

Fantasies of home: “Heimat” in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Haimatochare*

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Abstract

E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Haimatochare*, an epistolary fiction set in Hawaii, defamiliarizes the narrative of an erotic colonial fantasy by coaxing the reader into the assumption that its alluring central figure is an Indigenous woman and then revealing her to be an insect. This article studies the dynamics of misapprehension within the text, beginning with Walter Benjamin’s misreading of its title as “Heimatochare,” a mistake that has proved strangely persistent in the critical literature. By reading *Haimatochare* alongside *Der Sandmann*, the article shows how *Haimatochare* introduces a web of “Heimat”-related terms that both solicit the misreading and indicate the insect’s identity such that the central revelation is already partially intuited and thus takes on an uncanny aspect. Furthermore, in making “Heimat” present across the narrative and then destabilizing it, the text unfolds an experience of “Heimweh,” where home is both fantasy and sickness at once.

In what might plausibly represent either an accidental or a deliberate misstep, Walter Benjamin incorrectly transcribes the title of one of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s tales in the vignette “Schränke” of *Die Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*. The narrative in question—*Haimatochare*, a brief epistolary tale set in Hawaii, first published in *Der Freimüthige* in 1819—does not belong among the best known of Hoffmann’s tales, and so the mistake is likely not recognized as such by many of Benjamin’s readers.¹ Listing it after the more canonical works *Die Fermate* and *Das Majorat*, Benjamin switches the “a” of *Haimatochare* for an “e,” thus turning it into “Heimatochare”:

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Mit der Unschuld war es vorbei und ein Verbot erschuf es. Verboten nämlich waren mir die Schriften, von denen ich mir reichlichen Ersatz für die verlorene Märchenwelt versprach. Zwar blieben mir die Titel—“Die Fermate,” “Das Majorat,” “Heimatochare”—dunkel. Jedoch für alle, die ich nicht verstand, hatte der Name “Gespenster-Hoffmann” und die strenge Weisung, ihn niemals aufzuschlagen, mir zu bürgen. (133)

Benjamin’s play with misprision elsewhere in the *Berliner Kindheit* might arouse the suspicion that the transformation of “Haimat” into “Heimat,” home, is no innocent mistake. In Benjamin’s other vignettes, the misapprehensions of childhood enrich the child’s experience of the world via their distorting effects, contributing to the web of meanings that he finds there.² Benjamin is not the only reader to read *Heimat* in, or into, *Haimatochare*. A mid-20th-century publication of Hoffmann’s collected works lists the tale as “Heimatochare” (*Werke in fünf Bänden*), thus legitimizing the confusion, which persists into an essay by Diana Stone Peters of 1974 (65). More recently, a discussion of “Heimatochare” is included in Walter Cohen’s *A History of European Literature from Antiquity to the Present* (376), and “Heimatochare” appears again, though just once—presumably as a typographical error—in the introduction to a recent volume (Bosco and Latini xiv).

The mistake is compelling on its own terms. After all, the story of an entanglement between an original and its distorted variant or double sounds like something lifted straight from one of Hoffmann’s own tales. But the confusion of signifiers is also symptomatic of a capricious reading that has come adrift from both authorial intention and readerly shrewdness. Hoffmann’s attention to the creative nonsenses generated by typesetting errors in contemporary editions of his texts plays out in the humorous editorial preface to *Kater Murr* (*SW* 5: 9)—a novel that is itself staged as a huge kind of typesetting error, splicing together two documents, one of them destined for the waste-paper basket, as one.³ In acknowledgment of this attention, the *Haimat/Heimat* misreading that orients this essay is understood less in the terms of an essentially arbitrary misprision that generates something new—as for Harold Bloom in *A Map of Misreading*, for whom every act of reading is a creative misreading—than as the recognition of a particular semantic unsettledness that is already present within the original text. The fantasy text “Heimatochare,” which exists both as part of and apart from *Haimatochare*, is a mistake that we might better understand in the terms of an uncanny (un-homely) half-knowledge transmitted back and forth between text and reader—or perhaps even in the terms of a contagion, an intertwining of foreign bodies and hosts: a fitting logic for a text about a foreign insect. The *Heimat* slip serves to unlock an understanding of *Haimatochare* as a narrative of a properly pathological *Heimweh*, one that defamiliarizes both the form of the colonialist explorer narrative and the logic of a Romantic homecoming to nature by re-installing *Heim* into a foreign landscape and then unsettling it, such that home is everywhere and nowhere at once. In turn, it can help us place *Haimatochare* as a key participant within the genre that Susanne Zantop has termed the colonial fantasy: a network of fictions that allowed

Germans to imaginatively work through their desires and fears around colonial conquest as “substitute for the real thing” (7) before Germany’s colonial acquisitions in the 1880s. These speculations on what Germany might do as a colonizing power, in distinction to pre-existing colonizers (not least, as in this tale, the English) contributed to the formation of “an imaginary German colonial history on paper and in the minds of their readers” (3). Hoffmann’s text, as I will show, engages the tropes of such fantasies while throwing an unsettlingly skeptical light on that very act of fantasizing.

FANTASY VOYAGES

It was not until its first translation into English by Anneliese Moore in 1978 that *Haimatochare* was recognized as “the earliest piece of Hawaiian fiction” (25). This is a surprising achievement for an author who never stepped foot out of Europe, and further evidence that contributions to colonial discourse before Germany’s first colonial exploits in the 1880s, including in the form of imaginative fictions, were the province not only of travelers such as Humboldt but also of armchair explorers such as Hoffmann. Yet the tale does have its roots in a real voyage, as it draws heavily from the experiences of Adalbert von Chamisso, Hoffmann’s friend and fellow *Serapionsbruder*, on the 4-year-long *Rurik* world expedition led by Otto von Kotzebue, which had stopped off twice on the islands of Hawaii, and from which Chamisso had returned in 1818. Hoffmann’s exuberant imaginative response to Chamisso’s *Weltreise* is made manifest in a dreamy sketch of 1815, depicting the arrival at the North Pole of a figure who combines visual aspects of Chamisso and of his fictional creation Peter Schlemihl. The narrative *Haimatochare* forms a further chapter of that response, opening up another facet of Hoffmann’s interest in imaginary exotic spaces, mediated across a fanciful homage to Chamisso—although this time, as Bettina Schäfer has argued, in far more satirical terms (225).⁴

The 15 letters of *Haimatochare* tell the tale of a trip made to O-Wahu, one of the eight islands of Hawaii, by two British entomologists and friends, Menzies and Broughton. Both figures are named after real explorers from Chamisso’s expedition on the *Rurik*. Hoffmann wrote to Chamisso on a number of occasions, asking him to provide names and other details for his tale: These were evidently provided by Chamisso, although his written responses to Hoffmann have not survived. Hoffmann modified his characters’ names in order to distance them from Chamisso’s own factual reports of his voyage: “Broughton,” therefore, is the author’s unconvincing (and near-unpronounceable) adaptation of the British Broughton and *Discovery* that of the ship *Discovery* (Moore 15). These changed names, or misnamings, anchor Hoffmann’s text, for all its far-flung detail, firmly in his home ground, giving it the parochial air of an armchair exoticism manifested in a series of German-accented distortions.

Shortly after their arrival on the island, Menzies stumbles across a hitherto undiscovered species of insect and calls it “Haimatochare,” an Ancient Greek name that, as Hartmut Steinecke explains, means something like “die Freude am Blut hat” (1107) and that both indicates the bug’s identity as a bloodsucking louse and points to the

grizzly ending of the tale. For this act of proprietorship provokes such passionate anger and jealousy in Broughthon, who believes himself to be the rightful discoverer of the insect—having shot down the bird on which it was found—that the two friends can only resolve their dispute by killing one another in a duel. The letters, a series of missives written to the governor of New South Wales and to E. Johnstone in London, as well as handwritten notes passed between the two scientists by First Mate Davis, document the unraveling of their relationship. The tale revolves around a simple trick, which Hoffmann explains in a letter to Chamisso. The strangely named Haimatochare is introduced in such ambiguous terms that the reader is, at first, duped into thinking that “she” is an Indigenous woman: “daß der Leser, bis zum letzten Augenblick [...] glaube, es gelte den Besitz eines schönen Mädchens, einer holden Insulanerin” (letter to Chamisso, February 28, 1819; quoted in Steinecke 1103). The real identity of the insect is made clear to the reader only when their captain writes home to E. Johnstone to report the circumstances of the scientists’ demise.

While Chamisso’s replies to Hoffmann’s requests have not survived, numerous details from the *Rurik* expedition are traceable across the novella, to the extent that, for Moore, it resembles something of a “*Who’s Who in Hawaiian Exploration*” (17). Chamisso’s presence is underscored more strongly still in the framing introduction to the tale. In a manner that is characteristic of Hoffmann, the tale begins with an audacious claim to its authenticity by staging the material status of the text. Less typical, though not unique among his works, is the fact that Hoffmann signs it with his own name:

Nachfolgende Briefe: welche über das unglückliche Schicksal zweier Naturforscher Auskunft geben, wurden mir von meinem Freunde A. v. C. mitgeteilt, als er eben von der merkwürdigen Reise zurückgekommen, in der er den Erdball anderthalbmal umkreist hatte. Sie scheinen wohl öffentlicher Bekanntmachung würdig.—Mit Trauer, ja mit Entsetzen gewahrt man, wie oft ein harmlos scheinendes Ereignis die engsten Bande der innigsten Freundschaft gewaltsam zu zerreißen und da verderbliches Unheil zu bereiten vermag, wo man das Beste: das Ersprößlichste, zu erwarten sich berechtigt glaubte.

(E. T. A. Hoffmann, *SW* 3: 666)

The reassuring figure of Chamisso (appearing only in his initials, “A. v. C.”) really had, of course, provided material and inspiration for the narrative, if not the letters themselves. The tale’s apparent origins are thus grounded in an exchange between two men. This extra-diegetic friendship is mirrored in the fictional friendship between Broughthon and Menzies, a bond so intense and intimate that it affords them, according to Menzies, a clarifying double vision: “[wir sind] schon seit langer Zeit gewohnt, unsere Beobachtungen gemeinschaftlich anzustellen” (*SW* 3: 667). Unsurprisingly for Hoffmann, it is precisely this doubled vision that generates the tale’s most disquieting qualities, for it is within the blinkered epistolary exchange that the reader’s

misapprehension—mistaking a bug for an Indigenous woman—is cultivated. Meanwhile, with its homosocial provenance on display, the tale sets out to skew the conventional model of the epistolary format as a series of familiar love letters. Below, I will turn to the epistolary form of *Haimatochare* to show how it defamiliarizes the narrative of an erotic island encounter—what Zantop calls the “colonial urfantasy of the encounter between European and ‘native’” (2)—via the familiar epistolary form, which serves not to reveal or translate to its readers the intimate secrets of male desire but rather to expose them as hopelessly strange and puzzling.

Putatively a narrative of desire, arrival, and discovery, the tale is led by the circumlocutory logic of the narrative of homecoming. Menzies is driven by an overwhelming desire to return to the natural, though mysterious (“geheimnisvoll”) paradise of birds and insects, where he claims to feel most at home (*SW* 3: 670). In what we might call the cultural “contact zone” of Hawaii, following Mary Louise Pratt (8), Menzies has a calamitous interpersonal encounter—one that is mediated via the titillating female and racialized other, but whose ultimate object, in a triangulated relationship of homosocial desire in the model of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s paradigm in *Between Men* (21–27), is his male companion and rival, Broughthon. In the island space, Menzies and Broughthon are fatally exposed to their own desires and violence as neat mirrors of one another—they both lay claim to *Haimatochare*, they are both sickened with jealousy and rage, and they both die for her. Homi Bhabha frames the postcolonial experience in the terms of the uncanny: “the unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world” (141). This narrative hints at that same sense of dislocation, in the sense that the scientist explorer travels to an exotic locale only to uncover something unsettlingly foreign within himself.

Taylor Eggan has recently argued that a recursive logic of homecoming characterizes colonial settler narratives and contemporary ecological thinking, which both, tempted by the translation of “oikoiis” as “home,” subscribe to a normative and Romantic narrative of selves getting “back” to nature or returning home. He diagnoses an uncanny contradiction at the heart of both colonial narratives and ecological thought, where “arrival and homecoming fuse into a simultaneity” (22). One result of this is the reification of normative bodies who call “home” a territory they have claimed as theirs, and thus the reinscription of what Eggan calls the “settler colonial imagination” (23). Eggan’s book calls for a radical unsettling of this stabilizing logic of homeliness: “a practice of becoming *and remaining* unsettled” (33).

Hoffmann, while almost entirely unconcerned with the experiences of colonized selves and bodies, foreshadows some of this unsettling on the side of the colonialists through his attention to incomplete homecomings and unrealized returns. As *Haimatochare* solicits and provokes the reading of “Heimatochare”—smuggling the sound and sense of *Heimat* into its title—it places a more crucial misapprehension at the center of the tale: the colonial, gendered, and ecological presumption that *Haimatochare*, a kind of exotic insect, is a woman native to the islands of Hawaii. While resembling a readerly discovery, as I will show, the text’s patterning of *Heimat* cognates arranges this event as only a half-discovery or, to put it in psychoanalytic terms, the uncanny

return of repressed knowledge. By unleashing a swarm of *Heimat* words around the bug Haimatochare—in a way that draws particular attention to the intertwining of *Heimat* and the *Geheimnis*—Hoffmann teases out the misreading across the text. At the same time, he foregrounds the centrifugal draw of the home both as a point of orientation and, by its being everywhere and nowhere at once, a disorientating and indistinct sickness, a *Heimweh*: not in the sense of Novalis, who wrote in a famous fragment in *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* that philosophy represents the desire to return home—“Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh—Trieb überall zu Hause zu sein” (qtd. in Mueller-Sievers 60)—but as a pathological longing for somewhere that is known to be neither here nor there. *Haimatochare*’s contagious *Heimweh* is both the fantasy and sickness of home.

UNHOMELY CORRESPONDENCE

That centrifugal drag of *Heimat* provokes another return, this time within the bounds of Hoffmann’s own canon, to the domestic psychodrama of *Der Sandmann* in which the central female character Olimpia is, like Haimatochare, discovered to be less than human. The Olimpia episode, which has become almost synonymous with attempts to define the literary uncanny, is repeated here in a half-recognizable form such that, for Hoffmann’s reader, it has the effect of a further kind of uncanny echo. But the relationship between the two texts hinges first on their sharing of a crucial formal feature: letters. *Haimatochare* is both a relatively late epistolary work in the context of European literature (see Beebee 168–69) and, with *Briefe aus den Bergen*, one of only two fully epistolary works in Hoffmann’s oeuvre. While other tales, including *Der Sandmann* and *Der Magnetiseur*, feature epistolary exchanges embedded within the narrative, and while Hoffmann makes use of various forms of *Herausgeberfiktion*, such as the found manuscript trope in *Die Jesuitenkirche in G.* and *Die Elixire des Teufels*, among others, *Haimatochare* is unusual in that it consists solely of letters, except for the narrator’s brief introductory remarks, and therefore lacks the recognizable Hoffmannesque narrator who reflects on the work of art and his relationship to it.

Since Freud, the fiction of home as a reassuring metaphysical shelter to which we can safely return has been undermined. The experience of the uncanny, Freud argues in *Das Unheimliche*, can be explained if we understand the *heimlich* to be haunted by the *unheimlich*, which returns once-forgotten material to our conscious minds in moments of unsettling self-revelation. In his famously reductive reading of *Der Sandmann*, the uncanny register of that tale derives from Nathanael’s repressed father complex, which is compulsively re-enacted, first, in his projection of the “bad father” imago onto the Coppeliuss/Coppola figure; and second, in his narcissistic attraction to the automaton Olimpia. In his reading, Freud shuts down some of the text’s most meaningful internal ambivalences and makes no mention of its troublesome epistolary beginning: the two letters written by Nathanael to Lothar—the first of which, in a famous moment of parapraxis, is erroneously sent to Clara, his lover—and Clara’s

level-headed reply to Nathanael, in which she attempts to deliver a rational account of his delusions. It is only after the appearance of those letters that the narrator intervenes to offer an explanation for them:

Mir kam keine Rede in den Sinn, die nur im mindesten etwas von dem Farbenglanz des inneren Bildes abzuspiegeln schien. Ich beschloß gar nicht anzufangen. Nimm, geneigter Leser! die drei Briefe, welche Fre- und Lothar mir gütigst mitteilte, für den Umriß des Gebildes, in das ich nun erzählend immer mehr und mehr Farbe hineinzutragen mich bemühen werde. Vielleicht gelingt es mir, manche Gestalt, wie ein guter Portraitmaler, so aufzufassen, daß du es ähnlich findest, ohne das Original zu kennen, ja daß es dir ist, als hättest du die Person recht oft schon mit leibhaftigen Augen gesehen. Vielleicht wirst du, o mein Leser! dann glauben, daß nichts wunderlicher und toller sei, als das wirkliche Leben und daß dieses der Dichter doch nur, wie in eines matt geschliffenen Spiegels dunklem Widerschein, auffassen könne. (SW 3: 27)

The epistolary gambit is given here in the terms of a narrative failure. In the narrator's own account, the letters represent little more than his inability to begin and his decision to turn, instead, to a pre-existent written source to do the job for him. Having apparently deferred to more original material, the narrator then proceeds to trouble its status as such by declaring "das wirkliche Leben," from which the representation departs, to be so "wunderlich" and "toll" that the fiction might seem duller by comparison. If Nathanael's fate across the novella is to mistake fictions for reality, the narrator presents this fate as the consummate experience of Romantic readership—and extends it to the reader of *Der Sandmann*. The feeling of reading, then, is akin to the feeling of being duped or perhaps of going mad: "Nathanael's imaginative mania," as Adam Bresnick puts it, "is largely continuous with that of the reader" (123).

Clara's explanation of Nathanael's situation is famously rational and psychologically grounded. She draws a clear distinction between his projections and the material world: "Gerade heraus will ich es Dir nur gestehen, daß, wie ich meine, alles Entsetzliche und Schreckliche, wovon Du sprichst, nur in Deinem Innern vorging, die wahre wirkliche Außenwelt aber daran wohl wenig Teil hatte" (SW 3: 21). While the rest of the novella works to solicit, on the level of reading, the same confusion between fictions and reality that is experienced by Nathanael, Clara's letter provides a brief moment of distance from him. Her lack of interest in Nathanael's literary efforts, and her fate at the end of the text—promptly replacing him with another husband—ensure that in no other portion of the novella is her perspective presented as a satisfactory one. Indeed, the evidence throughout the text is that the narrator identifies closely both with Nathanael and the reader, as he wrings his hands over the difficulties of representation then delights in the feeling of having fallen for his own artistic illusions.

But the presence of Clara's epistolary voice to offer her dispassionate reading of events is mobilized as part of the seductive carousel of perspectives by which the

text moves the reader into and out of identification with Nathanael. It encourages the reader to approach with suspicion those moments in which Nathanael himself appears to have a repressed knowledge of what Olimpia really is—when in brief moments of clarity, for example, he reflects on her strangely passive and taciturn nature (“gänzliche Passivität und Wortkargheit”; *SW* 3: 43). An extensive account of this “litany of aversive truth-telling” is given by Bresnick (127), according to whose persuasive reading, the reader is furnished with enough clues that, when Olimpia is revealed to be an automaton, it is in fact for both Nathanael and the reader only a partial revelation—for “at some level, one *does* know all along” (122)—and is thus an uncanny experience, dredging up repressed knowledge. *Der Sandmann* presents Clara’s domestication of Nathanael’s fixations at its outset, therefore, before embarking upon the long and prickly task of dismissing her, to show that both the delight and the plight of the Romantic artist and of the Romantic reader involve indulging in madness for a while, falling for art’s illusions and projecting life into a puppet. As Bresnick argues: “Hoffmann’s tale will suggest that susceptibility to the ‘phantoms of one’s ego’ is a necessary precondition of aesthetic experience” (124). The acknowledgment and dismissal, or perhaps repression, of Clara and her epistolary interjection is a vital and necessary part of the experience of reading that work.

In his account of the European epistolary novel, Thomas O. Beebee reads the introduction of *Der Sandmann* in a rather different context. He takes it seriously as a milestone on the long demise of the epistolary narrative, which had fallen out of fashion by the second decade of the 19th century. To make use of the epistolary form at this point was to engage in a conscious throwback, often to parody its pretences to textual authenticity after its heyday in 18th-century works such as Richardson’s *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. The opening section of *Der Sandmann* is an explicit confession, Beebee claims, that epistolarity is an insufficient representational mode, one that “can at best sketch reality’s outline” before the omniscient third-person narrator seizes the reins (166). Beebee casts the opening letters as a portrait of the “ruined landscape of epistolary possibility” (166), as part of a 19th century “elegy of letters” (168) bearing witness to the displacement of the epistolary claim to imitate voice or text by the (more or less) self-effacing narrative voice that would grow to prominence with Realism. The shift away from epistolarity entailed a new kind of pact between reader and fiction: the reader was no longer obliged to accept a text as materially real but was obliged instead to accept the intervening presence of that fictional third-person narrator. As is evident in this early section of *Der Sandmann*, Hoffmann frequently enlivens the narrator as a character himself, one who despairs and delights over his own artwork by turns, thus forcing readers to actively acknowledge their shifting place in relation to that work.

It is perhaps surprising, then, that Hoffmann makes a return to the epistolary form 2 years after this apparent renunciation and long after its supposed demise—this time in a far more sustained and self-defeating attempt. The letters of *Haimatochare* are indeed a conscious throwback, calling up the genre of travel literature, but they are also reminiscent of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, published only a year earlier, and of

Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte* (1814), both of which channel an already antiquated form in a Gothic mode. In both of these texts, which merge the fantastic mode with a fictional travel narrative, the epistolary voice is engaged, according to Gerd Bayer, "not only to take the reader closer to the feelings of the characters, but also to create something like diegetic identity between the fictional realm of the narratives and the worldly reality of the readers" (174), that is, a concretely shared "reality" of readership. In *Der Sandmann*, too, as we have seen, the letters fulfill a specific role in orienting the text's own sense of its relationship to reality, and in its engineering of readerly sympathies and identifications.

In *Haimatochare*, though, the familiar mode is engaged in the service of alienation. In this epistolary tussle, there is no shaft of light from outside, no enlightening domestic Clara to hint to us that all might not be as it seems—not, that is, until the protagonists are dead and their captain intervenes in the narrative, which he does not with the fervor of the creative narrator of *Der Sandmann* but with cool, descriptive ambivalence. The reader is enclosed within the correspondence and within the illusion that the insect is an Indigenous woman. Each one of the 15 letters is sent from Australia or Hawaii or from on board the *Diskovery* somewhere between the two. The only character in the text situated in Europe is an Englishman, the unconvincingly named Eduard Johnstone, who is the recipient of Menzies's two longest and most revealing letters. The muted character of Johnstone is something of a mystery: His relationship to Menzies is not explained beyond the epithet of "mein lieber Freund" (SW 3: 667), none of his responses to Menzies are included in the narrative, and he is given no characteristics to distinguish him as anything other than a device to signal "home" as the place from which the voyagers have departed. The protagonists' European home is postulated as a kind of distant horizon, a point of certainty that exists only beyond the narrative at hand.

While radically unmoored in its setting and its form, as I have suggested, *Haimatochare* represents a striking repetition of the domestic psychodrama of *Der Sandmann*, for both are structured around a tragicomic "Entpuppen" relating to the identity of the female character at the heart of the text. Where in *Der Sandmann*, that female character turns out to be a lifeless automaton, here she turns out to be an exotic insect. Andrew Bennett has recently returned to Stanley Cavell's reading of *Der Sandmann* and the uncanny effects generated through one of skepticism's most "ordinary" substrata: the question of "whether I can know the existence of [...] human creatures other than myself" (qtd. in Bennett 141). Bennett traces, through Cavell, a return to Jentsch's diagnosis of the uncanny effects of *Der Sandmann* as intellectual uncertainty, a fear that is "pinned down" (142) by Freud's more restrictive account of the castration complex. The skeptical threat as described by Cavell and Bennett is not "whether and how other minds can be known," but "whether we can ever be sure that such minds exist in the first place" (143). Olimpia, who appears to be a human but is in fact an automaton, neatly embodies that threat, which is wildly concatenated in *Haimatochare* by its drawing together into one figure various categories created by

the colonial project from the 15th century onward in service of stabilizing dominant global powers: race, gender, and species.

A crucial difference in how this plays out is that, while it is Nathanael who is duped in *Der Sandmann*, with the reader trailing in his wake, the reader alone is properly duped in *Haimatochare*, for Menzies and Broughthon are perfectly aware that they are fighting to the death over a bug. However, the readerly delusion into which *Haimatochare* draws us—the erotic and ultimately fatal misapprehension of an insect—runs in tandem to the scientists’ own, in the sense that, as Valerie Weinstein has shown, the text serves as a parody of the precolonial scientific project, which proves both “frivolous and fatal” (167). This effect is intensified in episodes of comedic bathos: particularly in the revelatory moment when Captain Bligh describes the bloodied bodies of the men, between which he spots a “sehr seltsam geformtes schön gefärbtes kleines Insekt” (SW 3: 678), and in the melodramatic funereal rituals held for Haimatochare—and not for the scientists. If we pay attention to its form, too, the mechanisms by which that parody works extend to the “illusionist imperative” of the epistolary mode (Beebee 169). By coaxing the reader into its central misreading, at the same time as it demands that the reader accept the men’s letters as real, the narrative ironizes the capacity not only of the scientists but also of the reader to fall for an illusion.

WOMAN, INSECT, MONSTER

And yet this is not all there is to it. For just as there are clues throughout *Der Sandmann* that Olimpia is no ordinary woman, so too is the reader repeatedly exposed to the knowledge in *Haimatochare* that all is not as it seems with the text’s central figure. This knowledge, as I have already suggested, is encoded within her name. For a series of *Heimat* and *Geheimnis* cognates across the letters is explicitly associated with a longed-for homecoming to nature, a longing that turns out to have a particular erotic dimension. This series culminates in Menzies’s act of proprietorship when he catches and names his prize—but then it is retroactively unsettled, so that we can never be completely sure of her.

When Menzies writes to E. Johnstone in the third letter of the tale, he describes his longing to take up his entomological pursuits—his scientific colonial desire—as the experience of being “*heimgesucht* von einigen spleenischen Anfällen” (SW 3: 667, my emphasis). He names the “Reich der Insekten [...] das wunderbarste, geheimnisvollste in der Natur” and declares himself to be “angesiedelt in der *Heimat* der seltsamen, oft unerforschlichen Wesen” of insects (SW 3: 670–71, my emphasis). Insects, to Menzies, are “geheimnisvoll,” unhomely beings; his passion for them has haunted (*heimgesucht*) him; but he also feels at home among the strange objects of his obsession. Menzies’s desire is to settle into a home away from home, to immerse himself in an unfamiliar locale ripe for exploration where, presumably, the repressive forces of Europe are relaxed and the drive for discovery and mastery can be more readily expressed. It echoes the desire of *Naturphilosophie* to overcome humans’

alienation from the natural world as in Novalis's diagnosis of philosophy as a permanent homesickness.

Further into the tale, the pattern of *Heimat* cognates seeps into Broughthon's descriptions of the other Indigenous woman who plays a small role in the text: Kahumanu, the Hawaiian queen, who seems, according to Broughthon's account of her erratic behaviour, to be in love with Menzies: "Ich möchte beinahe glauben, daß sie ihn *heimlich* liebt" (SW 3: 673, my emphasis). This wording almost directly reproduces one of Chamisso's journal entries from his stay in Hawaii in which he describes his own reaction to a Hawaiian queen—"Fast *unheimlich* wurden mir, dem Neulinge, die Blicke, die meine Nachbarkönigin auf mich warf" (qtd. in Dunker 52, my emphasis). Hoffmann flips Chamisso's *unheimlich* into *heimlich*, a move sure to raise any Freudian's eyebrow. Where heterosexual desire is found in this homosocially coded epistolary puzzle—here, that is, as well as in Menzies's capture of Haimatochare—it is exotic, excessive, and strange, if not monstrous. The scene of Haimatochare's capture is expressed in the terms of a sexualized exoticism that plays into the literary topos of the sensuous Indigenous landscape:

Unfern Hana-ruru, König Teimotus Residenz, wo er uns freundlich aufgenommen, liegt eine anmutige Waldung. Dorthin begab ich mich gestern, als schon die Sonne zu sinken begann. Ich hatte vor, wo möglich einen sehr seltenen Schmetterling (der Name wird Dich nicht interessieren) einzufangen, der nach Sonnenuntergang seinen irren Kreisflug beginnt. Die Luft war schwül, von wollüstigem Aroma duftender Kräuter erfüllt. Als ich in den Wald trat, fühlt ich ein seltsam süßes Bangen, mich durchbeben geheimnisvolle Schauer, die sich auflösten in sehnsüchtige Seufzer. (SW 3: 672)

Here, we recognize the well-trodden tropes of the colonial landscape, drenched in suggestive imagery—the humid air, the smells of vegetation—and invested with male desire, reflected back by his own physical response to the environment. Later in the tale, another significant colonial landscape is framed when the bodies of the two scientists are found on the "öden Platz" (SW 3: 677) near a volcano, such that a landscape is again made the repository for human affect, this time of horror rather than desire. The titillating description of the forest is likely to seduce the reader into conjuring up a shimmering "schöne Insulanerin" on the first reading, but a careful re-reading will flatten this effect, while disentangling clues relating to Haimatochare's real identity. Not least of these is the fact that Menzies is out hunting a butterfly when he is distracted by (what turns out to be) a louse. Menzies's unwillingness to name the "sehr seltenen" butterfly he was chasing is, of course, a half-enunciated clue as to Haimatochare's identity, its "irren Kreisflug" a miniature recapitulation of the scientists' own circumnavigation of the globe (for the writer who casts the musician Johannes Kreisler as his alter ego, circles are rarely insignificant). Later, as Weinstein

has pointed out, following Christa-Maria Beardsley, further clues are registered in references to Haimatochare's tiny size and to her feathered bed (162).

Menzies's apprehension of Haimatochare comes simultaneously to the act of naming her, clinching the web of references to "Heimat" and contorting it into a new name for an entirely new species of insect: "Ich faßte sie, ich trug sie mit mir fort—das herrlichste Kleinod der Insel war mein!—Ich nannte sie Haimatochare" (SW 3: 672). This central episode also offers a clue to her identity by echoing an earlier passage in which Menzies fantasizes to Johnstone about making a significant natural discovery. We may note, again, the description of desire's effect on his body as well as the reference to a "Kleinod" and to the proprietary act of naming:

Mir schwillt die Brust vor Hoffnung und sehnstüchtigem Verlangen,
wenn ich daran denke, wie täglich, ja stündlich die Natur mir ihre reiche
Schatzkammer aufschließen wird, damit ich dieses, jenes nie erforschte
Kleinod mir zueignen, mein nennen kann, das nie gesehene Wunder!
(SW 3: 668)

Menzies's fantasy comes in the context of an admission that he is more inclined to study beetles and butterflies on his voyages than the customs of Indigenous peoples. In a puzzling defensive move, Menzies goes on to tell a cautionary story with the apparent purpose of downplaying his passion for entomology. This is the story of an old Dutch officer and natural scientist whose fixation on a dying insect prevents him from greeting the younger brother he has not seen for 30 years. The anecdote encapsulates a version of *Haimatochare's* central trick in miniature. While we have been primed that the lieutenant is interested in an insect, it is only revealed as such through the consternation of the younger brother at the end of the passage:

Der Alte sitzt an dem Tische und betrachtet, das Haupt hinübergebeugt, durch eine Lupe einen kleinen schwarzen Punkt auf einem weißen Blatt Papier. Der Bruder erhebt ein lautes Freudengeschrei, er will dem Alten in die Arme stürzen, *der* aber, ohne das Auge von dem Punkt zu verwenden, winkt ihn mit der Hand zurück, gebietet ihm mit einem wiederholen: "St–St–St–" Stillschweigen. [...] Nun bemerkt der Amsterdamer erst, daß der schwarze Punkt ein kleines Würmchen ist, das sich in den Konvulsionen des Todes krümmt und windet. (SW 3: 670)

Strangely enough, as I have suggested, Menzies seems to offer this story as a way of downplaying his own passion for insects, which he claims to be not as single-mindedly obsessive as that of the Dutch lieutenant. And yet, of course, it actually works to foreshadow how Menzies's own passion will play out—overwhelming him to the extent that he does not merely neglect but actually kills his closest friend (and is killed himself in the process). Here, again, then, the vexing anecdote contains a half-knowledge, in the sense that Menzies's disavowal turns out to be a confession:

His passion for insects is indeed so bizarrely all-consuming that it overwhelms all his other relationships and indeed his sense of reality. As a preposterous clue to the puzzling tale, the episode of the lieutenant's obsession is hidden in plain sight, a fact likely to strike any reader returning to the text after the first reading.

A whole web of clues crucially bound up with her name therefore works to identify Haimatochare as an insect before the captain discovers her between the dead bodies of Menzies and Broughthon. The effect of this is that the central revelation, when it comes, is already half-known, adding to the bathos of that strange scene. And yet, once revealed as insect, the *Geheimnis* of *Haimatochare* is far from settled, for—like the ambiguous *Ungeziefer* of Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*—even in the latter part of the tale, Haimatochare is only uneasily contained by the label of insect. According to Captain Bligh, she appears singularly strange to everyone who looks at her: “welches jedoch, was vorzüglich Farbe und die ganz sonderbare Form des Hinterleibes und der Füßchen anlange, von allen bis jetzt aufgefundenen Tierchen der Art merklich abweiche” (SW 3: 678). Haimatochare resembles no other creature known to Western science. Captain Bligh cites Menzies himself, who having established that she belongs to “eine ganz neue Gattung” offers a Latin description of her that—while likely proof that Hoffmann had immersed himself in “das Läusewissen der 1810er Jahre” (Borgards 158)—engenders a sense of the ridiculous and of the monstrous even to the reader unversed in Latin:

Vorläufig bemerkte ich, daß Herr Menzies das Tierchen für eine ganz neue Gattung erklärt, und es in die Mitte stellt zwischen: *pediculus pubescens, thorace trapezoideo, abdomine ovali posterius emarginato ab latere undulato etc. habitans in homine, Hottentottis, Groenlandisque escam dilectam praebens* und zwischen *nirmus crassicornis, capite ovato oblongo, scutello thorace majore, abdomine lineari lanceolato, habitans in anate, ansere et boschade*. (SW 3: 678)

As Weinstein points out, this incontinent, confusing definition—which places Haimatochare somewhere between a human pubic crab louse and a bird-eating parasite—ensures that Haimatochare remains “unique, exotic, and unclassifiable” (169) according to Western systems of knowledge, transformed by male disgust or desire into an abject monster. But Roland Borgards, both in an essay (“Macht der Laus” 159) and in his entry on *Haimatochare* in the 2015 Hoffmann *Handbuch* (177), raises a further perplexing question, asking whether Haimatochare really is an autochthonous creature, as Menzies assumes—that is, an indigenous Hawaiian louse, a truly foreign insect—or actually a stowaway that the voyagers have inadvertently imported to the island, an allochthonous creature akin to the imported “Hausmaus” of which Chamisso writes in his travel logs. Haimatochare would then resemble the fragmented eruption of Europe onto foreign soil, fusing and confusing the foreign and familiar. The two scientists, in that case, on their own “irren Kreisflug” (SW 3: 672), really would have unwittingly arrived home.

In these deliberations, I do not mean to ascribe to the curious Haimatochare a slipperiness that makes her mean nothing or everything—for there is something quite concrete about her in the sense that we can be entirely certain of her status as female. In those final letters of the tale, even while the captain and governor call her “das Tierchen” and “das Insekt,” they also continue to give her feminine pronouns: “die Haimatochare,” “diesselbe” (SW 3: 678–79). Long overlooked by Hoffmann’s feminist readers, Haimatochare might thus assume a place at the head of the canon of Hoffmann’s most desired and detested female characters, combining the illusoriness of *Serpentina*, the homeliness of Clara, and the uncanny nonhumanity of *Olimpia*.

CONCLUSION

The reading of *Haimatochare* put forward here has centered on the tale’s cultivation of a readerly misapprehension. The moment in which this misapprehension is resolved is foreshadowed by the presence of clues across the text such that the bug’s real identity, once discovered as such, is already partially intuited, and might thus be said to take on an uncanny aspect. Even then, the uncertainty around Haimatochare’s identity is compounded such that she continues to represent an unsettling narrative element. The central “Geheimnis,” then, is not contained as a singular revelation or twist but is prefigured and then retroactively troubled, such that the twist is dispersed uneasily across the text.

I have suggested, too, that in *Haimatochare* and its unveiling of a female character as an insect, Hoffmann returns to a structure—perhaps it would not be too strong to call it a formula—that he puts to work in the well-known *Olimpia* episode of *Der Sandmann*. In doing so, I have shown how he exports to an exotic locale a recognizable theme: the capacity of the Romantic subject to fall for illusory appearances, or to believe in unrealities, such that the experience of reading is akin to the experience of being duped. Where in *Der Sandmann*, that experience is geared toward the reader’s own partial identification with the hapless Nathanael, and perhaps toward our appreciation of the aesthetic experience, none of this is true of *Haimatochare*, which is not concerned in any explicit way with the text as a work of art. Stripped of a narrator back to the supposedly raw or primary materials with which the narrator of *Der Sandmann* fails to begin—letters—the reader is left stranded, deprived of any more familiar kind of insight into the events on the page. Formally as well as thematically, then, *Haimatochare* is an island narrative.

Without including any of the more obvious fantastic elements that populate his other tales—the hallucinations, demons, and doubles for which Hoffmann became known as *Gespenster-Hoffmann*—but by stripping the tale of a firm point of reality or Clara-style clarity beyond the letters, as well as by magnifying the strange and monstrous sense of the insect at its heart, *Haimatochare* situates the discovery not just of a new but of an unknowable creature at the heart of the imaginary colonial encounter. There is no reassuring self-reflexive discourse to scaffold the uncanny experience, no soliciting of readerly sympathies or identifications; as

Weinstein notes, Western epistemological structures are bafflingly absent (169). Absent too is that specifically reassuring construct of Western modernity, the third-person narrator. And *Haimatochare*, like home, flutters away from the scientists' attempts to contain her.

Hoffmann's texts, as I have suggested, are not likely terrain for postcolonial readings. But if we are to take seriously Zantop's paradigm of the specifically German colonial fantasy, with its solipsistic politics, as an early battleground for the conflicts of a "colonialist subjectivity" (2) long before Germany's assumption of colonial power, then we might turn to Hoffmann's *Haimatochare*, and its spectral twin *Heimatochare*, as a deeply troubling investigation of the precolonial desire to explore, and know, the world. The longing to re-install or re-home oneself in an island paradise, to see the world as belonging to the white European self, ready to be seized, named, and boxed up by its scientists, to see nature as our natural home—all of this is, for Hoffmann, both fantasy and sickness at once. The experience of unsettling that plays out in the erotic island encounter, which pushes the Indigenous female object of that encounter out of Western categories of understanding, is enclosed within an unsettling experience of reading a text that distinctly troubles readerly knowledge and certainty. As a satirical variation of a colonial fantasy, *Haimatochare* also makes a move toward an ethical reading practice that responds to a desire for stabilizing categorizations with a recognition of the priority of unsettledness and unbelonging. As a fantasy, it is, in turn, a testament to Hoffmann's knowing grasp on the realities of fantasizing.

ENDNOTES

¹ Benjamin's misreading is noted, though not discussed, by Axel Dunker in his chapter on *Haimatochare* in *Kontrapunktische Lektüren* (47).

² See Werner Hamacher's important investigation of Benjamin's language in this and other vignettes of *Die Berliner Kindheit*.

³ In this essay, I will refer to the *Deutscher Klassiker Verlag* edition of Hoffmann's works, edited by Hartmut Steinecke et al., as *SW*.

⁴ See Joanna Neilly's *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Orient* for a full-length study of Hoffmann's explorations of the Orient and on Hoffmann's place within postcolonial studies including a brief discussion of *Haimatochare* (75–76). For Hoffmann's sketch of Chamisso/Schlemihl, see Dickson.

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