

# Writing New Worlds: Eberhard Werner Happel and the Invention of a Genre

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With the sea travels of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, new data became available about the world, and little by little it was either introduced onto new maps or it became the topic of wonderful and surprising travel narratives. In 1581, one century after the first Portuguese expeditions and almost eighty years after Martin Waldseemüller, a German geographer, had drawn his map of the new contours of the world, theologian Heinrich Bünting included a presentation of the globe in his biblical commentary (see Berkemeier 95).

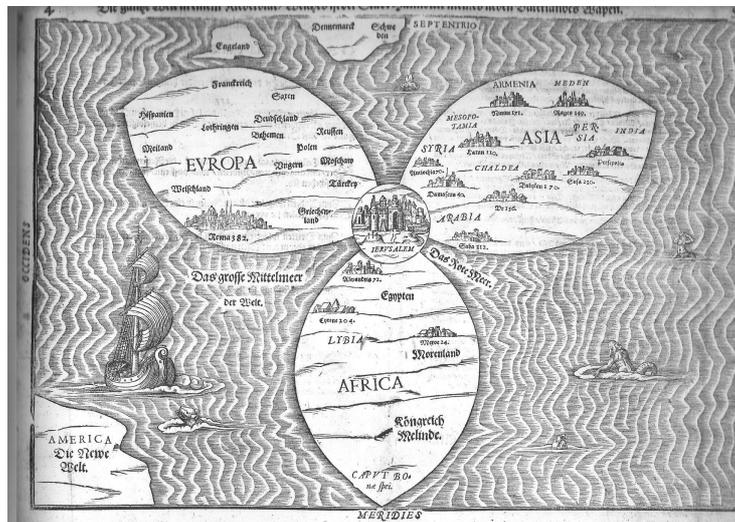


Fig. 1:

He gave his world map the shape of a clover leaf, with Jerusalem at its centre, just like in medieval maps. Though following the medieval tradition, the new continent America is represented as a small territory on the edge of the map—a symbol of the profound transformation which the image of the world underwent at the beginning of the sixteenth century (see Mesenhöller; Wolff).

This is but one example of how the transformation of the image of the world and of human beings more generally was understood and represented at the dawn of modernity. When current events were actually perceived as turning points in terms of prevailing world views and states of knowledge, fundamental positions were challenged. Cartographic representations emerged as elaborate responses by artists and scientists who had not seen the altered reality with their own eyes, but who could not ignore it. They did this despite their interest in conserving inherited ways of world-making in the representation of the limits and contours as yet unknown.

If it was difficult cartographically to imagine a new world, how was it in texts about human culture? If cartography in some cases stuck to old modes of representation, how would the new world appear in writings about culture and humanity?

In the context of a volume on ‘turning points,’ it seems appropriate to approach these questions through the example of an author whose work, which occupies a field between the historical and the literary, is exactly situated at the turning point of modernity, both in terms of his world view and in terms of the way he tried to represent the challenges of his time in fictional and non-fictional texts. In the discussion about the origins of the novel in Germany, the name Eberhard Werner Happel (born August 12, 1647 in Kirchhain; died on May 15, 1690 in Hamburg), soon became an unavoidable point of reference. In 1682, as an introduction to his work *Der Insularische Mandorell*, Happel published a treatise on the origin of the novel as a genre, which he had already written in Paris in 1672. This text initiated a theoretical debate among contemporary writers. As he translated the *Traité de l'origine des Romans* into his native language, Happel began a long and lively discussion about the characterisation of this genre among the German-speaking peoples as Wilhem Vosskamp notes in his history of the theory of novels.

In the *Traité de l'origine de Romans*, the author, Pierre Daniel Huet, outlines for the first time the issue of how to define this literary genre, how to ask about its trajectory, as well as how to answer questions such as what leads a man to invent fiction, and therefore what role such romance stories have in the cultural history of humanity. Huet

claims that the works considered as novels in ancient times were written not only in prose but, frequently, in verse. Yet what was classified under the name of 'novel' among his contemporaries were artfully crafted fictions about adventures and love written in prose, for the pleasure and instruction of readers (see Huet: 7).

The greatest theme of the novel, love, should thus be dominant; it should possess an orderly and simple structure; it should be written in beautiful or artistic prose; and it should aim at the pleasure and delight of its readers. In this characterisation of the genre, Huet relates the novel both to fables and to history. There may well be, he claims, fictitious parts in the writing of history, when occasionally false information is included, yet the novel is intended to be and is based upon invention, which brings it close to the fable.

On the topic of the origin of fiction and of the reason why human beings seem to need it, Huet writes:

Cette inclination aux Fables, qui est commune à tous les hommes, ne leur vient pas par raisonnement, par imitation, ou par coûtume: elle leur est naturelle, & a son amorce dans la disposition même de leur esprit, & de leur ame; [...] Cela vient, selon mon sens, de ce que les facultez de nôtre ame étant d'une trop grande étenduë & d'une capacité trop vaste pour être remplies par les objets présens, l'ame cherche dans le passé & dans l'avenir, dans la vérité & dans le mensonge, dans les espaces imaginaires, dans l'impossible même, de quoi les occuper & les exercer. (Huet: lxxiv–lxxv)

As a faculty of the soul, fiction enables us to create situations either in the past or in the present, in deception and in truth, in imaginary or impossible spaces, which endow the writer with vast creative power and provide the world with new artistic forms. As fiction is produced to entertain and educate the reader, as Happel's title reveals, it creates the possibility for readers to live and share in the distress and challenges of the hero, and thus to explore emotions and sensations as if they were part of her or his reality (see Happel, *Der Insulanische Mandorell*).

The plots of novels should remain close to reality; this is a *sine qua non*: in order to entertain, fiction must be plausible. Horace had already claimed this long ago and contemporary authors would live out this verdict. On the one hand, novels were the product of the writer's imaginative and fantastic liberty, and their mission was to create new horizons and worlds, providing pleasurable and unforgettable moments for the readers. Under these conditions romance stories could bring delight and instruction to readers. On the other hand, and in order for this didactic and instructional goal to be reached, the story and the plot had to be plausible. Invention lives from the invented fact, within the limits of plausibility. On the question, still valid today, of where the interest lies

in ‘enjoying’ the imitations of reality, Pierre Daniel Huet argues that the writing of novels responds to an innate natural need of the human mind to create possible worlds.

In this context, Huet stresses the proximity between the novel and history. If the novel is a literary genre that focuses on the narration of imaginary events and the representation of imaginary persons but takes into account facts from the real world, and if history is a narrative of true events though sometimes using means of imagination, it is clear that the boundaries between the two ways of narrating are porous: both work with a mixture of fact and fiction. This is what Happel proposes when he writes: “Diese Historien sind in *Genere* Wahr / Aber in gewissen Stücken falsch. Die *Romanen* hingegen sind in gewissen Theilen wahr / und im gantzen oder in *Genere* falsch. Diese sind warheit mit falschheit vermengen / und jene sind falschheit mit warheit vermischet” (Lock 31).<sup>1</sup>

The historian presents a sequence of facts, the writer tells a story; both are based on narration. The writer collects the material he needs to create a story, which could have been true. History therefore underlies the beginnings of the novel, as novelistic writing underlies the making of History: The genre of the *Historie*, as written by Happel, still maintains the traces of its origins in History, while at the same time preparing what then would be called ‘romance’ (see Knape). Both kinds of work seek to convey to the reader an appealing sequence of vital and exemplary facts, because it is history that provides the foundations, the conception and the goals of the work. Whatever the topic may be, history aims at being instructive; and this purpose of learning may be conveyed either by a true story or by a merely possible story. Both history and narrated stories seek to convey a message, and in doing so to educate the reader.

Happel knew how to write both history and stories. He devoted all his life to writing, having been one of the first men of letters to live from his work (see Böning). 1673 was the year of his first novel, *Der asiatische Onogambo*, followed by *Der insulanische Mandorell* (1682), *Der italienische Spinelli oder so genannte Europäische Geschicht-Roman auf das 1685. Jahr* (4 vol., 1685-1686), *Der spanische Quintana oder so genannte Europäische Geschicht-Roman auf das 1686. Jahr* (4 vol., 1686-1687), *Der französische Cormantin oder so genannte Europäische Geschicht-Roman auf das 1687. Jahr* (4 vol.,

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<sup>1</sup> “These Histories are in *Genere* true / but wrong in some parts. The Romances on the other hand are true in some parts / but wrong as a whole and in *Genere*. These are truths mixed with falseness / and those are falseness mixed with truth.”

1687-1688), *Der Afrikanische Tarnolast* (1689) and *Der Academische Roman, worinnen das Studenten-Leben fürgebildet wird* (1690).

While Happel, then, was a prolific novelist, it is also true that parallel to those texts he compiled history works such as *Gröste Denckwürdigkeiten der Welt oder so-genannte Relationes Curiosae* [...] (5 vol., 1683-1691), *Thesaurus exoticorum oder eine mit Außländischen Raritäten und Geschichten wohlversehene Schatz-kammer* [...] (1688) and *Mundi Mirabilis Tripartit. Oder wunderbaren Welt, in einer kurzen Cosmographia fürgestellt* (3 vol., 1708)—which go some way to justifying the claim that he was one of the first journalists of the German-speaking world (see Böning; Schock).

Between 1681 and 1691, the periodical *Relationes Curiosae* was published, and it was one of the first magazines to appear in the German language. While its format reminds one of a book, it is rather a weekly print, which became a great editorial success: several editions, translations into different languages, ten years of continuous editions and re-editions until the end of the eighteenth century, are just some of the external signs of the impact this publication had on the educated public. In fact it was part of an important and strategic enterprise on the part of Thomas von Wiering, a well-known printer of the city of Hamburg, who sold the magazine as a supplement to his newspaper *Relations-Courier*, one of the most successful newspapers of the city. Counting on the core body of regular readers of his daily newspaper, Wiering conceived of *Die größten Denckwürdigkeiten dieser Welt. Oder so genante Relationes Curiosae*, whose title immediately indicates its intention of appealing to readers' curiosities about the variegated exotica of the world.

Happel was invited to be the editor and compiler responsible for this ambitious editorial program. As he writes in the prologue of the *Relationes Curiosae*, it is the will to reveal important observations and knowledge about history, geography, botany or the diverse traditions of the whole world that inspired his work, written with those readers in mind who appreciate discovering the reasons and origins of things (see Happel, *Gröste Denckwürdigkeiten* prologue). Although he addresses a literate audience, this periodical does not neglect its function as instruction and, whenever possible, as entertainment. The multiple illustrations included therein are thus to be understood as a means for ensuring both cognitive and aesthetic edification.

One of the main features of the publication is its presentation of texts and pictures about other cultures. The pages of the magazine are filled with reports about countries, peoples and mores from overseas. In order to effect this task, Happel reveals his great knowledge of travel

literature and travel reports, from which he draws for his writing, also those written by Portuguese travellers (see Lopes, *Afrika; Der Afrikanische Tarnolast*).

Happel is widely interested in other cultures and willing to learn by their example. He is an important mediator of new information about the lands and the peoples beyond Europe. In fact Happel had already played this mediating role in the work he had published previously: *Thesaurus Exoticorum oder eine mit Außländischen Raritäten und Geschichten wohlversehene Schatz-Kammer* (1688), a singular work in which he presents side by side peoples of all nations of the world, with the intention of allowing his readers to discover “wonderful new worlds” (Greenblatt).

Reading about facts that have occurred overseas motivates the construction of other stories, ones which are possibly true. Many authors find in travel literature a source of information about the world, from which they can compile works with factual and veridical insights for their readers. Others use the same sources to write literary texts. Happel did both. Travelling through cultures and singularities, he aims at producing a new order of knowledge, to effect a new cultural mapping, and a new cartography of the cultural world. As a translator and mediator, Happel is deeply committed to a transnational and transcultural project (in the sense of Bachmann-Medick 242–50). Happel creates heroes and plots for his stories which are set in an exotic world. The novel, just like the other works, has the function of helping the reader to become familiar with other countries and other traditions, although now in a more relaxed and enjoyable manner.

Based on historical material, he does not however intend to reconstruct total and authentic truth. He collects facts and coordinates them as he sees fit (which are thus partially true; see Clifford 7). Since he does not aim at recounting events exactly as they happened, he allows himself to order the episodes in a way more amenable to his literary ends; he may even ignore aspects he considers unnecessary for this approach. The boundaries between history and the novel thus remain porous. The main function of the novel is still to inform the reader. Happel considers history—even in the form of a novel—as a useful instrument, without which people would live in blindness: “Die Historie ist ein solch nützlich Werk / dass wir ohne dieselbe / wie blinde Leute / gleichsam im Finstern tappen würden [...]” (Happel, *Der spanische Quintana* 128).<sup>2</sup> Whatever his theme may be, history aims to educate; and this

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<sup>2</sup> “History is such a useful piece of work / That without it / We would be in the dark / Like blind people.”

pedagogical feature may be located both in true stories and in those which only may have been true.

Combining adventures and love affairs in order to describe the physical and human world of the different kingdoms of Africa, Happel generates, in his *Afrikanischer Tarnolast* (1689), an opportunity to outline—over 1,200 pages—a portrait of this continent, then hardly known. Asia is not forgotten, as the novel *Der asiatische Onogambo* shows. Even if the author did not have the opportunity to experience *in loco* those alien and different worlds, he still does not hesitate before this lack of empirical qualification. Combining real facts with fictional elements, Happel mediates that other reality.

Happel's work as a whole is a milestone in the history of the novel—as a new genre which is able to bridge fact and fiction as well as pleasure and instruction. By opening up the minds of their readers to the wide and unexplored regions of possible worlds (in the readers' imagination and out there in far countries), Happel's texts contribute to the origin of a genre that—some hundred years later—should become a crucial means of literary communication: the novel.

Deeply interested in all kinds of possible worlds, Happel therefore transforms the enormous array of information and data of a new cultural mapping into pages and pages of encyclopaedic knowledge, clearly hoping that these would become valid lessons in different areas of knowledge for the citizens of the world. By allowing different cultures to wend their way into the imagination of his readers, Happel was actually writing new worlds: as global and as diverse as possible (see Nünning and Nünning). His possible worlds are simultaneously real and fictitious but they nonetheless ensure a firm understanding of the new horizons that Iberian travellers, amongst others, had recently revealed. Entangling facts and fiction, old stories and new realities, the new world and the old (see Randeria), such writing was the ideal means for offering readers a sense of orientation within the burgeoning beginnings of globalisation.

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Writing New Worlds

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