

# literatur für leser:innen

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Kunst in E.T.A. Hoffmann –  
E.T.A. Hoffmann in der Kunst.  
Intermediale Aspekte seines  
Werkes und Wirkens

Herausgegeben von Ricarda Schmidt  
und Sheila Dickson

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Monika Schmitz-Emans und Sheila Dickson



PETER LANG

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## Hoffmann's Signature Doodles

### Abstract

As scholars familiar with his manuscripts and drawings will know, E.T.A. Hoffmann had the idiosyncratic and rather charming habit of signing off some of his informal letters not with a signature in the conventional sense, but with a spontaneous self-portrait: a doodle. The aim of this article is to examine such forms by framing them within the context of a broader question about Hoffmann's doodles and drawings. Specifically, it places his 'signature doodles' at the centre of a graphic conversation between the contingencies of the medium and an impulse towards meaningful form. It is in that sense that they open up a space for new reflections on the author's relationship to writing and drawing, registering a vision of the author not as an authorizing or authoritative entity, held above and separate from the work, but rather as a peculiar entanglement of self and work, whose identity is defined and confirmed from within the act of composition.

**Keywords:** E. T. A. Hoffmann, doodles, signature, accident, inkblot

What's in a signature? When Goethe's Faust signs his name with "einem Tröpfchen Blut",<sup>1</sup> as is customary in the Faust legend, he singles out and intensifies the sense in which our signatures can be understood to extend our bodies into our writing, to mingle flesh and blood with paper. That mingling takes on an air of violence as the act of signing reproduces the body upon the page as a replacement for script. In a very different context, as the typewriter emerges in the media landscape of the early twentieth century, the boundaries between self and signature are blurred again for Franz Kafka, who, according to Friedrich Kittler, expressed increasing unease about signing his name by hand on his letters and documents. In a letter of December 1912, Kafka writes: "Verantwortungen weiche ich aus, wie eine Schlange, ich habe vielerlei zu unterschreiben, aber jede vermiedene Unterschrift scheint mir ein Gewinn".<sup>2</sup> He goes on to note the peculiarly, and for him comfortingly, disembodied effects of signing not with pen and ink (or blood, for that matter) but through the anonymizing proxy of the typewriter and its operator:

Ich unterschreibe auch alles (trotzdem es eigentlich nicht sein darf) mit FK, als könne mich das entlasten, deshalb fühle ich mich auch in allen Bureausachen so zur Schreibmaschine hingezogen, weil ihre Arbeit, gar durch die Hand des Schreibmaschinisten ausgeführt, so anonym ist.<sup>3</sup>

If not flesh and blood, then something of the self, Kafka suggests, is not just mediated by but actually contained within the signature. To escape the duty of committing one's name to paper by hand is thus to escape bureaucracy's potentially violent intrusions on the self. As scholars familiar with his manuscripts and drawings will know, E.T.A. Hoffmann had the idiosyncratic and rather charming habit of signing off some of his informal letters not with a signature in the conventional sense, but with a spontaneous self-portrait: a kind of doodle. In signing his name in this manner – inserting an image in a space where we expect to find text – Hoffmann, though not as uneasy as Kafka about the kinds of personal loss that signing one's name might entail, defamiliarizes the

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1 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Faust*. Berlin 2017, line 1737.

2 Cited in Friedrich Kittler: *Grammophon, Film, Typewriter*. Berlin 1986, p. 328.

3 Ibid.

autographic space and accordingly plays on that sense in which we imagine our signatures to resemble, represent, or stand in for, our selves. By calling attention to what is absent in a conventional signature, the iconic function of the face, Hoffmann begins to rewrite the space of the signature by expanding the potential range of materials that might be drawn into the service of self-representation. In doing so, he mediates a portrait of the author not as a stable authoritative entity connected to but separate from the work, but as an identity that comes into being from within the act of composition.

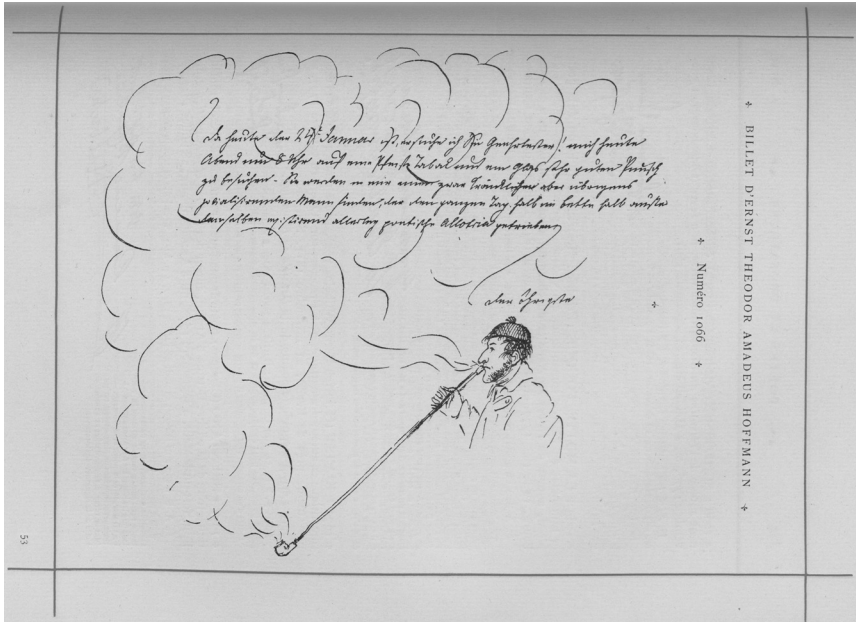


Figure 1: Letter by E.T.A. Hoffmann to J. G. Keller. In: Étienne Charavay, *Lettres autographes composant la collection de M. Alfred Bovet*. (Vol. 6). Paris, 1887/88, p. 393. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Signatur: Hs LS FL 8030.

This article takes as its case study the image in Figure 1: a letter written by Hoffmann to his friend J. G. Keller in 1814, preserved now only as reproduction.<sup>4</sup> It will examine Hoffmann's signature drawings across three main areas of inquiry. First, I will turn my attention to two scenes of signing in Hoffmann's texts: these I understand as 'signature fantasies' that present the act of signing one's name in the terms of a tussle between the signature's metonymic status – the promise or threat that the signature might actually contain something of the body – and the signature's curiously disembodied qualities. Second, I will examine the figure of the accidental inkblot and related phenomena in one of Hoffmann's drawings, known as *Der Kunzische Rib*, and in one of his texts, *Der goldene Topf*, as further 'signatory' traces of the composing body. A fluctuating attention between the accidental blot and the composed corporeal investment of a signature allows me, third, to explore Hoffmann's signature drawings as *doodles*, and consequently to make a case for the doodle as a meaningful form, one that figures or situates a kind of compositional thinking.

In the argument that follows I will draw both from Hoffmann's texts, primarily from *Der goldene Topf* but also from a number of other *Künstlertgeschichten*, and from his visual materials – a task made possible by Dietmar Ponert's two-volume publication of Hoffmann's collected drawings and artworks in 2016 – in a way that I hope is fitting to the study of a desultory, intermedial form.<sup>5</sup> In connecting Hoffmann's own playful signatory flourishes with the scenes of signing staged in his texts, I draw on the logic of Rüdiger Campe's *Schreibszene* as a scene that springs from an interest in the medial conditions of putting pen to paper.<sup>6</sup> By taking his pictorial signatures as case study, the article opens up a path into reading Hoffmann's largely underexplored corpus of drawings and doodles, proposing a new model of 'doodle theory' that is inspired by Hoffmann's particular investment in his medium. Hoffmann's signature doodles free themselves from the task of mediating the authorial self in any simple sense, both pre-empting and gleefully dissipating Kafka's anxieties concerning handwritten signatures. Instead, they open up a space for new reflections on the author's relationship to writing and drawing and register a vision of the author not as an authorizing or authoritative self, held above and separate from the work, but rather as a peculiar entanglement of self and work, whose identity is defined and confirmed by the act of composition. These signature doodles are portraits, then, of the author as composing self.

## I. Signature

A handwritten signature lies at the nexus of several interlocking significatory relationships. It is, first, a kind of *index* or trace left by the hand, verifying the presence of the signer's body at a particular time and place. As Susan Stewart notes, "to sign your name, your mark, is to leave a track like any other track of the body".<sup>7</sup> A signature also serves a *symbolic* function by representing the transfer of the signer's authority or consent. Finally, to complete the Peircean semiotic triad, a signature is invested with a certain kind of *iconic* significance. This is the trickiest of the signature's functions, and it is the one that interests me the most here. A signature is supposed to 'look like' any other signature made by the same person: indeed, we have a responsibility to make one signature look like another, for a signature must be replicable and recognizable, always referring to a potentially infinite series of identical signatures. According to graphological traditions that date back to at least the eighteenth century, however, the signature's potential iconic qualities are both stranger and further reaching than this, for the notion has long persisted that handwritten marks might resemble the self in some

4 See also a reproduction in E.T.A. Hoffmann: *Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden*. Ed. by Hartmut Steinecke/Wulf Segebrecht with contributions from Gerhard Allroggen et. al. Frankfurt/M. 1985–2004. Vol. 6: *Späte Prosa. Briefe. Tagebücher und Aufzeichnungen. Juristische Schriften. Werke 1814–1822*. Ed. by Gerhard Allroggen. Frankfurt/M. 2004, p. 17. I quote from this volume in the following by referring to 'H 6' and respective page numbers.

5 Dietmar Ponert: *E.T.A. Hoffmann, das bildkünstlerische Werk: Ein kritisches Gesamtverzeichnis*. 2 vols. Petersberg 2016.

6 Rüdiger Campe: Die Schreibszene: Schreiben. In: *Paradoxien, Dissonanzen, Zusammenbrüche: Situationen offener Epistemologie*. Ed. by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht/K. Ludwig Pfeiffer. Frankfurt/M. 1991, pp. 759–772.

7 Susan Stewart: *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham, NC 1993, p. 14.

more essential way. Since the signature is a mark that must be made exclusively by hand (at least until the relatively recent advent of 'digital signatures') it lies at the centre of those graphological fantasies. Johann Caspar Lavater, who argued in his tracts on physiognomy for the existence of a non-arbitrary correspondence between a person's concrete physical shape, their "Urform", and their soul, made fashionable the idea that a person's handwriting, too, "seine eigene, individuelle, und unnachahmbare, wenigstens selten und schwer ganz nachahmbare Handschrift",<sup>8</sup> corresponds directly and meaningfully to their essential self, as well as to the mood in which they write. He continues: "Je mehr ich die verschiedenen Handschriften, die mir vor die Augen kommen, vergleiche, desto sicherer werd' ich, daß sie physiognomische Ausdrücke, Ausflüsse von dem Charakter des Schreibers sind".<sup>9</sup> The drawing together of ink and self in that curiously-chosen term "Ausflüsse" calls to mind the Faustian signature, made in blood.

The Lavaterian fantasy of the self as a stable entity that leaves legible stains and traces, in its handwriting as much as in other forms of gesture, is famously undone by Derrida who reinterprets the signature in terms of its negative content. In *Signature Event Context*, the signature is understood to encounter such losses in its project of mediating the self that it is better understood not as a stand-in for the signer, but instead as a trace of the "actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer".<sup>10</sup> Rather than attesting presence, that is, the signature marks the signer's 'having-been-present', and thus attains the same kind of haunting temporal character of a photograph: "a past now, which will remain a future now".<sup>11</sup> Derrida also notes that the signature's apparent reproducibility presents a peculiar challenge to the authority that it is supposed to enact, for "in order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form: it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, by corrupting its identity and singularity, divides its seal".<sup>12</sup> The imperative of endless repeatability threatens the singular authority that it is intended to enact.

Hoffmann's graphic experiments with his signature like the one in Figure 1 seem, in the light of these fantasies and anxieties, like a spirited attempt to invest his signature with *more* of the self: to inch towards some less arbitrary correspondence between text and body by more explicitly making it resemble his person. The letter in which the self-portrait appears is an invitation to the singer and actor J.G. Keller, written from Leipzig on Hoffmann's birthday in 1814, at which time Hoffmann was deep in the process of composing *Der goldene Topf*:

Da heute der 24<sup>e</sup> Januar ist, ersuche ich Sie, Geehrtester! mich heute Abend um 8 Uhr auf eine Pfeife Tabak und ein Glas sehr guten Punsch zu besuchen – Sie werden in mir einen zwar kränklichen aber übrigen jovialisierenden Mann finden, der den ganzen Tag halb im Bette halb außerhalb demselben existierend allerlei poetische *Allotria* getrieben.

Der Ihrigste [...] <sup>13</sup>

**8** Johann Caspar Lavater: *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniß und Menschenliebe*. 4 vols. Leipzig, Winterthur 1777. Vol. 3, p. 113.

**9** Ibid.

**10** Jacques Derrida: *Signature Event Context*. Trans. by Samuel Weber/Jeffrey Mehlman. In: Jacques Derrida: *Limited Inc.* Evanston, IL 1988, pp. 1–23, here p. 20.

**11** Ibid.

**12** Ibid.

**13** E.T.A. Hoffmann to J.G. Keller, 24.01.1814. In: H 6, p. 16, emphasis in the original.

And there, beneath the text, in the place where we expect to find his name, we encounter, instead, an image. It is an image that we are seduced, therefore, into 'reading', and that might, in that sense, remind us of one of Hoffmann's most well-known drawings, a self-portrait composed entirely in the mode of a whimsically exaggerated physiognomy in which he pushes Lavater's conviction in the stable correspondence between the body and the internal self to a humorous extreme (see Hoffmann's self-portrait reproduced as fig. 1 in the essay by Laura Vordermayer in this issue of *Iffl*, p. 47). The self-portrait in the letter to Keller is part of a consistent self-stylising physiognomic impulse that takes shape across a number of Hoffmann's letters from the time. In particular, it corresponds to a description included in a message written to his publisher Carl Friedrich Kunz the week before (dated 16 January 1814), in which Hoffmann mentions a "türkische Pfeife" and describes himself as wearing "ein gewisses schwarz samtnes Mützchen" on account of a persistent headache, adding that "[d]ergleichen Kopfschmerz gebärt das Exotische" (H 6, pp. 12–16, here p. 16), in reference to his work on the Orientaly-inflected *Der goldene Topf*. Hoffmann's description of himself in the birthday invitation to Keller as both "kränklich" and "jovalisierend" therefore suggests that knitted into these letters, and into the self-portrait, is the consistent picture of a physically ailing but imaginatively inspired writer-artist, one who might himself have just stepped out of the pages of *Der goldene Topf*. In that sense, the author's appearance is produced through a series of consistent, repeated codes or "signature" details: traces arranged across the work of art to ensure recognition, like the "textual signals" in *Der Sandmann* that work to produce recognition of the Sandman's monstrous physiognomy.<sup>14</sup>

Hoffmann's playful signature might then be understood, quite simply, as a practical experiment in illustration, as the author sharpens his tools of self-representation and works through the possibilities of a pictorial version of the written signature. But the portrait also defamiliarizes the signature as convention. Unlike Kafka, who recoils from the horrors of committing signature to paper, Hoffmann experiments with investing more of the self into the signature by upping the ante on the signature's iconic function. In doing so he both anticipates and counters our suspicions of the signature – for corresponding either too much or too little with the signer's self – by embracing the signature's fragmentary and paradoxical relationship to his person. This is fully in keeping with Hoffmann's performative meditations on the strangenesses, interruptions, and problems that occur in the process of putting life and self into fiction: as evidenced in passages across his works where the distinction between author, narrator, and fictional character is made uncertain, such as in the final Vigil of *Der goldene Topf*. Hoffmann's signatures thus play with the notion of autographic resemblance or correspondence to the self in a way that both invigorates and playfully desanctifies the convention of autographic space.

In order to examine this particular signature more closely it will be instructive to turn to two 'signature fantasies' in Hoffmann's texts, as fictional variations on the 'scene' of signing. One of these occurs in the third section of *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht* (published in the collection *Fantasiestücke in Callot's Manier*), which assumes the form of a manuscript written both by and about Erasmus Spikher and left

<sup>14</sup> Marc Falkenberg: *Rethinking the Uncanny in Hoffmann and Tieck*. Oxford 2005, p. 99.

behind in an inn to be read by the narrator, “der reisende Enthusiast”.<sup>15</sup> According to this manuscript, when Spikher returns to his family after a trip to Italy in which he is seduced by the succubus Giulietta, the devilish doctor Dapertutto draws up a contract for Spikher to sign; this time, unlike in *Faust*, not with a mere drop of his blood but with a quill that fills itself from his veins. The terms of this contract state that Spikher must hand over his wife and child to Dapertutto in order to continue his relationship with Giulietta. The scene proceeds as follows:

“Worin besteht das?” frug Erasmus heftig. Da schlang Giulietta den Arm um seinen Nacken, und den Kopf an seine Brust gelehnt lispelte sie leise: “Du schreibst auf ein kleines Blättchen deinen Namen Erasmus Spikher unter die wenigen Worte: Ich gebe meinem guten Freunde Dapertutto Macht über meine Frau und über mein Kind, daß er mit ihnen schalte und walte nach Willkür und löse das Band, das mich bindet, weil ich fortan mit meinem Leibe und mit meiner unsterblichen Seele angehören will der Giulietta, die ich mir zum Weibe erkoren, und der ich mich noch durch ein besonderes Gelübde auf immerdar verbinden werde.” [...] Riesengroß stand plötzlich Dapertutto hinter Giulietta und reichte ihm eine metallne Feder. In dem Augenblick sprang dem Erasmus ein Äderchen an der linken Hand und das Blut spritzte heraus. “Tunke ein, tunke ein – schreib’, schreib’”, krächzte der Rote. – “Schreib, schreib, mein ewig, einzig Geliebter”, lispelte Giulietta. Schon hatte er die Feder mit Blut gefüllt, er setzte zum Schreiben an – da ging die Türe auf, eine weiße Gestalt trat herein, die gespenstisch starren Augen auf Erasmus gerichtet, rief sie schmerzvoll und dumpf: Erasmus, Erasmus, was beginnst du – um des Heilandes willen, laß ab von gräßlicher Tat! – Erasmus, in der warnenden Gestalt sein Weib erkennend, warf Blatt und Feder weit von sich. (H 2/1, pp. 356 f.)

A curiously chilling atmosphere characterizes this passage: the description of Spikher’s injury, as his vein bursts open in the act of taking up the pen, is detached and cool, whilst the lines of the contract themselves are given a childlike lilt in the nursery-rhyme couplet of “schalte und walte”. The act of signing is transformed into a scene of Gothic horror, one that is uncannily tempered by the uneasy language of the *Kinderbuch* or *Märchen*. The model for Erasmus Spikher, we recall, is indeed a character from a contemporary *Märchen*: not Faust himself but Adelbert von Chamisso’s variation on Faust, Peter Schlemihl, who also appears, borrowed from that tale, in Hoffmann’s own tripartite ‘adventure’ of fractured identity. Where Peter Schlemihl has given away his shadow to the unidentifiable devilish gentleman, “der Graue Mann”,<sup>16</sup> Spikher has given away his reflection to the devilish red doctor whose name Dapertutto, meaning everywhere, also bespeaks the vagueness of his identity.

Crucially, neither Schlemihl nor Spikher assents to signing his name when a further wager is offered. For Schlemihl, this second deal would authorize the exchange of his soul in return for his shadow; for Spikher, it would be to hand over the lives of his wife and child. Despite their choosing *not* to sign, however, both men have already lost something vital and unquantifiable. Where Schlemihl is committed to a life in exile, devoted to his scientific work, in Hoffmann’s more domestic version of the plot, Spikher’s wife expels him from their house and forbids him from seeing his child. By repeating and confirming the Schlemihlian adaptation of the Faustian signature, in Spikher’s domestic narrative – to give away something of the self, but *not* to sign away one’s

15 E.T.A. Hoffmann: *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht*. In: Id.: *Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden*. Ed. by Hartmut Steinecke/Wulf Segebrecht with contributions from Gerhard Allroggen et. al. Frankfurt/M. 1985–2004. Vol. 2/1: *Fantasiestücke in Callot’s Manier. Werke 1814*. Ed. by Hartmut Steinecke/Gerhard Allroggen/Wulf Segebrecht. Frankfurt/M. 1993, pp. 325–359, here p. 325. I quote from this volume in the following by referring to ‘H 2/1’ and respective page numbers.

16 Adelbert von Chamisso: *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*. In: Id.: *Werke in zwei Bänden*. Ed. by Werner Feudel/Christel Laufer. 2 vols. München 1982. Vol. 2, pp. 15–79, here p. 25.



most precious possession – Hoffmann implicitly summons up the signature, in line with the shadow and the reflection, as an appendage of the self. Not just shadow and reflection but also signature, that is, form part of a collection of metonymic pre-gifts that the hapless protagonist must make before he is to part with another, more precious part of himself. This leaves the signature at a complicated juncture between an acknowledgement of what is now at stake and what has already been lost.

Something similar happens to the signature when, in *Die Elixire des Teufels*, the criminal protagonist Medardus is identified before the judge by Bruder Cyrillus: first by means of the cross-shaped scar on his neck, stamped there by the crucifix worn by an abbess in his childhood, and second by his own handwriting: first, that is, by a trace on the body, and second, by the body's own trace.

Ich mußte meinen Namen unterschreiben, dann forderte mich der Richter auf, irgend etwas polnisch und deutsch aufzuzeichnen, ich tat es. Der Richter nahm das deutsche Blatt, und gab es dem Pater Cyrillus, der sich unterdessen wieder erholt hatte, mit der Frage in die Hände: "Haben diese Schriftzüge Ähnlichkeit mit der Hand, die Ihr Klosterbruder Medardus schrieb?" – Es ist ganz genau seine Hand, bis auf die kleinsten Eigentümlichkeiten, erwiderte Cyrillus, und wandte sich wieder zu mir.<sup>17</sup>

Both the scar on his neck as well as the signature and handwriting sample are called upon together to carry out the function played by Odysseus's scar, which is the trigger for the scene of anagnorisis in the *Odyssey*. And yet shortly afterwards, both marks are stripped of their authorizing, signatory function when Medardus's *Doppelgänger* is spotted bearing the very same scar, prompting Medardus's swift acquittal. We are left to assume that this consummate *Doppelgänger*, like any good imposter, is also able to produce a copycat signature. Hoffmann thus invokes, only then to swiftly destroy, the premise of the sign that can stand in for the self. Once again, the signature stands at the juncture between correspondence and loss.

What is striking about these two scenes is that the incapacity or nonpresence of the signature is central to both. The first is a 'Schreibszene' in which the act of writing does not take place, whilst the second scene frames the signature before stripping it of its supposedly unique semiotic promise to function as stand-in for its signer. And indeed we might remark of his own signature in Figure 1 that what Hoffmann does at the end of his letter is to both simultaneously *not* sign, at least not in the conventional way, and to do something else instead. That 'something else' is to draw, or doodle. Before turning to the act of drawing itself, however, I will explore another of Hoffmann's signatory flourishes: an inkblot.

## II. Blot

As paratextual marks go, an accidental inkblot, an unruly, inarticulate splatter interrupting the orderly space of the page, stands at a significant remove from a signature: deliberate, choreographed, confined to its proper space. And yet the inkblot too is, in its own way, a signatory mark of the self: a particular, if peculiar, utterance of the writing body, tracing that body's relationship to the writing media it demonstrably cannot always keep

<sup>17</sup> E.T.A. Hoffmann: *Die Elixire des Teufels*. In: Id.: *Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden*. Ed. by Hartmut Steinecke/Wulf Segebrecht with contributions by Gerhard Allroggen et. al. Frankfurt/M. 1985–2004. Vol. 2/2: *Die Elixire des Teufels. Werke 1814–1816*. Ed. by Hartmut Steinecke/Gerhard Allroggen. Frankfurt/M. 1988, pp. 9–352, here p. 206. I quote from this volume in the following by referring to 'H 2/2' and respective page numbers.

in check. I will therefore pause here over one of Hoffmann's more significant inkblots, which will, in turn, serve as the point of departure for a more focused investigation of his signature doodles. The blot in question occurs in the *Kunzischer Riß*, a humorous street plan of Hoffmann's lodgings on the Gendarmenmarkt sent to his publisher Kunz, which seamlessly combines recognisable landmarks of Berlin with fictional characters and details. Next to one of those fictions, the figure of Peter Schlemihl, is a large, dark blob:



Figure 2: Der Kunzische Riß. Lithography by L. Sache & Co Berlin. In: E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Erzählungen aus seinen letzten Lebensjahren, sein Leben und Nachlaß*. (5 vols). Hrsg. von Julius Eduard Hitzig. Stuttgart, 1839. Vol. 1, back page. Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, Signatur: L.g.o.390.<sup>18</sup>

On first glance, we might be forgiven for expecting the blob to conform to a representation of Schlemihl's shadow, but then we see, after all, that it is labelled simply, and provocatively, "ein Kleks": an inkblot. The "Kleks" is a strange point in this drawing. It seems, at first, to effect a hiccup-like break in the representational framework by serving as a reminder of the doodler's pen and ink and their capacity to get away from him. And yet, as Caroline Schubert has pointed out, by being labelled as "Kleks" (and presumably having been intentionally filled and smoothed to make it so shapely and streamlined; it has a clearly defined body, nose, and tail) the blot might after all be better understood as a *representation* of a blot, if not perhaps actually as the refinement and adaptation of some original splatter, a kind of 'ur-blot'.<sup>19</sup> The labelled blot, then, as a disruptive feature, is an important participant in this text-image experiment

<sup>18</sup> See also a reproduction in H 6, after p. 1344, Abb. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Caroline Schubert: *Defiguration der Schrift: Tintenleckerei, Makulatur und Schreibfehler bei E.T.A. Hoffmann und Nikolaj Gogol*. Berlin 2021, p. 109.

because it mediates between two levels within the drawing: first, the drawing as diagram in which all elements are carefully labelled, and second, the drawing as composition, in which the doodler's ink falls from his pen in uncontrollable ways. The drawing is no longer just a diagram, for it is also a signature of the composing self: one that is promptly recycled back into the work's whimsical diagrammatic logic.

The fraught cohabitation of text and image in the *Kunzischer Rib* works to underline the representational insufficiencies of those two modes. In turn, the drawing takes up a place within a broad category of unfinished art forms favoured by the Romantics, including the fragment, the sketch, and the outline drawing or *Umriss*. In Romantic thought, such forms are typically understood to engage a rhetoric of purposeful unfinishedness to gesture towards a more total ideal by engaging the viewer in the task of imagining that ideal. In the eighteenth century, François Hemsterhuis wrote in praise of the sketch as form:

Erstens enthalten diese Skizzen viel mehr von jener göttlichen Lebhaftigkeit der erstgefaßten Idee, als die vollendeten Werke, die viel Zeit gekostet haben. Aber zweitens, und dies ist die Hauptsache, setzen sie auch die dichtende und reproduzierende Fähigkeit der Seele in Bewegung, die sogleich das, was tatsächlich doch nur flüchtig hingeworfen war, vollendet.<sup>20</sup>

The important second point that Hemsterhuis makes here – that the sketch might stimulate its viewer to greater imaginative work, thus expanding the individual act of looking into a creative, collaborative process – is taken up by August Wilhelm Schlegel in his praise of John Flaxman's outline drawings. Schlegel writes: “[D]ie Fantasie wird aufgefordert zu ergänzen, und nach der empfangenen Anregung selbständig fortzubilden, statt daß das ausgeführte Gemälde sie durch entgegen kommende Befriedigung gefangen nimmt”.<sup>21</sup> He goes on to write of the outline drawing: “Endlich wird die Fantasie sie viel dreister zu den vorhergehenden und nachfolgenden Handlungen begleiten, als wo ihr die Schranken eines völlig decorirten Schauplatzes entgegenstehen”.<sup>22</sup> In turn, Hoffmann writes in praise of the *Skizzenhaftigkeit* of Jacques Callot's engravings in his essay on Callot in *Fantasiestücke*, admiring the succinct drama of the spare line drawing led by “ein Paar kühne Striche” (H 2/1, p. 17), able to summon up a sense of life itself. In these works, space is cleared for the imaginative act, their gaps and inconsistencies made meaningful and provocative as gaps and inconsistencies. The blot of *Der Kunzische Rib*, too, can be understood to enliven the diagram by unsettling and loosening the strictures of the finished artefact.

Key for an understanding of the role played by the inkblot, particularly if we indulge in the story of its having been an accidental splatter adapted by its maker into a meaningful form, is a well-known passage written by Leonardo da Vinci in which he recommends that artists seek out and take inspiration from those figures that seem to spring up from accidental forms: the haphazard texture of “some old Wall covered with dirt”, the vague borders of a stain, the wispy formations of a cloud.<sup>23</sup> Hemsterhuis had

20 Cited in Olaf Schmidt: „Callots fantastisch karikierte Blätter“. *Intermediale Inszenierungen und romantische Kunsttheorie im Werk E.T.A. Hoffmanns*. Berlin 2003, p. 75.

21 August Wilhelm Schlegel: *Ueber Zeichnungen zu Gedichten und John Flaxman's Umrisse*. In: Id.: *Kritische Schriften zweiter Theil*. Berlin 1828, pp. 253–309, here p. 266.

22 Ibid., p. 267.

23 Cited in Susan Stewart: *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture*. Chicago 2020, p. 30.

written about this in the eighteenth century and the idea is taken up by Wackenroder and Tieck in *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*:

Auch betrachtete er, was manchem lächerlich vorkommen mag, oft lange und ganz in sich verloren, altes Gemäuer, worauf die Zeit mit allerlei wunderbaren Figuren und Farben gespielt hatte, oder vielfarbige Steine mit irgend seltsamen Zeichnungen. Daraus sprang ihm dann, während des unverrückten Anschauens, manche schöne Idee von Landschaften oder Schlachtgewimmel oder fremden Stellungen und Gesichtern hervor.<sup>24</sup>

In this vignette, and in its lively reception across Romantic thought, the projection of meaningful forms (often faces) onto accidental material, a phenomenon known as pareidolia, is raised to the status of a credo for art-making. It forms the practical basis for an eccentric method of making art from inkblots and other such materials, where the medium's contingencies are taken as the inspiration for imaginative vision. A genealogy of artists who experimented with such methods can be traced from the eighteenth-century painter Alexander Cozens, who developed a 'blotting technique' for his landscapes, through to the Romantic *Klecksographien* of Justinus Kerner and the incantatory stain-paintings of Victor Hugo, into psychoanalytic exploitations of this process to reveal the unconscious priorities of the mind by Hermann Rohrschach and D.W. Winnicott; and then beyond, into the works of the Surrealists and then abstract expressionism with Jackson Pollock and the like. Hoffmann's possible place within this genealogy, if not as practitioner then at least, perhaps, as interested party, has been noted by Günther and Ingrid Oesterle, as well as by Caroline Schubert.<sup>25</sup> Alongside his pictured "Kleks" in the *Kunzischer Riß*, we might also note the possible role played by pareidolia in *Der goldene Topf*, a tale at the centre of which lies an accidental spillage of ink across a manuscript. Just before his first experience of the hallucinatory appearance of Serpentina and her sisters, Anselmus is introduced to us before the landscape of Dresden, blowing smoke rings by the river Elbe:

[D]a setzte er sich hin und stopfte eine Pfeife von dem Sanitätsknaster, den ihm sein Freund, der Konrektor Paulmann geschenkt. – Dicht vor ihm plätscherten und rauschten die goldgelben Wellen des schönen Elbstroms, hinter demselben streckte das herrliche Dresden kühn und stolz seine lichten Türme empor in den duftigen Himmelsgrund, der sich hinabsenkte auf die blumigten Wiesen und frisch grünenden Wälder und aus tiefer Dämmerung gaben die zackigten Gebirge Kunde vom fernen Böhmerlande. Aber finster vor sich hinblickend, blies der Student Anselmus die Dampfwolken in die Luft und sein Unmut wurde endlich laut, indem er sprach [...]. (H 2/1, p. 231)

This scene nicely corresponds to the self-portrait in Figure 1, in which Hoffmann too is depicted "finster vor sich hinblickend" as he puffs out a smoke ring. The puff of smoke, a motif frequently found within Hoffmann's casual drawings and doodles, both adapts the suggestive curlicues of script and is suggestive of artistic inspiration, by means of its own shifting visual aspect and hallucinatory potential. In this light, the signatory doodle in Figure 1 begins to take on a new aspect: as a playful illustration of the scene of enchantment in *Der goldene Topf*, in which we find not Anselmus but Hoffmann himself, ponderously blowing out smoke rings. Emergent from within the medium of script, the smoke, as motif of inspiration, sets the scene for a reflection on its own emergence.

<sup>24</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder: *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*. Berlin 1797, pp. 7 f.

<sup>25</sup> Ingrid and Günter Oesterle: Der Imaginationsreiz der Flecken von Leonardo da Vinci bis Peter Rühmkorf. In: *Signaturen der Gegenwartsliteratur. Festschrift für Walter Hinderer*. Ed. by Dieter Borchmeyer. Würzburg 1999, pp. 213–223; Caroline Schubert: *Defiguration der Schrift*, pp. 118 f.

In the ninth vigil of *Der goldene Topf* – following the magical interventions of Liese in the seventh vigil, who is working in the service of Veronika Paulmann who wants to win Anselmus for herself, and the punch scene with Heerbrand and Paulmann – the texts that Anselmus has been tasked with copying, and which had, in the eighth vigil, seemed to brim over with arcane meaning, appear to revert back into meaninglessness. In the moments before he spills the fateful blot on his manuscript, the page of text that he finds before him is compared to a mossy stone, in an image that seems to explicitly echo Leonardo da Vinci's instructions to artists:

Aber er sah auf der Pergamentrolle so viele sonderbare krause Züge und Schnörkel durcheinander, die ohne dem Auge einen einzigen Ruhepunkt zu geben den Blick verwirren, daß es ihm beinahe unmöglich schien das Alles genau nachzumalen. Ja bei dem Überblick des Ganzen schien das Pergament nur ein bunt geaderter Marmor oder ein mit Moosen durchsprenkelter Stein. – Er wollte dem unerachtet das Mögliche versuchen und tunkte getrost die Feder ein, aber die Tinte wollte durchaus nicht fließen, er spritzte die Feder ungeduldig aus und – o Himmell ein großer Klecks fiel auf das ausgebreitete Original. (H 2/1, p. 301)

It is not Anselmus's blot that spoils his manuscript, then: rather, the blot is the consequence of examining a manuscript that has already lost its meaning for him and has turned back into an illegible slab. In losing his ability to read Lindhorst's scripts, Anselmus loses his ability to write and reverts to the state of the clumsy and inarticulate child, splattering ink across the page. As in *Der Kunzische Riß*, the accidental blot marks a turning point between two ways of reading the page, and between the different paths open to Anselmus.

### III. Doodle

I return now to Figure 1, in the light of all of this, to note that the most striking aspect about the page as a whole is that neither text nor image is dominant, but that the overall effect of the design is engendered by a continuous shifting back and forth between the two. Once our eyes have followed the text down the page, they encounter the logic of the image and drift back upwards with the smoke to discover the writing again, in a kind of loop. And in the meeting of text and drawing, at the very centre of things, is the line, or 'Zug', that could form either: that might be part of the writing, or part of the smoke. It is irresistible, in this regard, to turn to the opening passage of *Der Artushof* in which the protagonist Traugott, first drawing out a flourish on the business letter, the "Avisobrief" he is supposed to be writing, gazes at the painting in front of him and finds himself absentmindedly doodling across the paper:

Traugott fand mit Mühe ein Plätzchen an den besetzten Tischen, er nahm ein Blatt, tunkte die Feder ein und wollte eben mit einem kecken kalligraphischen Schnörkel beginnen, als er, nochmals schnell das Geschäft von dem er zu schreiben hatte, überdenkend, die Augen in die Höhe warf. [...] so geschah es denn auch jetzt, daß statt den Aviso des Herrn Elias Roos nach Hamburg zu schreiben, er nur das wundersame Bild anschaute und gedankenlos mit der Feder auf dem Papier herumkritzelte.<sup>26</sup>

26 E.T.A. Hoffmann: *Der Artushof*. In: Id.: *Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden*. Ed. by Hartmut Steinecke/Wulf Segebrecht with contributions by Gerhard Allroggen. Frankfurt/M. 1985–2004. Vol. 4: *Die Serapions-Brüder*. Ed. by Wulf Segebrecht with contributions from Ursula Segebrecht. Frankfurt/M. 2001, pp. 177–208, here pp. 178 f. I quote from this volume in the following by referring to 'H 4' and respective page numbers.

This is one of many sequences in Hoffmann's texts that depict the production of art in a state of divided or suspended attention: we might recall, for instance, a scene in *Kater Murr* in which Meister Abraham absentmindedly cuts out shadow puppets from notepaper; or the painter Francesco in *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, who paints in a near-hypnotic state. But the idea specific to *Der Artushof* is that Traugott's experiences in the tale are unleashed by this particular transmedial switch from script to figure, which seems to bring to life the images he sees depicted in the painting of the Artushof, and thus to initiate him into a kind of fantasy (or delusory) existence. The remarkable parallel between Traugott's letter-turned-drawing and Hoffmann's letter-turned-drawing is that if there is a moment of transmedial 'switching' to be identified, then it is to be found in Hoffmann's signatory "Schnörkel", or flourish, the elongated mark that leads from the "e" of "Ihrigste" down to the face, a flourish that is very often exaggerated in Hoffmann's letters. The calligraphic line, which originates in the text, though it does not belong to the lettering, is incorporated into the logic of the picture, making it a nodal point between the two. In that sense, the flourish attains a function similar to August Wilhelm Schlegel's description of the role of the "Umriss" or outline in John Flaxman's drawings, which he describes as "der Punkt, wo die Strahlen der beiden Künste einander kreuzen und jenseits dessen sie wieder divergiren".<sup>27</sup> Schlegel is writing in figurative terms: he suggests that the draughtsman may take, from the writer, the sparseness and pared-back character of writing, to produce outline drawings that are charged with narrative potential. But Hoffmann, with his keen attention to the status of text as a set of calligraphic signs – or to what has been termed "Schriftbildlichkeit"<sup>28</sup> – makes that point literal, as he centres his work on a mark that unites and confuses letter and drawing.

The author's doodle has experienced an explosion of new interest in recent years, provoked by methodological considerations associated with the 'material turn', as well as by advances made in digitizing and enhancing access to authors' manuscripts. Notable recent work on authors' doodles and drawings includes that by Graham Allen on Percy Shelley's notebooks, by Thomas Gould on Barthes and Beckett, by Deborah Lutz on the Brontës, and by Andrea Meyertholen on Gottfried Keller.<sup>29</sup> As the once-ephemeral doodle emerges into literary criticism from wherever it had previously been hidden – the margins of the unpublished text, the corners of the archive – these studies begin to reach towards the production of a serviceable critical vocabulary for explaining what authors' doodles do, and how they might be read, productively, alongside texts, beyond being merely interesting but ultimately ephemeral imaginative flotsam. In what remains of this essay I will draw on some of these insights to show that what I have been calling Hoffmann's 'signature doodles' can help us to better understand what is particular

<sup>27</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel: *Ueber Zeichnungen zu Gedichten und John Flaxman's Umrisse*, p. 267.

<sup>28</sup> *Schriftbildlichkeit: Wahrnehmbarkeit, Materialität und Operativität von Notationen*. Ed. by Sybille Krämer/Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum/Rainer Totzke. Berlin 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Graham Allen: Shelley as Visual Artist: Doodles, Sketches, Ink Blots, and the critical Reception of the Visual. In: *Studies in Romanticism*. 60/2021, no. 3, pp. 277–306; Thomas Gould: Legerdemain/Gaucherie: Doodle Theory with Barthes and Beckett. In: *Paragraph*. 45/2022, no. 2, pp. 233–247; Deborah Lutz: *Victorian Paper Art and Craft: Writers and their Materials*. Oxford 2022; Andrea Meyertholen: From Marginalia to the Museum: The Transfiguration of the Doodle by Gottfried Keller, Hans Prinzhorn, and Jean Dubuffet. In: *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*. 58/2022, no. 4, pp. 361–385.

about the form of a doodle, and how this, in turn, might facilitate new approaches to Hoffmann's vast and largely underexplored corpus of visual artworks.

In an essay on doodling, Matthew Battles argues for the doodle's essential and constitutive lack of meaning when he claims that "if a doodle has anything to tell us about the creative work of its author, then it isn't a doodle".<sup>30</sup> Yet later in the same essay – indeed, on the same page – he is compelled to note that there is an accidental "fossil poetry" embodied in such forms.<sup>31</sup> There is a tension here, one that is perhaps symptomatic of any approach to the doodle. For if the doodle does not tell us anything, exactly, then how can it still be a kind of poetry? And do doodles not insist that we read them, that we ascribe some kind of meaning to them, even if that task is frustrated or impossible? For Battles, it is an important condition of the doodle that it is, as in Kant's reading of the arabesque and related forms, both compelling and ultimately meaningless, and Battles is thus one of a number of thinkers who understands the doodle as an interruption, a break or a pause, whilst the mind recalibrates its focus on its work. The doodle has, for this reason, been described as a kind of "miniaturized graffiti", as a defacement or private rebellion against the work of handwriting whilst the hand and mind allow themselves to be temporarily absorbed in the pleasures of the pen.<sup>32</sup> A doodle threatens, or promises, to decentre the page both topographically and temporally, troubling our easy notion of a text's fixity or finishedness. In such readings, a doodle is an alluring interruption of form, a subversion of form's order; is formlessness, blurring, noise.

Yet to see the doodle as inherently and necessarily meaningless is to do the doodle a disservice. Here I stand with Graham Allen who stresses the need to *not* read Percy Shelley's notebook doodles as a "cessation within the compositional process" because "there is no reason why [they] could not be playing a crucial role in the thinking through of compositional questions and problems".<sup>33</sup> Allen goes on to ask of his reader, about the distinction between texts and the doodles that adorn their drafts: "What kind of world would it be if such things had a merely contingent relation to each other?"<sup>34</sup> His alternative world, presumably, is one in which the products of a making, creative body do not relate to one another arbitrarily, but precisely on the terms of their shared space and maker. Yet if we understand their relationship to significant texts not to be 'contingent', then surely the answer does not lie in a crude correspondence either, as in Lavater's doctrine of harmony between form and soul. From the discovery of the doodle in the 1930s onwards, first in psychoanalytical and then in pop-psychological texts, casual doodle readings have been tempted to follow a kind of model of correspondence: whether as a psychological correspondence relating to the internal secrets of the doodler's mind, or an illustrative correspondence that takes us further into a text's hidden meanings. But aside from leading us into readings that are often tendentious and speculative, a 'correspondence theory' of the doodle also does the doodle a disservice by relegating it to the status of an adjunct form.

What doodles share with other works that emanate from the same pen and maker, I argue, is form. Caroline Levine has recently noted that 'form' always indicates *an*

**30** Matthew Battles: In Praise of Doodling. In: *The American Scholar*. 73/2004, no. 4, pp. 105–108, here p. 108.

**31** *Ibid.*

**32** David MacLagan: *Line Let Loose: Scribbling, Doodling, and Automatic Drawing*. London 2014, p. 57.

**33** Graham Allen: Shelley as Visual Artist, p. 283.

**34** *Ibid.*, p. 288.

arrangement of elements — an ordering, patterning, or shaping”.<sup>35</sup> And this is what doodles so frequently are: a spontaneous set of interests in insides and outsides, in arrangements and patterns, in lines and spaces, in making and unmaking. It is this characteristic that enables them to facilitate and situate what we might call a kind of compositional thinking. My working definition of a doodle is as a minor or secondary mode of drawing (a doodle almost always appears in an inferior position to some other work, and is almost never intended for publication), related to, but distinct from, say, a scribble or a sketch, in which a seemingly non-purposive graphic mark, whether accidental, automatic, or spontaneous, is checked and modified by an impulse towards form. Whilst the overall effect, therefore, may be erratic, unfinished, or nonsensical, doodles represent miniature graphic experiments in form. In this way, the doodle emerges in the terms of a conversation between, first, what the art psychologist Anton Ehrenzweig calls the “happy accident”,<sup>36</sup> and second, a movement towards meaningful form. The embrace of the “happy accident”, as described by Ehrenzweig, corresponds with Leonardo Da Vinci’s call for artists to find inspiration within the random details of their medium, emphasising the productive interference or contribution of the medium to the artwork:

Something like a true conversation takes place between the artist and his own work. The medium, by frustrating the artist’s purely conscious intentions, allows him to contact more submerged parts of his own personality and draw them up for conscious contemplation. While the artist struggles with his medium, unknown to himself he wrestled with his unconscious personality revealed by the work of art. Taking back from the work on a conscious level what has been projected into it on an unconscious level is perhaps the most fruitful and painful result of creativity.<sup>37</sup>

The drawing that I have taken as a case study here brings to life the processual nature of composition as a kind of thinking. Hoffmann’s signature doodle arranges particular features – the hat, the Arabic pipe, the distinctive eyes and hair – to trigger the reader’s recognition. Meanwhile, the smoke both activates elements from *Der goldene Topf* and alchemizes script with the self-iterative logic of the image, fusing them into one, and holding up, at its centre, the calligraphic mark that hovers between script and image, the mark that is sheer mark, sheer form. What the doodle does by invading and transforming the space of the handwritten signature is to think through the emergence of the author himself as a kind of fiction: as a being who emerges not beyond the writing and drawing process to direct them from above, but from within them.

That the compositional process is also part of the finished product, and that the representation of the self can be seen as defined through reflections on that compositional process, this is fairly well-trodden Hoffmannesque terrain. But there is a wealth of visual material in Hoffmann’s œuvre that has yet to be fully explored, and it is material that may well help in strengthening and transforming not only our interpretations of Hoffmann’s works, but of newly emergent theories of authorial doodling and drawing, and their subterranean role in the shaping of texts and other artworks, that are coming to light in other areas of literary scholarship. As an artist who consummately understood the potential power of the interplay between media, not just text and image, but

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<sup>35</sup> Caroline Levine: *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton, NJ 2015, p. 3. Emphasis in original.

<sup>36</sup> Anton Ehrenzweig: *The Hidden Order of Art*. London 2000, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



also music, Hoffmann must surely take centre stage in such developments. If, in his fictional scenes of signing in *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht* and *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, Hoffmann frames signatures that are simultaneously invested with and divested of their power, his own signature doodles playfully de-sanctify the autographic space. In doing so, they contribute, through a kind of compositional thinking, to a reflection on the status of authorship. The creative act, for Hoffmann as draughtsman, arises in a continuously renewed encounter with one's own medium, with the same childlike naivety with which we might catch sight of a face-like form within a plume of smoke. To have placed the doodle in a space on the page where we expect to find a signature, this too is part of Hoffmann's broader 'signature' self-stylizing impulse, a placing of the author as a kind of fiction.