



first publication

Nicht unerwähnt bleiben darf hier [...] Hellenbachs meisterhafte kleine Novelle im Jules Verneschen Stil: Die Insel Mellonta. In dem Traumbilde, welches er da zeichnet, schildert er in geistreich liebenswürdiger Weise nach Fouriers phantastischen Entwürfen den glücklichen Zustand einer menschlichen Gesellschaft in jeder Hinsicht so verwirklicht, wie er ihn ersehnte – frei von fast allen Vorurteilen und das Leben eine Lust idealer Menschen. (Hübbe-Schleiden 77)¹


 1 Hübbe-Schleiden, Wilhelm: Hellenbach: Der Vorkämpfer für Wahrheit und Menschlichkeit. Leipzig: Max Spohr 1891, p. 77: »We cannot overlook here [...] Hellenbach's masterful little novella, written in the style of Jules Verne, *Mellonta Island*. In the fantasy that he portrays he depicts in an intellectually stimulating, kindhearted way the happy state of a community following Fourier's incredible sketches, realized in every detail as he perceived it – free of almost all prejudices and with a sense of an ideal human life.«

2 Cf. Bloch, Ernst: Abschied von der Utopie? Vorträge. Ed. by Hanna Gekle. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1980, p. 110.

 3 Bloch, Ernst: Prinzip Hoffnung. 3 vols. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1959, p. 724.

4 Ibid., p. 714.

5 Ibid.: »To this category [i.e. abstract utopia] belongs Hertzka's *A Journey to Freiland* (1889 [sic]), with a Freiland maiden in it, mildly land reforming.«

 6 One of the few publicly available information on Lazar von Hellenbach is part of an online-paper on the history of parapsychology in Austria: »The field of parapsychology proper in Austria may be seen to have started with Lazar, Baron Hellenbach von Paczolay (1827-87). [...] Being friendly with the German philosopher Carl du Prel, half a generation his junior, and with the astrophysicist Friedrich Zöllner (famous for his theory of four spatial dimensions in conjunction with his experiments with Slade), von Hellenbach succeeded in bringing a number of mediums to Vienna for experiments, including Eglinton, Slade, and Bastian. [...] Yet Hellenbach was critically minded, and was extremely critical of Spiritists whom he called gullible. Though primarily a philosopher, he was a keen experimenter as well; in his own experiments with mediums, Hellenbach could witness a number of physical phenomena, including moving of furniture and even levitations. [...] Hellenbach was also interested in the history of alchemy

According to Ernst Bloch, an abstract utopia is the bare conception for an overhaul of existing social relationships without concrete regard of the developmental readiness of societal conditions. In other words, an abstract utopian narrative disregards the objective-utopian-tendency-latency in a given society, and is in fact little concerned with the possibility of its practical realization.² It is in this sense that Bloch views the post-Marxists' narrative utopias of the second half of the nineteenth century:

the abstract utopias devoted nine-tenths of their pages to the portrait of the future state and only one-tenth to the critical, often only negative, observation of the here and now. By so doing the goal was rendered colorfully and vivaciously, but the path to it, in so far as it could originate from the existing circumstances, remained obscure.³

On the other hand the »utopian tendencies were at least kept afloat by these romantic devices. The prophetic entertainment novel accomplished the same end among the non-proletarian classes in the curious petit bourgeoisie.«⁴ Hence, he applied this negative assessment to those bourgeois futuristic novels, which were seen as a response to Karl Marx's historical materialism, such as Theodor Hertzka's *Freiland* (1889)⁵ or Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Paradies am Dienster* (1877).

The now little remembered novel *Insel Mellonta* (1883) by the Austrian philosopher Lazar Baron von Hellenbach, was not only written at the same time as Hertzka and Sacher-Masoch were writing, but it was also written by an outsider to the established literary scene in Vienna. At first glance von Hellenbach's socially emancipated *Insel Mellonta* seems to fit without difficulty into Bloch's category. Yet, with its intricate narrative structure it stands aside from this simple categorization. Consequently, I would like to pursue the question of the extent to which von Hellenbach used the utopian genre merely as a narrative vehicle to bring his theosophical philosophy before a broader audience of readers. Using the case of *Insel Mellonta*, I would like to illustrate the extent to which the utopian narrative, even absent the »real« experience of the encounter between Polynesians and Europeans, was informed by the real relationships and conflicts of the heterogeneous population within the Habsburg multi-ethnic state. Furthermore, I would like to show that Austrian liberal authors developed a discourse in which they rethink Europe, precisely at a time when other European intellectuals were mired in the concept of Nation as something trans-historical. Yet, von Hellenbach's narration is steeped in the contemporaneous European debates about colonialism and utopianism, even though it thrives on inversions, hybridizations and transgressions of the dominant discourse.

*

Lazar Baron von Hellenbach is known today – if at all – only in parapsychological circles.⁶ Von Hellenbach, a self-identified »cross product of Magyar, Slavic and Germanic blood«⁷, was born in 1827 in Slovakia, went to school in Vienna, studied at the Prague University, traveled extensively in Europe and dedicated the last 20 years of his life to his scientific publications. He died in 1887 in Nice, France.⁸ The baron authored a theory that humans had a manifestation of being, which he called a »metaorganism« residing between the physical body and the spiritual Self (i.e. soul). He deemed this »metaorganism« to be capable of extrasensory perception. He ascribed to it paranormal abilities like clairvoyance, telepathy, or thought transmission. Von Hellenbach viewed birth and death as no more than experiential changes. One English language translation of his work refers to this phenomenon as a »change of perception«.⁹ In his view humans have a double nature, consisting of a phenomenological consciousness and



and several other topics that could be summarized as anomalistics rather than parapsychology.« In: Mulacz, Peter: History of Parapsychology in Austria. In: The Austrian Parapsychological Society, 08.07.2003, <http://www.to.or.at/~psi/history.htm>

7 Hellenbach, Lazar Baron v.: Die Antisemitische Bewegung. Leipzig: O. Mutze 1883, p. 41.

8 The biographical information follows Anton Neuhäusler's article on Lazar von Hellenbach published in: Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Neue Deutsche Biographie. Vol. 8. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 1969, p. 467f. For further biographical information consult the contemporary study by the German colonialist and theosophist leader Hübbe-Schleiden, Wilhelm: Hellenbach: Der Vorkämpfer für Wahrheit und Menschlichkeit. Leipzig: Max Spohr 1891.

9 Hellenbach, Lazar Baron v.: Birth and Death. As a Change of Form of Perception: Or, The Dual Nature of Man. Trans. v.c. London: Psychological Pr. 1886, p. 3.

10 Cf. reference to Blavatsky and Sinnet in Hellenbach, Lazar Baron v.: Geburt und Tod als Wechsel der Anschauungsform oder die Doppelnatur des Menschen. Leipzig: O. Mutze 1887, pp. 217-222.

11 For a detailed historical overview, cf. Sawicki, Diethard: Leben mit den Toten: Geisterglauben und die Entstehung des Spiritismus in Deutschland 1770-1900. Paderborn: Schöningh 2002.

12 Hellenbach, Lazar Baron v.: Das 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Kritik der Gegenwart und Ausblicke in die Zukunft. Ed. by Carl du Prel. Leipzig: O. Mutze 1893, p. viii.

13 Adorno, Theodor W.: Minima Moralia. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1951, p. 321f.

14 Cf. Hermand, Jost: Old Dreams of a New Reich: Volkish Utopias and National Socialism. Bloomington: Indiana UP 1992, pp. 26-74.

15 Zander, Helmut: Sozialdarwinistische Rassentheorien aus dem okkulten Untergrund des Kaiserreichs. In: Handbuch der Völkischen Bewegung 1871-1918. Ed. by Uwe Puschner et al. München: Saur 1996, pp. 224-251, here p. 226.

16 Ibid., p. 236.

17 Sawicki 2002, p. 334.

a transcendental, reincarnating Self. According to the baron, the soul incorporates the unfolding story of life as it evolves toward the quest for fulfillment. As we will see, he follows in his writings the tri-fold programmatic of Helena Petrowna Blavatsky's *Theosophical Movement*, which firstly posits a general brotherhood of all men regardless of race, religion and gender, secondly recommends the study of Arian literature, religion and the sciences of the East, and lastly tries to explicate the unknown laws of nature as well as the latent power of the human soul.¹⁰ Despite the close kinship of his views to those of theosophy, von Hellenbach does not characterize himself as a spiritualist, because parapsychological phenomena are not viewed by him as external revelation but instead as indicators of an internal, innate intelligent essence. Still, the assignment of von Hellenbach to the theosophical movement should in no way be elevated to indicate a general differentiation or delimitation within the often overlapping spiritual debates and discourses within the German-speaking territories.¹¹ Apart from his theosophical-philosophical writings and his colonial utopia *Insel Mellonta* (1883), von Hellenbach also published several pamphlets and book-length studies about current political issues in the Habsburg monarchy such as *Die Okkupation Bosniens und deren Folgen* (1878), *Die Antisemitische Bewegung* (1883) und *Der Ungarisch-Kroatische Konflikt* (1883). Aside from his published work, von Hellenbach managed his estate in Paczolay, Croatia and served as a representative in the Croatian state parliament (1860-1867). Later, he moved to Vienna where he dedicated his time to his philosophical studies. In his role as a trailblazing parapsychologist in the Habsburg Empire, he wrote several books, which, at the time, had a profound influence on fashionable philosophical circles in Vienna and Munich. The philosopher Carl du Prel of Munich, who edited von Hellenbach's unpublished papers, describes him and his works:

As if [von Hellenbach] before his death, from lofty perspective, had thrown a last objective glance on our condition. He criticizes the 19th century, uncovers the roots of our evil, presents the means of healing – yet with the gloomy presentiment that his is a voice crying in the wilderness – presents to us then a view of the twentieth century, convinced that this view of the future will be self-fulfilling, whether on the path of peace, or – if his proposals should echo unheard – on the path to catastrophe.¹²

It is not difficult to find in occultism a bizarre breeding ground for chauvinistic ideas, even without Theodor Adorno's dictum, that occultism depicts »a symptom of the regression of the consciousness [and] a metaphysic for stupid rascals, [...] substituting bouncing tables and radiating dirt mounds for the rationality of reality.«¹³ Jost Hermand has analyzed the discourse of *Volksgemeinschaft* in the context of utopian and occultist writings.¹⁴ »Volkish utopias« are interesting, because even if they did not help to shape the politics of their time, they did mirror it faithfully in their ideology. *Volksgemeinschaft*, which is difficult to render in English and so is perhaps best left untranslated, refers to a mystical union of the Germanic people. This union encompasses the overriding ideal of German nationalists and chauvinists by purporting to make insignificant all class interest as well as individual aspirations. Closely allied to this idea of the mystical community is the notion of a *Führer*, a leader who by his charismatic personality directs his followers in what they should think and do. This notion of the leader is as ubiquitous in these occult-utopian writings and, as we will see later, it is perhaps not by accident, that the hero of *Insel Mellonta* is called Alexander and carries similarities to the Greek charismatic conqueror of the same name. In the German-speaking territory important proponents of spiritualism, who depicted a close association of occultism and theories of Germanic purity, enjoyed great popularity in the fin-de-siècle period. Yet, according to the political scientist Helmut Zander, von Hellenbach demonstrates how far a rash embrace of occultism can be misconstrued to lead to racist conceptions of Germanic purity. Zander sees in Lazar von Hellenbach writings »a barrier to a hasty stigmatization of the occultism with volkish ideas«,¹⁵ and positions the baron »politically on the side of socialism.«¹⁶ Whereas the historian Diethard Sawicki concedes in his recent study of occultism in Germany *Leben mit den Toten* (2002) that von Hellenbach »sympathized with socialist ideas and saw himself as a philanthropist« and also points out that »his philanthropic conviction did not hinder his entertaining a discreet anti-Semitism and his delineating a Malthusian euthanasia program, in which newborns were to be killed with chloroform or potassium cyanide in order to prevent overpopulation.«¹⁷

When the baron comes to address racial questions, the stress in his argumentation lies in his liberal-socialist inclination and that shapes his explanation of ethnic phenomena. In his



18 Hellenbach, Lazar Baron v.: Die Vorurtheile der Menschheit. 3 vols. Vol. 1. Leipzig: O. Mutze 1879/80, p. 263.

19 Ibid., p. 268.

20 Hellenbach 1883, p. 45.

21 Ibid., p. 51f.

commentaries about Jews, he interprets specifically Jewish qualities as resulting from their social situation for which they were not themselves responsible, but which was forced upon them:

The physiognomy and speech of the Jews generally offers nothing inviting or attractive; [...] If one observes the narrow, dirty city quarters, into which they have been everywhere confined, if one considers the contempt and persecution, which they suffer, then one will no longer be surprised at their disadvantageous racial characteristics.¹⁸

Or a little further along in the same excerpt:

The thought that the Jews are striving for the formation of a new national state, or as a comical member of parliament would have it, should be driven to do so by the state, is an impossibility. First of all, they don't want it, and secondly they could do it; the non-Jews have only themselves to blame that the Jews can only live in the *inter-cellular-substance* of the state organism and perish in the actual cell-complex. I have found all nationalities among the day laborers, masons, craftsmen, forest-, brick- and earth-workers, but no Jews. They are intelligent enough not to have to use their own hands but also too soft to be able to without the work of others.

This is one reason more why both parts should strive to set aside the limitations of a specific nationality, which is caricatured so easily by all nationalities. America, England, Hungary and other countries have likewise sufficient examples of characteristics that are part ridiculous, part nasty, and which lead to stereotypes and disparaging names. It's high time that the concept of »nation« fades into darkness and that of »humanity« comes into the light.¹⁹

Even though von Hellenbach would like to attack prejudices with his writings, he at the same time advances them (Jews as parasites of the money economy). On the other hand his call »to set aside the limitations of a specific nationality« sounds extremely enlightened and progressive. Also in token of the enlightenment, he speaks in his essay, *Die Antisemitische Bewegung* (1883), not against Jewish rituals *per se*, for it was mere superstition that they use Christian blood in them, but against religious rituals in general. The essay is a reprise of Karl Eugen Dühring's essay, *Judenfrage* (1881), which postulated ostensible Jewish racial characteristics. Von Hellenbach denounces as medieval Dühring's demand that the Jews be expelled from the German speaking countries. In contrast to Dühring, von Hellenbach demands assimilation: »they have to become English, French, etc. in fact and not just in name.«²⁰ According to the baron, Voltaire, Schopenhauer, even Fourier, all speak disparagingly of the Jews, while he himself refuses to »condemn the bloodline«. Von Hellenbach limits his analysis of the etiology of the Jewish question to traditional Jewish childrearing emphasizing ethnic solidarity. He asks: why has the Jewish emancipation yet to bear fruit? He then proceeds to answer that Jewish assimilation into Austrian society will only succeed after the problem of Jewish solidarity is addressed. He argues that what he sees as a false cosmopolitan solidarity needs to end, because »the Jew is no cosmopolitan since he isn't above the national squabble. He is much more a nomad moving about in the world; he shares this false cosmopolitanism with the Gypsies.«²¹ This statement, of course, in which von Hellenbach defines Jews as nomadic outsiders, shows how he was nevertheless affected by the contemporary anti-Semitic discourse in Austria and Germany. By allegedly lacking the ability to rise above the profane political squabble, the Jews constitute an extraordinary member of the Austrian society despite having been inorganically appended to the community. Needless to say, for the baron, true cosmopolitans are elitist members (e.g. aristocrats) of the Habsburg Empire who take the liberty to wander around without danger of losing touch with the community at home, which would – pushing Hellenbach's line of argumentation – render the Jews as a negative mirror image of aristocracy! Later in the same essay von Hellenbach doesn't make a case against Jewish wealth, but against the inequality of the distribution of wealth generally. His utopian plan is the redistribution of the inheritance of childless decedents to the social collective in order to rectify the disproportionality that individual capital grows continuously (due to interest earnings) while collective capital is understood to be steadily dropping (due to state indebtedness). With his theory of refined socialism, which differs pointedly from the radical contemporary socialism, he decisively rejects the acceptance of mass poverty as an economic, liberal necessity, and he advocates an increase of collective wealth. He criticizes vehemently positivistic science and its causally mechanistic explanatory models, which sought to displace the higher destiny of humankind. The central idea in his writings focuses on the struggle to improve the well-being of all people and not just the wealthy and the Jews.



*

22 After the first ed. (Vienna: C. Rosner 1883), the book was reprinted by W. Braumüller (Vienna 1885), followed by a third edition by O. Mutze (Leipzig 1896) and a fourth printing by R. Besser (Leipzig 1926).

23 Beyond publishing von Hellenbach's work, Carl Leopold Rosner shared the credit with Heinrich Laube for having discovered the extremely popular Austrian author Ludwig Anzengruber. Similarly he arranged for the Viennese flaneur Daniel Spitzer to collect his well-known sketches in Austria's leading liberal newspaper *Freie Neue Presse*, and he also published the work of essayist Ferdinand Kürnberger. Cf. Hall, Murray G.: *Österreichische Verlagsgeschichte 1918-1938*. Wien: Böhlau 1985.

In 1883 the highly respected Viennese publisher C. Rosner brought *Insel Mellonta* onto the market, and it went through three further editions.²² The number of printings, and the renown of the publisher, provide indicators that the novel, which today is little remembered, was in its day well known to the intellectual public.²³ In the third edition, the publisher's publicity release touted the book as a »corollary to *Bellamy's Looking Backward from 2000 to 1887*«. The plot of the utopia is as follows: A highly educated German aristocrat by the name of Alexander is shipwrecked and stranded in the Indian Ocean near a coral island, where he is rescued by natives. In the course of his stay in the island paradise, Alexander comes to learn the history of the island's inhabitants: the natives are descendants of noble French émigrés and their African wives, who have been living in a libertarian commune since the time of the French revolution far away from European civilization. In short order he is asked to report on the current state of European circumstances, in the course of which he comes to know the charming young lady named Aglaia. Afterwards he receives his first lessons about the social and economic relationships of the island commune from the »leader (Führer) and teacher« (39), Sophoron, who is assigned to him. The following morning his leader takes him on a hike through Mellonta in the course of which he comes to know the tropical paradise in all its abundance. During a climb up the highest mountain on the island, Olympus, Alexander sees the interior lake with its potable water, a vineyard district, and other agriculturally productive areas. In the afternoon he is introduced to Mellonta's somewhat primitive workshops by a group of shop leaders and by Musarion, the attractive and learned female leader of the Vestals (women under 22 years old). In the evening of the same day he converses with the Council of Grandfathers (men between 45 and 60 years old) about possible technical developmental deficiencies of Mellonta, and he declares himself prepared to review the entirety of their educational books.

In the course of the following weeks Alexander is accepted into the Mellonta commune, and he becomes popular among both the male and female inhabitants through nearly daily scientific presentations and musical performances. One evening the idea of a sailing tour comes up, and the very next morning Aglaia and Musarion accompany their mutual friend, Alexander, on the tour. That same evening there is a tête-à-tête between Aglaia, a Bachantin (childless woman over 22 years old) and Alexander. Although she prophesizes to him that Musarion is his true love, she gives herself up to him without remorse. Next he is told of a rare formal convening of the Council of the Grandfathers, who are to decide whether the islanders should pursue contact with the outside world. Alexander, who is the only one with experience of the outside world, elucidates the possibilities for the Council, and declares that he is ready if needed to lead the expedition. In the course of this meeting Alexander's preeminence within the commune becomes clear, and it is underscored by Musarion's concern about his eventual departure from the island. During the ensuing moonlit evening walk of Alexander, Musarion and Aglaia, Alexander learns from the erudite teachings of Musarion about the philosophy, religion and morality of his new home. In accordance with its tenets, children are dogmatically brought up in the spirit of the Socratic-Platonic worldview, which includes a divine Providence and the immortality of the Soul. Afterwards, Alexander is invited by Mellonta's group of young people to join them on an expedition in which up to 150 young adults participate.

The expedition is a mix of games and useful shared work. Alexander and Musarion get closer to each other during the lunch break after the expedition is cut short by a torrential downpour. During a communal evening meal Alexander does his best in performing three captivating songs, which have the effect of fully awakening in Musarion a passionate interest in him. Following the meal, Alexander is admitted by Musarion to her house »as first man«, and during the ensuing conversation he tells her his life story in the outer world, according to which he grew up in German rural isolation and undertook many journeys because of his aversion to the political circumstances in his homeland. His deep-seated melancholy mood was supposedly evoked by unhappy love affairs with egocentric and sadistic women. The theme of cruel female figures re-appears not only Sacher-Masoch's infamous novellas, but is also present in Herzl's *Altneuland*. Thus, nothing more was standing in the way of a union of the two. This idyllic, dreamlike existence is interrupted by a volcanic eruption as a result of which the island disappears into the ocean. Yet, the same glistening light, which reveals the doom of their world to the lovers, now illuminates a wise Brahman named Shakretes, who stands by Alexander as he awakens from his intensive dream. In the course of the developing

conversation the Indian makes clear to his aristocratic disciple that, while it was all actually only a dream, this must be seen as the manifestation of the inherent capabilities and experiential forms of the Soul. As evidence for this the Master undertakes with his German student a spiritual encounter during the course of which successive aspects of Mellonta are brought into relationship with personalities from Alexander's life. Even his lover, Musarion, appears during the séance in the form of a »light blue coloration« (228). The novel blue-toned coloring is one that does not yet exist on earth, thus indicating that renewed union with his beloved can only occur after Alexander's demise. Through this moving experience and the ensuing clarifications of Shakretes, Alexander finally becomes ready to distance himself from worldly social engagement and to accept his destiny. Thereby, he contents himself with having wanted goodness. As the story ends, Alexander is striding over the »spine of the majestic Himalayan mountain range«, and he finds his solace in the conviction that the »future will justify [...] the vision of his dream« (248).

*

24 Glaser, Horst A.: Utopische Inseln: Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte und Theorie. Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1996, p. 34.

25 Cf. Wagner, Hermann F.: Robinson in Österreich: Ein Beitrag zur Deutschen Robinson Literatur. Salzburg: H. Dieter 1886.

Up to the dramatic *peripeteia* in the text resulting from the volcanic eruption, von Hellenbach is following the usual schematic of an island utopia or a Robinson Crusoe saga. In his book *Utopische Inseln* (1996), the German literary scholar Horst A. Glaser gives the following definition:

With the classic utopian island the arriving traveler is led around as a visitor, and a well-organized state system *in actu* is presented and explained. In order to be able to report to the reader about the utopian island, the author, or a confidant of the author, must first have been there. That is to say that a fictitious travel report is provided: someone reports on that which he might have seen or heard along the way. The author, that is to say the reporter, of the utopian ideal state conducts himself like a tourist, who is shown the sights of the country. For a Robinson in contrast, the character is not a visitor but a worker. While a visitor can calmly view the institutions of the utopia, a Robinson tale tells of the triumphs and setbacks in the organization of simple survival. The classic utopia is a completely institutionalized world, while the Robinson tale in contrast offers a world in a raw state, which can be developed into a utopia. To that extent it presents the genesis of a utopia.²⁴

The utopian genre has been based from the start on a spatial displacement (u-topia), and the location of the action is often set on an island. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1624), as well as Tommaso Campanella's *City under the Sun* (1637) offer paradigmatic examples of this, upon which von Hellenbach may have drawn. Like *Insel Mellonta*, the above island utopias take place in the present, or at least in the immediate past, in order to more strongly emphasize the contrast between the historical real world (e.g. Europe) and island-based ideal state. According to the convention of a Robinson Crusoe saga, the main character is a first person narrator, with whom the reader can easily identify. However, von Hellenbach's Alexander is not a conventional first-person narrator, but instead the experiences of the educated aristocratic hero are given to us in the third-person, which in turn helps to objectify the narrative. Mellonta's names of localities and persons likewise follow the conventions of the genre in that they are all descriptive or allegorical names. With its epic structure and »deep« individual characters, *Insel Mellonta* is closer to a Robinson Crusoe saga than to a utopian narrative. But unlike Crusoe our shipwrecked hero is stranded on a remote island, where he converses with the virtuous, yet simultaneously hedonistic, members of a humanistic community. Despite the ideal state of the society on Mellonta Alexander's stature and influence on the community are considerably enhanced by his scientific and aesthetic education, and like a »Habsburg Robinson« he enlightens the graceful people about the technological achievements of the European modernity.²⁵ More importantly, von Hellenbach inverts the Robinson Crusoe saga and the utopian narrative through the peripetic dream. Although dreams are a commonplace in utopian novels of the 19th century, perhaps due to the groundbreaking success of Louis-Sebastian Mercier's *L'An 2440* (1770) in which the dream of the narrator for the first time renders a temporal rather than a spatial displacement. But in *Insel Mellonta* it is precisely Alexander's awakening from his dream that renders his utopian plan superfluous, unless the reader accepts von Hellenbach's spiritual program. In this respect, the author marries successfully the two neighboring genres and posits his novel in-between the conventional confines.

26 Cf. Innerhofer, Roland: *Deutsche Science Fiction: Rekonstruktion und Analyse der Anfänge einer Gattung*. Wien: Böhlau 1996, pp. 29-85 passim; Innerhofer, R.: »Julius« Verne in Österreich: Produktion und Rezeption eines Erfolgsautors. In: Amann, Klaus/Lengauer, Hubert/Wagner, Karl (Eds.): *Literarisches Leben in Österreich: 1848-1890*. Wien: Böhlau 2000, pp. 805-828.

27 Innerhofer 1996, p. 117.

28 Cf. Brüggemann, Fritz: *Utopie und Robinsonade: Studien zu Schnabels Insel Felsenburg 1731-1743*. Weimar: A. Dunker 1914, p. 85.

29 Vosskamp, Wilhelm: »Ein Irdisches Paradies«: Johann Gottfried Schnabels *Insel Felsenburg* (1731-43). *Literarische Utopien von Morus bis zur Gegenwart*. Ed. by Klaus L. Berghahn and Hans Ulrich Seeber. Königstein: Athenäum 1983, pp. 95-105, here p. 95f.

30 Stolberg, Friedrich Leopold Graf zu: *Die Insel*. 1788. Afterword by Siegfried Sudhof. Heidelberg: L. Schneider 1966, p. 28. Stolberg's vision of a »Leben in froher frommer freier Einfalt« anticipates the motto of »Turnvater« Jahn's volkish sport youth movement during the Napoleonic era!

31 Müller, Götz: *Gegenwelten: Die Utopie in der Deutschen Literatur*. Stuttgart: Metzler 1989, p. 132.

32 Cf. Spencer, M.C.: *Charles Fourier*. Boston: Twayne 1981, p. 13.

From the literary point of view, *Mellonta Island* borrows from several European authors. First, the theme and structure of the book can be traced to Jules Verne, whose importance for the genesis of German science fiction literature has been documented by the literary scholar Roland Innerhofer.²⁶ In *Insel Mellonta*, as in Verne's *L'île mystérieuse* (1874/75), »the carefully created island civilization is in the end demolished through a volcanic eruption, which causes the destruction of the island; all traces of the colonizing effort are once more extinguished.«²⁷ Through these extra-natural jolts in the narrative, the utopian societies are instantly relocated into the imaginary realm. Secondly, the story can be linked to the enlightened German novel *Insel Felsenburg* (1731-1743) by Johann Gottfried Schnabel. Schnabel's original adaptation of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) joins together the motif of the shipwrecked traveler stranded on a deserted island with the theme of an ideal commonwealth. The contrast between the late-feudal society of modern Europe with its cabals and intrigues, which is presented in the form of approximately twenty life stories, and the idyllic-patriarchal social order on Felsenburg island, defines the structure of the novel and lets it appear as a harbinger of bourgeois culture. For members of the lower and middle bourgeoisie, who come there from Europe, an island is not a place of *exile*, as is the case for Robinson Crusoe, but an *asylum*, from which they hope never to have to return to the land of their birth.²⁸ Aside from these striking content and structural agreements between the novels there are also notably formal similarities. According to the literary scholar Wilhelm Vosskamp, the novel not only has »the form of a two-tiered narrative«, but Schnabel also achieves »a novelistic composition, which is characterized by an inherent duality«. *Structurally*, there are two primary forms, the autobiographical-narrative and the utopia-descriptive discourse.²⁹

Thirdly, von Hellenbach adapts elements of Friedrich Leopold Graf zu Stolberg's *Insel* (1788) to advance his purpose. Stolberg orients his outline for an ideal republic according to a patriarchal structure for a society with little division of labor. By means of philosophical conversations between Sophron and his confidantes (Glaukos, Kallias, Hilaros), which take place on a small island in the Danube, the vision emerges of a isolated, self-contained, mountainous island with gentle climatic conditions which enables a »life of happy pious free naivety«³⁰ and a spiritual, Christian community. Complete equality of social status and wealth, and an informally regulated balancing of work and leisure create conditions for the »education of a new breed of humans« that is to be subject to as few laws and regulations as possible. The two novels are comparable not only because of their dream character, the regressive form of their idylls and their enthusiasm for the culture of the ancient Greeks, but also for their shared structural positioning between a Crusoe-like adventure tale and a utopian narrative. As the literary scholar Götz Müller in his study *Gegenwelten: Die Utopie in der deutschen Literatur* (1989) demonstrates:

The basic model of the Crusoe-tale is the *forced dissociation* from civilization; the formative thought of the classic utopia is the conscious break from tradition. With Stolberg a *voluntary renunciation* is to appear in place of the forced situation of a shipwreck.³¹

The strongest indicator of an intertextual dependency between *Insel* and *Insel Mellonta* is the duplication of the central character Sophron. While Stolberg's Sophron is wealthy through inheritance and a benefactor of the impoverished, who instructs his confidantes through philosophical discourses, von Hellenbach's Sophron enlightens Alexander in the role of island leader and paternalistic friend.

Sophron symbolizes also the connection to the philosophical inspiration which von Hellenbach is actualizing with his utopian community. Towards the end of the novel, Alexander in a séance encounters once more his island guide, Sophron, who rapidly morphs into Charles Fourier before disappearing entirely. Thus, no lesser figure than Charles Fourier himself guides Alexander through the Mellonta island community. That is an indication how much von Hellenbach was indebted to the French utopian socialist's exuberant plans. Just as in Fourier's phalanx, Mellonta offers a communal life fraught with constant meaningful encounters and unlimited sexual relationships, punctuated only by abundant sessions at the dinner table.³² Both writers consider bourgeois marriages and nuclear families as enslavement or prostitution, and von Hellenbach shares Fourier's disgust for civilization, which seems to be the worst period before humanity attains a higher plane of consciousness. The economic systems of the two authors also bear striking similarities, consisting of co-operatives while maintaining a



33 Pollin, Burton R.: Politics and History in Poe's *Mellonta Tauta*: Two Allusions Explained. In: *Studies in Short Fiction* 8/4 (Fall 1971), pp. 627-631, here p. 627.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

limited access to private property for its residents. On a textual level, von Hellenbach clearly copies Fourier's concepts of corporations for young women: »vestals« and »bacchantes« nor does he mind referring to them with similar terminology.

Last but not least, the title *Insel Mellonta* evokes Edgar Allan Poe's short story *Mellonta Tauta* (1849), which represents a fictitious message in a bottle from Pundit, an antiquarian scholar of the year 2848, who »has been allowed to examine the material exhumed by workers digging up the ground of the »emperor's principal garden« of »Paradise« for a new fountain«.33 The title *Mellonta Tauta* is taken from the end of Sophocles' *Antigone* (441 B.C.) and means »these things are in the future«. Like several other Poe tales of balloon and sea travel *Mellonta Tauta* borders on science fiction, dealing plausibly with scenes that were fantastic, or beyond the bounds of everyday reality. *Mellonta Tauta* describes a complex future society radically different from his own. The world depicted in *Mellonta Tauta* is not utopian, like in other future tales, such as Mercier's *L'An 2440*, or disastrous, like Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), but merely very different. *Mellonta Tauta* incorporates many scientific advances, and social and historical changes, from the society of the present day and is a warning, against the totalitarianism of modern society, but at the same time it does not present a viable societal alternative, though it deals with the problem of identity and the multiple nature of the self in society. According to the literary scholar Burton R. Pollin the story is »one of Poe's most savage attacks upon contemporary civilization especially as represented by the city and by modern democratic government«.34 His science fiction stories often vacillate between the romantic and the occult discourse. The story, *Colloquy of Monos and Una* (1841), to which Poe added the Greek motto »mellonta tauta« before writing *Mellonta Tauta*, is a tale of survival after death, in which the »spirits happily meet each other« after separately leaving »the Art-scarred surface of the Earth«, purified, Poe implies, »by a universal holocaust«.35 In addition to the textual and ideological coincidences, it is likely on other evidence that von Hellenbach was familiar with Edgar Allan Poe's oeuvre, since it was celebrated on the continent for its sinister imagery and formal ingenuity.

*

36 Marin, Louis: *Utopics: Spatial Play*. Trans. by Robert A. Vollrath. Atlantic Highlands/NJ: Humanity Pr. 1984, p. 57.

37 Wegner, Phillip E.: *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, The Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* Berkeley: Univ. Pr. of California 2002, p. 36.

38 Ibid., p. xviii.

39 Ibid., p. 37.

According to Louis Marin, the French structuralist and author of the influential theoretical analysis *Utopics: A Semiological Play of Textual Spaces* (1968), narrative utopias form a displaced vision in a fictitious non-temporality as well as non-spatiality which neutralizes the historical reality. Therefore per Marin a utopia is:

the neutral moment of a difference, the space outside of place; it is a gap impossible either to inscribe on a geographic map or to assign to history. Its reality thus belongs to the order of the text.³⁶

Thus, the narrative provides a neutral space, which allows the reader to reconstruct the underlying social conflicts and concealed ideological concepts of the present society, which the utopia inverts and neutralizes. According to Phillip Wegner, the English-literature scholar and author of *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (2002), the result is a critically productive reception for narrative utopias:

[W]hen we attempt to translate the utopia back into the ideological enclosure of its immediate present, as would historicist or culturalist approaches, we discover blind spots, dislocations, erasures, and aporia marring the picture of the Utopian commonwealth. These absences and slippages are crucial, for they signal the productive, critical neutralizations taking place in the narrative unfolding of the utopian figure.³⁷

Narrative utopias are neither literature presenting fictional experiences, nor are they presentations of social theory with systematized totalities, but rather they are: »an in-between form that mediates and binds together these other representational acts«.38 Tending towards Louis Marin's central thesis, that utopias are organized around a blind point, which constrains their vision from a radical transformation, Wegner asserts that these are forms of imaginary textual figuration or cognitive markers of cultural space, which merely permit a »pre-theoretical« view of historical development, a view that can only be completed later through social theory. With this view Wegner contradicts the traditional view of literary ideal-state-depicting novels,



45 Musil, Robert: *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Ed. by Adolf Frisé. 2 vols. Reinbek: Rowohlt 1978, p. 32f.

46 Honold, Alexander: Peter Altenbergs *Ashantee*: Eine impressionistische cross-over Phantasie im Kontext der exotischen Völkerschauen. In: Eicher, Thomas/Sowa, Peter (Eds.): *Grenzüberschreitungen um 1900: Österreichische Literatur im Übergang*. Oberhausen: Athena 2001, pp. 135-157, hier p. 137

47 Musil 1978, p. 35: »[O]hne dass die Welt es schon wusste, der fortgeschrittenste Staat; es war der Staat, der sich selbst irgendwie nur noch mitmachte, man war negativ frei darin, ständig im Gefühl der unzureichenden Gründe der eigenen Existenz und von der großen Phantasie des Nichtgeschehenen oder doch nicht unwiderruflich Geschehenen wie von dem Hauch der Ozeane umspült, denen die Menschheit entstieg.«

48 Cf. Berman, Russell A.: *Enlightenment and Empire: Colonial Discourse in German Culture*. Lincoln: UP of Nebraska 1998, p. 8.

49 Cf. Buch 1991, p. 11.

Kains Vermächtnis (1870-1877): when he comes to speak of the content of the planned volume, *Der Staat*, he illustrates it in the following terms: »the misery and business of the absolute monarchy; the mendacity of constitutionalism; rescue through democracy, United States of Europe; common legislation«.⁴⁴ The fundamental Habsburg policy favoring those on the periphery over those at the center – unlike other contemporaneous European nations (France and England) – seemingly inspired liberal intellectuals such Hellenbach, Sacher-Masoch and Hertzka to develop federalist European concepts at a time when ardent nationalism was still virulent in Germany, Italy and Eastern Europe.

Accordingly, Hellenbach was engaged in a political and aesthetic negotiation of »otherness« at home and abroad. In fact, it was not necessary for him or his contemporaries to go beyond the bounds of the heterogeneous Habsburg state structure if one wanted to get to know other cultures. To that extent one can almost grant Robert Musil credibility when he opines in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* about the state of mind prevailing in Austria in those years: »no man had an ambition for global economic or global political power; one was situated in the center of Europe, where the old world axes crossed; the terms ›colony‹ and ›overseas‹ sounded like something still completely untested and distant«.⁴⁵ If Germany came late to colonizing activities, Austria, arguably, never undertook colonization in the form of overseas settlements. But far from being disinterested, Austrian literature during the heyday of liberalism was saturated with conscious and unconscious expressions of the author's aspirations for an alternative social and spatial organization. Hence, it is generally assumed that Austria was bypassed by overseas colonialism, but it also developed its own parallel discourse that led liberal intellectuals to rethink Europe at a time when other nation states were mired in the concept of nation as something trans-historical.

It may be that the intellectuals in Vienna, the European capital of »domestic strangers« in those days, viewed all too casually the global political developments of the age of imperialism and, thus, found »themselves in the position of the other, the foreigner or even that of the uncanny«.⁴⁶ In the same place, Musil paraphrases this special »utopian« position of Austria:

[W]ithout the world yet knowing it, [Austria was] the most advanced state; it was the state that somehow got along by itself, one was negatively free in it, continuously in the sense of the insufficient bases of his own existence and of the large fantasy of what hasn't happened, or not happened unrescindably, as if washed by the ocean breeze, from which humanity sprang.⁴⁷

Hellenbach's, Hertzka's and Sacher-Masoch's colonial utopias support Musil's negative freedom, a freedom achieved only through Austrian disengagement in worldly affairs. Instead this freedom was found in the realm of the writer's fantasy. By all »distance«, it is hard to imagine that the contemporaneous discourse on colonialism did not reach the coffeehouse debates of Vienna. Certainly, these Austrian authors valued the exotic and imaginary cultures highly. Now and then they even identified themselves with the victims of colonialism and they occasionally expressed criticism of the European imperialism of the other great powers.

If the literary scholar Russell Berman in *Enlightenment or Empire* (1998) presupposes for the colonial discourse a narrative recollection of an actual colonial experience (e.g. a travelogue), I would argue that von Hellenbach appropriates the rhetoric of the travelogue for his prose without the actual exploration experience.⁴⁸ Instead he experienced the human interactions along the heterogeneous margins of the Hapsburg Empire. And it is precisely from this experience that his imaginary, exotic communities in the South-Sea are crafted. To paraphrase the German author Hans Christoph Buch, whose excellent book *Nähe und Ferne: Bausteine zu einer Poetik des Kolonialen Blicks* (1991) is often unjustifiably overlooked in German colonial studies, von Hellenbach's experience as an estate owner in Croatia, at the margins of the intellectual discourse and metropolitan self-understanding, created a similar colonial perspective as did the exotic realms of the colonies overseas in some of the travel writings. The relationship between the »foreign« and the »familiar« is dialectical, when things near and things distant collapse into each other.⁴⁹ Buch bases his argumentation concerning the near and far of the colonial perspective on the exoticism theory of the literary scholar Wolfgang Reif, who describes such fantasies in the following terms:

The exoticist produces pictures, which as a projection of his inner being are intended to compensate for his alienated view of self and reality. His negative view of reality is suppressed in the projection of a picture of the present that is determined by an

50 *Ibid.*, p. 30f.

increasing repulsion that escalates up to a passionate hatred. The structure of this picture is characterized by the alienating experiences of restriction, complexity and uniformity and manifests itself aesthetically as a desolate, trivial proximity. In the process of turning away from this proximity, the exoticist simultaneously, to some extent as a negative of his view of reality, projects a positive wish-concept at a distance, to which he can then turn with an equal passion.⁵⁰

To illustrate this point, I want to show how, through a process of inversions, hybridizations and transgressions, von Hellenbach's narrative utopia destabilizes the predominant utopian and colonial discourse at the time.

*

51 Marin, Louis: *Utopics: Spatial Play*. Transl. by Robert A. Vollrath. Atlantic Highlands/NJ: Humanity Pr. 1984, p. 57.

52 Cf. *quid.* in Buch 1991, p. 29.

53 *Ibid.*

After beginning with a geographic natural history of the South Seas island world and its volcanic origins, the tale unfolds with the description of a stranded victim of a shipwreck: He awoke as from a dream and is unable to ascertain if he has dreamed or if, *vice versa*, he is now caught up in a dream (5). This is the harsh awakening of our completely exhausted »hero« (9). As readers we are thus encouraged to understand his situation as the sobering reality, even though we later learn (with the beginning of the framework story) that the paradise island represents merely a dream of the protagonist. The narrator introduces his character with mysterious ambivalence:

by the shape and color of his face one could only suppose a Mediterranean, but his deep-seated blue eyes lessened such an impression, so that it remained unclear to which European nationality he belonged. But his posture carried an aristocratic character (*ibid.*).

And later, when asked for his name, the protagonist adapts himself to the penchant of the island community for Greek names and »calls himself Alexander« (49). Caught on an island between dream and reality, the »Mediterranean« aristocrat from Germany [*sic*] chooses a name more suitable to the altered circumstances. This liminality of Mellonta recurs also in a spatial respect since the aristocrats, who left their country in response to the nightmare of the French Revolution, are interested in the enticingly described lonely island, but with certainty they learn only the latitude: 17 degrees 3 minutes southerly. The informant, a captain in the harbor at Rio de Janeiro, merely reveals, »that this island lies certainly not under 25, nor over 35, degrees easterly of Tahiti« (29). To that extent the *Insel Mellonta* is spatially, as well as temporally, *entre deux*, or in Marin's words: »[u]topia is thus the neutral moment of difference, the space outside of place, it is a gap impossible either to inscribe on a geographic map or to assign to history. Its reality thus belongs to the order of the text.«⁵¹ Yet even the island community itself is everything other than a homogenous descendant of the French aristocracy, for already in Brazil the colony's founder Marquis de Chateau-Morand, who had been emancipated through the writings of Voltaire and Rousseau, bought:

six young Negresses, who were just landed from an arriving ship, so as to have women workers who were accustomed to the high temperature and to be able to shift to them the care for the interior housekeeping. *In addition the arrangement created a favorable relationship between female and male individuals.* The purchase of Negroes was not carried out as the *creation of a wild race and the perpetuation of slavery* was not in the interests of the colony. (29f., italics by UB)

The reasoning by which the seemingly enlightened nobles took advantage of the slave trade seems astonishing, at least from our present perspective. This conduct by the Marquis seems far different from Denis Diderot's emancipated utopia of free love in a free society. Paradoxically, with his trade in women and the related »shifting« of the housekeeping work to the women, the Marquis perpetuates derogatory traditions toward women of the primitive people.⁵² We can already read in Georg Forster's *Entdeckungsreise nach Tahiti und in die Südsee 1772-1775* (1780):

The men didn't show the slightest respect towards the women while the women responded obediently to the slightest gesture and often had to take on the services of beasts of burden. Meanwhile all primitive peoples are accustomed to deny to women the common rights and to treat them as creatures of a lower sort.⁵³



55 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang v.:
Werke: Hamburger Ausg. Ed. by
Erich Trunz. Vol. 9. München: dtv
1998, p. 271.

56 Apart from Greek mythology,
John Ruskin's art-historical essay
Cestus of Aglaia (1866) could
have been a namesake for von
Hellenbach's protagonist.

Instead of taking the opportunity to imagine a utopian social order, the author allows the primitive and civilized social orders to collaborate with one another through the women-buying Marquis. It's equally baffling that during his human trade he doesn't ignore for a moment traditional racial, gender or class hierarchies, and with full knowledge he refrains from the purchase of male slaves with the humanistically embellished justification of wishing to inhibit the formation of a slave society. Thus, the narrator can present Mellonta as a successful multi-ethnic social order. And one is therefore not surprised to find at several places in the text flattering »allusions« to the island population along the lines of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, which are more reminiscent of Tahitians although the story involves the descendants of French aristocrats and African slave mothers. In keeping with his »gender« preference the men are portrayed first:

He found himself among honorable men, who were unusually good-looking with very fine gestures, who had a markedly gentle manner; they were good-looking, but not with masculine good-looks... It is conceivable that the continual scarcity, the exhausting work and the life struggles always left traces in their faces, and it is conceivable that life on such islands, among the superfluity of natural gifts and the peaceful existence, is bound to result in a gentle character (14).

The affect of the male islanders is very feminine, and they seem to be a kind of androgynous melding of the genders. In short, their beauty is so striking that the narrator feels obliged to explain this phenomenon in greater detail: the lack of heavy work and the absence of the social-Darwinist structures of Europe allow even men to become gentle and beautiful on the island. While the men are conspicuous for their purity and exaltation, the description of the women of Mellonta clearly emphasizes the *mixing of the races*:

Three different racial qualities had successfully embodied themselves in Musarion, the *fine gestures of a French lady from a good lineage* and the *dark tone of the Spanish race* were not to be overlooked in her eyes and hair. This beautiful head was enthroned upon a *figure, such as is to be found among the daughters of the wilderness*, which with Musarion appeared in a still ennobled form. (167, italics by UB)

In Musarion, who later becomes Alexander's lover, Moorish-Spanish blood is united with French-noble blood. There is no doubt that this multi-ethnic background contributes to a previously unknown refinement. Her name might be an allusion to Christoph Martin Wieland's three-volume epic, *Musarion: oder die Philosophie der Grazien* (1768), which significantly is set in a utopian-Arcadian Greece and which evoked a poetic »resonance« in Goethe: »*Musarion* had the deepest effect on me. [...] Here was where I was able to experience the ancients alive and new.«⁵⁵ Even Aglaia, Alexander's first dalliance, comes from a similarly multi-ethnic ancestry although her description assumes a sexually functional character:

A young girl sat next to him. While she lacked beautiful gestures, she was large, *wonderfully built*, and had rich, reddish brown hair, *ivory white teeth*, and bright facial coloration. What particularly distinguished her, however, was the glance from her dark blue eyes, *her facial structure and nose were certainly such to mark her as a descendant of one of the Negresses brought along from Brazil*, if the splendid whiteness of her arms and neck had spoken against that impression. She was called, certainly not by chance, Aglaia (50f., italics by UB).

Her lack of beauty is offset by a »wonderfully built« body, and although in Greek mythology Aglaia represents one of the three goddesses of grace, the narrator is primarily cognizant of her sensual radiance, by focusing on her African facial characteristics, thereby mixing a classical European beauty with African exotic.⁵⁶ The ethereal Musarion is virginally white, while Aglaia like her African forebears is dark skinned, sensual and sexually active. The role that the rearing of offspring takes in Mellonta is illustrated in a conversation about sexual practices that Alexander has with the patriarch: »Yes, yes, in that our women have the right instinct! They are afraid of contact with men with whom they have children, while the girls prefer precisely the proven, more mature men.« Alexander answers chuckling: »You approach it among humans as we do with breeding horses, which only rise in price when their progeny have proven themselves!« (146). The Christian moral ideal of married partners who grow old together is inverted with experienced women carrying on with young lovers and *vice versa*.



57 Lévi-Strauss, Claude: *Structural Anthropology*. Trans. by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic Books 1963, p. 263.

58 Bhabha, Homi K. (Ed.): *Nation and Narration*. New York: Routledge 1990, p. 310.

In keeping with the theosophical literature von Hellenbach sees the true future of humanity in the mixing of the races: the descendants of the refined French aristocracy with full-bodied African slave mothers:

It became clear to him [Alexander], why an island, on which one is used to encountering savages, who, after missionary work, become almost more hideous than in the natural state, developing taste, culture and grace to such a high degree, that one could hardly find its like in the rotten and virtually decaying Europe. (33)

Neither »old« and »rotten« Europe, the state of nature, nor the civilizing process produces a public as cultured as is the hybrid community of *Insel Mellonta*. This Viennese *melange à la von Hellenbach* doesn't take place without a certain hierarchy. That the Caucasian race is represented as *primus inter pares* is made clear in the description of the leisure time activities of the islanders:

Amphibian-like graceful swimming is nearly universal among the wild tribes of Polynesia. It is therefore not surprising that the culture brought with the settlers from Europe brought about in this as well an *advanced race*, and the skill of the Mellontanians in swimming surpasses that of the wild tribes. (84f., italics by UB)

Still in all of these descriptions not only is a European superiority to be seen, but also an inversion of the contemporary colonial discourse about European dominance, for only through the fruitful union of the advanced, but Europe-weary, French aristocrats with the exotic »Negresses« does a new, qualitatively better race emerge. These natural preconditions for a better society were underscored by a conscious distancing from European marriage traditions:

Soon after the birth of the first few children, they came to the conclusion that all offspring – naturally without detriment to parental attention – would be viewed as the *children of the commonality* and that they would therefore be brought up in *complete brotherliness*. It was decided to form one big family to leave the young generation thereby in ignorance of European marriage relationships and, thus, to substitute *free love* for the monopoly of marriage. (32, italics by UB)

With this the narrator suggests a disparagement of French values of civilization in contrast to a rhetorical elevation of his own creation of a Mellontanian »native people«. In *Insel Mellonta* the natives and European civilization are already one and the same. The determinative moment of encounter is already a *fait accompli* and now, as is the case for every formative nation, it's necessary to create a genesis myth to explain the founding of the community, to avert the destabilizing effects of colonial claims by the colonizing powers, which typically took place when there was an actualized preexisting imperialism within a context of considerable ethnic diversity. As is well known, the most important function of myth is to mold an integrated society, free of social conflicts and tensions. The meaning and purpose of this view of social harmony is to ameliorate societal anxieties on the one hand while on the other hand glossing over actual existing injustices. Claude Levi-Strauss describes this as the »problem-solving« capacity of myth whereby an imaginary synthesis between fundamental antinomies of a society (such as female vs. male, or life vs. death) is achieved, and therefore provides legitimacy for the social organization.⁵⁷ The restructuring of human communal existence on Mellonta is achieved through a radical break with tradition and with the past. Von Hellenbach expresses this break from the rest of the world through the island's name, »Mellonta«, which in classical Greek connotes »destined future«. Thus, the author deliberately creates a foundation myth: »Since their relation with the rest of the world broke down, and their *future* was to be decided on this island, they honored the Marquis's admiration of ancient Greek culture, by giving the island the name, *Mellonta*« (31).

The offspring were also left in complete ignorance of dogmatic religious teachings, but instead were brought up in the belief in a divine Providence and an afterlife. In keeping with this purpose, *all nonscientific works that could infringe on this opinion were completely removed*. (32, italics by UB)

According to Homi Bhabha it is »this forgetting – a minus in the origin – that constitutes the beginning of the nation's narrative«.⁵⁸ In Mellonta's case however, it is a control of memory

59 His biographer Hübbe-Schleiden 1891, p. 20 notes: »He was [...] in Paris (finally in the Spring of 1887); it was also on a repeat trip there that his skill was given to him and – as he puts it – the »veil of the Maja was shredded.« Significantly, the 15th, and most important, chapter of *Insel Mellonta* is likewise entitled *Veil of Maja*.

60 »[Durch] den Bau von *Arbeits-häusern...*« (117) [italics by UB].

61 Hermand 1981, p. 21.

which troubles the protagonist the most, as when he has to inform the island community about recent historical developments in France:

A chain of quite extraordinary circumstances and coincidences hurled me out of a world unknown to you that exists on the *fringe of this paradise*. I would almost like to believe that this happened merely so I could become a *messenger of all the horrors* from which you have been spared by what I believe to be a benevolent destiny (43, italics by UB).

In the course of his lectures criticizing civilization within the context of political circumstances in France, it becomes clear why he feels like a latter-day Job who is in the process of destroying a happy idyll by teaching and enlightening his listeners about the »European Work Colony« (35):

Your fathers left the country when the monarchy was laid to rest and the First Republic was constituted. *The bourgeois element seized the reins of power, and after that element had robbed the nobility, the owners of the major part of the estates, and where possible had slaughtered them, the bourgeoisie began to rage against itself.* Mass executions followed, and as these let up, the sons of France were sacrificed by the hundreds of thousands in wars. A victorious field commander, named Napoleon, grabbed the reins, restored the monarchy, placed himself upon the throne, only then calling for blood and devastating Europe and, after 20 years to concede the throne again to the descendants of the former ruling family. After 30 years government by this dynasty, the previous drama repeated itself; once more a Napoleon assumed the throne, only to be toppled after various wars and horrendous devastations. Now a republican form of government is again in power, but the assorted pretenders to the crown are waiting for the opportune moment, to again seize power for themselves. That is what I have to say to you about the political conditions in your immediate homeland. (44, italics by UB)

The aristocratic »Francophile« von Hellenbach shows a strong anti-bourgeois affect: the French bourgeoisie, which not only buried the monarchy, but then went on to devastate the rest of Europe, is blamed for the lamentable conditions in France.⁵⁹ Alexander's depiction of the revolutionary developments creates an ideological bridge to the Marquis, who in light of the political circumstances in France then saw emigration and a break with the homeland as the only possibility to »sweep away with one swipe class differences and the conflict of situations« (24). The émigré aristocrats thus paradoxically try to bring to reality in their new communal society the idealistic goals of the revolution, which after all was the cause of their forced flight. The leading families of Mellonta seek on the one hand to suppress the scientific developments of civilization while on the other hand they try to realize the advanced ideals of freedom, equality and brotherliness. In his address Alexander depicts a French population, which is »subjugated to war service« (45) and, in particular, he points to the misery of the working classes: »the situation of the workers becomes something wretched because work developed through strength and intelligence, is shifted to costly machines, so that the worker becomes more and more dependent on those who have these tools« (45f.). If a »disarmament of the mass army« and a »guarantee of work and existence« (48) doesn't soon emerge Europe will inevitably devolve toward catastrophes, »in contrast [with which] the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution will seem like an idyll!« (47)

In connection with the fate of the working classes von Hellenbach's blind spot in the text becomes clear. If Alexander attributes the excellent productivity of Mellonta to the »magnificent climate« (116) and, above all, to the »fine morals« (117), then he thereby recognizes in the »coarseness of the masses« (117) the greatest obstacle to introducing the superb conditions on Mellonta into the civilization-diseased Europe: »A turn to the better could only be achieved by the building of *labor camps*,⁶⁰ which aside from other advantages would allow the bearing and upbringing of the children to be carried out communally and systematically« (117, italics by UB). Further along in the text Alexander offers the disturbing insight »that human society is comparable with a *fermenting and boiling mass*, which is suited to nothing more than the development and crystallization of human character, which as it were *through the pressure of its purity and through the experiences of life gains refinement*« (247, italics by UB). In the same context Shakretes darkly prophesizes: »Most people are not at all aware that *they are standing on a volcano*, and the few who sense the approaching eruption, hope to be able to escape it« (245). The recurring image of a volcanic eruption thus serves not only formally as



62 Interestingly enough, Charles Fourier's attack on Civilization focuses as well on the commercial institution middle-man! Cf. Spencer 1981, p. 48.

63 Herzl, Theodor: *Altneuland*. Leipzig: Hermann Seemann 1902, p. 98..

a dramatic turning point, but clearly stems from the baron's anxiety about the revolutionary masses, which might instigate a future bloody proletarian revolution, which could overshadow the bourgeois French Revolution. In the context of a development »which had already led to a sharp confrontation between bourgeoisie and proletarian masses between 1830 and 1848, a global *Endkampf* after 1885, as the opposition of both classes rapidly worsened, was in the assessment of many contemporaries unavoidable.«⁶¹ Accordingly, von Hellenbach shares this »red anxiety« with Hertzka and Herzl. To escape this pessimistic prognosis for the future, Alexander recognizes the true alternative in his dreamed island commune:

The ideal inhabitants of Mellonta owe their happy existence to the circumstance, that – completely in contrast to the conditions of European civilization – a large communal wealth lay at their disposal by means of which concerns for raw existence and for the upbringing of children ceased to apply and, thereby, distress and misery – these sources of all suffering and vice – were unknown. (242)

The fragmentation of this communal harmony is the essential ill of civilization, yet Alexander was:

intelligent enough to recognize that the *splintering of the European commonwealth* brought with it an enormous squandering of the productive workforce. The societal splintering alone makes it impossible to come close to attaining the good life of the islanders. (95, italics by UB)

The island commune is bound together by a »solicitous paternalism« and marked by »sympathetic relationships among kinsfolk and old acquaintances.« Still, the merits of commonality are not only to be seen in the social context, but, if we want to grant Alexander credibility, have a solid economic significance:

On Mellonta there were *no tradesmen* who, as in Europe, would cut off a poor girl's ponytail for 5 fl., only to sell it for 50 fl. More to the point there was an absence of the *whole chain of middlemen*, who grew rich without contributing their own work effort, while the producers and consumers groan under their pressure. (96, italics by UB)

Without wanting to read the utopia merely as an expression of the historical reality, I see an unconscious abhorrence on the part of the author toward the numerous Jews emigrating from East Europe toward Vienna, who thereafter as foreigners had to devote themselves to commerce.⁶² As Hellenbach explains in his booklet *Antisemitische Bewegung*:

Now, however, »trading« is in actuality a line of lies, in which the overcharging of one's neighbor is the guiding principal. He who sows a wind will reap a storm. Moreover, the almost comical trading in *Genesis*, in which Abraham bargains Jehovah or Yahweh down from 50 righteous men to 45, then to 40, 30, 20 and finally 10, shows that traders were very early at home among the Jewish people. (13)

That the anti-Semitic trope of the Jewish haggler contaminated also Theodor Herzl's thinking is amply expressed by David Littwak, the Zionist pioneer in *Altneuland*: »We won't let the old style street traders come into being at all, but we will set up a consumer association right from the beginning. [...] We won't have to destroy anyone to be able to help our poor masses.«⁶³ Thus, the absence of alien, cutthroat tradesmen lies near the heart of the concept of a happy commonality. Like the exoticist described by Hans Christoph Buch, von Hellenbach is not fully conscious of his biased abhorrence, so viewed superficially he writes compassionately and comprehendingly about the workers and the Jews. Von Hellenbach tries to compensate for his unconscious phobia and his inner alienation from modern society with his utopian island dream of a happy commune. By turning from this proximity, the baron projects at a distance a positive wishful ideal, to which he passionately flees.

*

The putative danger of the masses in the European metropolises manifests itself in the text through lengthy discussions about the contrast between modern society and traditional communal culture. Although the similarities with the argumentation in Ferdinand Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft & Gesellschaft* (1887) are evident, it would be anachronistic to interpret von Hel-



64 To be sure, Ferdinand Tönnies published *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) four years after von Hellenbach's *Mellonta Island* (1883).

65 Tönnies, Ferdinand: *Community & Society*. Ed. by Charles P. Loomis. New York: Harper & Row, 1957, p. 231.

lenbach as a reader of Ferdinand Tönnies.⁶⁴ In Tönnies's view, *Gemeinschaft* (community) is maintained by traditional rules and a universal sense of solidarity and which fits the organic theory of social union. Over time each community tends to change into a rational, will-based *Gesellschaft* (society), in which reasoned self-interest becomes the strongest determinative element. In the life of the community man participates with all his sentiments. The real controlling agent is the people (*Volk*). Likewise the community as a whole embodies the folkways of rural village life and mores, and humankind enters fully with mind and heart into this form of existence. In contrast life in metropolitan society consists of conventions that constrain man's aspirations, and public opinion, which governs the collective life of its citizens.⁶⁵ In conformity with Fourier's model, the community of *Insel Mellonta* distinguishes itself from Tönnies *Gemeinschaft*: the Mellonta family is a social construct. The Mellonta community is characterized like a large family group, while in the portrayal of the European metropolis there is an emphasis on conflicting egoisms with all set in rivalry with each other and with an increasing moral depravity. Marriages are entered into on the basis of »predicaments and support concerns« (241), though this is nothing other than lifelong prostitution! Alexander describes the false morality of Europe:

In Africa, and to an extent also in Asia, women are sold in the market like animals. By one very numerous sect, they are penned in for their entire life like cows in a stall, and in civilized Europe one can very easily purchase a wife for the cost of her maintenance, and often much less expensively; yes, it even occurs that *women buy men*. (114)

The criticism of European customs is not so much directed at chastity and prudery, but more towards the commodification of erotic love. While the founding father of Mellonta still bought female slaves in Brazil, women even buy men in the civilized Moloch of Europe. The trope of European love-slaves threads through the entire text. After the sensuous Aglaia had given herself to Alexander without regret or ulterior motive, she tells her lover as he declares his fidelity: »It's clear that you come from the land of slaves!« (133). When Alexander afterwards begins his great romance with Musarion, he tells her of his earlier unhappy relationship: »This conniving woman understood the *demonical power* that she had over me, and although not at all a demon but good-hearted, it gave her *pleasure to test her power* and to content herself with that« (199, italics by UB). In other words, European civilization turns well-meaning citizens into slaves or demons. In connection with female sadistic power tests, only sexual escape fantasies remain to the truehearted and upright Alexander, to free him from his masochistic position. It is the sexual economy of Mellonta that brings the text close to Sacher-Masoch's infamous representation of gender relationships with his apparently weak male characters which are nevertheless in control of the situation. If sadism follows the logic of institutional dominance and the oppressor's pleasure in the victim's feeble resistance, than in contractual masochism, it would be the victim, the one who authorizes his own humiliation, who is paradoxically in charge of the scenario. Accordingly, Hellenbach's character needs the colonial setting to get rid of the burden of European civilization.

With Alexander's sailing excursion we see how strongly von Hellenbach's cultural pessimism is still evident in the eroticized image of the beautiful savage:

The harsh north wind blew on Aglaia, who sat opposite him, drawing her coat back from time to time, now at the top, then at the bottom, allowing indiscreet glimpses. Aglaia was not at all as hasty in restoring the *status quo ante* as her European sisters would have been; nor did she have reason to do so, it was all so marvelous that one would have had to have been a native Mellontan not to be influenced by such a sight in his views and speeches. (120f.)

Unlike the situation in Europe, erotic passions are neither vicious nor perverted on Mellonta, since it is civilization that distorts and represses them, thus turning them into something vicious. The model for this sensuous, glowing, healthy woman, free of societal shame, seems to have been taken from the depictions of Tahiti in the 18th century, and is reminiscent of Rousseau's glorification of the natural condition. But the author penetrates this romanticized and glorified depiction of the beautiful savage with the *peripeteia* of the volcanic eruption. The social utopia of Mellonta is transformed by the awakening of the protagonist into a dreamlike fantasy world. When Alexander inquires about the possible concrete realization of his dream world, he receives a evocative answer from his fatherly friend, Shakretes:

Futile effort, my son! Earth does not yet shine forth in love's blue light! The problems of work and the recognition of the natural still bear heavily on the shoulders of humanity. *You are among a small group of outsiders* among those citizens of this world who have a heart for humanity and an understanding for its suffering, but there have always been such, and the teachings, deeds, and sacrifices of these friends of humanity have nearly always caused more harm than good because one ought not to take unripe fruit from the tree. (236, italics by UB)

On the one hand this refusal to effectuate in the present the transcendental orientation of the Mellontanian utopia represents a further inversion of the text in that it paraphrases an arch-liberal, anti-utopian program that advances the view that the utopian aim to eliminate all strain and suffering from society is often not worth pursuing, because unhappiness and misery result inevitably from incongruity between the Constitution and the conditions of the commonwealth. On the other hand the framework story confirms Alexander's dream, not only through the improvised séance in which we again encounter Musarion, leaving behind as evidence of her existence a fetishistic »thin, bluish fabric«, but also through the enunciation of Alexander's exceptional position, for Alexander is one of the few humans whom »the veil of Maja has not entirely entwined« (237). In other words these are the visions of a solitary seer whose only misfortune is to live before his time. Hence, his Indian Brahmin advises him:

[...] let go of all hopes for improvement, as long as you live – and you won't live that much longer – resign yourself to your fate and content yourself with having wanted the Good. (246)

And:

The dream was given you far more as a comfort, than as doctrine, for you have to struggle and suffer in the interest of your own development. Therefore, *return to your life* enriched through the comforting knowledge that *humanity, however slowly, is progressing toward better conditions*, and that love will compensate you when you have suffered much, for only suffering can lead to love's magic palace. (236, italics by UB)

The demand that the protagonist return to a private life comes closer to the ideology of a bourgeois *Bildungsroman* than to a social utopia. The sobering, though mildly optimistic, insight that humanity is slowly moving in every possible way in a favorable direction is not only paradigmatic for von Hellenbach's unconscious fear about the revolutionary proletarian masses, but is diametrically in opposition to Bloch's concept of a »concrete utopia«. This apparent fatalism of the Brahmin far exceeds Ernst Bloch's critique of the abstract narrative utopias of the second half of the 19th century, but the question of the remaining utopian residues in the text imposes itself on us. For although the Brahmin himself puts to rest the hope of rapid change, and he dismisses Alexander's Mellonta dream as merely an ideal for social improvement, his dream analysis and the ensuing séance can be read as a utopia of theosophical philosophy:

Everything that lives on the earth, my son, originates from another sphere [Welt]; you have that sphere and not the earth to thank for the plan of your forms... you would constitute yourself differently on our two neighboring planets, because you would find another living matter, but the cosmic core of your essence is – even if capable of development – always the same. (234)

His utopian scheme is that all humans will one day perceive birth and death as merely experiential changes, untouched by the universal cosmic kernel of the human Soul. In his posthumously published treatise *Das 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (1893) von Hellenbach summarizes his vision for humanity in the 20th century:

(1) Human birth and death is nothing more than a change of experiential form. (2) The motif for this metamorphosis lies in the quest for the development of our character and our abilities. (3) This development requires a corresponding quantity of suffering, work and experience, which can be completed more quickly or more slowly. (4) There is consequently no injustice in the world, because suffering and work translate into a transcendental capital, and everyone becomes what he [has] made of himself. (5) Human life is in a certain sense fatalistic, because each human enters the world with a predetermined quotient for his own education or that of another, and therefore conducts himself instinctively in accord with this intention. (6) Humans

66 Hellenbach 1893, p.122f.

67 Ibid., p. 122.

68 Ibid., p. 126.

69 Ibid., p. 127.

70 Ibid., p. 136.

71 Jameson, Frederick: *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*. 2 vols. Vol. 1. Minneapolis: UP of Minnesota, 1988, p. 3.

72 Wegner 2002, p. 37.

73 Hermand 1981, p. 23.

have a vital interest in sparing no effort in the pursuit of one's own or another's ethical, intellectual and physical development. (7) No action, no thought is for naught. Action and inaction of each individual is decisive for his own ethical and intellectual value and transparent through all time.⁶⁶

According to his view our life is predetermined, and all earthly injustice will be abolished, and therefore there is no need for a preparatory social utopia. Rather the Mellonta dream is a preview of the happy condition that will come into existence when the enlightened stage of the blue light is attained. Moreover humans first have »to lift the mystical veil«⁶⁷ and to learn »that we have interests in solidarity with humanity, because death neither separates us permanently from humanity's destiny nor from other people«⁶⁸. The dreamlike community in *Insel Mellonta* sets forth a societal model by which »the excesses of capital and the limitations of ownership can be removed without disturbing the freedom of acquisition«.⁶⁹ Von Hellenbach's vision of the island community, therefore, provides no contribution to a concrete utopia in which the oppressed working masses of the European metropolises could rediscover themselves, but offers a showcase for societal circumstances by which the social problems and capitalistic excesses have found »their solution through initiative from above«.⁷⁰ Written at a time of great social disparity, the author's conservative approach, with the hope of a return to a pre-industrial community of brotherly love, serves the function of a »vanishing mediator«⁷¹ between two different ways of organizing social life, and whose particular effectiveness disappears once the transition has been accomplished. The perception in the text of the growing social tension, expressed through the anxiety about the »boiling mass« (247) and the subliminal aversion toward the East European Jews who had recently immigrated to Vienna, let *Insel Mellonta* appear in an in-between, intermediate space. Following Phillip Wegner one function of a narrative utopia is »to mediate between two different cultural and social realities, between the world that is and that which is coming into being«.⁷² The social tensions between the bourgeoisie and proletarian masses, which troubled von Hellenbach and his contemporaries, were partially eased in the 20th century through an increase in the power of social democracy and the extension of the welfare state. However, the pervasive authoritarian structures in the text play into the hands of pre-fascist ideologues and their aims. Thus, only through the frame story, does *Insel Mellonta* become a utopia, albeit a conservative one, in which the human potential to explicate the unknown laws of nature as well as the latent power of the human soul is demonstrated. The novel helps its readers to free themselves from the superstitious notion of a one-time, final existence since only the knowledge of an immortal life of the soul justifies the »dream face« of Mellonta (248). The innovative form of the narrative's structure gives von Hellenbach's dream of Mellonta not just a temporal distancing from the present, but it also achieves through the device of the »play within a play« a desirable believability and sense of reality. That the author's creative narrative structure did not always achieve the sought-after success with the readers or critics, can be grasped from his foreword to the second edition: »What surprised me very much [...] was the perception that only very few readers were able to draw conclusions and render it into a prose of the common sense, which was clear and distinctly expressed in the book although in dramatic form.« (vii f.) He therefore feels compelled to add an explanatory chapter, even if the creative structure of the text suffers from this editorial measure. Von Hellenbach prefers drama and poetic writing in contrast to »everyday« prose; he values it as the genre for productive illusion and liberating fantasy, while a sober prose only serves for him for its practical utility.

Unjustifiably, the secondary literature has paid little attention to *Insel Mellonta*. In his otherwise exemplary book, *Orte, Irgendwo* (1981), Jost Hermand appraises it succinctly:

Thus Lazar B. Hellenbach in *Mellonta Island* (1887 [sic]) and William Alexander Taylor in *Intermere* (1901) take up the conventional shipwreck motif and allow their travelers to become stranded on a utopian island.⁷³

Certainly, this unenthusiastic assessment is too cursory for von Hellenbach's novel, since by means of a peripeteiaic dream and an imaginative framework story he is able skillfully to use the then generally familiar discourse about social utopias as a vehicle to bring to humankind his redeeming theosophical philosophy. As I have shown, von Hellenbach's narration is steeped in the contemporary debates about colonialism and nationalism, although it thrives on inversions, hybridizations and transgressions of the dominant discourse. Von Hellenbach appropriates colonial rhetoric for his narrative without the actual exploration experience. Rather, he



makes use of his personal experience at the multiethnic margins of the Habsburg Empire. And it is precisely from this experience that his imagined exotic community in the South-Sea is crafted. The relationship between »foreign« and »familiar« elements in the novel is dialectical, things near and things distant collapse into each other. In this respect, von Hellenbach's utopia indicates a possible Habsburg *Sonderweg*, colonialism without overseas colonies.



Dr. Ulrich Bach: After a formal apprenticeship as an antiquarian bookseller in Frankfurt/Germany, Ulrich E. Bach studied art history and book science at Gutenberg Univ. in Mainz (B.A.), before receiving an M.A. degree in book history from the School for Advanced Study at the Univ. of London. In 2004, he received his PhD from the department of Germanic Languages at UCLA. His dissertation *The Tropics of Vienna: Austrian Colonial Utopias* examines how Austrian colonial utopias engage in a fashionable social discourse, uncovering the ideology of a peaceful, multi-cultural Habsburg empire which is allegedly disinterested to participate in European imperialism. Presently, he holds a lecturer position in the Department of German Studies at Stanford University.
Contact: ubach@stanford.edu