to the regular craft of the historian. A past exhibition can, like other historical events, only be resurrected in the mind by placing together exhibition texts, object pictures, floor plans, and what other material we might have available to get a sense of what it was like to walk the exhibition.<sup>20</sup> Here, however, I want to focus on the present permanent exhibitions of the Dickens Museum and Buddenbrookhaus as sources for the writers’ standing in cultural memory. The reason is that I assume that in recent years museums have more assertively begun to move away from national frames and to emphasise connection lines crossing through the nations,<sup>21</sup> and that therefore the current exhibitions of the museums provide more abundant material for my questions. So the current exhibitions form the central part of my analysis, yet I want to regard the former permanent exhibitions as well, so that any significant differences or marked alterations from them can be taken into account, and the development of the exhibition themes and emphases be traced. The analysis following the tour of both exhibitions will therefore consider additional material in the form of catalogues and guide books on these previous exhibitions. Naturally, the catalogues cannot substitute the actual exhibitions. Apart from a catalogue only being a piece of paper, its contents do not always match the exact contents of the museal exhibition, like in the case of the catalogue for the Buddenbrookhaus’ 1990s exhibition which offers more extensive text material than the exhibition itself.

Regarding the current exhibitions, as more than printed sources, the following questions arise: How should the meaning of objects be assessed, and how, and to what extent, should the “context” of the exhibition be covered in the analysis, too? By “context” I mean everything that is neither exhibition text nor object on display, so for example the structure of the exhibition, that is in which room the visitors start their tour and how they are then guided onwards, the arrangement of objects in the respective rooms, the role of the staff, as of sounds, smells, or possible interactive elements.

In the beginning of the working process, these questions carried great weight and heavily influenced my reading. However, they became less important once I had visited the museums

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<sup>20</sup> Thiemeyer, "Geschichtswissenschaft: Das Museum als Quelle", 80-81.

<sup>21</sup> See for example the contributions in Andrea Meyer and Bénédicte Savoy, *The Museum Is Open: Towards a Transnational History of Museums 1750-1940* (Berlin/Boston, 2014).

and began analysing the exhibitions. This is especially true for the current exhibition of the Buddenbrookhaus, for which I can agree with Michael Parmentier that, despite all which objects and other stimuli can tell, only language contrives to establish causal and final links to connect the things in such a “temporalized form of scenic display” (as he calls narrative exhibitions).<sup>22</sup> What was difficult about the Buddenbrookhaus exhibition was that its longstanding permanent exhibition in Mengstraße 4, Lübeck is closed down at the moment, and substituted by a much smaller one in the historical Behnhaus (today an art museum). The reduced space at this new location might be one factor for that the exhibition here relies heavily on text and only displays a limited number of objects, which on top have to be integrated into the frame of another museum. The analysis of the Buddenbrookhaus therefore focuses on text. Nonetheless, works on the exhibition context have influenced how I viewed the exhibitions and enabled me to better “close-read” them, if more so in the case of the Charles Dickens Museum, and are hence worth being discussed here in brief.

There are many studies which have tried to render semiotic theories fruitful for a more holistic museum analysis that covers more than just the sequence of texts and objects, though the meaning of the object often remains vital. The person who is considered to have paved the way for this direction is Krzysztof Pomian. He introduced the idea that an object changes its meaning once it is made an exhibit, and nourished various attempts to systematically fathom the meanings of exhibits in museums.<sup>23</sup> One of these attempts was put forward by Jana Scholze. She expands the classical semiotic levels of denotation (the literal meaning or reading of an object, for example when we recognise an eagle as one) and connotation (the possible cultural meanings we attach to the eagle, like: the eagle as a national symbol of the United States) with a third one she calls metacommunication. This metacommunication includes all other aspects of an exhibition that speak of the curators’ underlying notions and intentions (meaning their general political or academic stance) and can be described in the wider design of the exhibition. Scholze claims that all objects are ultimately polysemic or can have various possible meanings, which the curators try to restrict through their specific exhibition design and the way in which they guide the visitors. Still, there always remain several readings of the exhibition for the visitors. Scholze tries to uncover these tensions between the reading that the curators intend to propose and the meanings a “reader”, or visitor to the exhibition, can gather from it, and to determine

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Parmentier, "Mit Dingen erzählen: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Narration im Museum", in *Die Praxis der Ausstellung: Über museale Konzepte auf Zeit und auf Dauer*, ed. Tobias G. Natter, Michael Fehr, and Bettina Habsburg-Lothringen (Bielefeld: 2012), 147-164: 161-162, 156.

<sup>23</sup> Krzysztof Pomian, *Der Ursprung des Museums. Vom Sammeln* (Berlin, 2013 [first 1988]), especially 49-50 for the definition of a "semiophore", and 73-90 for a practical application on the basis of the Medici vases.

which structures create these meanings and how they do it.<sup>24</sup> An example which shows how this theory works in practice can be taken from a study by Wonisch and Muttenthaler, who analysed how the categories of race and gender show through in different Viennese museums, and emphasise the architectural surroundings the exhibition is embedded in: In the Museum für Völkerkunde (now Weltmuseum), they point out how on the textual level native Americans are implicitly always, and only, seen in comparison to European calculations of time, and how European terminology of progress and modernity is carelessly projected onto native American societies. This direction of the exhibition texts is continued on the metacommunicative level, like in the architectural elements of the museum which tend to present the natives' objects in dimly lit rooms, giving them a touch of the eerie and exotic.<sup>25</sup>

An author who puts special emphasis on perceiving exhibitions as “art and aesthetic experience” is Leslie Bedford, who takes a closer look at non-textual elements, but without applying semiotic terminology. Bedford underlines that especially adults have learnt to make sense of their own and others' experiences through formulating narratives in their mind, which always contain a more personal element which appeals to the human experience. For the same reasons, narrative exhibitions are so attractive to visitors, and yet these strengths should not lead us to believe that it is the text that makes the narrative in the museum. On the contrary, Bedford contends that to a large part it is the non-textual elements like smell or touch that compose the narrative space in which the visitors can come up with their own questions and get a “feeling of being there”, a feeling of experiencing something they, in reality, do not.<sup>26</sup> This “feeling of being there” is a strange concept when applied to the writer's house museum, for is it not more than a feeling but the factual experience of being in the place the author used to inhabit which lures the visitors into these museums? The writer's house museum does not pretend to send the visitors to another place, it rather wants them to revel in being exactly where they are, and if it intends to set them on a journey, then rather on one through time. Because the writer is not there anymore, yet so are the things that he used and touched. In any case, Stephanie Moser would likely agree with Bedford that the exhibition is its own genre of art as she turns her attention to architectural elements that constitute the exhibition, and points out that the exhibition not only

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<sup>24</sup> Jana Scholze, *Medium Ausstellung: Lektüren musealer Gestaltung in Oxford, Leipzig, Amsterdam und Berlin* (Bielefeld, 2004), especially 26-39; also Jana Scholze, "Kultursemiotik: Zeichenlesen in Ausstellungen", in *Museumsanalyse: Methoden und Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfeldes*, ed. Joachim Baur (Bielefeld: 2010), 121-148.

<sup>25</sup> Roswitha Muttenthaler and Regina Wonisch, *Gesten des Zeigens: Zur Repräsentation von Gender und Race in Ausstellungen* (Bielefeld, 2006), 150-226.

<sup>26</sup> Leslie Bedford, *The Art of Museum Exhibitions: How Story and Imagination Create Aesthetic Experiences* (London/New York, 2014), 57-64, 108-113, 120-122.

replicates knowledge garnered in research but creates new knowledge itself.<sup>27</sup> Her focus on architecture and design plays on the metacommunicative level discussed above, and shows once more how important museologists deem the contextual facets of the exhibition.

Like Scholze, I aim to treat the museum exhibitions from a visitor's perspective, and will try to fathom how they come across for the visitor rather than to ascertain what the curators had in mind.<sup>28</sup> I therefore abstain from interviews with the curators, which means that I cannot always make sure what idea was meant to be conveyed, and that I have to work with ambiguities and gaps. Also, I will regard the metacommunicative level of the exhibitions, if only to smaller degrees. But there are two more aspects that make writer's house museums special and should be considered: the literature, and the author's "aura".

The texts and the literary worlds people concocted are what made them known in the first place, which seems a sufficient justification to integrate the literature itself into the museums. But in practice this can prove difficult.<sup>29</sup> Reading a writer's literature is usually not a central part of visiting a writer's house museum. Two possible answers to this challenge can be found in the South African Olive Schreiner House and the Norwegian Olav H. Hauge Centre. In the Olive Schreiner House, much room is given to extracts of the author's texts herself, both from her fictional works as from her letters. These extracts again are chosen to corroborate a certain image of Olive Schreiner as a woman and locally important figure.<sup>30</sup> The Norwegian Hauge Centre comes up with a particularly elegant way of integrating the literature into its house: Windows that offer a view on the landscape which inspired Hauge are merged with extracts of his correspondent poetry.<sup>31</sup>

The example of the Hauge Centre also brings the writer's house as a place of inspiration for the writer himself into focus, in contrast to it being a place of inspiration for the visitors who set off on "pilgrimages" to the author's abode.<sup>32</sup> Because still the fascination of a writer's house museum does to a large part lie in the "auratic" experience it offers. How Ulrike Spring and

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<sup>27</sup> Stephanie Moser, "The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Display and the Creation of Knowledge", *Museum Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2010), 22-32.

<sup>28</sup> Scholze, *Medium Ausstellung: Lektüren musealer Gestaltung in Oxford, Leipzig, Amsterdam und Berlin*, introduction, especially 12-13, 24-25, 33-34; and 62 (footnote nr. 83).

<sup>29</sup> See for example Vanessa Zeissig, "This Is Not a Set of Guidelines - Or How (Not) to Exhibit Literature", in *Transforming Author Museums: From Sites of Pilgrimage to Cultural Hubs*, ed. Ulrike Spring, Johan Schimanski, and Thea Aarbakke (New York/Oxford: 2022), 177-196: especially 182.

<sup>30</sup> Dana Ryan Lande, "Narrative Intersections in an Author Museum: The Olive Schreiner House", *Narrative Culture* 7, no. 1 (2020), 60-78: especially 68-69.

<sup>31</sup> Thea Aarbakke, "Musealiserte relasjoner mellom liv og litteratur på Olav H. Hauge-senteret", *Nordisk Museologi* 1 (2020), 75-90: 79-81.

<sup>32</sup> "Unluckily" though, the centre is housed in a former community building which lacks any connection to Olav H. Hauge's dwellings, but the statement still holds true for the centre's surroundings, as the view on the Ulvik fjord which presents itself to the visitor at the window can be regarded a part of the grounds Hauge inhabited.

others have outlined, tentative attempts to make the writer's house museum a place of reading and engaging with literature can be observed in a number of institutions nowadays, shifting the focus away from the sheer aesthetical attraction of the place which revolves around the literary creative process reflected in the building and its interior (importantly, Spring and Schimanski also emphasise that it is the interplay of biography and literature that makes the contents of the writer's house museum, not their competition).<sup>33</sup> But it cannot be denied that many visitors flock to writer's house museums because of the *genius loci*, in search for the "ghost" of the author they hope to encounter,<sup>34</sup> perhaps also filled with a vague longing to get inspired – in contrast to e.g. art museums which are attractive by means of the artwork they show.<sup>35</sup>

There is one other way left in which writer's houses exert influence and represent ideas. They harbour all the aspirations the museum's founders carried with them, as well as those of everyone else in charge of shaping the museum throughout its history, or, as Harald Hendrix puts it: "As a medium of remembrance, writers' houses not only recall the poets and novelists who dwelt in them, but also the ideologies of those who turned them into memorial sites."<sup>36</sup> Hendrix further contends that unlike other "personal museums", writer's house museums are predominantly preoccupied with remembrance, less with objective documentation of the writer and his life.<sup>37</sup>

Before we move on, it therefore remains to shed some light on how the meaning of writer's house museums has changed throughout time. Writer's house museums were founded to recall writers who had become dear to the people, and to be valued as a source of individual inspiration as well as donors of a sense of community among the fan base. This limited sense of community soon blended in with a sense of common national identity as the high phase of founding writer's house museums coincided with national movements in many European countries. Writer's houses were then also places in which national identity was asserted, entwined with an

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<sup>33</sup> Heike Gfrereis et al., "Literature, Exhibitions and Communication: A Conversation", *Nordisk Museologi* 28, no. 1 (2020), 91-102; Johan Schimanski and Ulrike Spring, "Hva kommuniseres i forfattermuseer?", *ibid.*, 23-41; Ulrike Spring and Johan Schimanski, "Biografi og verk: Kommunikasjonsprosesser i forfattermuseer", *ibid.*, 4-7; Ulrike Spring, "Die Inszenierung von Archivmaterial in musealisierten Dichterwohnungen", in *Schauplatz Archiv: Objekt - Narrativ - Performanz*, ed. Klaus Kastberger, Stefan Maurer, and Christian Neuhuber (Berlin/Boston: 2019), 141-155; Ulrike Spring, "Exhibiting Mozart: Rethinking Biography", *Nordisk Museologi* 2 (2010), 58-74.

<sup>34</sup> Ulrike Spring and Johan Schimanski, "Ghostly Voices in the Author Museum", in *Transforming Author Museums: From Sites of Pilgrimage to Cultural Hubs*, ed. Ulrike Spring, Johan Schimanski, and Thea Aarbakke (New York/Oxford: 2022), 105-135. Also, in the same volume, Elin Haugdal, "New Architecture in Author Museums and Centres", in *Transforming Author Museums: From Sites of Pilgrimage to Cultural Hubs*, ed. Ulrike Spring, Johan Schimanski, and Thea Aarbakke (New York/Oxford: 2022), 35-67: especially 60.

<sup>35</sup> Spring and Schimanski, "Ghostly Voices in the Author Museum", 115.

<sup>36</sup> Harald Hendrix, "Writer's Houses as Media of Expression and Remembrance: From Self-Fashioning to Cultural Memory", in *Writer's Houses and the Making of Memory*, ed. Harald Hendrix (New York/London: 2008), 1-11: 5.

<sup>37</sup> Hendrix, "Epilogue: The Appeal of Writer's Houses". In *ibid.*, 235-243.

awareness of a national literature. At times the significance of a place as a walk-in photo album of a specific time period exceeded the preoccupation with the actual author, like in the case of Walter Scott's Abbotsford and its grounds, which "gave rise [...] to the idea that it would be possible and desirable to [...] reconstruct writers' houses as national museums, and it invented the romantic ideology and the aesthetic of the writer's house museum as set within a haunted national landscape [...]",<sup>38</sup> or that of Franz Grillparzer's room which has come to serve as a period piece for mid-nineteenth century Viennese home culture.<sup>39</sup> Despite the mobile character of many of the authors who have been receiving personal museums – many were at least ardent travellers and not confined to impressions of their home nation –, the idea of national identity seemingly continues to play a big role for the museums.<sup>40</sup> Hoffmann is not even sure if writer's house museums are capable of including a wider, more international audience, for as mediums of a national memory their values might not be unconditionally compatible with other collective memories.<sup>41</sup>

As tricky as it seems to place the writer's house museum among other museums, as manifold are the elements that together make up the museal exhibition. Personally, smaller writer's house museums have a touch of the local *Heimatmuseum* for me, which was established out of a desire to put locals in contact with their roots and foster their sense of community.<sup>42</sup> That museums dedicated to writers who made themselves a name nationwide serve a similar function for the national community, appears to be just consequent. It will be interesting to now see what the Charles Dickens Museum and the Buddenbrookhaus have made of this.

To borrow one more thought on national museums, do they revolve around nationally specific facets of the writer, or around universal human themes in their work?<sup>43</sup> And what role does the urbane side of the writers have? Perhaps there are just subtle differences to be found in the style of the exhibitions. Anyhow, the cursory look taken at museum research here should have sharpened the eye for the upcoming analysis a little and help discern more nuances. I now aim

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<sup>38</sup> Watson, *The Author's Effect: On Writer's House Museums*, 186. For the aforementioned explanations on writer's houses and national remembrance see *ibid.* Also see Hoffmann, *An Literatur erinnern*, 21-30.

<sup>39</sup> Eva-Maria Orosz, "A Displaced Apartment of a Poet in a Museum: Staging and Reception of Franz Grillparzer in the Wien Museum", in *Transforming Author Museums: From Sites of Pilgrimage to Cultural Hubs*, ed. Ulrike Spring, Johan Schimanski, and Thea Aarbakke (New York/Oxford: 2022), 68-82.

<sup>40</sup> Watson, *The Author's Effect: On Writer's House Museums*, 231; Lande, "Narrative Intersections in an Author Museum: The Olive Schreiner House", 69.

<sup>41</sup> Hoffmann, *An Literatur erinnern*, 55-56 (footnote nr. 20).

<sup>42</sup> Anke te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums zur Einführung* (Hamburg, 2021), 139-142.

<sup>43</sup> Krzysztof Pomian, "Museum, Nation, Nationalmuseum", in *Die Nation und ihre Museen. Für das Deutsche Historische Museum*, ed. Marie-Louise von Plessen (Frankfurt am Main/New York: 1992), 19-32: 25. The original quote refers to two forms of national museums: "The ones show the nation participating in the universal, in that which applies to all people, or at least to all civilised people. The others show what is special and extraordinary about the nation and its path in time."



to look at the museums in question as a close reader<sup>44</sup>, as a better informed visitor with an observant mind.<sup>45</sup>

In both museums, I brought a set of guiding questions to experience the exhibition in a more structured way. I wrote down my immediate impressions in a notebook and took detailed photos of the rooms so that I could recall my visit later on when writing the analysis.

The tour starts in Lübeck.

### **3. Case Study: Buddenbrookhaus**

#### **3.1. History of the Institution**

It is unique for a writer's house, and its museum, to be named after a fictional personality and not after the author's. The name Buddenbrookhaus became established soon after Thomas Mann had published his novel about the family with the same name in 1901, which tells of the rise and fall of merchant Johann Buddenbrook and his kin. Contrary to the still existent popular belief, Thomas Mann did not grow up in the house in Mengstraße 4. Only his grandmother still inhabited the house when he was a child, and he cherished it as a (regular) visitor himself. So, after the house had existed since the Middle Ages and been a merchant's home since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century when it received its characteristic front, it was the tale of the Buddenbrooks family that made it known worldwide.

Mostly reconstructed after the Second World War, the town of Lübeck managed to buy the building in 1991. A Thomas Mann Society had existed in Lübeck since the 1960s and harboured vague ideas to buy the property, yet had not succeeded to this point. But since a local politician had expressed his regret for a missing homestead to remember Thomas Mann, more concrete plans emerged.<sup>46</sup> What then started as a "Heinrich-und-Thomas-Mann-Zentrum im Buddenbrookhaus" in 1993 soon turned into a greater museum project which encompassed more and more members from the Mann family – and is largely financed by the German state. Still, the two brothers Thomas and Heinrich are in the heart of the museum, and Nobel laureate in

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<sup>44</sup> See for example <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading>, accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Also see Muttenthaler and Wonisch, *Gesten des Zeigens: Zur Repräsentation von Gender und Race in Ausstellungen*, 237-238. Being a "better informed" visitor, in regard to a writer's house museum, should naturally also include to know the author's life and work before visiting the museum. Though I am very far from being an expert on the Manns or Dickens, I tried to at least make myself familiar with the authors' most important works, or those that take up most space in the museums.

<sup>46</sup> Ada Kadelbach, "Wie alles begann: Eine nicht alltägliche Gründungsgeschichte", in *Fünf Jahre Heinrich-und-Thomas-Mann-Zentrum im Buddenbrookhaus: 1993-1998 (Stationen - Ereignisse - Dokumente)*, ed. Manfred Eickhölter (Lübeck: 1998), 9-14: 9-10.

literature Thomas Mann was and remains the central figure of the museum, which is why I will often speak of him alone when I refer to the Buddenbrookhaus.<sup>47</sup>

Founding member and early director Hans Wißkirchen saw literary education at the heart of the new museum and took pride in the fact that the exhibition animated visitors to actually pick up the Manns' books.<sup>48</sup> Literature was to play an even bigger role in the museum after a remodelling of the house's concept in 2000 came up with detailed scenic imitations of two rooms as they were described in the "Buddenbrooks" novel (the *Landschaftszimmer* and *Speisezimmer*). Parts of the house were thus turned into a "walk-in novel". In the same year, the museum opened two new permanent exhibitions on the eponymous novel and on the Manns as a family of writers.<sup>49</sup>

Since 2020, the long-standing exhibition in the Buddenbrookhaus is closed, and the house is supposed to open its doors again in 2025 to a new, even bigger space. Meanwhile, a smaller exhibition is being shown in the nearby Behnhaus, an art museum (occasionally, the Buddenbrookhaus in fact calls it a "special exhibition", though it serves as a substitute permanent exhibition for the years in which the actual museum building is closed). This exhibition is the only one I was able to visit, and will be the topic of the upcoming chapter. References to the former permanent exhibitions will be included in the later analysis, for the modules in the current exhibition are derived from these. The architectural scenery however will have to remain in the background, because the Behnhaus is an independent institution and the current exhibition of the Buddenbrookhaus there could only but adapt to the frame it provides.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Iconic is the picture taken in 1953 of Thomas Mann and his wife in front of the bombed Buddenbrookhaus (Holger Pils called it a "symbol" in itself in his talk on "The Buddenbrookhaus as a symbolic place", see [https://buddenbrookhaus.de/file/holger\\_pils\\_das\\_buddenbrookhaus\\_als\\_symbolischer\\_ort.pdf](https://buddenbrookhaus.de/file/holger_pils_das_buddenbrookhaus_als_symbolischer_ort.pdf), 13, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022); and for a recent cooperation with a school the students were photographed grouped around a life-sized, neon pink figure of Thomas Mann. Thomas also is the star of the Buddenbrookhaus' Instagram account. His brother Heinrich has always been a part of the museum as well, however, and, as pointed out above, Thomas' son Klaus and others have been more strongly included over the years. So, when I at times only name Thomas Mann, this does never mean that the museum only covers his person; it is simply easier to generally operate with Thomas Mann as the central figure than to start long enumerations every time.

<sup>48</sup> Hans Wißkirchen, "Fünf Jahre Buddenbrookhaus oder: was taugt ein Literaturmuseum am Ende unseres Jahrhunderts?", in *Fünf Jahre Heinrich-und-Thomas-Mann-Zentrum im Buddenbrookhaus: 1993-1998 (Stationen - Ereignisse - Dokumente)*, ed. Manfred Eickhölter (Lübeck: 1998), 22-36: especially 29.

<sup>49</sup> The information for this overview stem from the introducing chapters of a museum's publication from 1998, Kadelbach, "Wie alles begann: Eine nicht alltägliche Gründungsgeschichte"; Birgitt Mohrhagen, "Der Anfang vor dem Anfang", *ibid.*, 15-21; Wißkirchen, "Fünf Jahre Buddenbrookhaus oder: was taugt ein Literaturmuseum am Ende unseres Jahrhunderts?". I have also drawn on the articles of an illustrated publication on the occasion of the 250th birthday of the building, Britta Dittmann and Hans Wißkirchen, eds., *Das Buddenbrookhaus* (Lübeck: 2008).

<sup>50</sup> See the website of the Buddenbrookhaus, particularly <https://buddenbrookhaus.de/buddenbrookhaus-2018>, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

### 3.2. The Interims Exhibition in the Behnhaus

#### OVERVIEW OVER THE STATIONS:

- 1) Buddenbrooks
- 2) Mann Family
- 3) Rebellion
- 4) Julia Mann
- 5) Passion
- 6) Politics
- 7) Exile

Upon entering the Behnhaus, I was welcomed by an employee who asked what part of the house I was most interested in. As I uttered my interest in the Buddenbrooks exhibition, I was referred to the employee in charge who had extensive knowledge on the novel and the Mann family, and introduced me to the exhibition. She ushered me in to a small room to the right of the entrance, which thus was my first impression of the place – and is intended as the reception room,<sup>51</sup> though it also contained a guestbook and thus invited to end the tour here again. Two things stood out here. First, a pompous wooden bookcase which was explained to represent the twofold origin of Thomas' and Heinrich's family, for it was made out of wood from their mother's home country Brazil, but produced in Lübeck. The bookcase is a nice example for an object that is not only "an active participant in the exhibition message"<sup>52</sup> but appeals to the personal imaginative space of the visitors described by Bedford, in which not only intellectual but aesthetical experience, too, help convey the story. This effect is strengthened by the fact that the bookcase is one of the very few exhibits (the other being the candelabra upstairs) that is not covered by glass and can be perceived without a barrier. Sitting on the couch area on the opposite side and contemplating the marbled wood and delicate ornamental leaves, one can picture this case as the backdrop to a gathering of the Mann family.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Birte Lipinski, Caren Heuer, and Tristan Bielfeld, eds., *Buddenbrooks im Behnhaus: Eine Ausstellung im Museum Behnhaus Drägerhaus (Katalog zur Ausstellung)* (Lübeck: 2020), 13.

<sup>52</sup> An expression borrowed from Moser, "The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Display and the Creation of Knowledge", 27.

<sup>53</sup> See Bedford, *The Art of Museum Exhibitions: How Story and Imagination Create Aesthetic Experiences*, especially 76, 92-93. Here she also stresses the importance of appealing to the visitors' emotions.



Figure 1. Mahogany bookcase in the reception room, Behnhaus 2021. Photo by Maret Grapengeter. Copyright: Buddenbrookhaus Lübeck, reproduced with permission.

On another wall, a family tree which reaches down to the newest descendants of the family who are young and alive today, seems to allude to the role that the Manns and their themes still play in the presence. From the foyer and around the corner the way leads into the grand entrance hall of the Behnhaus, and to the exhibition's first two stations. The atmosphere in the entrance hall matches what, according to the catalogue, was meant to be conveyed in this special exhibition: how it was like to be part of the *Bürgerklasse* in 19<sup>th</sup> century Lübeck, a feeling for the lifestyle and *savoir-vivre*.<sup>54</sup> Like an elegant protestant church, the entrance hall is impressive without being overly ornamented: It is roomy, at any rate for a private home, painted in simplistic, muted colours that lend it a cool but also calm vibe. At the same time, the hall is gently flooded with light coming through the ceiling-high window-panes, drawing attention to the frescoes on the wall, and the statues flanking doors and staircases.

The chosen themes in the exhibition, too, refer strongly to Thomas' and Heinrich's relationship with Lübeck, whereas other important phases in their life like the exile are paid less attention to.<sup>55</sup> The seven stations depart from the "Buddenbrooks" novel, go over to family and end with political themes. Each station disposes of a monitor which provides additional textual information, probably because a larger amount of text could not have been integrated into the Behnhaus otherwise. What is new about the exhibition in the Behnhaus is a series of videoclips (one for each station, to be seen on the monitors or in an app) in which Tony Buddenbrook, the self-confident, status-conscious and perky daughter of the Buddenbrooks family, introduces the visitor to the topic of the station and comments on it in the character's notorious, cheeky tone.

<sup>54</sup> Lipinski, Heuer, and Bielfeld, *Buddenbrooks im Behnhaus: Eine Ausstellung im Museum Behnhaus Drägerhaus (Katalog zur Ausstellung)*, 8, 11-12. The first text panel in the reception room also clarifies this reasoning.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Though the Behnhaus is not the inspiration for the Buddenbrooks' home, the catalogue characterises it as one that would have suited a woman like Tony, and thus refers to her videos as a kind of “home-story”<sup>56</sup> (some footage is filmed with a selfie camera even). Indeed the filmclips are reminiscent of the type of YouTube channels in which prominent actors or musicians open their doors to the virtual public, expatiate on their architectural taste and tell the stories behind selected objects along the way.<sup>57</sup> The two stations in the grand hall named “Buddenbrooks” and “Mann Family” focus on the immediate literary inspiration Thomas Mann drew from his acquaintances in Lübeck as well as on the social background of the family in general. The few objects shown mostly stem from the Mann family's property, and hint to the family's status. A “special cup of the Bergen traders” which had been awarded to Thomas' and Heinrich's great-grandfather emphasises the longstanding involvement of the family in maritime trade. Like most of the other exhibited objects (a walking stick, a signet ring, a fan from the 2008 Buddenbrooks film, a family bible) the cup serves more than just an illustrative character by initiating its own story – though the engraved text on the cup, decipherable with some effort, renders the cup a textual piece at the same moment. It seems to say: The Manns were not just an “ordinary” family from provincial Lübeck, they disposed of contacts in various European places and beyond as a result of their trading connections. The Siberian bear which ornamented the Manns' house in Beckergrube and a letter from relative Wilhelm Marty supertitled with his office as *Vice-Consulado de Portugal* underline this impression (both these objects are only referred to digitally on the touchscreens). Still Tony stresses the family's origins in Lübeck once again when she refers to Heinrich's dressing style as the of a “stiff Hanseatic citizen”.



Figure 2. Entrance hall with the first station of the Buddenbrooks exhibition in the left corner, Behnhaus 2021. Photo by Maret Grapengeter; Copyright: Buddenbrookhaus Lübeck, reproduced with permission.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>57</sup> I am particularly thinking of the magazine's Architectural Digest channel on YouTube here.

Up the stairs and all the way through to a back room lies the third station, “Rebellion”. Though it is dedicated to Thomas’ and Heinrich’s break with their family, or at least with the family tradition, the objects assembled here actually seem to confirm once again how deeply rooted the bourgeoisie lifestyle of the Lübeck merchants continued to be in the Mann brothers. A seal from the brothers’ uncle Johann Siegmund, “respected long-distance trader and Dutch consul”, is contrasted with a golden pencil which belonged to Thomas Mann. On the one hand the pencil symbolises his writing life, on the other it also hints to his predilection for luxurious style and “representative function”. The same kind of contrast between family tradition and individual path can be seen in the other pair of objects in the room, the Mann family’s coat of arm with Hermes at its centre, and the Hermes figure Thomas later acquired from a Lübeck sculptor and displayed in his garden in Munich.<sup>58</sup> The texts on the monitor are more occupied with Heinrich Mann. We learn that at the age of 13 he was sent to St. Petersburg to learn the merchant’s trade but returned only reassured in that this was not the right way for him. The text then relates Heinrich’s disdain for Lübeck with his literature, first and foremost the famous “Professor Unrat” about the social downfall of a staid teacher. As both Heinrich’s and Thomas’ educational efforts seemed equally disappointing to father Johann Mann, he did not want to entrust his business to neither of his sons and wished for it to be dissolved after his death. His will did not consider his wife Julia either, a fact Tony Buddenbrook takes up in her monologue from a feminist perspective. While she shortly muses on how Julia Mann went empty-handed out of her husband’s will – seemingly with a reproachful undertone –, she detailedly dwells on her own fate in the novel. Here Tony is pressured into marrying a man she does not want, on which her brother comments that “one has to bear these things”. Although Tony Buddenbrook grew up in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and thus considerably earlier than Thomas, the fate her writer had chosen for her creates a stark contrast to his own youth, in which he had the opportunity to break free from his family’s conventions and expectations.

The walk-through room leading back to the hall is dedicated to Julia Mann and her “exotic” origins in Brazil. It is mentioned, too, that these were not purely idyllic, as slaves constituted a vital brick for the family’s comfortable life. Born in the Brazilian Jungle to a German merchant and a Brazilian mother, six-year-old Julia accompanied her father to Lübeck after her mother’s death. Her father returned to Brazil soon but left Julia in a girls’ home in Lübeck, where she later became the wife of Consul Johann and mother to Thomas, Heinrich, and three more children. The text stresses how Julia, who could never quite acclimatise to the demure people of Lübeck, symbolises a kind of Southern spirit in the family’s memory, an affinity and antenna

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<sup>58</sup> The museum does not show Thomas’ original casting as it was lost to the Nazis.

for poetry, music, the fine arts, and beauty. The feeling of being torn between this warm, artistic character, and the cool merchant mentality was to be reflected in Thomas' "Tonio Kröger". That the theme of the South North contrast is being stylised in the Mann family in a nearly corny way, is pointed out by Tony: "On the one hand their sensual-artistic mother from the south, on the other their proper, down-to-earth father from the north. Now that does represent the typical clichés of the time [...]." Only two objects complete Julia Mann's room: An ostentatious servant bell-pull as a document for her privileged social position as a woman who disposed of her own staff at home, and an opened poetry album with a drawing (and writing) by Julia. Indeed, Julia Mann liked to draw,<sup>59</sup> and so the sketch alludes to this romantic creative nature of hers once again.



Figure 3. Presentation for the station "Julia Mann": in the long-stretched showcase the servant bell-pull, Behnhaus 2021. Photo by Maret Grapengeter. Copyright: Buddenbrookhaus Lübeck, reproduced with permission.

The fifth station, "Passion", further elaborates on the Southern heritage in the family. While it is conspicuous in Heinrich's life and writing, Thomas takes a more distanced stance towards the "Southern temper", particularly when it comes to depictions of sexuality. At this point Tony also gets a chance to resume her tale of stifling conventions and unhappy marriage, when she reflects on the brief romantic afternoon she gets to spend with young doctor Morten by the seaside (in the novel). The fulfilment of this fleeting joy was denied to her by author Thomas, who did not like to see his character "entangled in sensual passion". At this point some room should be given to a quote from Tony Buddenbrook's monologue the visitors get to listen to at the station:

<sup>59</sup> Dieter Strauss and Maria A. Sene, eds., *Brasilien – Lübeck – München. Lebensstationen der Mutter von Heinrich und Thomas Mann* (Lübeck: 1999), 89.

*“I found something about this in his notebook; it’s the story with Morten at the beach: ‘Correction on the conclusion of the chapter on love (Liebeskapitel): this is all told in such detail simply because it is the only, from her cradle to her grave, the only truly blissful hour granted to this graceful and kind-hearted creature by God’ – By God ... ( Tony sighs). Well, by which he obviously rather means himself.”*<sup>60</sup>

Unlike Thomas, Heinrich is known for his seductive, passionate femmes fatales. Which does not render his depictions of women more female friendly, as the introduction text remarks: “The manner in which the writers address eroticism in their works is also almost contrary. But the merchant’s sons appear to agree on at least one thing: if a woman pursues her goals with passion, it is sure to lead men to disaster.” Tony adds that “I certainly wouldn’t have liked to swap places with one of Heinrich’s female characters ...they are bursting with eroticism, that would have been too much for me.” The pressure on women at that time to fulfil the demands on a respected housewife comes across in the only object complementing the station, a family cookbook opened on the site of the *Plettenpudding* (a cold dessert as it appears in “Buddenbrooks”).

“Politics”, the sixth station, is marked by a rather abrupt change of subject as it leaves the private sphere and devotes itself to the writer brothers’ political lives, which the last station “Exile” ultimately does as well. Both last stations are closely connected and shed light on Heinrich’s and Thomas’ political stances towards the First and Second World War. On the way in to “Politics”, a bronze bust of Heinrich Mann’s head greets the visitor. The information that artist Edwin Scharff was an activist for the Bavarian Räterepublik together with Heinrich and was later ostracised under the Nazi regime foreshadows Heinrich’s fate. The station is dedicated to the time of the First World War, however, which Thomas eyed with some sympathy whereas Heinrich fiercely objected to it. Tony introduces us to the topic by telling that Kaiser Wilhelm II. once dwelled in the Behnhaus as a guest. The same Wilhelm that obviously loses out in Heinrich’s “Der Untertan”. Thomas, for his part, is not too concerned with politics in his work. A gold ornamented beaker given to the Mann company’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary seemingly represents Thomas’ natural habitat, in which he also settles his fictional characters. Heinrich, for the most part, also lives a rather bourgeoisie lifestyle but uses his literature to highlight and critique societal problems, which is why his stories take place in the middle and working class milieu as well and not only among the well-endowed and the rich. After Heinrich’s publication of an essay which champions the political engagement of writers in 1915 (“Zola”), the communication between the brothers ceases for many years. The last text segment lets another voice give

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<sup>60</sup> English translation taken from the subtitles generated by the Buddenbrookhaus and only slightly adapted by me to bring the irony across better.



her judgement on Thomas and Heinrich: It is the voice of Ida Boy-Ed, Thomas' longlasting and loyal patron, who did not think much of Heinrich's political convictions. It seems peculiar that she is given a platform to speak out against Heinrich here. Perhaps with the intention to balance out the impression that Heinrich's moral and political compass is immaculate whereas Thomas could be seen to be less integer? In any case, the part on Ida Boy-Ed is a good example of how the exhibition tries to interact with the art exhibited in the Behnhaus, because it reveals to the visitor that the shown portray of Ida can be seen in original on the ground floor of the museum. The same applies to a painting depicted at the next station's monitor, "Kinderkarneval". It shows Thomas Mann's later wife Katia Pringsheim and her siblings, children of a prominent Munich family as they were painted by Friedrich August Kaulbach in 1888.

The last station deals with the Manns' exiles and slowly builds up the developments until 1933. The two objects used to design this station seem a little randomly chosen: An artful Russian tobacco box showing a winter landscape with troika came "into the possession of the Mann family" in Lübeck. It speaks of the international connections of the Mann family, and, as the text explains, was also used as a blueprint for the literary depictions of such boxes as in for example "Buddenbrooks", but it feels out of place as it lacks the connection to the exile. A Jewish styled candelabra represents a piece of stability in Thomas Mann's life for it accompanied him to his many homes around the world (or those in America and Central Europe). The monitor texts focus on the changing political framings of Heinrich and Thomas throughout the years. In the 1920s, Heinrich is a prominent democratic spokesperson in the Weimar Republic. Thomas, on the contrary, is more successful in the literary field, winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1929. An honour that makes him proud of his nationally, or geographically complex origins, as he reminisces about the influence of the "Scandinavian sphere" and refers to her as a "home of the heart".

In the 1930s, it does not take long for Heinrich to realise he urgently needs to leave Germany. With Thomas the situation is a bit more complicated and both Tony and the text name his 1933 lecture on Richard Wagner as the reason he felt forced to stay away from German ground, since the Nazis considered that it was being too harsh on their idealised composer. However, the role of Thomas' children and their "urgent plea" to Thomas not to return to Germany is acknowledged, too. Ultimately stranding in the US, Thomas Mann becomes the central voice of the German expatriates. Heinrich struggles for losing relevance, and turns to the memories of his youth in Lübeck again. In the end, both brothers begin to talk about their father in a reconciling tone as they grow old, how the text highlights.

### 3.3. Exhibition Analysis

The “Buddenbrooks im Behnhaus” exhibition calls itself a special exhibition, but for the most part brings together the themes which formed the basis for the previous permanent exhibitions, and to a smaller degree for previous special exhibitions (like for Julia Mann). Just the space on which this happens is severely curtailed in the Behnhaus. A look at the thematic modules from the permanent exhibition of the 90s reveals that the general subjects have not changed much, as these were titled: Family, Youth in Lübeck, Berlin-Munich-Italy, Buddenbrooks, Beginning of Fame and Early Discord, Brothers’ Dispute, The Republic, Exile, The Last Years. The introductory module ran under the title “Europe – Germany – Lübeck”, and the focus of the exhibition was said to lie on “the relationship of the brothers towards their hometown Lübeck and towards each other”.<sup>61</sup> Except for Berlin-Munich-Italy all the modules can be found in concise form in the Behnhaus exhibition. As overarching themes can be identified the brothers’ relationship towards Lübeck and how they positioned themselves towards their parental origins, their relationship towards one another (personally, literary, politically), and – very briefly – their differing experiences in the exile; so, quite the same themes as in the very first exhibition. That the Mann brothers saw themselves as Europeans rather than Germans becomes evident, a notion that was emphasised clearer in the 90s exhibition, in which the brothers’ own statements on Europe are given a lot more space. The current exhibition also stresses the family’s merchant tradition as a source for this supranational orientation, which is again connected to the “Buddenbrooks”, a book which, in a way, recounts author Thomas Mann’s own break with the family’s professional background. Due to the comparatively little space the stations are given within the Behnhaus museum, some questions can only be touched upon, and it remains unclear, for example, how and why Thomas Mann’s opinion on the rising National Socialists definitely manifested itself. This becomes much clearer again in the very first permanent exhibition from the 90s, which also chose a special design as it tried to only let the authors themselves speak. The whole exhibition was composed of fragments from Thomas’ and Heinrich’s letters, essays, books, and only enriched with explanations when deemed absolutely necessary. The concept thus left the visitor space to puzzle together an own view on the writer brothers. It is hard to ultimately judge this here, however, because I only dispose of the accompanying catalogue which had the freedom to print many of the text excerpts in a full or a longer version than they could be integrated into the physical exhibition. The same holds true for the

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<sup>61</sup> Eckhard Heftrich, Peter-Paul Schneider, and Hans Wißkirchen, eds., *Heinrich und Thomas Mann: Ihr Leben und Werk in Text und Bild. Katalog zur ständigen Ausstellung im Buddenbrookhaus der Hansestadt Lübeck* (Lübeck: 1994), foreword p. IX.

subsequent permanent exhibition inaugurated in 2000 for which only very cursory brochures exist as accompanying material. One thing that catches the eye about these is that they speak of the transnational literary inspiration for Thomas Mann, who received many literary impulses from Northern European authors, many of them stemming from the (near) coastal regions west and east of the Skagerrak.<sup>62</sup> How Scandinavian authors also inspired the themes picked up in “Buddenbrooks”, is not discussed in the Behnhaus.<sup>63</sup>

Two approaches make the Behnhaus exhibition significantly differ from the previous permanent ones. First, that the narration of the story is initiated by fictional character Tony Buddenbrook. In a way, she makes up for the missing “authentically” furnished rooms of the previous permanent exhibition (which resurrected two rooms as described in “Buddenbrooks”). Moreover, by choosing Tony as a narrator, the exhibition is told from a female perspective, and quite a modern one as well, that might at times be more in line with the present (only) female curator team than the Tony from the novel. Modern as well is Tony’s usage of language when she reminisces about pivotal moments of her life, while her monologue is interspersed with the characteristic sentences she is known for from the novel (“Yes, I know life ...”, or: “Sliced honey, a true natural product!”). This Tony here is very insightful and self-reflective, she complains about her own belittled character in the novel and sheds light on the female figures in Heinrich’s and Thomas’ personal and imaginary life. Not only does she point out what can be problematic about the Mann brothers’ literature from a female perspective, on a second level she also, implicitly, points out that the brothers might not have been able to have the careers they had had they not been men. An aspect that is worth mentioning because the Buddenbrookhaus as another museum on male artists might evoke the notion that men generally have a higher potential to make and create than their female family members.

Tony with her characteristic language from the novel presents a way to make literature itself a part of the exhibition and offers a form of literary scenography beyond the spatial. And one that does not only serve a show character but a critical purpose by ironically breaking the narratives of the “Buddenbrooks” novel and its creator’s life.<sup>64</sup>

A second approach that is new about the Behnhaus exhibition is the focus on the Lübeck

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<sup>62</sup> Manfred Eickhölder and Claudia Bahnsen, eds., *Die ‘Buddenbrooks’: Ein Jahrhundertroman (Ausstellungsführer)* (Lübeck: 2000), 14-15.

<sup>63</sup> Herefore see Daniel Linke, “Aber nehmen Sie die Bücher, die dort oben geschrieben werden [...]!” Buddenbrooks - ein skandinavischer Roman?!, in *Buddenbrooks: Neue Blicke in ein altes Buch*, ed. Manfred Eickhölder and Hans Wisskirchen (Lübeck: 2000), 194-203.

<sup>64</sup> See the following article by Vanessa Zeissig, “A Room is not a Book’: Szenografie als Brücke zwischen Literatur und Museum”, in *Transitzonen zwischen Literatur und Museum*, ed. Matteo Anastasio and Jan Rhein (Berlin/Boston: 2021), 189-212: especially 195-197. (Who herself worked and exhibited at the Buddenbrookhaus between 2015 and 2019).

*Bürgertum* which nicely connects to the Behnhaus as an art museum, that is deeply imbued with a Northern spirit: the interior designed by a Danish architect (the same who designed the interior of the Buddenbrookhaus) it covers several well-known Northern painters like Caspar David Friedrich or Edvard Munch. Also, just like the Buddenbrookhaus, it emerged as a merchant's home in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>65</sup> It therefore presents as an elegant solution to have an underlying focus on the lifestyle and natural surroundings of the well-situated Lübeck citizens throughout the Buddenbrooks exhibition because it allows to strew in several references to the artwork housed in the building. As shown above with Ida Boy-Ed, the Manns were acquainted with the who-is-who of the local artistic and political elite, some of which have their portraits hung in the Behnhaus nowadays, next to other paintings which convey a feeling of the *Bürgertum*'s world. Sculptor Fritz Behn himself, a son of the house Behn, was a contemporary of Thomas Mann, visited the same school as him, and was defended by Thomas later on after he failed to get a job called out by the town of Lübeck for a new Wilhelm monument.<sup>66</sup>

Lastly, politics played and do play a bigger part in the Buddenbrookhaus' exhibitions. The museum is committed to explaining Heinrich's and Thomas' stance towards the First and Second World War, and especially towards the Nazi Regime. Though Thomas Mann ultimately ranged among the most well-known representatives of the German political exile, the museum does not shun away from pointing out the ambiguous and more problematic stances in his political development. In the Behnhaus exhibition this is only visible in Thomas' altered opinion when his stances towards First and Second World War are compared, while the earlier 90s exhibition provides textual evidence that Thomas initially had a more conflicted attitude towards the radical nationalists of the *Weimarer Republik*, in any case compared to his brother Heinrich.<sup>67</sup> Heinrich's role as a kind of political prophet also has more space in the earlier 90s exhibition, while on the other hand the literary quality of his work is regarded more critically here, through the lens of his brother. This nearly judgemental look at the literary value of Heinrich's books compared to those of Thomas does not play a part anymore in the Behnhaus exhibition, unlike the political questions which are supposed to be granted even more importance in the upcoming "New Buddenbrookhaus".

The new exhibition is being designed under the motto "From parental home to humanity",

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<sup>65</sup> <https://museum-behnhaus-draegerhaus.de/die-haeuser>, accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>66</sup> For Thomas Mann another blatant example for the lacking sense for art of his hometown's fellow citizens. See Thomas Mann, *Für Fritz Behn* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> For Thomas' stance towards the emerging National Socialist threat see Heftrich, Schneider, and Wißkirchen, *Heinrich und Thomas Mann: Ihr Leben und Werk in Text und Bild. Katalog zur ständigen Ausstellung im Buddenbrookhaus der Hansestadt Lübeck*, 316 onwards, continuing into the chapter on exile, especially 338-339 (Thomas' diary).

quoting Heinrich Mann.<sup>68</sup> Heinrich had expressed his feelings towards Lübeck in quite the same way before when he was cited in the 90s exhibition: “No world citizenship without a birth-place.”<sup>69</sup> The upcoming exhibition will treat the international character of the Mann family on another level, too, the of the Mann children (which for the most part means Thomas’ six children). It can build on previous special exhibitions that have already discussed the lives of Klaus, Erika, Elisabeth, and more. The Mann children, who grew up between Europe and the US, on the one hand surely profited from being raised in such a cosmopolitan environment, but on the other hand struggled perhaps even more with the question of belonging, also because the frequent travels between America and Europe had to do more with the political pressure forced upon the family than with a lifestyle decision. The new exhibition will be different as well in that it will be based more strongly on a participatory approach and for example contain a number of modules devised by local school students. The students ascribe more importance to those topics that feel relevant to the youth of today, so for example flight and exile, but also topics that have not been talked about a lot in the museum before like depression and suicide (two of Thomas Mann’s siblings and two of his own children killed themselves, as well as Heinrich Mann’s wife Nelly). As one of the core themes will remain, nonetheless, the family’s struggle for the “interpretive sovereignty on German culture” (“Deutungshoheit über deutsche Kultur”); and the Manns’ history as “world and family history” (“Welt- und Familiengeschichte”).<sup>70</sup>

There is one point the local students have made regarding their expectations for the new exhibition which seems especially relevant looking at the Behnhaus exhibition: A museum should offer an experience the visitor could not get outside of its walls. If it mainly consists of texts and pictures, why not just stay at home and read an illustrated book? The students wish for sound scenery, games, interaction and more.<sup>71</sup> All these elements are clearly lacking in the Behnhaus. It is a silent, reserved space, and the integrated stations on the Buddenbrooks and Manns are mostly built around the text displayed on the monitors, as well as on the respective introduction boards and the texts pertaining to the objects that are safely covered under glass vitrines. Text that does not leave much doubt about what the objects are supposed to stand for.

The museum has meanwhile become aware of these shortcomings and is planning to use objects more strongly in the new exhibition, for example the above-described servant bell-pull

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<sup>68</sup> [https://buddenbrookhaus.de/inhalt/ausstellungsinhalt\\_2](https://buddenbrookhaus.de/inhalt/ausstellungsinhalt_2), accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>69</sup> Heftrich, Schneider, and Wißkirchen, *Heinrich und Thomas Mann: Ihr Leben und Werk in Text und Bild. Katalog zur ständigen Ausstellung im Buddenbrookhaus der Hansestadt Lübeck*, 391.

<sup>70</sup> <https://buddenbrookhaus.de/what-a-family>, accessed 7th November 2022; <https://buddenbrookhaus.de/fremde-heimat>, accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>71</sup> Birte Lipinski and Caren Heuer, eds., *Vier Jahre Co-Kuratieren am Buddenbrookhaus: Abschlussbericht des partizipativen Bildungsprojekts ‘Literatur als Ereignis. Die Manns und wir’* (Lübeck: 2020), 16, 32.

“on which a whole social structure can be unfolded”.<sup>72</sup> This semantic breadth does not fully come across in the Behnhaus exhibition, however.

To be fair, the nearly sterile atmosphere probably has to be attributed to the then present covid pandemic, too. Moreover, I cannot assess to what degree the encompassing design of the Behnhaus limited the frame in which the Buddenbrooks exhibition could be shaped. The silent, demure atmosphere can also be seen as a deliberate act, of course: Would it not have felt exactly like this to reverently, diffidently enter the halls of a noble city house? After all it is the milieu in which the Mann brothers grew up, the posh 19<sup>th</sup> century Lübeck, that unfolds the strongest power in the sensual sphere of the exhibition. Not the individual stories of Thomas and Heinrich. Thus the Behnhaus, though only a temporary home for the Buddenbrooks exhibition, does carry a more sensual context, too, if one looks for it between its cool stone walls and its reserved interior. Which presents quite a contrast to the warmth that emanates from the Dickens Museum’s smaller, nested room, to which we now turn.

## **4. Case Study: Charles Dickens Museum**

### **4.1. History of the Institution**

Charles Dickens was dearly beloved to his countrymen already in his lifetime, and his fame only increased after his death. In 1902, a globally operating Dickens Fellowship was established, which managed to buy Dickens’ former house in Doughty Street in 1923. Dickens, who moved around a lot throughout his lifetime, only lived here from 1837-1839 which was nonetheless a seminal time in his life as a young father and burgeoning author – amongst others “Oliver Twist” was written in Doughty Street.<sup>73</sup> After having been acquired by the Fellowship, the property was shortly taken over by an independent fund, and the museum remains in private ownership to this day. An article in the Dickensian addressed the aspirations the Fellowship held for the “permanent Dickens shrine” to be built in Doughty Street: “The headquarters of the Fellowship will be located there, and a Dickens Library, Picture Gallery and Museum will be established. In short, it will be the centre for all lovers of Dickens.”<sup>74</sup> As much as the Fellowship venerates and loves Dickens, as confident is it in his impression on the rest of the world: “The Fellowship was not needed to keep Dickens’s reputation alive. As his son said at the birthday

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<sup>72</sup> [https://buddenbrookhaus.de/file/fachgesprach\\_perspektiven\\_auf\\_buddenbrooks\\_16.09.2016.pdf](https://buddenbrookhaus.de/file/fachgesprach_perspektiven_auf_buddenbrooks_16.09.2016.pdf), p. 4, accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>73</sup> For Dickens’ time in Doughty Street also see Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (London, 2011), 76-106.

<sup>74</sup> J. W. T. Ley, “The Dickens Fellowship, 1902-1923. A Retrospect”, *The Dickensian* 19, no. 4 (1923), 178-195: 194.

celebration in 1906, ‘Dickens’s reputation can take care of itself’.”<sup>75</sup> The Fellowship also saw this confirmed in the interest the global community expressed in Dickens and his work, though the naming of members and branches in other countries makes it clear that, outside Europe, this enthusiasm was mostly limited to the countries of the Commonwealth and the United States.

A more recent look at the beginnings of commemorating Dickens confirms that for a long time Dickens was exclusively pictured and revered as a jolly, warm-hearted family man with a soft spot for the poor and wretched. Only the belated revelation of Dickens’ affair with young actress Ellen Ternan managed to cast a shadow on his persona, but even this shadow passed, or at least waned next to the dazzling figure Dickens had become.<sup>76</sup> The current Dickens Museum treads this path further when it briefly introduces Dickens on its website as a man with a lasting effect on Christmas celebrations, who cared for society’s outcasts and could at the same time rejoice in that “even Queen Victoria was a fan”. The last paragraph of this little overview over the museum is quoted in full here as it neatly shows how the museum perceives itself and its mission, and how this fits into the archetypal definition of writer’s house museums:

*“Today the Charles Dickens Museum is set up as though Dickens himself had just left. It appears as a fairly typical middle-class Victorian home, complete with furnishings, portraits and decorations which are known to have belonged to Dickens. A visit to the museum allows you to step back into 1837 and to see a world which is at once both intimately familiar, yet astonishingly different. A world in which one of the greatest writers in the English language, [sic!] found his inspiration.”<sup>77</sup>*

To be fair, the portrayal of Dickens as a radiant hero is really no illusion after all, which is also stressed by the numerous volunteering Dickens fans working at the museum who were very eager to tell me more about Dickens’ life and talk about their favourite Dickens’ novels and adaptations with me.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>76</sup> Emily Bell, “The Dickens Family, the Boz Club and the Fellowship”, *Dickensian* 113, no. 503 (2017), 219-232.

<sup>77</sup> <https://dickensmuseum.com/pages/about-us>, accessed 7th November 2022.

## 4.2. The Permanent Exhibition

### OVERVIEW OVER THE ROOMS:

- Ground floor: 1) Entrance hall  
                  2) Dining room  
                  3) Morning room  
Cellar: 4) Kitchen  
          5) Scullery and washhouse  
          6) Wine cellar  
1<sup>st</sup> floor: 7) Drawing room  
          8) Study  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor: 9) Dickens's bedroom  
          10) Mary Hogarth room  
          11) Dressing room  
3<sup>rd</sup> floor/attic: 12) Nursery  
                  12) Servants' bedroom

Before entering Dickens' former home, the visitor passes the threshold into the shop to buy a ticket. This place, where a museum tour often ends in rummaging through postcards, magnets, and other fan paraphernalia, is also the starting point. Though the shop, at least, disposes of dark wooden floor panels and solid bookshelves, it does not form a part of Dickens' 48 Doughty Street. Instead, it is located to the right of number 48 in number 49, which also belongs to the fund (In 2012, the museum was expanded and the offices moved to number 49, allowing for more space for the presentation of Dickens' former rooms).<sup>78</sup> The employee behind the counter is giving a brief explanation on how to best walk the house and providing me with an audio guide<sup>79</sup>, before showing me around the corner into the old entrance hall. Here again, I am immediately received by a friendly elderly man, one of the volunteers of which one is positioned on every floor, except the cellar and attic, and who can be approached with any further questions regarding Dickens one might have. He points out the shadow silhouette of Charles Dickens drawn on the wall by the first steps of the staircase, which is meant to match the man's actual size and give the visitor an impression of what he was like, a rather short, slender type. The volunteers often turn out very helpful because written text in the form of text boards is scarce

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<sup>78</sup> This information stems from a more informal conversation I had with curator Emily Smith when I visited the museum in January 2022.

<sup>79</sup> I am working with a transcript of the audio guide handed to me by Emily Smith here, based on the current audio guide issued in 2019.



in the museum. The rooms are brimming with pictures and things, but not all of them are explained in detail. Some rather inconspicuous (double) DIN A4 paper sheets (in a cheap old-fashioned style, and seemingly stemming from a booklet) are placed throughout the rooms to provide some further explanations on a number of objects, and pictures are usually furnished with a small plaque naming artist and title, or what is being depicted. This subordination of text likely stresses the curators' emphasis on the visual, immersive experience, cause, as Scholze explains, the style and presentation of text forms a part of metacommunication, too.<sup>80</sup> Otherwise, the audio guide is relatively extensive, and provides information for all the twelve rooms of the house, beginning on the ground floor, moving down to the cellar, and up again to first, then second floor, and finally the attic. Though "information" is perhaps not the right term to refer to all parts of the audio guide, in which the visitor encounters three different voices. First, there are the mainly informative parts, delivered by Dickens' great-great-great-grandson Ollie. Second, the more creative bits written and told by Rachel Rose Reid who introduces herself as "a writer, a storyteller, and a Londoner".<sup>81</sup> In near stream-of-consciousness like episodes she invites the visitors to let the world of Charles Dickens resurrect before their eyes. Lastly, the guide is completed with additional, brief comments by Dickens expert Michael Slater.<sup>82</sup>

One of Ollie Dickens' first remarks stresses once again the aim of the museum, "to give you a sense of his everyday live here in Doughty St.". Besides Dickens' leather bag and walking stick which are showcased in a closed vitrine, the entry is lined with an array of pictures and framed pages, amongst others a map of London, an old title cover of *Nicholas Nickleby*, and a theatre programme. Although the explanation texts says that "in the hallstand are items owned by Dickens", not all of the objects along the walls can be decodified, and this pattern continues throughout the house (The curator commented on this that all pictures and pieces displayed in the rooms were deemed suitable to furnish an authentic Victorian home, and that they all either belonged to Dickens or have a connection to him or his work<sup>83</sup>). A visitor might be tempted to interpret all displayed items as belonging to Dickens himself, thus blurring the lines of

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<sup>80</sup> Scholze, *Medium Ausstellung: Lektüren musealer Gestaltung in Oxford, Leipzig, Amsterdam und Berlin*, 134. She remarks "[...] that the metacommunication of exhibition texts does not rest on informative aspects alone, but also on aesthetic and rhetoric ones."

<sup>81</sup> On her YouTube channel, she presents herself in more detail: "Hi, I'm Rachel Rose Reid, spoken word artist, writer & storyteller. I was raised on a hotchpotch of immigrant heritage, English folk and concrete jungle, which probably explains the work that I create now, shaking the dust of the past and stretching between the oral traditions of ancestors and the spoken word of today." See <https://www.youtube.com/user/rachelrosereid/about>, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022. Or more concise, on Twitter: "shaking the present by reclaiming the past", <https://twitter.com/rachelrosereid>, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

<sup>82</sup> Slater put forward a comprehensive biography on Dickens in 2009 and regularly cooperates with the Dickens Museum.

<sup>83</sup> Comment by curator Emily Smith, January 2022.

authenticity.<sup>84</sup> The audio guide clarifies how the interior design was meant to be to Dickens' liking, as "Dickens was flamboyant in his taste and we've tried to reflect that in the décor of his house in the wallpaper, carpets and curtains."

The two rooms to be found on the ground floor are the dining and the morning room. The dining room is used to initiate the narration of Dickens' rise to fame which coincided with his move to Doughty Street and was brought about by the publication of his "Pickwick Papers", to which different artwork and a theatre bill refer. A central piece of furniture is the rather simple rectangular table, adorned with little tags that name the male companions Dickens would invite to dine here. Whereas the dining room is presented as a place of social gatherings and thus as a more public one, the morning room is fashioned as a secluded and private space, and its use attributed to wife Catherine Dickens and the children. A displayed marriage certificate of the Dickens strengthens this impression of the room as a family space. The central pieces of the room are a skilfully embroidered overmantle<sup>85</sup> made by Catherine Dickens, alluding to her domestic spirit, and a selection of her jewellery as proof of "her fashionable taste in jewellery and domestic goods". Like Alison Booth remarks, such depictions of female house-holding and domesticity are a typical feature of Victorian homes and haunts (also regarding women writers).<sup>86</sup>



Figure 4. Dining room with invitation cards for Dickens' friends on the table, and a view on Doughty Street, Charles Dickens Museum 2022. Photo by Maret Grapengeter. Copyright: Charles Dickens Museum London, reproduced with permission.

<sup>84</sup> See also Scholze, *Medium Ausstellung: Lektüren musealer Gestaltung in Oxford, Leipzig, Amsterdam und Berlin*, 164-165.

<sup>85</sup> Spelled like this in the Dickens Museum!

<sup>86</sup> Booth, *Homes and Haunts: Touring Writers' Shrines and Countries*, 6.

Despite the conventional link made between the room and the woman of the house, Dickens is still inscribed in the storyline as a loving, though hard-working father. The number of exuberant expressions used to describe him throughout the first two rooms is astonishing, even assuming that this wording can be seen as a distinctive feature of the British speaking and writing style. Regarding Dickens as a writer, he is ascribed “prodigious energy”, “extraordinary vitality”, and “brilliance” combined with “sheer hard work” (all taken from the text by Ollie Dickens). Concerning his role as a family man in the morning room, Slater falls back upon the word “marvellous” two times within few lines, completed with “wonderful”; in general Dickens is described as one who “delighted” his children and was simply “very very good with all” of them. Ollie Dickens adds; “One can imagine this room filled with laughter and bustling with life.” Rachel Rose Reid’s segment is the only one that challenges this image to some degree when she asks: “I wonder if she [Catherine] ever questioned this life. What do you think? [...] Did she ever look up to that little patch of yard out there and dream a little further than these neat and ordered borders?” Nearly cynically, or bitterly, she ends her monologue by addressing Catherine as “Queen of this domestic dominion. Long may she reign happy and content.”

I will have to return to the trail of this feminist remark for a while as I am looking at the presentation of the cellar rooms. Unlike Dickens’ living quarters, the cellar is far less pompous and consists of three rooms, or rather the kitchen, a scullery and washing chamber, and a little wine cellar which cannot be entered but only peered into through its barred gate. Nonetheless the rooms have been refurbished with attention to detail, and visitors who look carefully can for example spot a (fake) rat hiding amongst the wine bottles. As Dickens’ literature suggests, he was genuinely invested in the lives of servants and other “simple” folk, and the museum takes this fondness of his to its heart by dedicating this part of the exhibition to the arduous daily routines of the house’s servants. In the washhouse, the audio guide takes up this argument in pointing out that Dickens “himself came from a modest family background and his own grandparents had been servants so he had a genuine understanding of working life”. The wine cellar then is arranged as a sign of Dickens “the entertainer” – how the museum terms him –, as he liked to enjoy a drink or more from his stock with his chums. For the most part, the cellar is a place where the visitor can learn about how much hard work had to be put into everyday tasks like heating the house or doing laundry back in Dickens’ times. Again it is Rachel Rose Reid who prompts the listener to reflect a little more critically on the servants’ position when she utters: “This could have been our place. Who’s to say what we’d have been born into?” Her monologue makes the listener think about the backgrounds and individual fates of the many servants populating London, who often literally lived their lives in the basement of society.

But finally speaker Ollie Dickens ties in housewife Catherine into the storyline again, and this is where some feminist critique might be appropriate. Talking about the jelly moulds and other kitchen equipment lined up on the shelves, he tells:

*“Catherine included several jelly recipes in a book she later published called ‘What shall we have for dinner?’ It was published with a comic preface written for her by Dickens about how terrifying it was for women having to struggle with this problem every day of ‘what shall we have for dinner?’ That you had to keep your husband happy by coming up with a wonderful dinner every evening. I think Dickens probably encouraged her to have a project to make this collection of recipes. After all, she was a very experienced hostess by this time.”*

While her husband’s preface about women’s terrifying struggle makes me think of an old Dr. Oetker television spot from the 50s (in which the viewer is suggested that it was no secret women had two questions in life, what to wear, and what to cook)<sup>87</sup> which has gained a crude popularity as a symbol of the post-war gender divide, Ollie Dickens’ then following assumption seems more problematic. Sure, Charles Dickens might just have been a man of his times who naturally attributed women a place in the house, and therefore excused, but Ollie Dickens’ statement can be read in two ways. If we ignore the last sentence of the quote above, he seemingly just wipes away the only instance which would have made Catherine appear as a creative and creating person as well, as the author of a cookbook, by attributing its existence to husband Charles, who “encouraged her” and therefore is the actual driving force behind the book (we do not learn how or why Ollie Dickens came up with this assumption). The following sentence which acknowledges Catherine as an experienced hostess also allows for the interpretation that she was perhaps not very confident or wished to remain in the background, thus that Charles’ act of encouragement can be read as a very loving one towards Catherine. Both interpretations leave Catherine in a passive role, whereas her husband is portrayed as the provider of the needed push.

The tale of Dickens as an “entertainer” that was touched upon above in this little excursion to the cellar rooms, is continued on the first floor. The two rooms here, drawing room and study, proceed with shining and successful chapters of Dickens’ life, and at the same time contrast the outer appearance of his success to what was going on behind closed doors to generate it. The drawing room might be the most opulent in the whole house and represents this outer dress of success: Lush red curtains, gold-framed pictures all over the walls, elegant seating furniture, a piano. The room is built around two central objects, Dickens’ reading desk and a mirror with a

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<sup>87</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=072LrIGvSq8>, accessed 7th November 2022.

golden frame. The reading desk is carefully exhibited and illuminated inside a glass vitrine, an opened book seemingly hovering above it as if Dickens' ghost was just about to read out a scene. About this desk, which was specifically designed for a standing reader, and the idea behind it one learns that Dickens "wanted people to see his whole body when he was reading [...] because he acted with his legs and with his whole self". Though the arduous reading tours proved a valuable source of income for him, they are also cast in a negative light as a factor that contributed to his physical decay. The mirror, too, tells of the vividness Dickens' characters had for him and the physicality involved in creating them: "He'd be [...] pulling faces and jabbering away then rushing back and writing more because he'd 'got' the character." In Watson's fashion it thus serves as a good example of how the author is made come alive in the museum, by inducing the visitor to imagine Dickens' silhouette being reflected in the glass as he was working on his characters.<sup>88</sup>



Figure 5. The drawing room, Charles Dickens Museum 2022. Photo by Maret Grapengeter. Copyright: Charles Dickens Museum London, reproduced with permission.

The smaller room on the first floor, the study, is on the one hand centred around Dickens' imagination again. This manifests itself in the famous picture "Dickens's Dream" which is hung over the mantelpiece. The picture shows a musing Charles Dickens in his chair, surrounded by characters from his stories who populate the study. In mentioning that artist R. W. Buss died before finishing this last work of his, just like Dickens did, Dickens' death is foreshadowed here for the first time and indicates that his life, and the exhibition, is slowly but steadily coming to its end from here on. Rachel Rose Reid's contribution on the audio guide does not come to

<sup>88</sup> Watson, *The Author's Effect: On Writer's House Museums*, 158-159.

talk about the lives of the poor for once but focuses on Dickens' enormous self-discipline which she makes out to be the pivotal reason for his success: "Genius is not worth half so much as this." The study further contains the place where this discipline most obviously showed, Dickens' original but later desk (at which he wrote at Gad's Hill); and a selection of books from the National Dickens Library which comprises such books Dickens owned as well as different editions (in different languages) of his own works, of which Ollie Dickens remarks that "some of them are seen as among the greatest novels of all time." Success and hard work are thus joined in a causal relationship as the two sides of a medal which made the Dickens phenomenon.

Up the stairs to the second floor, companionship and literary success suddenly have to make way for less pleasant themes: death and divorce. The audio guide grasps the opportunity to use Dickens' bedroom for discussing the relationship between Dickens and his wife Catherine. Ollie Dickens mostly focuses on the later, more difficult years of the marriage, whereas he judges that the couple's relationship was still harmonious throughout their time at Doughty Street. As time wore on, however, "Dickens was to become increasingly dissatisfied in his marriage and in 1858 he separated from Catherine." He then focuses on the aftermath of the separation, which entailed a public (!) statement by Dickens elaborating on the reasons for his decision, and the rumours going around about Dickens and his wife's sister Georgina, who had lived with the family before as a household help and nanny, and stayed with Dickens even after her sister Catherine had moved out. Though the visitor does not learn about the reasons for the separation, he does learn about the ensuing dynamics between the sisters and Dickens: "There's no suggestion that Dickens and Georgina did have a sexual relationship. In fact, Dickens went so far as to arrange a virginity test for Georgina to silence the scandal but Catherine must still have found her sister's decision deeply hurtful." This is the only point at which Catherine's feelings are acknowledged, and Ollie Dickens then also refers to one of the most meaningful objects of the room, a ring in form of a snake that was a gift from Catherine to her sister Georgina and which "does perhaps hint at betrayal". It is placed in a glass vitrine under an opened edition of "Household Words" which is also mentioned in the audio guide: the opened page shows a personal statement by Charles Dickens regarding his divorce, from June 12, 1858. Allegations about a possible extra-marital affair are only addressed in shrouded words here. What the statement clearly shows, however, is the "love affair between himself and the public" Ollie Dickens attributes to Charles Dickens, as the statement begins:

*"Three-and-twenty years have passed since I entered on my present relations with the Public [...]. Through all that time I have tried to be as faithful to the Public, as they have been to me. It was my duty*

*never to trifle with them, or deceive them, or presume upon their favor, or do any thing with it but work hard to justify it. I have always endeavoured to discharge that duty.*"<sup>89</sup>

Michael Slater's comment continues Dickens' perspective but again leaves the visitor in the dark about the actual reasons for the separation, only telling about a vague sadness or emptiness Dickens had come to feel in his marriage.<sup>90</sup> All the material belonging to the bedroom does not once mention the young woman Dickens was seeing at the time of his separation, and her role in the conflict. Rachel Rose Reid does come up with some cloudy allusions to Catherine's married life only, of which I will include some lines here to convey a feeling of her style:

*"Last night she sat alone and reread his tender letters in the candlelight. 'My dearest love', he wrote, 'God bless you, my darling. I long to be back with you again. Your faithful and most affectionate husband.' These words wrap around her, fix her fast like hair coiled tight around their cotton curling strips [...]. A sleepy eye. A smile. A stretch. Two years in, this pattern is set in place. Pregnant again or in recovery. Love, he wrote, is very materially assisted by a warm and active imagination which has a long memory and will thrive a considerable time on very light and sparing food."*

As described above, it is not only divorce that makes the rooms on the floor dark-themed, but death too. The Mary Hogarth's Room is where this younger sister of Catherine in fact died during the Dickens' stint at Doughty Street, but it also treats the death of Dickens himself. Mary Hogarth was another younger sister of Catherine who lived with the Dickens in 1837 (Georgina only joined the household a couple of years later.) She succumbed to a sudden death, about which "Dickens was utterly devastated. 'Thank God she died in my arms, and the very last words she whispered were of me.' He took the ring from her finger and wore it for the rest of his life. He even asked to be buried alongside her." Subsequently Mary's death became a source of inspiration for similar depictions of innocent young women falling ill and/or dying in Dickens' novels. Nothing in the text the audio guide delivers indicates that it could have been kind of peculiar Dickens was so deeply attached to his wife's sister, and Rachel Rose Reid's closing words, too, set the scene for the dramatic premature death of a loved young girl, and a wretched Dickens in distress. In pointing to the death-themed pictures on the walls, Ollie Dickens calls special attention to a photograph of a railway accident of which Dickens and his lover Ellen Ternan were affected – this is the first and second-to-last time Ellen Ternan is mentioned, in passing-by (a note mentions her a second time as the first person to be named in Dickens' Will;

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<sup>89</sup> From Household Words 429, June 12 1858, as seen in the Dickens Museum.

<sup>90</sup> The "violated letter", though of course also out of Dickens' perspective, addresses these reasons more openly and mainly makes out the fundamental incompatibility between the spouses' characters as the origin of their increasingly unhappy relationship. See also below, p. 41.

here she is also characterised as “actress and close friend” of his).

What Ollie Dickens’ monologue ultimately comes up to, on the other hand, is Dickens’ own death that occurred exactly five years after the railway accident. Dickens’ and Mary’s death and the death of fictional characters are present in pictures and objects all over the room, in the drawing of “Mrs Gargery’s Funeral from *Great Expectations*”, a bust modelled upon Dickens’ death mask, a picture of his grave in Westminster Abbey, or in a hair lock.

Before leaving for the attic, there is another, small room on the second floor which is not commented upon in the audio guide, the dressing room. Its central object is a navy suit with golden buttons, collar and sleeve seams, “thought to be Dickens’s only surviving suit”. Accompanied by a gold-ornamented sword, the text on the exhibition plaquette uses the suit as a two-folded sign: On the one hand, as another indicator of Dickens’ prestige, on the other as a kind of anti-sign in pointing out that this modest suit was rather unusual for Dickens, whose “own taste in clothes was far more colourful than this suit suggests. He took pride in his appearance and was known among his friends for his stylish tailoring and bright waistcoats.”

In the attic, the former nursery and servants’ bedroom await. Unlike the other rooms, the museum has “chosen not to recreate [these] in period detail”. The nursery gives off a more vintage vibe still as it assembles various objects stemming from Dickens’ time and life. The walls are white, except for the one to the left which houses several show cases against a black-and-white wallpaper of (presumably) 19<sup>th</sup> century London houses. The objects and texts displayed in the cases, as well as the accompanying information on the audio guide, are occupied with Dickens’ own youth and, to a minor degree, with his affectionate relationship towards his children. The central theme of Dickens’ childhood here is the period in which he was forced to work in Warren’s Blacking Factory at the age of twelve to support his financially struggling family. The objects symbolizing this time are a small wooden window taken from the attic in Camden Town which Dickens used to inhabit while working in the factory, and a prison grille from Marshalsea Prison, in which Dickens’ indebted father John was placed. Finally, the room shows another window even, a pantry window from Chertsey believed to be the inspiration for the famous scene in “*Oliver Twist*” in which Oliver is pushed through it by Bill Sikes. This reference to “*Oliver Twist*” can serve to underline the contrast between Dickens’ childhood and later success and prosper. The museum also locates this contrast in the details of his window from Camden Town that “give a sense of the contrast between his childhood despair and his extraordinary triumph over his misfortunes”. The shame – Dickens remained silent about this time in his life and only wrote about it in a concealed way when writing about child poverty –, and also disappointment Dickens felt about him being sent to Warren’s is highlighted not only



in the text plaquettes but also in Rachel Rose Reid's monologue, who shows Dickens musing about the brighter prospects his own children would have. Their education plays a role in this room, too, and so the visitor in passing learns about some other thematic fields Dickens ventured into in his writing like when he wrote "A Child's History of England" as he "was keen to instil what he felt was a liberal view of Britain's past".

Lastly, the servants' bedroom seems the duller in the whole house, as it only disposes of an Oliver Twist inspired game (or playing field) drawn on the floor, and walls plastered with quotes from Dickens' fiction "to look at Dickens, the social campaigner". The quotes hence mostly refer to charity and empathy with others, as to bleakness but also hope and the refuge literary fiction can provide. In the audio guide, Ollie Dickens characterises Charles Dickens as "a friend and a champion and somebody who altogether transcended the idea of a novelist for [the English people]".

#### **4.3. Exhibition Analysis**

If I myself was to characterise the Charles Dickens Museum in a word, I would describe it as a feel-good museum. Yes, darker themes like death play their role, too, and poverty of course – though rather as the concern it caused Dickens than as a problem in itself –, but overall it is a place inviting the visitor to imagine the house filled with Dickens, his family and friends, a bustling and gay place. Yet whether good times or bad ones, the exhibition is carefully built around Dickens' private life and largely omits his more public journalistic activities, which were abundant as well. Given the great standing Dickens enjoys as a champion of the poor, this is kind of curious. Of course his tireless commitment for the neglected is by no means left aside in the museum but it plays a comparatively minor role compared to the stories on his family and his novels, even more minor being the role of his political writings when they addressed something else than social issues in Britain (like questions regarding developments in the colonies, or the Empire in general). That Dickens also was a keen traveller, does not become all too clear either (Michael Slater dedicates some lines of his audio contribution to Dickens' year in Italy but the theme is not taken up again).

The museum instead lets the visitor discover a lot about Dickens' private life and how it connected to his beloved novels, with a focus on the years spent in Doughty Street, trying to let the house be aglow with the domestic splendour and comfort that is so pronounced in Dickens' writing.<sup>91</sup> Here, too, the museum is probably more revealing in what it does not say about

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<sup>91</sup> Catherine Malcolmson, "'A veritable Dickens shrine': Commemorating Charles Dickens at the Dickens House Museum", *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century (Online Publication)*, no. 14 (2011): especially 3-4, and 13-14.

Dickens than in what it does. Not once is Dickens criticised throughout the whole narration: He is shown as a brilliant mind who moreover possessed a big heart which made him care equally for his family members as for the poor as a social class. Whenever anything that could flaw this image is touched upon, it is done so in a deflecting way; and it is talked about how others around him might have been disgruntled about Dickens' behaviour, but not about if Dickens' behaviour was perhaps indeed morally questionable at times.

As already seen in the exhibition tour, this neglect becomes blatant in the portrayal of Dickens' relationship towards his wife Catherine. That his closeness to her sisters Mary and Georgina might have irritated Catherine does not seem worth mentioning in the exhibition. That Dickens furthermore became entangled in a number of peculiarly intimate relationships with other women, and infatuations – most notably with Ellen Ternan –, throughout his life, is another interesting facet about his character that did not make it into the museum. In his first letter addressing his divorce, which was published in the "Tribune" and become known as the "violated letter",<sup>92</sup> Dickens expatiated on his reasons to leave Catherine, defended Georgina as a dyke struggling to keep the married couple together, and, concerning the rumours on his relationship towards Ellen Ternan, remarked:

*"Two wicked persons, who should have spoken very differently of me, in consideration of earnest respect and gratitude, have (as I am told, and indeed, to my personal knowledge) coupled with this separation the name of a young lady for whom I have a great attachment and regard. I will not repeat her name – I honor it too much. Upon my soul and honor, there is not on this earth a more virtuous and spotless creature than that young lady [...]."*<sup>93</sup>

Like already mentioned, the figure of Ellen Ternan is nearly completely effaced in the Dickens Museum, however. Writer Claire Tomalin discusses this and other "romantic" matters in her biography of Dickens; and although she is surely very fond of Dickens as well, she makes no secret of the circumstance that Catherine was most likely more than once deeply offended and hurt by her husband's behaviour – and justifiably so.<sup>94</sup>

Also, anything that could have blemished Dickens' relationship towards his children is neglected. But he was not always the loving father as which he is depicted in the museum. Tomalin judges: "Dickens had not wanted more than three children, and he preferred daughters to sons,

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<sup>92</sup> K. J. Fielding, "Dickens and the Hogarth Scandal", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 10, no. 1 (1955), 64-74: 67.

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.charlesdickenspage.com/the-violated-letter.html>, accessed 7th November 2022; originally in Jenny Hartley's "The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens"; and the discussion of it in Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 298-300. Tomalin names a convoluted letter in "The Times" as Dickens' first public statement regarding his domestic affairs, see *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-152, 160-166.

but he became interested in each baby as it appeared and felt concern, if not exactly love, for the six younger sons. When he said he found it hard to show his feelings for them, perhaps he meant it was hard to have the feelings he was expected to have for so many unwanted offspring [...].”<sup>95</sup> Indeed Dickens seemed to have been nearly relieved to accommodate several of his sons in the distant British colonies.<sup>96</sup> Upon the birth of his son Francis he merely wrote: “Kate is alright again; and so, they tell me, is the Baby. But I decline (on principle) to look at the latter object.”<sup>97</sup>

Certainly there is no gainsaying in Dickens’ qualities as a most prolific writer, social campaigner, and probably also as a friend, and Tomalin, too, reports episodes which document that Dickens surely was no oblivious man, like one in which he puts all his efforts into defending a young housemaid who had been accused of having killed her newborn baby, fathoming her desperate situation instead of condemning her.<sup>98</sup> These episodes do not rule out strained relations within his own family, however, in which Dickens played a more complex role than the exhibition likes to acknowledge. But even his view of the poor was not completely angelic or without any prejudice, and, as Judith Flanders points out, Dickens sturdily identified as a descendant of the middle class, different from the wretches of society:

*“Even those who were generously inclined, who did not believe that being poor by definition made a person bad, used language that suggested they saw the poor as different from themselves in essential ways. Oliver Twist was an outraged response to the new Poor Laws; even so, Dickens used the words ‘wild’ and ‘voracious’ – as of an animal – to describe the workhouse children.”*<sup>99</sup>

An outstanding personality can have its flaws, too, which quite often make it more interesting. Nevertheless, the Dickens Museum chooses to paint a rather one-dimensional picture of a genius, generous Dickens.

How this picture evolved over the course of the museum’s existence since 1925 cannot be discussed exhaustively here, also because I do only dispose of a limited selection of museum booklets and guides that do not allow for a thorough judgement of the development of the permanent exhibition. In general, the earlier guidebooks were far less structured. The very first one

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 248-249.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 233; Moore Grace, *Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Class, Race and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens* (Aldershot, 2004), 104.

<sup>97</sup> Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 151. From a letter to T. J. Thompson, 15 Feb. 1844, The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens, IV, p. 46.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Prologue, xxxix-xlvii.

<sup>99</sup> Judith Flanders, *The Victorian City: Everyday Life in Dickens’ London* (London, 2012), 168; furthermore Grace, *Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Class, Race and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens*, 31. Also see his description of Mr. Pickwick “alone in the coarse vulgar crowd” of the prison in Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (London, 1969 [first 1836-37]), 579.

from 1925 briefly summed up how the museum came into being and assembled a number of episodic fragments around the works Dickens wrote at Doughty Street, and around the interests he pursued at the time. It is followed by a complete list of works produced during the stay in Doughty Street but does not offer any overview over the exhibited rooms.<sup>100</sup> Judging from the selection of guide books available to me, it was not before the 1990s that the guide developed its two-part design, with a first part explaining the importance of the time at Doughty Street for Dickens (in a coherent text this time) and a second part offering a (n illustrated) tour through the various rooms. But perhaps it is of little relevance trying to trace the exact development of the exhibition in terms of how it portrayed Dickens. For the museum never uttered the intention to wholly reform its view on its central figure, nor to critically engage with him.<sup>101</sup> It is more the aesthetic experience that changed over the years than the approach of the exhibition, which has always been to display a version of Dickens' former home that should be true to the original, or do its best in offering the visitors an immersive experience of how life in an early Victorian home would have felt like (The emphasis should indeed lie on "early" Victorian here, because Dickens moved into Doughty Street shortly before Victoria even ascended the throne, and as the museum itself acknowledges, the original interior style of the house is also representative of the earlier "Regency period"<sup>102</sup>). The premises of Doughty Street itself, and the objects being available as exhibits therefore played the crucial role in the museum's maturing. Most formative periods were the early years in which the gifts from the Suzanett collection greatly increased the museum's property of objects affiliated with Dickens, and then again the more recent years from 2012 onwards in which the museum's trust restructured the estate to make way for a complete presentation of Dickens' former rooms in number 48.<sup>103</sup>

To be sure, certain accentuations in the museum's guides and booklets have likely changed over time. Dickens' relationship towards Ellen Ternan was mentioned in earlier booklets but often brushed aside with the explanation that "biographers have disputed the exact nature of their relationship" – which was perhaps partially true, at least before Claire Tomalin published "The Invisible Woman" in 1990. The latest museum guides now acknowledge Dickens' "infatuation" with Ternan as a driving force for his split from Catherine, and the great role Ellen

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<sup>100</sup> The Dickens House, ed., *Guide* (London: 1925).

<sup>101</sup> Malcolmson, "'A veritable Dickens shrine': Commemorating Charles Dickens at the Dickens House Museum", 10.

<sup>102</sup> Charles Dickens Museum, ed., *Museum Guide Book* (London: 2017), 25.

<sup>103</sup> Michael Slater, ed., *Catalogue of Treasures from the Dickens Collection formed by the late Comte Alain de Suzanett on Exhibition at the Dickens House, 1 June – 12 September 1970* (London: 1970), 4; Charles Dickens Museum, ed., *Great Expectations: A Vision for 2012* (London: without year; leaflet). These two developments were also highlighted by curator Emily Smith as she handed me the brochures.

Ternan played in his later life.<sup>104</sup> Still the part of Ellen Ternan remains murky, like so many of the objects scattered all round the house. Yet maybe it is not necessary to see through and comprehend everything in order to fathom what the Dickens Museum is all about. Like it says in a 2012 flyer on the occasion of the upcoming remodelling of the property:

*“Our vision is to establish the Charles Dickens Museum as the world’s most accessible centre for the enjoyment, appreciation and understanding of Charles Dickens and his cultural and social legacy.”*<sup>105</sup>

Enjoyment comes first in this list, and indeed the Dickens Museum is a place for entertaining and at times peculiar events, lately ranging from a ghostly “Doughty Street Séance” to an “Oh, Poo!” workshop – and though the museum is not shy of advertising the latter in comically jaunty expressions (including “digging through some Victorian ‘poos’” before “following our Toilet Trail”), it deems it necessary to mention in a footnote that “this wonderfully weird family day” to “get your hands dirty” does not involve any actual faeces.<sup>106</sup> Such events underline that the museum not only wants to portray Dickens as a person, but equally Victorian culture, for which reason it is perhaps of little significance that some objects have a vague connection to Dickens at best.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, especially the most known and cherished stories by Dickens like “Oliver Twist” or “A Christmas Carol” are much alluded to in the museum, which explains why the museum also puts such emphasis on objects that can rather be deemed “paratextual”, as Watson says, than biographical, like the Chertsey window Oliver Twist was supposedly pushed through in a burglary.<sup>108</sup> That Dickens explicitly named existing places in London in his books, renders it more than plausible to offer events and tours that interweave fiction and factual history.<sup>109</sup> Like Flanders says, “Dickens created London as much as London created Dickens.”<sup>110</sup>

Hence, the Dickens Museum first and foremost is a place to celebrate Dickens and his work, and continue his special bond with the public. Catherine Malcolmson sees this reflected in the “language of sentiment and feeling”, in which the design of the museum has been driven

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<sup>104</sup> Charles Dickens Museum, ed., *Museum Guide Book* (London: 1986), 5; Charles Dickens Museum, ed., *Museum Guide Book* (London: 1990), 12; Charles Dickens Museum, ed., *Museum Guide Book* (London: 2015), 30 and 33; Charles Dickens Museum, ed., *Museum Guide Book* (London: 2017), 30, 33.

<sup>105</sup> Charles Dickens Museum, *Great Expectations: A Vision for 2012*.

<sup>106</sup> <https://dickensmuseum.com/blogs/all-events/the-doughty-street-seance>, accessed 7th November 2022; <https://dickensmuseum.com/blogs/all-events/oh-poooh>, accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>107</sup> Like Watson illustrates on the stuffed hedgehog in the kitchen as a presumably typical feature of Victorian kitchens. See Watson, *The Author's Effect: On Writer's House Museums*, 44-45, 70-71.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 127. This blending of fiction and reality could also be observed in the previous permanent exhibition of the Buddenbrookhaus which showed two of the “Buddenbrook family’s” rooms as they would have looked like when the family was moving out.

<sup>109</sup> See also Booth, *Homes and Haunts: Touring Writers' Shrines and Countries*, 7: “Dickens [...] has become a country and world more than a specific house”, and 256-257.

<sup>110</sup> Flanders, *The Victorian City: Everyday Life in Dickens' London*, 12. As a reply to a quote by Walter Benjamin, “Dickens did not stamp these places on his mind; he stamped his mind on these places.”

forwards since its beginnings, and the way in which the house is presented as the home of Dickens' literary characters which he conceived here, thus promising an intimate encounter not only with the writer himself but just as well with Mr. Pickwick or Sam Weller.<sup>111</sup>

As a more recent booklet adds, Dickens "like no other author [...] put into words the feelings, thoughts, expectations, fears and hopes of the nation".<sup>112</sup> He is a man in tune with his nation, which manifests itself also in his friendly relations to political personalities and the Queen, for whom he put on a private performance of "The Frozen Deep" in 1857.<sup>113</sup> It is hard to imagine Thomas or even more Heinrich Mann hobnobbing with the mighty in this way, no matter if in the 20<sup>th</sup> century or in the *Kaiserreich* of the 19<sup>th</sup>.

## 5. Discussion: Appreciation Comes in Many Ways

*"I wish Mr. Micawber to take his stand upon that vessel's prow, and firmly say, 'This country I am come to conquer! Have you honors? Have you riches? Have you posts of profitable pecuniary emolument? Let them be brought forward. They are mine! [...]'*  
*I wish Mr. Micawber [...] to be the Caesar of his own fortunes."*

Mrs Micawber about her husband in *David Copperfield*.

*"[...] that what I have done, I did, in despite of mercenary and selfish objects,  
For England, home, and Beauty."*

Mr. Micawber.<sup>114</sup>

*"'Listen, Smolt, and you other people! Those of you who are reasonable fellows, those go home and stop bothering about revolution, and don't disturb the order here ...' – 'The holy order!'", Mr. Gosch interrupted him hissingly ... 'The order, I say!'", decided Consul Buddenbrook."*

Consul Jean Buddenbrook in *Buddenbrooks*.<sup>115</sup>

Both the Buddenbrookhaus and the Charles Dickens Museum have an affectionate relationship with their protagonists, I would argue. While the London museum serves its visitors a picture book hero in shiny armour, Lübeck strikes a more reserved note. Yet Thomas and

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<sup>111</sup> Malcolmson, "'A veritable Dickens shrine': Commemorating Charles Dickens at the Dickens House Museum", 2, 18-19.

<sup>112</sup> Charles Dickens Museum, ed., *Plan & Visitor Guide* (London: 2012), 13 (Servant's Bedroom, Third Floor).

<sup>113</sup> The Dickens Fellowship Players, eds., *The Frozen Deep: A Souvenir* (London: 1933).

<sup>114</sup> Both quotes from Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (Oxford, 2008 [first 1849-50]), 738, 788.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks: Verfall einer Familie* (Berlin, 1951 [first 1901]), 199. My translation from the German original.

Heinrich are shown to us as fascinating characters nonetheless, and perhaps even as heroes too, albeit clad in a more demure attire, as their heroic deeds were expressed through their political and moral stance against a fascist Germany.

Apart from political questions, the Buddenbrookhaus ironically plays with the Manns' flaws. Perhaps because it is not supposed to be a secret that Thomas Mann preferred men over women and boys over girls with more than a tinge of homoeroticism, therefore nearly necessarily neglecting his wife Katia to a certain point; that Heinrich on the other hand indulged in brothels and prostitutes, or that Klaus Mann was a suicidal drug addict (and gay, too). Not all of these things are discussed in the small Behnhaus exhibition, but the complex, at times difficult personalities and family ties of the Manns are a key theme. Such features as named above are certainly not untypical for artists, but rather unsuitable to create the image of a decent, merry family, particularly a Victorian one like the Dickens family. As mentioned in the beginning, Thomas Mann belonged to a later generation than Dickens. His reception is therefore influenced by the different historical background against which he grew up, and which marks the cornerstone of the present German memory culture. This German memory culture shall now briefly be broached in relation to Thomas Mann, followed by a foray into English identity and memory culture, and how Dickens fits in.

Finally, I will return to the questions raised in the beginning of this text, and answer how Charles Dickens and Thomas and Heinrich Mann are remembered in their museums and what role the museums ascribe to them in national history (and beyond), and assess what kind of institutions Charles Dickens Museum and Buddenbrookhaus are after all.

### *German Memory Culture and Thomas Mann*

Thomas Mann experienced the rise of the National Socialists in 1930s Germany, followed by the Shoah and a world war. These two are the guiding themes of German memory culture nowadays. If one picks up basically any book by German Aleida Assmann, one of the leading authorities in memory studies, they presently realise that the Second World War and the Shoah are the linchpin of her memory studies. Assmann shows how the memories of and the debate on the dictatorship and its victims came to be the fundament of German memory culture in post-war times. What started as an also personal argument between young people and the generation of their fathers, was in a way won by the former and firmly inscribed into German political

culture.<sup>116</sup> A history of trauma suppresses a history of triumph,<sup>117</sup> which helps explain the critical element of German historiography, also popularly, when it comes to the depiction of individuals who were responsible citizens while the Nazi regime lasted. It seems hardly viable nowadays to write a book or make a movie about a known personality without asking: What did they do between 1933 and 1945? A public museum bears a special responsibility here and so the Buddenbrookhaus cannot avoid making the Mann brothers' political stance one of their central themes – which of course did play a major part in their lives, if more so in Heinrich's than in Thomas', who, after a plot twist in which he had become the leading voice of the German expatriates, in 1938 proclaimed: "Where I am, there is Germany."<sup>118</sup> So, as Marcel Reich-Ranicki argues in his amusing and tellingly titled essay "The King and the Antiking", Thomas Mann ultimately remained an unpolitical until the end of his life, who resented his brother more for the unpleasing aesthetic quality of his works than for his political activism and whose main concern was to protect "his intellectual world from the demands of the presence".<sup>119</sup> This is also the impression one can gain from reading Inge and Walter Jens' biography on Thomas Mann's wife Katharina "Katia" Pringsheim, a woman chosen to take care of life's petty to-dos and errands lest that Thomas would be hindered in the manifestation of his aesthetic prowess.<sup>120</sup>

As Assmann points out, German memory culture has a tendency to become rigid and "ritualized".<sup>121</sup> Like a, even if honestly meant, *mea culpa* that has become a second nature, dealing with the period of National Socialism can end up being a routinely matter for places of memory, thus thwarting attempts to engage with the past in a really critical way and to accept that it is precisely the tensions and shadows that make for a more far-reaching examination of the portrayed topic or personalities.<sup>122</sup> Now Thomas and Heinrich Mann are definitely "flamboyant, ambivalent, and contradictory personalities", also regarding their relationship towards politics.<sup>123</sup> This shows in the Buddenbrookhaus as well, even in the relatively small Behnhaus

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<sup>116</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention* (München, 2013), 49-59; Aleida Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen? Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes der Moderne* (München, 2013), 144-148, also 294; Aleida Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis: Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung* (München, 2007), 43-58.

<sup>117</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München, 2006), 12-17. Especially p. 14 which is referencing Bernhard Giesen.

<sup>118</sup> Spiegel, Hubert, "Wo ich bin, ist Deutschland", [https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/wo-ich-bin-ist-deutschland.700.de.html?dram:article\\_id=85206](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/wo-ich-bin-ist-deutschland.700.de.html?dram:article_id=85206), accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>119</sup> Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Der König und der Gegenkönig", in *Thomas Mann und die Seinen*, ed. Marcel Reich-Ranicki (Stuttgart: 1987), 152-179: especially 178-179 (here also the quotation).

<sup>120</sup> Inge Jens and Walter Jens, *Frau Thomas Mann: Das Leben der Katharina Pringsheim* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2003).

<sup>121</sup> Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention*, 76-81.

<sup>122</sup> Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis: Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung*, 168-169; Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention*, 98-99.

<sup>123</sup> Reich-Ranicki, "Der König und der Gegenkönig", 167-168.



exhibition. Certainly the nuances and phases of the brothers' political development could be discussed in more detail but this might mean a highly intellectual discussion which would have to consider not only Heinrich's later flirt with the dictatorial communist regimes, for example, but also the role of Thomas' aestheticism. It probably does well here to remember that a museum is not a textbook, and that politics are still only one of many interesting themes to examine within the Mann family. In the end, despite bringing up their political aberrations and making sideswipes at their difficult characters (especially narrator Tony does not feel much need to mince her words in the Behnhaus), the Buddenbrookhaus presents the Mann brothers, and family, as quirky, maybe a little "neurotic", but nonetheless endearing characters. The ironizing yet charming way in which the museum paints this picture could well be borrowed from Thomas Mann's own style, like to be seen in the introducing quote to this chapter in which an irritated Consul Buddenbrook tries to stave off the pesky revolutionary rabble, but does so in his nonchalant, homy dialect so that not even the crowd can be seriously cross with him. For it is only "order" that the dutiful Northern German merchant wishes for.<sup>124</sup> The ironic manner in which Thomas Mann distances himself from the people of his hometown turned much darker in later years. But perhaps even in this deep break with Germany it is where Thomas Mann's love for his home country lies. Navid Kermani lets Thomas Mann himself speak in his essay about Kafka and Germany, and Mann remarks that "it is nearly part of German humanity to behave un-German and anti-German even; that a tendency to cosmopolitanism, corroding the national sense, is inseparable from the nature of German nationality [...]".<sup>125</sup> Hence Kermani's conclusion about German poets reads: "They are great Germans, although they were, or precisely by being at odds with Germany. In other words: Germany may be proud of those who were not proud of Germany."<sup>126</sup> In much the same way, the post-war tenet of "A German identity, never again!" has become outdated as one realises that it is exactly in the moral break with the past and the critically distanced stance towards it that German identity can be found nowadays.<sup>127</sup>

To be sure, another story than the "Buddenbrooks" would have been fitter to demonstrate Thomas Mann's political thought, like "Mario und der Zauberer" or once again "Der Zauberberg", whose protagonist appears as a "mere reflection figure"<sup>128</sup> anyway. However I want to

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<sup>124</sup> Immanuel Nover also refers to this passage as "the ironically narrated thwarting of the revolution", Immanuel Nover, "Bürgerlichkeit", in *Buddenbrooks-Handbuch*, ed. Nicole Mattern and Stefan Neuhaus (Stuttgart: 2018), 145-148: 147.

<sup>125</sup> From Thomas Mann, *Gesammelte Werke*, X, 1146, in: Navid Kermani, "Nachmittag Schwimmschule: Kafka und Deutschland", in *Zwischen Koran und Kafka: West-östliche Erkundungen*, ed. Navid Kermani (München: 2015), 211-228: 219.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention*, 27-28.

<sup>128</sup> Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen? Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes der Moderne*, 51-52.

say some words about Dickens' character of Mr. Micawber in the next paragraph, and as Micawber stems from Dickens' most autobiographical novel it seemed only fair to contrast his words with those of Thomas Mann's correspondingly "autobiographical" novel "Buddenbrooks".

### *English Identity and Charles Dickens*

Just as Consul Thomas Buddenbrook is formed after the model of Thomas Mann's father, so is Mr. Micawber at least loosely based on Charles Dickens' father John, who had no talent for handling money either and was financially dependent on his son Charles for much of his life.<sup>129</sup> In "David Copperfield", Micawber eventually decides to draw a line under this life of pecuniary troubles he had had in England and ventures to start a new life with his family in Australia. The quotes above bear witness to the mixed feelings the Micawbers harbour upon leaving England. On the one hand the affection for the home country expressed in a letter by Mr. Micawber, on the other hand the euphoric, energised mood that is especially pronounced in Mrs Micawber who – by chance? – envisions her husband as a "conquering Caesar", hence nicely alluding to the British Empire and England's role in it. A role which is quite peculiar and can be difficult to characterise, though at least one of Dickens' authors for his journal "Household Words" referred to Caesar as well in paralleling him with the British Government itself, quoting from Shakespeare: 'Caesar never does wrong without just cause'.<sup>130</sup>

As Anthony Smith remarked, the English are a nation that have long disposed of a strong national feeling without having had a national movement or "nationalism".<sup>131</sup> Krishan Kumar expatiates on this particularity, and highlights how crucial it is to distinguish between "British" and "English". While the term British rather refers to the Empire, including territories of the British Isles themselves like Scotland or Wales which the English incorporated pretty early, English is meant to denominate the lands in the South from which the Empire spread forth. The English are at the beginning and the core of the British, and precisely because of that they did not feel any need to think about what characteristics might define them. Even more, Kumar says, it is just not prudent to make much fuss about oneself when you are powerful, in control, and so present on the world stage already. Better to remain a little reserved when it comes to your national consciousness and leave Englishness in the closet. Even Britishness can be hard

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<sup>129</sup> Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 219-220.

<sup>130</sup> John Lang, "Wanderings in India (V)", *Household Words* 17, no. 407 (1858), 93. As told and cited in Sabine Clemm, *Dickens, Journalism, and Nationhood: Mapping the World in Household Words* (New York/London, 2009), 136.

<sup>131</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London, 1991), 72.

to define, though it showed more clearly in the country's labour class and its struggles, as they appear in Dickens' novels, too. Britishness, in any case, is a wider concept that allows room for different identities and people of different colours under its roof, while Englishness has been marked by a more regional, and white, strand. It was not before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that England experienced a kind of national romanticism span around the quaint sceneries of the Southern English countryside, and once again stressed in English literature, which also gave the impetus to reflections on the English language.<sup>132</sup> Though written by Dickens quite some time before, in the 1830s, the pieces that were to be published as "Sketches by Boz" were originally titled (possibly<sup>133</sup>) "Sketches of English Life and Character" and already pointing in this direction.<sup>134</sup> Appropriately enough, Dickens himself stemmed from the heartlands of this romanticised English South, having been born in Portland and moved to Kent before ending up in London; and his break-through hit "Pickwick Papers" takes the reader on a tour through the English countryside, to the red-bricked town of Muggleton, "an ancient and loyal borough" in which "no fewer than one thousand four hundred and twenty petitions against the continuance of negro slavery abroad, and an equal number against any interference with the factory system at home [have been presented]",<sup>135</sup> or to the cosy Saracen's Head in Towcester in which "everything looked (as everything always does, in all decent English inns) as if the travellers had been expected, and their comforts prepared, for days beforehand".<sup>136</sup> Dickens' travelling lifestyle and curiosity which so nicely show through in the "Pickwick Papers" have indeed been part of a special exhibition titled "Global Dickens: For Every Nation upon Earth". While the release paper for the exhibition claims that Dickens regarded himself a global author, the contents of it cover his (reading) tours through Europe and the US or feature objects like a copy of "David Copperfield" which Robert Falcon Scott brought to his Antarctica expedition, but seemingly nothing on Dickens' relationship towards the Empire or the colonies.<sup>137</sup> Even though the latter are practically omnipresent in Dickens' work, not only in Mr. Micawber's emigration to

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<sup>132</sup> Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003), 1-18, 37, 179, 169, 183-184, 209-212, 219-222, 239-269 and here especially 257-258.

<sup>133</sup> According to Judith Flanders their first official name was "Sketches of London", Flanders, *The Victorian City: Everyday Life in Dickens' London*, 5.

<sup>134</sup> Dickens' Birthplace Museum, ed., *List of Books, Prints, Portraits, Autograph Letters & Memorials Exhibited at Dickens' Birthplace Museum* (Portsmouth: 1926), 13.

<sup>135</sup> Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, 87-88.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 716.

<sup>137</sup> Charles Dickens Museum, ed., *Global Dickens: For Every Nation Upon Earth, May to November 2019* (London: 2019; release paper for journalists sent to me by curator Emily Smith). A draft of the exhibition layout and texts I was allowed to look through marginally touched upon the colonies, if only in saying that Dickens did never physically make it there and asking the visitors to imagine what Dickens might have written about India or Australia had he visited them.

Australia, but also for instance in “Great Expectation’s” Magwitch, also going to Australia, though rather involuntarily as a convict, where he ends up being a successful sheep farmer, “Bleak House’s” Mrs Jellybee who is so busied with her charity efforts for Africa that she neglects the needs of her own family and the poor around her (for which Dickens implicitly criticises her just as the Muggletons mentioned above), or, also from “David Copperfield”, the cold-hearted and indifferent Jack Maldon who is eventually ridded off by his family and sent to India to join the military (similarly to Dickens’ own son Walter). While the antisemitic depiction of “Oliver Twist’s” Faggins or possible LGBT identities of Dickens characters have been broached by the Dickens Museum, these stories of emigrants and colonists have not. Still the example of the “Global Dickens” special exhibition suggests that the Dickens Museum is more prone to touch upon such complex themes in its special exhibitions.

But Dickens was highly interested and invested in what was happening in the British colonies, and in America, and he and his fellow journalist commented on these issues in even clearer words in journals and letters. Their writings reflect the then commonplace beliefs and stereotypes on the colonial population; written from the standpoint of British superiority, from those who deemed the people of India brutish and in need of a guiding hand, and Australia not inhabited at all before the arrival of British settlers.<sup>138</sup> It might be that Dickens at times projected his dissatisfaction with domestic politics on the happenings in the colonies, which he had never visited himself;<sup>139</sup> in any case there were occurrences that were just as eerie to him there as here, like the tumultuous uprisings of the oppressed he was usually so concerned about.<sup>140</sup> Which is again connected to another question that was bothering him, the of what Englishness actually meant.<sup>141</sup> One attribute the writers of “Household Words” could agree on was freedom, of opinion and of speech.<sup>142</sup> What this freedom meant for the local poor and the colonial populations far away, was another matter.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Grace, *Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Class, Race and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens*, 94, 127-128; Clemm, *Dickens, Journalism, and Nationhood: Mapping the World in Household Words*, 14-15, 139-147.

<sup>139</sup> Grace, *Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Class, Race and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens*, 108.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82, 129-132.

<sup>141</sup> Clemm, *Dickens, Journalism, and Nationhood: Mapping the World in Household Words*, 3-4.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53, 61-62.

<sup>143</sup> But Dickens himself also eyed the much-praised English liberty with scepticism at times, see *ibid.*, 68-69.

*The Local, the National, and More:*

*Competing Ways of Representing and Remembering in the Museum*

Now of course such patronising attitudes towards people outside the known, the white and the European, had been and continued to be virulent for a long time and are not specific for Dickens or his generation. When Thomas Mann's children Erika and Klaus, who presumably deemed themselves quite progressive, visited Hawaii in the 1920s, what they had to say about the men there was that "they are [...] beings *different* from us, the question only is, whether of higher or lower nature [...]. He is, as physical man, unsurpassable; we, as spiritualised physical men, not at all."<sup>144</sup> Concerning a man with the standing and range of Charles Dickens, then even more so than now, the question should be allowed however why his political writings and the more general role of colonies, Empire and Englishness in his work do not feature in the Dickens Museum. Moreover, that Dickens asked what was English, and not what was European, is something that sets him apart from the Manns: If the Mann children felt intellectually superior to the Hawaiian men, they did so as Europeans (and Europeans of a select elite), if Charles Dickens felt intellectually superior to the Indians or the African Americans, he did so more explicitly as an Englishman.<sup>145</sup> This mode of thinking has survived till the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when politicians underlined that Britain was an autonomous entity, only loosely associated with Europe,<sup>146</sup> and beyond. When the House of European History opened in Brussels in 2017, apart from the Polish only the British press uttered outspoken critique on its presentation of Europe, because where were its great inventions and its glories (especially the British ones), a British journalist asked, where all the things Europeans could be proud of?<sup>147</sup>

For some Germans and outsiders, a tendency to complacently condescend to such other, prouder forms of memory culture, seems to be sensible in Germany. Such that more marginalised nations like the Polish feel that the Germans, after having committed one of the greatest crimes in human history in a spirit of moral supremacy, once again try to pose as moral signposts, if now in the field of memory culture; that they are wallowing in a certainty of being the

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<sup>144</sup> Erika Mann and Klaus Mann, *Rundherum: Abenteuer einer Weltreise* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2020 [first 1929]), 87-88.

<sup>145</sup> This is very nicely visible in his essay on John Franklin's Arctic expedition, too, in which Dickens repudiates the Inuit's claims that Franklin's team had resorted to cannibalism, and defends Franklin's honour as an Englishman and one of the makers of "the flower of the trained adventurous spirit of the English Navy". See Charles Dickens, *The Lost Arctic Voyagers*, from <https://victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/arctic/pva342.html>, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022 (originally in *Household Words* in 1854).

<sup>146</sup> Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, 270-271.

<sup>147</sup> Regente, *Flucht und Vertreibung in europäischen Museen: Deutsche, polnische und tschechische Perspektiven im Vergleich*, 497-498.

“best” in having dealt with and come to terms with their history.<sup>148</sup> And that their political dominance in the field of memory culture unjustly spreads the blame for the Shoah on Europe as a whole and pressures other countries to succumb to a culture of guilt.<sup>149</sup>

Against this backdrop, it is my concern to say that pointing out the lack of critical elements in the Dickens Museum does of course not make this the (morally, strategically) lesser museum. It is true that the Charles Dickens Museum is less critical of Dickens than the Buddenbrookhaus is of the Manns. Interestingly, this has shown most clearly in how the museums approach the writers’ female characters (in the Behnhaus) and their personal relationships towards women. In addition, the Charles Dickens Museum largely neglects the international interests and affairs of Dickens, specifically in the permanent exhibition and regarding the colonies. The Buddenbrooks exhibition in the Behnhaus again feeds off contrasting the Manns’ upbringing in Lübeck with their various international entanglements. These include more or less innocuous motives like the Manns as a traditional merchant family or mother Julia Mann’s roots in the Brazilian jungle,<sup>150</sup> which originated her sons’ identity as torn between a Northern austerity and the Southern, artistic temper; yet also the brothers’ role in European and world politics which was not always firmly pacifistic and in line with present moral standards, specifically in the case of Thomas Mann.

But Charles Dickens Museum and Buddenbrook exhibition are fundamentally different, and just that. According to the traditional readings of museology, the Dickens Museum bears a certain resemblance with a *Wunderkammer* in assembling a wide variety of at times curious objects pertaining to Dickens, like his navy suit, or the merely “Victorian”, now stuffed hedgehog. These objects are nonetheless assorted to the most appropriate rooms to let Dickens’ house rise once again as it may have been like back in the days. Also, from the lower to the upper floors, different themes are being attributed to the rooms which loosely move along Dickens’ life in chronological order, from his early days of success in Doughty Street to his deathbed.

Meanwhile the Buddenbrook exhibition structures its objects and contents along clearly outlined themes that are not proposed by former functions of the rooms they are placed in.<sup>151</sup> This opposition which structured the seminal work of Eilean Hooper-Greenhill was answered by

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 228-229; also Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention*, 59.

<sup>149</sup> Ann Rigney, "Transforming Memory and the European Project", *New Literary History* 43, no. 4 (2012), 607-628: 614-615. (Rigney is also referring to Peter Novick here)

<sup>150</sup> This chapter of the Mann family’s history is not wholly innocuous, of course, and the museum has acknowledged it by pointing out that Julia Mann’s father was a slaveholder, see chapter 3.2.

<sup>151</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London, 1992), 206; Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Orgins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: 1985).

Tony Bennnett, who departs from a dividing line that fits the two museums in case even better: the carefully structured, “scientific” museum on the one, the gaudy, opulent fair on the other hand – because the Dickens museum is explicitly also a place of fun events and joy.<sup>152</sup> In a way this opposition seems justified, given that the Mann family which is housed by the Buddenbrookhaus was a family of intellectuals, at least since the generation of Thomas and Heinrich, while Dickens was a man of the people, creating characters of and for the people, and read by the lower classes or children alike. The vividness and tangibility of Dickens’ characters is alive in the Dickens Museum, whereas the heaviness that comes along with some of Thomas Mann’s at times little accessible novels (for the common leisurely reader) which followed the “Buddenbrooks” lingers over the Buddenbrooks exhibition.

Now that a museum is still an educational institution does not mean it has to be a “temple” in which a silent and diffident visitor reverently nods at the exhibits. Creating the museum as more of an open forum,<sup>153</sup> or as a kind of fair, might prove more successful in engaging with the audience, even if in a more light-hearted way. In this sense the current Dickens Museum has an advantage compared to the Buddenbrookhaus, precisely because it is less critical of its hero. Its nimble, entertaining approach might appeal to a variety of visitors more easily.

The Buddenbrookhaus, though no temple, must deal with addressing a difficult chapter of the German past without excluding part of its visitors from the possibility to identify with its protagonists, or at least to find own experiences echoed, sympathise with and connect to them. Constructing an eccentric, erudite personality like Thomas Mann as an identification figure for the audience is hard enough as it is, especially regarding younger audiences. But for the Buddenbrookhaus, the background of the National Socialist dictatorship poses another obstacle as it is an experience so closely tied to German family history that it can make Germans with a migration background feel alienated from it.<sup>154</sup> On the other hand, the Buddenbrookhaus is finding its way here, too, in emphasising more universal themes that are of interest also or even especially for younger visitors with more diverse roots: political resistance, emigration, homesickness. And in zooming up closer on the scions of Thomas and Katia Mann, who grew up to be marine activists or controversial historians, but also addicts and closeted homosexuals, and

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<sup>152</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London/New York, 1995).

<sup>153</sup> The oppositional pair of “temple” and “forum” was introduced by Duncan Cameron in the 1970s. Importantly for Cameron, a museum can indeed rid itself of being a temple, but a museum cannot and should not be museum and forum at the same time; or, if elements of both of these are integrated in it, they should be clearly separated. See Duncan Cameron, “The Museum: A Temple or the Forum”, *Journal of World History* 14, no. 1 (1971), 11-24; also Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, chapters 7 and 8, 167-215.

<sup>154</sup> See Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention*, 123-130.

thus offer a variety of contact points for visitors.<sup>155</sup>

The Mann children and the family's dynamics also served as an access point in the participation of the local students mentioned earlier. One of the central demands upon a museum exhibition they formulated was that it "should clearly differentiate itself from other forms of mediation, should rely on atmosphere, interaction, and vividness". What in more concrete terms corresponds to, amongst others, "very sparse use of text".<sup>156</sup> In a publication based on a cooperation with the Buddenbrookhaus this issue is raised as well when Vanessa Zeissig elaborates on literature exhibitions and claims: "Literature is conveyed through a medium that offers a spatial dimension and includes the visitors – regardless of the book reading – physically as well as mentally along with their own presence."<sup>157</sup> That the students did apparently not feel included in this way in the former Buddenbrooks exhibition can help explain why the context of the exhibition, its atmospheric interplay, lost out a little in the analysis – there simply was not much of it there, or, in the Behnhaus exhibition at least, these aspects occupied a rather small room compared to the textual elements and vitrified objects. Where the Dickens Museum takes visitors into the writer's actual, former home, the Behnhaus exhibition can merely convey a vague feeling of the affluent's lifestyle in 19<sup>th</sup> century Lübeck.<sup>158</sup> On the other hand, and regarding the exhibition of literature itself discussed above by Zeissig, the narrating voice of fictional character Tony Buddenbrook is stepping out of line, as a direct manifestation of exhibiting literature beyond textual representations.

In the Dickens Museum manifestations of literature play their part as well, like in the window in the attic that *Oliver Twist* was supposedly shoved through, a boy who was not real after all, and of course in the constant thematization of the works and characters Dickens put forward while living in the house. The surroundings of Doughty Street play a bigger part for the Dickens Museum, too. For sure, the Buddenbrookhaus as well offers tours and media activities related to the places that influenced the Mann brothers' personal lives as well as their literary worlds, and intends to tie the Manns in into the wider cultural wickerwork of Lübeck. Yet the Dickens

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<sup>155</sup> For example in the special exhibitions on exile and on family relations, the contents of which are supposed to be integrated into the new permanent exhibition. See Birte Lipinski and Anna-Lena Markus, eds., *Fremde Heimat: Flucht und Exil der Familie Mann (Magazin zur Ausstellung)* (Lübeck: 2016); Tilmann Lahme, Birte Lipinski and Julius Sonntag, eds., *"What a Family!": Die Manns von 1945 bis heute (Magazin zur Ausstellung)* (Lübeck: 2017).

<sup>156</sup> Lipinski and Heuer, *Vier Jahre Co-Kuratieren am Buddenbrookhaus: Abschlussbericht des partizipativen Bildungsprojekts 'Literatur als Ereignis. Die Manns und wir'*, 32.

<sup>157</sup> Vanessa Zeissig, "Zur inszenatorischen Immaterialisierung von Literatur als musealem Objekt", in *Das Immaterielle ausstellen: Zur Musealisierung von Literatur und performativer Kunst* ed. Lis Hansen, Janneke Schoene, and Levke Tessmann (Bielefeld: 2017), 223-237: 229.

<sup>158</sup> It is not clear, however, if the new permanent exhibition in the actual Buddenbrookhaus in Mengstraße will not include the biographical aura of the place more strongly.



Museum tends to play more with the frontiers between fiction and factuality, and includes its neighbourhood more staunchly as a vital source of inspiration for Dickens. Which it was, after all. Because, whereas Thomas Mann wrote both of his Lübeck tales, “Buddenbrooks” and “Tonio Kröger”, far away from the bosom of his hometown, Charles Dickens himself uttered that he found it hard to find inspiration for his writing away from the streets of London.<sup>159</sup> The Dickens Museum in the metropolis of London hence makes for a better *Heimatmuseum* than the Buddenbrookhaus in the more provincial and sleepy town of Lübeck. And in Lübeck, perhaps surprisingly, visitors are confronted with a lot more “big history” than in London.

### *Writer’s House Museums and the Nation*

Lastly, I want to come back to the terminology discussed on the first pages of this text. In terms of what Hoffmann and Watson have said about museums, memorials, and writer’s house museums, the Buddenbrookhaus and Dickens Museum range on different parts of the spectrum. Although the Buddenbrookhaus too is located in an “authentic” space (currently in the Behnhaus, but usually in the former home of Thomas’ and Heinrich’s grandmother in Mengstraße), it feels much more like a museal space – regarding the usual exhibition in Mengstraße I only have an indirect impression, though, as I never visited it. The plans for the new Buddenbrook museum, too, apparently focus on mediation, because as the museum explains, “the strength of the museum is that it makes knowledge tangible, available to be experienced by the senses”.<sup>160</sup> Revelling in the authenticity of the place is less important to the Buddenbrookhaus, albeit the place’s aura was acknowledged on an early conference regarding the museum’s renovation and restructuration: the Buddenbrookhaus as a symbolic place, steeped in literary, biographical, self-referential aura.<sup>161</sup> According to Nicola J. Watson’s definition, the Buddenbrookhaus would not even qualify as a writer’s house museum, or writer’s house.<sup>162</sup> Neither is it concerned with resurrecting the author’s body nor with mystifying the act of writing. It is not a place of worship, and the objects pertaining to the Manns are not “fetishized”.<sup>163</sup> They are there to tell or corroborate a story, not to make the visitor gaze at them in awe only because they belonged to members of the famous family. The Buddenbrookhaus does not intend to accommodate the Manns’ ghosts within its walls. Though it is authentic in the sense that it was

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<sup>159</sup> Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 183.

<sup>160</sup> <https://buddenbrookhaus.de/gestaltung>, accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>161</sup> Pils, Holger, Das Buddenbrookhaus als symbolischer Ort, [https://buddenbrookhaus.de/file/holger\\_pils\\_das\\_buddenbrookhaus\\_als\\_symbolischer\\_ort.pdf](https://buddenbrookhaus.de/file/holger_pils_das_buddenbrookhaus_als_symbolischer_ort.pdf), accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>162</sup> Watson, *The Author’s Effect: On Writer’s House Museums*, 213. (Watson herself does not address the Buddenbrookhaus.)

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, for example 140-141.

being visited by Thomas and Heinrich Mann when they were children, and served them as a source of inspiration, the museum chooses not to build its exhibition around the authenticity of the space (a decision that might also be influenced by the fact that the house had been nearly completely destroyed in World War II and such changed from its original form already).<sup>164</sup>

The Charles Dickens Museum, conversely, qualifies as a writer's house museum. It attaches far more importance to the authenticity of its place. More than that, the authentic element, that fact that Dickens once dwelled in this house, is the core of the museum's concept, without which it would not work. Where the Buddenbrookhaus is a museum which at least temporarily also worked in a house not connected to Thomas Mann, the same cannot be said of the Dickens Museum, which is much more a memorial than only a museum. Funnily, it was a German who was responsible for the renovation of the Dickens Museum in 2012, and who, instead of musealising the place more in a modernist fashion, wanted to bring it even closer to the original. As then director Florian Schweizer explained: "We wanted to recreate it like a home, so visitors could feel like they're actually visiting Charles Dickens and that he might step back in at any time."<sup>165</sup> Seemingly he did not fail, for a visiting German journalist appropriately noted that "the house now looks older than it has in a long time".<sup>166</sup>

The Buddenbrookhaus' secret to success, or what it is counting on at the moment, is participation. A participation that strongly comes across in visitor surveys asking for the people's requests considering the new Buddenbrookhaus,<sup>167</sup> or the unique school project that turned students into equal co-curators. But also in the discussions preceding the opening of the new permanent exhibition, in which the participants appear quite concerned with the use of new media.<sup>168</sup> The Dickens Museum, it seems, can afford to abstain from this level of participatory involvement, which in museum studies has usually been praised as a commendable step forward from the earlier museum "temples" that taught their visitors reverence.<sup>169</sup> Or, quite the opposite, showing reverence is, to a certain degree at least, what the Dickens Museum is about, and it

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<sup>164</sup> Which partly contradicts Spring and Schimanski, "Ghostly Voices in the Author Museum", 105. Here they write: "Not all author museums are where the author lived, but in some sense there is always a 'non-presence' of the author's body to deal with. The objects and rooms suggest to us the author is living there, but the author is conspicuously absent." The aforementioned Hauge Centre is another example for an author museum which is more a museum than a spiritual memorial.

<sup>165</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-dickens-museum-idUKBRE8B919U20121210>, accessed 7th November 2022; also <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2012/dec/16/desirable-twist/>, accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>166</sup> <https://www.zeit.de/reisen/2013-03/dickens-museum-london>, accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>167</sup> [https://buddenbrookhaus.de/oeffentliches-forum\\_2](https://buddenbrookhaus.de/oeffentliches-forum_2), accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>168</sup> [https://buddenbrookhaus.de/file/sektion\\_3\\_diskussion\\_virtualitaet\\_digitalitaet\\_authentizitaet\\_und\\_erinnerungx.pdf](https://buddenbrookhaus.de/file/sektion_3_diskussion_virtualitaet_digitalitaet_authentizitaet_und_erinnerungx.pdf), accessed 7th November 2022.

<sup>169</sup> See Cameron, "The Museum: A Temple or the Forum". But also for example Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Museums in Late Democracies", *Humanities Research* 9, no. 1 (2009).

stands by this. Fancy modern media installations are not to be found in the Dickens Museum either (though I had no insight into the museum's internal debates and cannot rule out that they have been discussed here, too). Instead, authenticity is the keyword in the Dickens Museum, and old is good. Like Valentin Groebner (with reference to Hans Magnus Enzensberger) writes, the past is the only place that remains a white spot on the map these days, and therefore such a fascinating destination.<sup>170</sup> And authentic is not the object itself, but the word refers to a process,<sup>171</sup> one in which the Dickens Museum is succeeding quite well. The "aura" that Dickens instilled in today's memorabilia through making them his belongings is still enclothing them, lending them a cultic touch.<sup>172</sup> The Dickens Museum resists the memorial trend away from celebration towards more reflection,<sup>173</sup> and at the same time shows that this does not mean a dull or joyless experience at all (but since when have celebrations been joyless?).

What is interesting about the case of the Dickens Museum, though, is that it not simply quells the visitors' longing for a picture-perfect past world. Behind Victorian domesticity and (supposed) family idyll, poverty and misery are looming right outside. So, the visitors' yearning to find identity in the past is taken quite serious after all, as it not only confronts them with a jolly English Christmas atmosphere and the like (Groebner comes up with the fitting trias "fireplace, socks, Dickens"<sup>174</sup>), but also with social issues that persist to this day. The Dickens Museum follows in an English tradition of stressing feeling over intellect,<sup>175</sup> and yet it serves more than a trip to merry Victorian days. Dickens tourism, in the Dickens Museum, too, is also "dark tourism",<sup>176</sup> and presents a source of English identity that comprises the country's social abysses. Still the black-and-white character of separating light from dark, just as the good are separated from the bad in Dickens' novels, allows the visitor to find a seeming stability that appears to be lost to him in the present.<sup>177</sup> The share of darker themes in the museum is ultimately not high or nuanced enough to leave the visitor feeling conflicted.

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<sup>170</sup> Valentin Groebner, *Retroland: Geschichtstourismus und die Sehnsucht nach dem Authentischen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2018), 10, 163-164.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 22, 166-167, and especially 181.

<sup>172</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit", in *Walter Benjamin: Gesammelte Schriften I 2*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: 1974), 431-508: 478-480, 486, 489.

<sup>173</sup> Ann Rigney, "Fiction as a Mediator in National Remembrance", in *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media and the Arts*, ed. Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas, and Andrew Mycock (New York/Oxford: 2008), 79-96: 81.

<sup>174</sup> Groebner, *Retroland: Geschichtstourismus und die Sehnsucht nach dem Authentischen*, 173.

<sup>175</sup> Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, 215-216.

<sup>176</sup> Booth, *Homes and Haunts: Touring Writers' Shrines and Countries*, 272.

<sup>177</sup> Hermann Lübke, *Der Fortschritt und das Museum: Über den Grund unseres Vergnügens an historischen Gegenständen* (London, 1982), 17-18. Lübke stays more neutral here than Groebner, who primarily addresses the longing for a merry, positive past.

Linda Young, about whose article on why there are so many writer's house museums in Great Britain I have talked in the beginning, asserts that often the motivation to visit a writer's house museum is "not primarily inspired by knowledge of, let alone dedication to, the author".<sup>178</sup> Yet literature is a vital component of English identity,<sup>179</sup> and out of the many writer's house museums this resulted in in Britain, the Dickens Museum is one that indeed shows lots of dedication for its hero, but also offers less informed visitors access into Dickens' world. Literature and reading have buttressed English cultural identity since the days of the Empire,<sup>180</sup> and the Dickens Museums does not shy away from following in this tradition.<sup>181</sup>

Thomas Mann might even feel a little jealous nowadays. In his later years he uttered how he wished to be an anglophone writer, not only because of the increased outreach but also because of the effortless, cheerful humour they displayed. At the same time he made out an un- or even anti-European element about the English character, which, even as the perhaps most German member of the Mann family, he disliked.<sup>182</sup> The Buddenbrookhaus seems equally concerned about un-Europeanism and nationalism. Where others raise the question of if there are good and bad forms of nationalism to give people orientation,<sup>183</sup> the Buddenbrookhaus distances itself from all its manifestations. Which entails the critical stance towards its "heroes" Thomas and Heinrich Mann, that might remain as the most German element about the museum.

Nevertheless, for some visitors the Manns are real heroes indeed. As a visitor expressed his feelings with firm words in the museum's guestbook, "Hayatı korkusuzca yaşayanlar, ölümden de korkmazlar!" Those who live life fearlessly do not fear death itself. Well, maybe Thomas Mann would have been quite pleased with how humbly he is displayed in Lübeck after all, that, so tiny compared to London, shows such European spirit in its dedication to the Mann family and their work?<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Young, "Literature, Museums, and National Identity; or, Why are there So Many Writers' House Museums in Britain?", 242-243.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., especially 236-243.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Watson predicts that this tradition which originated in 19th century romantic nationalism will be revived by new writer's house museums beyond Western Europe: "However transnational such figures may in actuality have been, it seems likely in the current state of geopolitics that many new writer's house museums will put at their core a sense of national identity." See Watson, *The Author's Effect: On Writer's House Museums*, 231.

<sup>182</sup> Hans Rudolf Vaget, "'Wäre ich nur in die angelsächsische Kultur hineingeboren!': Zur Archäologie von Thomas Manns West-Orientierung (für Wolfgang Heuß)", *Thomas Mann Jahrbuch* 8 (1995), 185-208.

<sup>183</sup> Stefan Bohman, *Historia, museer och nationalism* (Stockholm, 1997), especially 152-156.

<sup>184</sup> Charles Dickens, by the way, wished to only live forth in his literature, a wish that could not be granted to him who, like Virginia Woolf remarked, had been "made to appear [...] an intolerable institution" so early on. See Mark Hussey, *Virginia Woolf A to Z: A Comprehensive Reference for Students, Teachers, and Common*

## 6. Summary

To succinctly answer the questions posed in the beginning, to the Buddenbrookhaus Thomas Mann and his kin mean great, if now and then demanding literature, a pinch of “genius and madness”, as well as European spirit and resistance against dictatorship and oppression. To the Charles Dickens Museum Dickens is a generally good-natured, exuberant talent against the backdrop of Victorian domesticity and cosiness, but also an activist concerned about the social evils of society. Yet its narration remains as conciliatory and consoling as the end of many a Dickens’ novel.

And where the Buddenbrookhaus cannot help but place the Manns into the European network they felt themselves to belong to, the Dickens Museum is comfortable with letting Dickens stay in London for the most part. His doings outside of the city are of little concern to it, as are what he thought of the lands beyond. Which can also be attributed to the Dickens Museum being a writer’s house museum, that wants to show its visitors an authentic version of how the writer’s abode could have felt like, and thus naturally focusses on the time period spent in the house. Quite different in the Buddenbrookhaus (or these days Behnhaus), not a typical writer’s house museum, not trying to conjure any ghosts, which is further influenced by a national remembrance culture that does not want to be just that: too national. Which of the two ways is more inclusive, is another question.

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*Readers to her Life, Work and Critical Reception* (New York, 1996), 71; Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 399-400.

## 7. Sources and Literature

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My main sources, the museum exhibitions, were visited in June 2021 (Buddenbrookhaus/Behnhaus Lübeck) and January 2022 (Charles Dickens Museum London).

Illustration of museum visitor in front of guest book (on the title page) by the author.

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## **8. Appendix**

### **Guiding questions for visiting the exhibitions, with special considerations regarding Lübeck (orientated among the guiding questions used by A. R. Hoffmann):**

Architecture and characteristics of the rooms: are they more negligible für Lübeck as the exhibition is only temporarily housed in the Behnhaus? On the other hand: How are the rooms of the Behnhaus used for the Buddenbrooks exhibition, possibly adapted ... (after all, the interim exhibition is located here for at least three years!)

Which principles underlie the organisation of the exhibition? Is it organised chronologically, thematically ...?

Which aspect is the focus of the exhibition? Biography, works, historical background ...?

Does the focus lie on the authors' well-known magnum opus?

Which objects are used? Do they have a rather illustrative or a narrative character?

And possibly also: are they protected or openly/"tangibly" presented, are they originals or only "similar" objects or replicas ...? Are the objects used true to their context?

How is text used in the exhibition? Where and in what way is it presented and integrated?

What about the (quantitative) relationship between texts and objects?

Is other (interactive) media used and which?

What added value does the staff as contact persons offer, and perhaps also guided tours?

Is the exhibition designed to be visited alone?

Who is the target audience? Is there a specific age group; with or without prior knowledge ...?

Are visitors directly addressed in the texts?

Are foreign visitors targeted?

How long does it approximately take to visit a room/the whole exhibition?

What role does the historical background play in the exhibition (and is it explained differently in the English texts in Lübeck)?

Does the location Lübeck/London stand above the transnational/global dimension of the life and work of the Mann brothers/Dickens, or how are the two linked?

Is there an audio guide available and does it provide additional information?

> document the exhibition in notes and pictures, and not forget to note down my general impression of the atmosphere in and around the house