

“UNHEIMLICH FANTASTISCH – E.T.A. HOFFMANN 2022“: THE HOFFMANN YEAR AT STAATSBIBLIOTHEK ZU BERLIN

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Abstract. This article introduces the E.T.A. Hoffmann Archive at the Berlin State Library as well as the E.T.A. Hoffmann Online Portal, which could be established as the main platform to start all E.T.A. Hoffmann research. It describes the functions of the Online Portal and gives an overview of the exhibition project ‚Fantastically Uncanny‘ which links young people to Hoffmann’s thoughts and motifs.

Keywords: online portal; E.T.A. Hoffmann; exhibition; E.T.A. Hoffmann Archive; Berlin State Library

The German Romantic universal artist E.T.A. Hoffmann, mostly known for his uncanny and fantastic writing, died 200 year ago, on June 25, 1822. To remember E.T.A. Hoffmann, his work and his versatile personality, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin in cooperation with the Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, the Freies Deutsches Hochstift in Frankfurt on the Main and the E.T.A.-Hoffmann-Gesellschaft organized a comprehensive and immersive exhibition that is shown on all three locations and accompanied by an extensive program of events on Hoffmann and his work.

The exhibition is part of a longer project at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin and closely connected to the history of the library’s collection of Hoffmanniana. Based on this collection as well as the collection of Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, it benefits from the two largest collection of Hoffmann originals in the world. The cooperation of these two institutions, enriched by the collection of the Freies Deutsches Hochstift on German Romanticism makes it possible to offer to the public an intense introduction into the world of E.T.A. Hoffmann.

The Berlin-collection, nowadays the E.T.A.-Hoffmann-Archiv, has its roots in a donation to the Prussian king by Hoffmann’s widow Michaelina: At his death E.T.A. Hoffmann left about 2300 Reichstaler in debt – one and a half times his annual salary as a judge. This legacy could apparently not be covered by his material

possessions, and forced his widow Michaelina to evade the demands of creditors by rejecting the inheritance and leaving Berlin as quickly as possible. 20 years later, in 1847, she donated 19 autographs by Hoffmann to the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, the “Romantic on the throne”. The transfer of these autographs to the Royal Library laid the foundation for the extensive collection of Hoffmanniana that the State Library has been able to amass over the past century and a half.

The development of the archive took a major step forward at the beginning of the 20th century. Hans von Müller, a Hoffmann connoisseur and enthusiast, took on the collection as an employee of the State Library and expanded it not only with numerous new acquisitions, but also with his own publications, a considerable part of which consisted of editing previously unpublished documents of Hoffmann and his circle of friends and colleagues. However, the foundation of a separate E.T.A. Hoffmann archive had not yet taken place.

In 1999, the Staatsbibliothek purchased the important collection of the Hoffmann connoisseur Hans-Dieter Holzhausen, consisting of more than 100 titles of primary literature, extensive secondary literature and a number of other works from or about Hoffmann's circle. This was possible due to the generous donation of Dr. Christa Karoli, a native of Berlin, who had died in September 1998 and bequeathed part of her estate to the State Library with the stipulation that an E.T.A.-Hoffmann-Archiv should be established. This archive was founded in 1999 as a virtual archive which lists all Hoffmann holdings of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin and makes large parts of them digitally accessible. The collections themselves are kept in the individual departments according to their nature.

E.T.A. Hoffmann Portal

Since 2016, the E.T.A.-Hoffmann-Archiv, in cooperation with the Staatsbibliothek Bamberg and the E.T.A.-Hoffmann-Gesellschaft, has been establishing and managing the E.T.A. Hoffmann Portal, which was designed and built in a one-year project phase.

The portal provides access to numerous works by and about Hoffmann, some of which are unique. In addition to the presentation of the extensive Hoffmann collections of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin and the Staatsbibliothek Bamberg on an independent platform, the portal offers individual access to different interest groups through different modules and thematic entry points. The aim of the project is to develop a multimedia website that conveys the versatility of E.T.A. Hoffmann as a writer, musician, draughtsman and lawyer. New offers for research and presentation of the very heterogeneous Hoffmanniana – consisting of letters, texts, drawings, sketches, musical materials, pictures and legal documents – are to make the portal an innovative example of a broad offer for research, teaching and education. With the E.T.A. Hoffmann Portal, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin has been building a new home for its E.T.A. Hoffmann Archive. As a virtual institution of the SBB,

the archive has been the common gateway to the various materials about and by Hoffmann, which are maintained in different departments of the library. The new portal is now giving the valuable holdings a distinctive face.

In fall 2016, a three-year follow-up project was approved and launched on January 1, 2017. In addition to expanding content and interactive elements, the focus of this project was on digitizing and presenting Hoffmanniana from the holdings of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. This includes not only materials by and about E.T.A. Hoffmann, but also works that influenced the artist and material connected to his reception. To this end, letters, surviving diary fragments, Hoffmann's literary works, and an auction list relating to his personal library are evaluated, as well as relevant handbooks and research articles.

In January 2020, the current follow-up project started with two very different focuses. Firstly, an online bibliography is to be developed to further improve the possibilities for researchers as well as the general public on the Hoffmann Portal. The goal is to convert the older printed bibliographies into an online format, to add missing information, to complete them with the data available in 2022, and to develop a resource-saving solution for the permanent continuation of the bibliography.

On the other hand, this third project phase should focus on the 200th anniversary of Hoffmann's death and the preparation of an exhibition on E.T.A. Hoffmann as well as the planning and coordination of relevant events on this occasion all over Germany and Europe.

“Unheimlich Fantastisch” – Exhibition and Events

Three extensive exhibitions in Bamberg, Berlin and Frankfurt on the Main were planned, curated and organized by the project team at Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin in cooperation with the partners in Bamberg and Frankfurt. The three exhibitions present E.T.A. Hoffmann in his full diversity, as poet, draftsman, musician, theater director and lawyer and explore his influence on music, science fiction, literature and art until today. In addition to the presented original manuscripts and book publications from the 19th century the exhibition is enriched by historical objects from Hoffmann's time and by contemporary works of art. This enables the exhibition to draw direct lines from Hoffmann to the present and emerge the visitors in an experience of Hoffmann's importance for today's urging problems and questions. In order to do justice to the cross-genre, synesthetic aspects of E.T.A. Hoffmann in particular, an innovative exhibition in the form of an “exploratorium” was put into reality. Under the overall artistic direction of the studio TheGreenEyl, four rooms were created that take up the breaks, distortions, reflections, perceptual illusions and changes of perspective in Hoffmann's work.

The extensive anniversary program 'Unheimlich Fantastisch' accompanying the exhibition is making Hoffmann's work accessible to a young audience in particular.

To this end, the program highlights his preoccupation with artificial intelligence, the limits of the real, and personality development in the context of societal constraints. It includes guided tours in the exhibitions as well as workshops, lectures, guided tours to places connected to Hoffmann's life in Berlin and Bamberg as well as events in Hoffmann's favorite wine house. The many different opportunities it offers to the public interested in Hoffmann mirror Hoffmann's diverse personality and the infinite worlds of his work.

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