

Animals and Humans in German Literature, 1800-2000:

Exploring the Great Divide

Edited by

Lorella Bosco and Micaela Latini

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CHAPTER THREE

THE MIGHTY LOUSE. ANIMALISTIC SOUTH SEA IMPERIALISM AND E.T.A. HOFFMANN'S *HAIMATOCHARE* (1819)

ROLAND BORGARDS

In late June, 1819, the Berlin weekly *Der Freimüthige*, a “magazine for educated, open-minded readers”, published an epistolary short story by E.T.A. Hoffman bearing the somewhat enigmatic title *Haimatochare*.¹ In a short preface, Hoffmann insists that the letters are authentic, claiming to have been given them by his friend “A.v.C.” (666). The Berlin readership will have had no difficulty deciphering the abbreviation: it refers to Adelbert von Chamisso, who had returned from a round-the-world voyage with the Rurik expedition the year before. Chamisso had joined the expedition as a naturalist, and along the way he had explored, among other places, the Hawaiian island of O‘ahu—or as it was then known: the Sandwich island of “Woahoo”.² Upon his return to Berlin and the Berlin salons, Chamisso had told stories of his voyage, thus providing his friend Hoffmann with the inspiration—and, moreover, the scientific and navigational details—he needed to write his epistolary short story (Cf. Hoffmann’s letter to Chamisso dated 28th February, 1819, and the accompanying commentary by Hartmut Steinecke, *Nachtstücke* 1102–1109).

Hoffmann presents *Haimatochare* as a document of the tragic events that befell two English naturalists Menzies and Broughton, close friends and

¹ Page numbers refer to the German edition, published in volume three of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Sämliche Werke*. Ed. Hartmut Steinecke (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker-Verlag, 1985), pp. 666–680. The English translation cited here is by Douglas Robertson, and available on his blog, *The Philosophical Worldview Artist*. I have silently modified the translation slightly in places. —Trans.

² Chamisso describes his voyage in two works, both published after Hoffmann’s *Haimatochare*: “Remarks and Opinions of the Naturalist of the Expedition” (1821) and *A Voyage Around the World* ([1836] 1986).

collaborators on an expedition to “Woahoo”. Shortly after their arrival on the island, Menzies begins to investigate the local fauna:

Not far from Hana-ruru, the seat of King Teimotu’s court, at which he has received us most cordially, lies a quite charming woodland. Thither I repaired yesterday as soon as the sun began setting. I had intended, if possible, to catch a very rare butterfly (the name of the species would not interest you), which commenced its erratic but vaguely circular flight pattern after sundown. The atmosphere was sultry, suffused with the voluptuous perfume of aromatic herbs. As I entered the woods, I felt a curiously sweet sense of dread, a mysterious shudder that thrilled through my entire body, that dissolved into sighs of passionate longing. The nocturnal bird that I had set out in search of sprang up right in front of me, but my arms were dangling flaccidly, impotently on either side; as if transfixed by a cataleptic fit, I was unable to budge from the spot where I was standing, unable to pursue the nocturnal bird, which was soaring forth into the forest. Then I found myself being pulled as if by invisible hands into a thicket, which, amid the ambient rustle and bustle, spoke tender words of love to me. Oh, good heavens! On the parti-colored carpet of the wings of a dove lay the prettiest, sweetest, loveliest island-dweller that I had ever seen. No! Only the external contours of the winsome creature suggested that she was indigenous to Woahoo. Everything else—colour, deportment, appearance—was different. For sheer enraptured terror, I could scarcely breathe. Warily I approached the tiny creature. She seemed to be sleeping—I grabbed her; I carried her out of the woods with me; the most splendid jewel on the island was mine! I named her Haimatochare, pasted together a lovely little bedchamber for her out of goldleaf paper, and prepared a bed for her out of the very shimmering, parti-colored dove-feathers on which I had discovered her! She seems to understand me, to surmise what she means to me! Forgive me, Edward, I am taking my leave of you—I must see what my lovely being, my Haimatochare is up to—I am opening her little bedchamber. She is lying there on her bed; she is toying with its parti-colored little feathers. Oh Haimatochare! (671–672)

Shortly after this scene, Broughton describes the relationship between Menzies and Haimatochare as a “foolish, nay outrageous passion” (673–674), while at the same time making demands of his own: “Haimatochare! Yes! You have christened her whom you have abducted from me Haimatochare: she whom you for all the world keep hidden away, she who was mine, she whom to be sure in my sweet pride I myself intended to christen for the benefit of the eternally perduring annals of natural history! [...] Restore Haimatochare to me!” (675) The dispute over Haimatochare escalates and quickly ends in a duel which leaves both rivals dead. A letter from the leader of the expedition, Captain Bligh, explains the situation:

They had been standing barely ten paces apart from each other, and between them lay the unfortunate object that, as I learned from Menzies's papers, had ignited Broughton's hatred and jealousy. In a tiny box taped together with gold paper I discovered beneath a carpet of lustrous feathers a tiny, curiously shaped, beautifully coloured insect, which Davis, with his knowledge of natural history, was inclined to identify as a pygmy louse, albeit one that especially in point of coloration and the quite curious shape of its abdomen and feet differed considerably from all animalcules of that genus that had hitherto been discovered. On the box was written the name *Haimatochare* (678).

Thus at last we discover that the name *Haimatochare* refers a louse of a hitherto unknown species, which both Menzies and Broughton claim to have discovered: Broughton because he had shot the dove on which the louse had been living; Menzies because he had found the louse that had been living on the dove. What had seemed to be a lovers' quarrel turns out to have been a dispute over scientific priority. The Governor orders *Haimatochare* to be executed, and the story ends with Bligh's detailed account of how she is placed in a gold-taped box, weighed down by a stone, and ceremoniously drowned in the ocean.

Hoffmann's short story belongs, on the one hand, to the genre of *science-in-fiction*: a critical scientific parody about two naturalists' self-destructive pursuit of glory and about the failure of a taxonomic system brought on by the confrontation with a beautiful and exotic lifeform (cf. Beardsley 300–307). On the other hand, it belongs to the genre of *literary precolonialism*: as a foundational text of "Hawaiian fiction" (Moore 25), the story makes use of the stereotypical features of the contemporary discourse of South Sea exploration (cf. Weinstein 2002) to lure readers into the trap of their own imperialistic prejudices (cf. Dunker 2002), taking both sides of the characteristic ambivalence of European colonialism, desire for the exotic and fear of the Other, and uniting them in a single figure: indigenous beauty and fatal louse all rolled into one (cf. Dürbeck 2008).

All of this has already been covered in considerable detail in the small but compelling body of scholarship on Hoffmann's *Haimatochare*, most of which has approached the text through the lens of postcolonial studies (see especially Weinstein 2002; Dunker 2002; and Dürbeck 2008). From a cultural animal studies perspective, however, one might nevertheless add to these interpretations by insisting that the story does not in fact culminate in the "death of *both* protagonists" (Dürbeck 181), i.e. Menzies and Broughton, but rather in that of all *three* protagonists: *Haimatochare*, the louse, also dies in the end. What is more, the text gives double precedence to *Haimatochare* over the other two protagonists. First, it is she—and not the two colonial

naturalists, for instance—who furnishes the story with its title. Second, the story ends not with the duel that kills the two scientists, but rather with Haimatochare’s execution. To be sure, this execution is carried out, by order of the Governor, “in honor of the unfortunate naturalists” (679), but the ceremony itself is devoted entirely to the louse, with “Mr Davis, the loyal custodian of Haimatochare,” giving “a very moving speech in which, after synoptically recounting Haimotachare’s career, he held forth on the transience of all things terrestrial” (680). Thus, this short story begins with the name of a louse and ends with the recitation of her curriculum vitae. What is it that makes this louse so special?

Hoffmann’s decision to devote this work of science-in-fiction to a louse has two very specific correlates in the history of science. First, in 1818, the same year in which Chamisso returned from his round-the-world voyage and Hoffmann began writing “Haimatochare”, the zoologist Christian Ludwig Nitzsch published a ground-breaking essay entitled “Die Familien und Gattungen der Thierinsekten (*insecta epizoica*)” [“The Families and Species of Animal Insects (*insecta epizoica*)”], which not only introduced the concepts of “parasite” (262) and “parasitism” (270) into zoology but also offered the first rigorous definition of this zoological phenomenon.³ Nitzsch defines “animal insects” as those insects “which dwell permanently on other animals, feed on them exclusively, mate and reproduce, and as a rule never depart from them, except in order to transfer to other individuals” (1818, 261–262). Nitzsch’s principal aim in the essay is to develop a precise and comprehensive system of parasitic insects: “It has for some time now been an object of my endeavours to observe these insects closely in order to provide as complete and accurate a picture of their natural history as possible” (267). He has, he writes, succeeded in describing “more than four hundred, mostly new species” and in “classifying or discovering” a large variety of “genera” (268). Among these, particular importance is given to the study of animal lice, including the “genus *pediculus*” (270), or body louse, as well as the “subgenus [...] *nirmus*” (291), or bird louse.

Thus, Nitzsch’s essay outlines the entomological problem without which the scientific dispute between the two literary naturalists Broughton and Menzies never could have escalated as it does. Captain Bligh specifies that

Mr Menzies regarded the animalcule as an entirely new genus and placed it midway between *pediculus pubescens*, *thorace trapeziodeo*, *abdomine ovali*, *posterius emarginato ab latere undulato etc. habitans in homine*, *Hottentottis*, *Groenlandisque escam dilectam praebens* and *nirmus*

³ On Nitzsch’s importance for the history of science cf. Toepfer 1.

crassicornis, capite ovato oblongo, scutello thorace majore, abdomine lineari lanceolato, habitans in anate, ansere et boschade [...] (678).

Menzies believes Haimatochare to be not merely a new *species* of louse, but rather a new *genus*, whose distinctive feature is that it can have two different host organisms, or *Heimathsthiere* [“home animals”], as Nitzsch calls them (273), namely: birds (the dove that Broughton shoots) and humans (Mr. Davis, in whose cap Haimatochare lives for the nine months that pass between the duel and the execution). This, judging by the phthirapterology of the 1810’s, is an extremely rare characteristic. As a result, the discovery of the Haimatochare louse constitutes breaking news for the scientific community, as it not only expands the number of known species of louse but actually troubles the taxonomic structure of phthirapterology as a whole, which, of course, is the subject of Nitzsch’s studies as well.

The second specific reference in Hoffman’s story to the scientific study of lice in the early nineteenth-century may be found in the choice of species between which Menzies places Haimatochare: *pediculus pubescens* and *nirmus crassicornis*. Both species designations can be traced back to Iganx von Olfers’s 1816 treatise *De vegetativis et animatis corporibus in corporibus animatis reperiundis commentarius*, or roughly: “Commentary on the plant and animal bodies to be found in the bodies of animals”. Like Nitzsch, Olfers is concerned with parasites, with the “Animalia corporum animatorum parasitica” (66), and, again like Nitzsch, Olfers is primarily interested in the taxonomic classification of parasitic organisms.

In his treatise, the first species of the genus “Pediculus” that Olfers describes is “P. *pubescens*: thorace trapezoideo, abdomine ovali posterius emarginato ad latera undulato [...]. *Hab.* [...] in homine, Hottentottis, Groenlandisque escam dilectam praebens” (80–81). The seventh species of the genus “Nirmus”, described by Olfers a few pages later, is “N. *crassicornis*: capite ovato-oblongo, scutello thorace majore, abdomine lineari-lanceolato. [...] *Hab.* in anate Ansere et Boschade” (88–89). Evidently, Hoffmann copied the Latin definitions in his text verbatim from Olfers’s treatise.⁴ Or, to put this intra-diegetically: evidently, Menzies has brought Olfers’s treatise with him on his research trip to Woahoo, which is why he is able to refer in his description of “Haimatochare” to the scientifically established definitions of *pediculus pubescens* and *nirmus*

⁴ In his commentary on the story, Hartmut Steinecke erroneously claims that: “This Latin definition is a mixture of scientific phrases and dog Latin” (1108). As we can see, Hoffmann is not making up phrases in dog Latin but rather citing scientific Latin.

crassicornis. The same definitions, incidentally, which had granted Olfers the very thing which Broughton so ardently desires, namely entry into the “eternally perduring annals of natural history” (675), which, ever since Linnaeus introduced binomial nomenclature, has appended the name of the authority who first described a species to the binominal name of that species: “*Pediculus pubescens* von Olfers 1816⁵ and “*Nirmus crassicornis* (Scopoli): Olfers, 1816” (Mateo 324).

Clearly, Hoffmann took great care to include references to the most up-to-date phthirapterological science available in his text: this is a story about parasites, not in some everyday sense of that term, but rather in a very specialised, state-of-the-art scientific sense. But what does this phthirapterological knowledge, which, it will be observed, is manifestly European, and indeed, in the case of Olfers and Nitzsch, manifestly German, have to do with Hawai‘i? Or, to put it more generally: What are these European animals doing in the South Pacific?

In recent years, and especially in the last decade, historians have begun to formulate an answer to this question: namely that nonhuman animals from Europe were important actors in the European colonialization of the “new world”.⁶ The fact that the human colonizers themselves were not unaware of this can be seen in a remark by George Forster, who accompanied James Cook on his second voyage (1772–1775). In the preface to his *Voyage round the World* (1784), Forster writes that Cook’s ships

are destined to carry the harmless natives of Taheitee a present of new domestic cattle. The introduction of black cattle and sheep on that fertile island, will doubtless increase the happiness of its inhabitants; and this gift may hereafter be conducive, by many intermediate causes, to the improvement of their intellectual faculties. And here I cannot but observe, that considering the small expence at which voyages of discovery are carried on, the nation which favours these enterprizes is amply repaid by the benefit derived to our fellow-creatures. I cannot help thinking that our late voyage would reflect immortal honour on our employers, if it had no other merit than stocking Taheitee with goats, the Friendly Isles and New Hebrides with dogs, and New Zealand and New Caledonia with hogs (12).

⁵ See, for instance, the entry in the database *Phthiraptera.info*. To be sure, the name of this species of louse is marked as “invalid”, but the name of the zoologist who first described it retains its validity.

⁶ I am using “actor” here in Bruno Latour’s (2005) sense. On “colonizing animals” see, for example, Crosby 1986; Anderson 2004; Griffith and Robin 1997; Pelzer-Reith 2011; and Krüger 2014.

Forster's statement is informed by the usual Enlightenment optimism: these European hogs will make better people out of the indigenous inhabitants of these Pacific islands. But in 1778, when Cook arrived in the Sandwich Islands (thus 'discovering' them for Europe), he and his men left behind more than just pigs and goats, as Hoffmann's informant Chamisso would observe when he visited the island a few decades later: "our common mouse [...] the flea, some species of blatta, and other noxious parasites" had also settled the island ("Remarks and Opinions" 3, 237).

Between Forster's sanguine vision of the colonial animals' rationalising influence on the Pacific islanders and Chamisso's rather sceptical account of an island recently beset by parasites lies a period of just forty years. To be sure, Chamisso also praises the systematic import of European species, which allow the industrious colonial farmer to extract "new sources of prosperity from the soil with the varieties of useful plants and animals that he has introduced" (*A Voyage around the World* 120):

He has assiduously introduced and multiplied our various kinds of animals and plants. He has near Hana-ruru numerous herds of cattle (Goats seem to be more generally spread). He possesses horses, and will increase the breed of asses and mules, which are more useful in these mountains ("Remarks and Opinions" 3, 237).

But this agricultural optimism is tempered by the more critical reference on the same page to the "common mouse [...] the flea, some species of blatta, and other noxious parasites."⁷ Chamisso uses the uncommon loan-word *Parasit* here, instead of *Schmarotzer*, which would have been more usual at the time, and this lexical choice—like Hoffmann's use of phthirapterology—can also be traced back to the entomological writings of Olfers and Nitzsch.

Of course, according to Nitzsch, neither the mice, nor fleas, nor "blatta" (i.e. cockroaches) are parasites in the strict sense. Even "fleas", Nitzsch writes, "are not entirely continuous parasites", and must thus be excluded from the category of "insecta epizoica". They could only be considered parasites if one were to broaden the term considerably (Nitzsch 263). Thus, at the very moment when Nitzsch is defining parasitism as a zoological concept, we can observe two opposing tendencies that will continue to haunt the conceptual and scientific history of the parasite: conceptual restriction, on the one hand, and metaphorical extension, on the other. Nitzsch emphasizes

⁷ Chamisso's comments are confirmed by later historiography; e.g. Kuykendall 28: "Among the importations were some not intended and certainly not desired such as fleas, mosquitoes, citipedes, and scorpions". Note also the dates given by Kuykendall for the importation of goats, cows, horses, etc.

that the latter tendency is grounded in the nature of the term, which does not describe ontological facts but rather functional relations: “Parasite”, Nitzsch writes, does not refer to animals belonging to an “essential kinship group” (263), but rather to animals exhibiting a specific relationship to other animals. Johann August Ephraim Goeze, whose 1776 treatise on *Insects on animals and even on insects* Nitzsch quotes in the context of his discussion of the dove louse (of which more in a moment), goes so far as to relate the determination of this specific relationship back to himself in an elaborate *mise-en-abyme*: “And it is truly a marvel to observe that upon insects there live still other insects. And so it continues in a well-nigh unbroken chain to infinity; or in any case further than our understanding and our eye can reach” (Goeze 253–286). The fact that this combination of self-reference, infinity, and transcendence provides all the necessary ingredients for a Romantic zoology will not have been lost on Romantics like Chamisso and Hoffmann.

In its rhetorically contrived mirror symmetry, the title of Olfers’s treatise, *animatis corporibus in corporibus animatis*, likewise dramatizes the self-reference of parasitism. One animal body refers to another animal body. Because the word “parasite” does not describe an essence (an ontology) but rather a relationship, “any definition of the term must needs be somewhat arbitrary, given the transitions involved” (263). This tendency toward conceptual extension and metaphorical transfer is also at work in Chamisso’s reference to the house mice and cockroaches that inhabit O’ahu. Both are *cultural* parasites, not animal parasites: the mouse’s host organism is the house; the cockroach’s is the kitchen.

Chamisso refers to parasitism in the context of a distinction he is drawing between *allochthonous* and *autochthonous* species, i.e. non-native species imported by humans and indigenous, non-imported species, respectively. The former category is further divided into *neozoa* (species introduced by Europeans after 1492) and *archaeozoa* (species introduced before 1492 by non-Europeans): “The only original wild quadrupeds of the Sandwich islands are a small bat and the rat. To these is added our common mouse; besides the flea, some species of blatta, and other noxious parasites. The oxen are now grown wild in the interior of Owhyee, where the king sometimes has them killed for his table” (“Remarks and Opinions” 3, 237). Thus, among the neozoa Chamisso discovers both useful domestic animals and “noxious parasites”. With regard to the latter, two questions present themselves: How is Chamisso able to distinguish so confidently between autochthonous and allochthonous parasites? And what are the “*other* noxious parasites” to which he refers?

Presumably, Chamisso is extrapolating from the recent cultural history of Hawai’i and the other Sandwich Islands: He observes the poor health of

the islanders and concludes, drawing on his experiences at sea, that zoonoses, i.e. diseases transmitted by animals, must be to blame. James Cook himself had noted “the spread of sexual diseases from his crew to native populations” (qtd. in Haley xxxii) of the Pacific Islands he visited. In Hawai‘i, for instance, he observed the quick spread of syphilis, which had been introduced to the island by his men.⁸ And on his third voyage, which resulted in his death in 1779 on Hawai‘i, he would also acknowledge the connection between seafaring Europeans (British, Spanish, Russian, Dutch), infectious diseases (“diphtheria, typhus, tuberculosis, smallpox, viral infections, and syphilis” [Küchler Williams 25]), and parasites (“fleas, lice, and rats” [ibid.]). Forty years later, Chamisso would witness the full extent of a process of which Cook had observed only the initial stages: As a result of this contact with Europeans, the population of the Sandwich Islands, which in 1780 is estimated to have been around 250,000, had been cut almost in half, to around 140,000, by 1820.⁹

The specific relationships between certain animals and certain diseases were still largely unclear around 1800. Nevertheless, it was obvious that there was a connection. Particularly biting animals like lice left behind a visible and palpable trace of their spread through the population, and thus served as an index of the contact between Europeans and the indigenous population. Wherever the bites of head lice (*pediculus captivus*) and body lice (*pediculus humanus*) were observed, infectious diseases were also found; wherever the pubic louse (*pediculus pubis*) struck, sexually transmitted diseases followed.¹⁰

Against this background, the association between a louse and a love scene enacted in Hoffmann’s “Haimatochare” must appear in a somewhat different light.¹¹ On the basis of the historical situation and Chamisso’s account, Hoffmann understands that the louse, as an animal vector between the European colonizers and the indigenous island population, creates a peculiar “contact-zone” (Pratt 1991; Haraway 2008) whereby a seemingly binary relationship (European–Native) gets triangulated (European–Louse–Native). In his report on the autochthonous and allochthonous fauna of the

⁸ Cf. Haley xxxv, also for the relevant debate as to whether Cook truly was the first European to set foot on Hawai‘i.

⁹ This is a cautious estimate provided by Stephen J. Kunitz (47); Kunitz refers to other estimates which put the population at the time of Cook’s arrival at closer to one million inhabitants, but which still put the population in 1820 at 140,000 (46).

¹⁰ On the epidemic of lice as experienced by European travellers to the Sandwich Islands in the 1820s, see also Haley 81.

¹¹ Cf. Weinstein 2002; Dürbeck 2008. Incidentally, Hoffmann himself had contracted syphilis in 1807, which led to his death in 1822.

Sandwich Islands, Chamisso refers only very generally to “other noxious parasites”, but he does elsewhere acknowledge the fact that ships like the *Rurik*, aboard which he sailed around the world, were instrumental in the spread of lice, namely in a rather humorous passage referring to their departure from the Aleutian Islands:

Perhaps it will be characteristic in more than one respect to confess that I myself have learned and remembered only a single word of the Aleutian language: *kitung* (i.e. *pediculus*). And, with respect to the word *kitung*, casting a look at the gloomy north in parting, I shall note for the sake of completeness that during our northern journey in the years 1816 and 1817 the above-mentioned was nothing rare on the *Rurik* [...] (*A Voyage around the World* 179).

Pediculus is on board. Chamisso does not explain where and when *pediculus* came aboard: whether it was already there when they left Europe, or later, during their sojourn on the Sandwich Islands, or indeed not until they reached the Aleutian Islands. It is highly unlikely that the *Rurik* was louse-free when it set sail from Europe. And yet chronologically, Chamisso restricts the louse infestation to the years 1816 and 1817 and geographically to the northern campaign, thus implicitly excluding the ship’s departure in July of 1815. The precise point in his narrative at which Chamisso mentions the lice is instructive for our reading of Hoffmann’s novella, however, for the very next sentence marks the beginning of the chapter describing his voyage from the Aleutian Islands to the Sandwich Islands and his “Second Sojourn There” (*A Voyage Around the World* 180). In other words, for Chamisso, too, the lice lead directly to Woahoo.

Now, Hoffmann not only adopts this constellation for his story, but also at the same time inverts it: he turns the historical situation around, since in his tale it is not the European lice that sink their deadly probosces into the flesh of the native population, but rather it is a local louse that takes up residence in the heads of two European scientists, with fatal results. Chamisso—and for the time this is truly remarkable—takes note of the implicit violence of the colonizing animals that play their part in the establishment of the British-European Empire. Hoffmann takes this one step further in his story, which shows how this violence turns back on the colonizers: The Animal Empire bites back. These animal bites ultimately become legible as signs, a subcutaneous language that even the most obtuse human understands.

Hoffmann’s text thus gains an analytic force that extends beyond the questions of Postcolonialism and into the arena of Animal Studies. First, the text mobilises a common imperialist analogy, whereby the relationship

between the Europeans and the indigenous peoples is seen as comparable to the relationship between man and animal, thus conflating an imperialistic difference with an anthropological one. Around 1800, this analogy becomes morally overdetermined. To paraphrase George Forster: Just as humans have domesticated wild animals, Europeans can domesticate (civilize) the savages. And what is more, you don't even need European humans for this; European cattle will suffice. Thus, the doubling of anthropological and imperialistic difference results in a double disparagement: first the indigenous peoples are equated with animals, only then to be placed below European domesticated animals in the hierarchy.

Chamisso himself troubles this common analogy. In his account, it is not only domesticated animals that the Europeans bring with them but also parasites. Thus, it becomes evident that the European presence is not purely beneficial, but also harmful to the Pacific Islanders. This in turn makes it at least possible to read the "other noxious parasites" as including the Europeans themselves, and hence to interpret imperialism as a variety of parasitism. For "parasite", as Nitzsch emphasises, refers to a structure of relation: it describes a *relationship* that obtains between one organism and another. Indeed, this is why the concept lends itself so readily to metaphorisation.

Hoffmann seizes upon this metaphorical potential, giving it an additional idiosyncratic twist by making the louse the eponymous heroine and her death the climax of his story: here nonhuman animals are not simply the objects of human action, but rather actors in their own right. *Haimatochare* [αἱματοχαρής] means "delighting in blood" in ancient Greek. If we follow Hoffmann's story, it is the joyful bite of this little animal that makes a difference. Thus, the louse becomes legible as an actor in Bruno Latour's sense, a "thing that [modifies] a state of affairs by making a difference" (71). If we take human abilities as the default when approaching the question of whether animals can be attributed 'agency', then we cannot expect much from a louse. If it has a mind at all, then it will be comparatively dull; if a louse has feelings at all, they will be comparatively minor; if a louse has a will at all, it will be comparatively simple. But if we approach the question from the perspective of new materialism, then even a louse can potentially be an actor. From this perspective, Hoffmann's louse is not merely an animal mask for a human subject, but rather in a strong sense an animal actor. The louse may be small, weak, and stupid, but it can write. For its bite, to borrow a phrase from Donna Haraway, is a "material-semiotic action" (30). When man meets louse, "material-semiotic nodes or knots" are formed, "in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another" (4). Hoffmann's text thus makes explicit that which was only implicit in Forster's optimistically pedagogical version and Chamisso's pessimistically epidemiological one: animals in general and lice

in particular are active participants in the complex process that we have come to refer to as Western Imperialism.

By combining the perspectives of Animal Studies and Postcolonial Studies we can see how this louse named Haimatochare is a prominent representative of the Animal Empire. Hoffmann shows how on the one hand this Animal Empire is complicit in the processes of colonization, while also, on the other hand, developing a wilful and unpredictable mind of its own that threatens to deconstruct both the anthropocentric distinction between autochthony and allochthony as well as the Eurocentric distinction between archaeobiota and neobiota.

The literary device Hoffmann uses in order to set this deconstruction in motion is a trap, indeed a double trap, which he sets for the reader, whereby the second trap is hidden inside the first. First, the text lures the reader into the trap of believing Haimatochare to be a human being; only in retrospect does it become clear that she was an animal all along. In a letter to Chamisso, Hoffmann himself described this trap as the core of the story (3, 1102–1103), and all of the published scholarly interpretations of the text have involved the explication of this device. But the fact that this first trap, once revealed, immediately sets off another, has so far gone almost entirely unnoticed (a notable exception here is Gabriele Dürbeck's reading 169). Having discovered Haimatochare's true identity, the reader is now lured into this secondary trap of believing the louse to be an autochthonous animal, and that Menzies and Broughton's deadly quarrel had thus revolved around being the first to describe an albeit small, but nevertheless exotic species. With regard to the first trap, the story provides a clear resolution: Haimatochare is an animal. With regard to the second, the story instead creates ambiguity: Haimatochare may not in fact be an autochthonous animal but rather an allochthonous and even potentially neobiotic one. Or perhaps she is none of the above.

In order to see just how closely Hoffmann's text—via Chamisso—follows these specialist entomological questions, we have only to return to Olfers's *De vegetativis et animatis corporibus in corporibus animatis reperiundis commentarius*. No fewer than four paths lead directly from Olfers's phthirapterology into the argumentative framework of the sort of zoological colonialism at issue in Hoffmann's "Haimatochare". First, in 1816, immediately following the publication of his *Commentarius*, Olfers set off on a voyage of discovery to South America (cf. Donop 1887). Thus, while Hoffmann was writing his story, Olfers was in the jungles of Brazil doing exactly what Menzies is doing on Woahoo: advancing his research.¹²

¹² Cf. Schröter 103. Olfers probably left Brazil again in May 1820 (*ibid.*); in December 1820 he is reported to be in Berlin (Abeken 2:40; cf. Parthey 266). In other words, Olfers was probably not back in Berlin until after the publication of

Evidently, there is an inner correlation between the rise of phthirapterology in the early nineteenth century and the intensification of European Imperialism. This correlation may also be felt in Hoffmann's text.

Second, Olfers's definition of *pediculus pubescens* itself contains not just an entomological but also an ethnological aspect: "*Hab.* [...] in homine, Hottentottis, Groenlandisque escam dilectam praebens", "lives on man, a source of food for Hottentots and Greenlanders, who regard it as a delicacy" (Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke* 1108). It is important to note that Hoffmann did not invent this particular configuration, but rather found it in the scientific literature: the information regarding this louse and its status in Hottentot and Eskimo cuisine is not a literary fiction but rather a "scientific fact".¹³ Thus it is not artistic license that allows Hoffmann to make the connection between the study of parasitic insects and the colonisation of the New World in his story; it is a salient feature of contemporary phthirapterology itself. In part, this is inherent in the nature of the field, insofar as parasitism, being a structure of relation, requires a reference to the parasite's host: "*Hab. in*" (Olfers 1818, *passim*: "lives on"). And this in turn reveals the extent to which the field of phthirapterology in the early nineteenth century was saturated with the structures of Eurocentric prejudice which Hoffmann's story critically reflects: The "scientific fact" of the Eskimo-Hottentot-louse is preconditioned by the European narrative of the filthy and primitive non-Europeans. This is further underlined by the fact that, in addition to the Greenlanders and Hottentots, Olfers also lists two other primate species as

Haimatochare. It is not unlikely that Hoffmann and Olfers had met, given that their social circles overlapped to a considerable extent (for details of who frequented the Berlin Salons at the time, see Wilhelmy 1989), but there is no hard evidence of an acquaintance between the two (thanks to Petra Wilhelmy-Dollinger for this information). That Olfers and Chamisso knew each other is documented in various letters, all of which were written after Hoffmann's death, however. All the same, I would like to imagine that Chamisso introduced Olfers to Hoffmann's story, and that he thus did in fact receive the homage concealed in the literary reference to the two Olfersian species of louse. After all, there is evidence that Olfers was an enthusiastic reader of Hoffmann: his daughter Marie von Olfers writes in a letter that "Papa is reading E.Th. Hoffmann, his daily bread" (335 [I once again thank Petra Wilhelmy-Dollinger for this reference]).

¹³ Whereby the term "scientific fact" should be regarded not as an objective, empirical given, but rather as the object of consensus within a particular scientific community at a particular historical moment (cf. Fleck 1983). In a journal entry dated April 1st, 1825, published the following year in *The Christian Advocate*, the Presbyterian missionary Rev. Charles Samuel Stewart, reported with horror that "the lower classes of people not only suffer their heads and tapas to harbour the most filthy of vermin; but they openly and unblushingly eat them!" (412; cf. Haley 81).

potential hosts: “Inventus etiam est in cercopitheco Panisco et simia Troglodyte” (81); “also to be found on guenons and chimpanzees.” Hoffmann, in turn, has only to cite the reference to the eating habits of the Hottentots in order to reveal the inherent racism underlying the construction of this scientific fact, and what in Olfers’s text had been a tiny detail, buried among a plethora of zoological description, in Hoffmann’s story is singled out and enlarged, as if under a microscope.

And when Chamisso refers to the *pediculus* in the context of the Aleutians, i.e. at the furthest possible distance from his native Europe, at the pivotal point in the voyage when the journey turns from outbound to homeward bound, he too is invoking the racist narrative that associates lice with non-Europeans. Even the reference he makes during their first sojourn on the Sandwich Islands to the “other noxious parasites” that have proliferated there as a result of European colonialism is later retroactively coloured by this narrative when, during their second sojourn, he describes the encounter between the Aleutian Kadu, whom they have brought with them from the farthest point of lousedom—*ultima phthiraptera*, if you will—and the inhabitants of O-Waihi (now Hawai‘i): “The O-Waihians were kind and obliging to him, and he mixed happily with the people” (*A Voyage Around the World* 181). A lousy Aleutian mixes happily with the O-Waihians; and such human mixtures invariably go hand-in-hand with nonhuman mixtures. This transfer of lice, orchestrated by Europeans and undoubtedly involving European lice as well, is not made explicit in Chamisso’s text. By making a louse the eponymous heroine of his Hawaiian fiction, in which he moreover cites Olfers’s entomo-ethnological definition of *pediculus pubescens*, Hoffmann brings to the fore what had only been in the background of Chamisso’s account: the louse as a creature of Animal Empire.

The third connection to zoological colonialism lies in the host species listed for the *nirmus crassicornis*: “Hab. in anate Anser e et Boschade” (*De vegetativis et animatis corporibus* 89: “living on ducks, geese, and mallards”).¹⁴ It is not unlikely that *nirmus crassicornis* could have made it as far as O‘ahu by the 1810s on the backs of such as imported species as the mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) or the red junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*).¹⁵ But nor is it

¹⁴ The translation provided in the commentary (Hoffmann 1109) gives *Huhn* (“chicken, hen”) for “Boschade”, whereas Robertson gives “teal”. In fact, however, “*Anas boschas*” appears to be a (now-obsolete) designation for the mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*. —Trans.

¹⁵ On the allochthonous status of these birds, cf. <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org> (or *The Howard & Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World*). See also the rich assortment of poultry introduced by the colonizers of these islands, listed in Wyß and Wyß (1812).

inconceivable that the parasite may have arrived on the Islands long before Cook, carried there by brants (*Branta bernicla*) or pintails (*Anas acuta*).¹⁶ But more important than the question of whether *nirmus crassicornis* is an allochthonous or autochthonous species of louse on O‘ahu is the opposition established by the listed host species: whereas in the case of *pediculus pubescens* Olfers refers to the outlandish culinary tastes of Greenlanders and Hottentots, his reference to ducks and geese as hosts for the *nirmus crassicornis* evokes two favourite varieties of European poultry. Menzies’s “Haimatochare” thus occupies an intermediary position between not only two species of parasite, but also two cultural spheres. This constitutive liminality is not entirely of Hoffmann’s own making: he does not invent two ostensibly scientific descriptions out of whole cloth, but rather selects them from among the nineteen species of *pediculus* and sixty-eight species of *nirmus* that Olfers places at his disposal (cf. 80–97). With this selection, Hoffmann, no doubt assisted by Chamisso, succeeds in reducing this vast field of knowledge down to a clear opposition between Self and Other along cultural and culinary lines: on the one hand, the crunchy louse; on the other, the crispy duck.

Thus, Menzies’s Olfers-inspired definition places Haimatochare squarely at the intersection of Europe and non-Europe. But, and this is the fourth path leading from Olfers’s *Commentarius* to the discourse of zoological colonialism, in Hoffmann’s story the louse is discovered neither on the body of a non-European Eskimo, nor yet on that of a European duck, but rather, as the text emphasises twice over, on that of a “dove” (678). Ornithologically speaking, this would seem to be an open-and-shut case: all four of the dove species to be found on O‘ahu, i.e. the rock dove (*Columba livia*), the spotted dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*), the mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), and the zebra dove (*Geopelia striata*), are considered to be non-native.¹⁷ Thus the host organism on which Haimatochare is discovered refers not only to the symbolism of the Biblical flood, but also once more to the Animal Empire, which, in the 1810s had already spread so far around the globe that a European naturalist on the Island of O‘ahu can shoot a European animal and find, nestled among its feathers, another European animal. Europe sets off to discover the New World only to encounter its own animals there.

But there is more to it than that. While it is true that, from an ornithological perspective, the dove-as-host refers unambiguously back to Europe, at the same time, Olfers’s *Commentarius* also supplies an entomological clue that serves once again to distance Haimatochare from the

¹⁶ On the autochthonous status of these two species, cf. <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org> (or, again *Howard & Moore*); this also offers a slight corrective to Dürbeck’s comments (169).

¹⁷ Cf. <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org> (or *Howard & Moore*. 4th edition).

ordinary everyday reality of the European louse. For, as Olfers notes, the species of louse one would ordinarily expect to find feeding on a dove bears the name “N. [sc. *Nirmus*] *filiformis* [...]. *Hab. in columba Oenate*” (90–91). If, upon inspecting the body of a dove, one were to find a louse that is not simply a “dove-louse”¹⁸ or part of an often-deadly infestation of “*pediculus Columbae*”,¹⁹ but rather “an entirely new genus” (Hoffmann 678), and if, moreover, this appraisal is issued by a man who is demonstrably familiar with Olfers and all the latest phthirapterology, then it seems the Haimatochare louse may indeed be a truly extraordinary creature: not simply a species of European louse that is rediscovered in some far-flung corner of the world thanks to European colonial expansion; nor yet a species of louse transported to that far-flung corner of the world by that same European colonial expansion; but rather a species of louse which, like innumerable other species, exists *only* in the contact-zone between European colonialism and the non-European world.

Certainly, I am not suggesting that Hoffmann intended this in an evolutionary sense. Charles Darwin will not set sail on the *Beagle* until 1831. Rather, I mean this to be understood in terms of (post)colonial and animal theory: the Haimatochare louse is neither autochthonous nor allochthonous, neither archaeobiotic nor neobiotic. It is not autochthonous because without colonialism it would not exist. It is not allochthonous because it was not brought to the island by humans. It is not archaeobiotic because it is not linked to any of the domesticated animals that were on the island before Cook’s arrival there. And it is not neobiotic because it was not simply introduced along with the domesticated animals that the Europeans brought with them. Thus, Haimatochare turns out to be a creature that calls all of the zoological hierarchies and taxonomies produced and exploited by European colonialism into question: Haimatochare is a dangerous idea, and as such no circumspect Governor will allow it to be exhibited in the British Museum; rather he will order it to be weighed down and banished to the bottom of the ocean. E.T.A. Hoffmann, by contrast, saw fit to bring this dangerous idea to life, in the shape of this short yet remarkable literary text.

—Translated by Kári Driscoll

¹⁸“*Taubenlaus*”: the German designation given by Franz von Paula Schrank (506), which Olfers cites.

¹⁹Cf. Goeze 256, qtd. by Olfers in his description of “N. *filiformis*” (91).

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