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Haarbüschel, *Pausbacke*, and *Fledermaus*: Christopher Kloeble's Recasting of the Schlagintweit Expedition in *Das Museum der Welt* (2020)

Abstract: In *Das Museum der Welt* (2020), Christopher Kloeble presents a fictionalized recasting of the 1854–1857 expedition by the three Bavarian Schlagintweit brothers to India, the Himalayan Mountain range, and parts of Central Asia. Complementing recent rewritings of expeditions in colonial times (Kehlmann, Hamann, Trojanow), Kloeble, too, seeks approaches and writing strategies that undermine the hierarchies of traditional travelogues. Kloeble portrays the Schlagintweit expedition from the vantage point of a fictional young Indian travel companion, a trickster and rogue hero in the picaresque tradition who undermines the dominant power relations. This shift in perspective and genre allows for several interventions: it avoids a heroic glorification of the Schlagintweits and decenters the European gaze, highlighting the importance and agency of so-called historical minor characters such as translators, assistants, and guides. Drawing on the subversive potential of mimicry (Bhabha), this essay suggests that Kloeble's *picaro* depicts the Schlagintweits' mission with wit and irony, exposing the utterly irrational elements of enlightenment science in the colonies and offering a pointed critique of Western discovery and exploration.

I

Upon the recommendation of Alexander von Humboldt, in 1854 the British East India Company invited the brothers Hermann, Adolph, and Robert Schlagintweit to an exploration of India, the Himalayan Mountain range, and parts of Central Asia, with some expenses funded by the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV. The British Empire was primarily interested in the prospective practical applications of their research, such as the expanse of forests for building materials, agricultural lands for the cultivation of tobacco, coffee, tea, and spices, as well as coal and mineral deposits. The modest Prussian support was more concerned with a geographical investigation of the Himalayan region mirroring the comprehensive and comparative aims of Humboldt's own research. The Schlagintweit brothers spent the following three years (1854–1857) in India and high Asia in varying

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groups of regional guides, translators, and assistants, exploring topographies, glaciers, vegetation, and cultural sites.

As the Schlagintweit journey itself became the subject of critical reevaluation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it also invited experimental forms of writing. In *Das Museum der Welt* (2020, translated into English as *The Museum of the World* [2022]), Christopher Kloeble presents a fictionalized view of the expedition from the perspective of a young Indian travel companion. Kloeble depicts the Schlagintweits' mission with wit and irony, similar to Daniel Kehlmann's *Die Vermessung der Welt* (2005) – the fictional biographical account of Carl Friedrich Gauß and Alexander von Humboldt – especially with respect to the latter's journey to South and Central America 1799–1804. Like Kehlmann, Kloeble portrays the nineteenth-century German protagonists in a distant, laconic, and humorous if not satirical tone, though without resorting to the frequent indirect speech that characterized Kehlmann's novel. Both authors point to the utterly irrational elements of Western science in the wake of the enlightenment, specifically as it concerns Germans' scientific expeditions to colonized lands. If the unadorned style in both novels functions as a distancing device that prevents adulation or heroic embellishment, Kloeble goes a step further by denying the explorers their own rendering of the voyage and by refraining from an omniscient narrator to convey the events. Instead, Kloeble portrays the expedition from the vantage point of a fictional Indian adolescent boy. Through this shift, Kloeble not only avoids a heroic glorification of the Schlagintweits but decenters the European gaze altogether, pointing to the gaps in the documented historical tradition.

Kloeble's novel continues the efforts of contemporary German-language writers to critically illuminate and reevaluate historical expeditions of colonial times. Aside from the aforementioned *Die Vermessung der Welt*, Christof Hamann in his novel *Usambara* (2007) retells the story of Mount Kilimanjaro's first European ascent in 1889 by the German geographer Hans Meyer and the Austrian mountaineer Ludwig Purtscheller, mediated by several interlocutors and fictional travel companions. In *Bis ans Ende der Meere* (2009), Lukas Hartmann revisits James Cook's Third Pacific Voyage (1776–1779) through the eyes of its young draftsman, the novel's main character John Webber. Multiple shifts of perspective also inform Ilija Trojanow's *Der Weltensammler* (2006) fictionalizing the life and obsessive travels of Richard Francis Burton, a multilingual British colonial officer. Trojanow juxtaposes Burton's point of view with the (fictional) reports of guides and servants he encounters in British India, Mecca, and East Africa. Finally, the Austrian writer Raoul Schrott, in his meticulously researched *Eine Geschichte des Windes oder: Von dem deutschen Kanonier der erstmals die Welt umrundete und dann ein zweites und ein drittes Mal* (2019), adopts the perspective and baroque folksy voice of Hannes from Aachen who (presumably) accompanied Ferdinand

Magellan as an unpaid gunner on his circumnavigation of the world and returned as one of only eighteen survivors.

In his incisive analysis of literary rewritings of expeditions in colonial times, Hansjörg Bay credits Hamann and Trojanow with an inventive narrative structure that aptly conveys colonial entanglements while also cautioning against a "kolonialen Wiederholungszwang" (Bay 2012, 130). Specifically, Bay contends that the literary recastings he analyzes feed into our continued fascination with so-called Western discovery but run the risk of reinscribing local inhabitants in lower profile or cliched patterns. Kloeble, too, focuses on European exploration, but the novel's peculiar narrative perspective, its complex cast of characters, episodic plot, and use of humor and satire encourage a much-needed questioning of the Schlagintweit expedition's hierarchies, priorities, and recording methods. Kloeble focalizes the narrative through the perspective of a historical minor character through a multilingual boy who acts as a translator to the Bavarian Schlagintweit brothers. But as readers learn over the course of the novel, the narrator's perspective is more complicated than it first seems. As the illegitimate son of a Hanoverian soldier and an Indian mother who died in childbirth, the fictional main character and narrator Bartholomäus was placed in a Bombay orphanage and grew up under the tutelage of a Bavarian missionary, Father Fuchs (also a fictional character). In this way, Bartholomäus carries the double legacy of colonizer and colonized, literally embodying the transcultural negotiations in the contact zones of colonization that Homi K. Bhabha outlined in his concept of hybridity.

To Bhabha, cultural identities emerging in such a Third Space carry transformative capacity, as also exemplified in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" (1984). When the colonized are forced to assimilate and imitate colonial powers, the mimicry of colonizer culture (via language and cultural practices) begins to blur the difference between colonized and colonizer, which, as Bhabha suggests, produces an ambivalence that lays bare the disingenuousness of the colonial mission and threatens its claim to superiority. In this way, mimicry is both a subservient survival strategy and functions as a form of resistance that destabilizes the colonial system. In Kloeble's novel, mimicry indeed becomes a tool of subversion when Bartholomäus passes through both India's privileged and poor spaces, outsmarting German explorers and British governors alike. Conversely, Bartholomäus' transformative power to assimilate highlights the Schlagintweits' clumsy and failed attempts to adapt to India's cultures, resulting in their utter dependence on translators, guides, and other expedition members.[1] If Bhabha

1 Hansjörg Bay (2009) offers a useful critical juxtaposition of Bhabha's mimicry and colonizers' assimilation (117–122).

emphasized intercultural contact and interdependence over a clearly demarcated opposition of colonizer and colonized, he was at times criticized for downplaying the imbalance of colonial power relations.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has precisely highlighted the power dynamics of colonial representation. By outlining the potential and tendency for misrepresentation and exclusion, Spivak offers a pointed critique of appropriation when hegemonic groups speak for marginalized groups (Spivak 1988). Indeed, this poses a dilemma for Western authors to either reinscribe a European perspective of exploration or adopt a (presumptuous) perspective of the colonized that is neither familiar nor much documented in prevailing historical records.[2] Kloeble fashions as narrator an orphaned Indian boy, an outsider between colonizer and colonized but bestowed with power and influence far greater than historical realities permit. To be sure, this fictionalized mediation does not change the hierarchical and asymmetrical structures of the colonial discourse, and it cannot speak for the subaltern or imbue the dispossessed with more agency. Rather, I suggest, the interventions of Kloeble's idealized narrator that readers can readily expose as wishful thinking help illuminate the complex, tenuous, and uneven configurations of European exploration while pointing to significant gaps in historical documentation. By harkening back to the tradition of the picaresque genre, the narration follows Gregor Schuhen's genre definition: "der *picaro* reist umher, er ist permanenter Gewalt ausgesetzt, er betrügt, er taktiert, er macht Späße, er dient, er erzählt" (Schuhen 17). In this way, *Das Museum der Welt* disrupts our expectations of exploration narratives, allowing for the laws of probability to be stretched. To Michaela Holdenried, inverted strategies of representation help create critical distance to established discourses: "Gerade weil sie sich nicht das 'Recht auf Repräsentation' anmaßen, erweisen sich derlei literarische Formen als glaubwürdiger in der Darstellung fremdkultureller Alterität als andere" (Holdenried 296). In *Das Museum der Welt* it is precisely the quixotic literary form that lays bare the tensions between absent and existing documentation and the pressing need for imagination.

II

Along their historic 1854–1857 journey, the Schlagintweits produced maps, drawings, photographs, and descriptions of landscapes, the flora and fauna, and provided studies on geology and meteorology along with (often discriminatory) observations of peoples and civilizations. They also compiled a vast collection of

2 See also Bay 2009, 134.

plant specimen, rocks, and cultural artifacts. As the brothers, with the help of guides, translators, and porters, climbed mountains, surveyed the land, documented its cultures, and amassed artifacts, they adhered to a *Weltanschauung* indebted to enlightenment and European liberalism rooted in deep-seated beliefs of Western superiority. Their vast measurements and comparative perspectives followed Humboldt's approach; yet in contrast to their mentor they did not seek to elucidate the interactions of ecological and cultural forces and did not question the colonial paradigm nor voice political or environmental critiques as Humboldt did (see Schaumann 2017 and 2024).

While the brothers largely slipped into obscurity, a biographical sketch in the ideologically colored *Helden der Berge* (published in 1935, then in revised form in 1970) by the influential South Tyrolean Alpinist, writer, actor and film director Luis Trenker glorified them as heroic mountaineers embarking on larger-than-life adventures on the "dark" subcontinent:

> Das ist das seltsame Schicksal der drei Brüder Schlagintweit! Alles haben sie auf das eine Ziel gesetzt: Himalaya! Ihr Geld, ihre Gesundheit, ihre Existenz, ihr Leben; denn sie waren Deutsche und machten die Sache gründlich. Dafür wurden sie aber auch gründlich vergessen. [. . .] der Winkel zwischen Indien, China und Turkestan war damals noch ziemlich unbekannt, und die Asienkarte wies hier einen hellen, weißen Fleck auf, der besagte, daß hier alles noch finster und dunkel sei. Aber gerade dieser Fleck war es, der den Brüdern Schlagintweit keine Ruhe ließ. (*Helden der Berge* 83)[3]

If Trenker posthumously attempted to recuperate the German mission in colonial India, a special exhibit at the Alpines Museum in Munich in 2015, followed by historian Moritz von Brescius's study *German Science in the Age of Empire: Enterprise, Opportunity, and the Schlagintweit Brothers* (2018), brought the brothers and their ambitious and ambiguous journey to renewed attention eight decades later, highlighting the Schlagintweits' often questionable research methods, their precarious funding, and the role of their travel companions. Rudi Palla's 2019 biographical account, *In Schnee und Eis: Die Himalaja Expedition der Brüder Schlagintweit*, followed suit, seeking to correct the hero worship:

> Hermann, Adolph und Robert waren gewiss nicht die heroischen Reisenden, die in unerschlossenen Gebieten, inmitten einer unbändigen Natur geforscht hatten, als die sie in verschiedenen patriotischen Publikationen verherrlicht wurden. (*In Schnee und Eis* 185)

Nevertheless, the book's main thrust follows Trenker in depicting the brothers as indefatigable mountaineers willing to risk their lives to conquer Himalayan

3 Luis Trenker, "Die drei Himalajabrüder: Adolf, Hermann und Robert Schlagintweit," *Helden der Berge* (83), hereafter referred to as *Helden*.

heights and gain scientific insights. In this way, the back cover claims, the Schlagintweits advance

> tief hinein in den Himalaja, um dort wissenschaftliche Daten zu erheben, die höchsten Pässe der Welt zu erklimmen – und um Ruhm zu erlangen setzen sie sogar ihr Leben aufs Spiel. Und wurden dennoch von der Nachwelt vergessen. (*Schnee* n.p.)

Despite outwardly rejecting Trenker's glorification, Palla's book reiterates many of Trenker's views, such as the emphasis on the brothers' sacrifice, their risking of life and limb, their mountaineering achievements in unknown territories, and their perceived missing recognition.

With his novel, Kloeble takes a decidedly different approach, choosing fictional interventions to counter both the glorification of the Schlagintweint brothers as heroes and the dearth of historical records. After detailing the best-known achievements of the brothers in a short preamble, Kloeble concludes: "They would never have been able to achieve all this without the help of numerous people who accompanied them. One of them was an orphan boy from Bombay" (n.p.)[4] The fictional intervention continues with three quotes about the Schlagintweits that preface the novel, one from a letter by Alexander von Humboldt, one from a novel by Jules Verne, and a fictional quote by Kloeble's protagonist Bartholomäus: "I wish the Schlagintweits had never come to India" (n.p.). This bold – and sometimes criticized[5] – move lends the power of speech to someone who usually would not have had a public voice, an orphan between the ages of 12 and 15 years of age over the course of the novel and a figure loosely based on a composite of several historical travel companions of the expedition. By adding a fictional quote to the historical documents, Kloeble suggests that we will have to imagine the histories of those not privileged enough to be preserved in official records or documents. And by placing Bartholomäus' words next to the well-known praise by Humboldt and Verne, Kloeble invites readers to question the expedition's overall value. When Bartholomäus utters the same wish later in the novel (*Museum* 142), he calls attention to issues of exploitation and violence in the wake of colonial exploration, exposing and highlighting the discrimination and injustices stemming from the Schlagintweit expedition.

As an uncannily bright yet ill-mannered child, Bartholomäus witnesses the Schlagintweit exploration and the entire world of adults differently from them. Not being motivated by adult drives pertaining to power, wealth, and sex, Bartho-

4 Christopher Kloeble, *Das Museum der Welt*. Translated into English by Rekha Kamath Rajan as *The Museum of the World*, hereafter referred to as *Museum*.

5 See Miryam Schellbach's scathing review in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which, however, contains several errors in its description of the book.

lomäus remains unencumbered to freely describe and evaluate political plots, drug trades, and amorous innuendos. He is also privy to encounters and conversations precisely because he is not seen as an adult. In this aspect, the novel bears some resemblance with Günter Grass' *Die Blechtrommel* (1959). Bartholomäus has a much-expanded view because he observes the world from below, from a frog's-eye view, so to speak. While Bartholomäus may not have sufficient background knowledge to explain the motives, tactical moves, and competing goals of the various expedition members and other protagonists, as a brown and presumedly naïve child he remains "invisible" (*Museum* 137) in the world of white influential adults and is given considerably more leeway. Over the course of the novel, Bartholomäus becomes a protégé with privilege and access and is entrusted with confidential information from several rivaling protagonists.

Das Museum der Welt comprises a coming-of-age story, depicting Bartholomäus' development through travels and encounters, in which the narrator observes love, lust, and violence in personal relationships as well as political plots for power and control. As Paul Michael Lützeler pointed out in his review in the *Tagesspiegel*, the novel depicts Bartholomäus' growth like a *Bildungsroman* through insights, mishaps, opportunities, coincidences, disillusionment, and learning processes. Yet I propose that *Das Museum der Welt*, with its trickster protagonist who stumbles into adventures, deceives his superiors, and survives calamities, resembles even more a picaresque novel, a genre which permits Kloeble to critically probe the expedition and its goals.

Juxtaposing the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque novel, Maren Lickhardt concludes: "Der pikareske Weg ist kein progressiver und oftmals idealisierter Bildungsweg. Die zyklische Struktur schließt innerhalb der erlebten Handlung eine lineare Progression, einen Fortschritt oder Aufstieg aus" (Lickhardt 193). In the tradition of the picaresque, the various destinations along Bartholomäus' journey become sites of trial and error but do not build up in continuous progression. Lickhardt sees a renewed rise of the picaresque in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, since it emphasizes "Unterwegssein und unzuverlässiges Erzählen, ein[en] unvorhersehbare[n] Weg und ein[en] uneindeutige[n] Bericht" (Lickhardt 192). Indeed, the genre proves exceedingly suitable to capture the unforeseen and unintended, productive and destructive aspects of European exploration. By assuming a voice that is at once appealing and unreliable, Kloeble highlights both the central importance of low-status travel companions and their regrettable absence in historical documentation. Another important aspect of the picaresque genre is its capacity for delivering a political critique. Pertaining to his own novel of colonial exploitation *Eine Geschichte des Windes*, Raoul Schrott explains:

> Umso reizvoller war es, diese Expeditionen einmal nicht aus der Heldenperspektive der hohen Herren zu betrachten, welche die Missionen anführten, sondern all ihre Fährnisse, Irrungen und Wirrungen samt der inneren und äußeren Konflikte von unten her zu schildern: aus dem Blickwinkel eines Simplicissimus. Der wie jener des Grimmelshausen zwar schelmisch ist, aber dabei allmählich klüger wird – wenn auch nicht eremitenhaft weise. (Schrott n.p.)

Schrott's and Kloeble's protagonists navigate land, sea, and society horizontally and vertically, deceiving their expedition leaders and higher-ups by defying coercion through mischief. As a rogue picaresque hero, Bartholomäus mocks Victorian ideals and subverts British power when naming the colonizers "Vickys": "the English call everything and everyone in India as it pleases them. Therefore, it is only fair that I call them what I please" (*Museum* 5). Bartholomäus' mischief comically lays bare the stiff conventions of the Victorian Age but also takes on a distinct political agenda when he becomes a spy for the rebellion forces and the Chinese government, working several sides at once while evaluating their motives, goals, and means. At the conclusion of the novel, Bartholomäus rejects the Schlagintweits' offer to follow them to Germany and instead decides to join the widespread but ultimately unsuccessful Indian Rebellion in 1857. Unlike previous nonfictional renderings of the expedition, Kloeble does not end his novel with the Schlagintweits' return to Germany. And unlike the ensuing historical record, Kloeble does not depict the brutal dissolution of the Indian Rebellion and inception of the British Raj. Instead, the picaresque form allows Kloeble to close his novel open-ended, with a hopeful Bartholomäus renouncing his name along with the use of German and English and affirming his Indian identity as Eleazar.

III

As a self-assured and brazen protagonist, Bartholomäus refuses to be subjugated to the role of a servant by the Schlagintweits and the colonial British Empire whose interests they represent. Pursuing his own agenda, he instead turns the scientists into objects of his own museum. At the orphanage in Bombay, Bartholomäus was schooled by the Jesuit Father Fuchs who acts as a loving father to the boy, teaches him German and the Bavarian dialect, and names him Bartholomäus after one of the twelve Apostles who went to India but also after Bartholomäus Ziegenbart (1682–1719), a Protestant missionary who established schools in India and translated the Bible into Tamil. The novel begins with Father Fuchs' disappearance (as we later find out, he suffered from severe tuberculosis and likely died of an Opium overdose) and Bartholomäus leaving the orphanage with the

Schlagintweits. Even though Bartholomäus initially sets out to look for his beloved mentor, he eventually comes to view Father Fuchs' naming, Christian education, and withholding information about his biological parents more critically. Over the course of the expedition, Bartholomäus becomes attached to the middle Schlagintweit brother, Adolph. As Bartholomäus learns more about the brothers and their project, however, and encounters unforeseen situations and new people and surroundings, his alliances begin to shift. In a surprising turn at the end of the novel, Bartholomäus learns that Father Fuchs baptized him at birth in order to protect him, given that he was an illegal offspring of a German soldier recruited to fight along the British in India and an Indian mother who died in childbirth. Bartholomäus must learn to live with this legacy. In Kloeble's version, it is the Indian orphan who, at the beginning of the novel in October 1854, finds, collects, and describes artifacts, people, flora and fauna, smells, and experiences named and numbered as "remarkable objects" 1 through 94 that form the chapters of *Das Museum der Welt*. Even before the Schlagintweits arrive at the orphanage to take him along as a translator, Bartholomäus had already begun collecting items for "India's first museum. I call it the Museum of the World" (*Museum* 3), a large-scale project inspired by Alexander von Humboldt's holistic vision, modeled after the British Museum, and named in antithesis to European colonial history. In his essay "Welt/Reisen: Zur Poetik des Globalen in Reisetexten des 21. Jahrhunderts," Bay tracks the epistemologically ambiguous yet totalizing claim of the term "world." In light of such global claims, the Indian orphan's "world" museum in Kloeble's novel robs the Schlagintweits, and European explorers in general, of their agency, upends traditional power structures, and questions Western hierarchies of knowledge.

While the Schlagintweits endeavor to establish an archive of India from the perspective of the colonizers by sketching landscapes, gathering plants, collecting rocks, measuring faces and bodies, taking pictures, and procuring face masks, Bartholomäus assembles his own museum made up of memories, dreams, notes, and small items. In stark contrast to the valuable items taken from the colonies and exhibited in the Western world, Bartholomäus' collection is deemed worthless and exists mainly on paper and in his mind. He selects and sorts the objects for his museum according to his own value system, including "exceedingly small objects that were collected on the street; they were thrown away or forgotten like orphans" (*Museum* 15). Drawing a parallel between the discarded items and his own identity as an Indian orphan, Bartholomäus seeks to make visible and elevate both, so that the museum becomes a personal and political quest. With his collection, Bartholomäus thus rewrites a material and cultural history of India from a decolonizing perspective, reordering and restructuring colonial patterns and practices.

Compared to the Schlagintweits, Bartholomäus is far superior at his task: He speaks a host of local languages such as Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Marathi, and Farsi in addition to English and German, enabling him to understand and communicate not only with the influential politicians and businessmen they meet but also with local citizens, guards, and prisoners. He is intimately familiar with India's diverse religions and cultural traditions, conventions, and foods; at the same time, he is also well versed in Western thought, including the works of Humboldt and Goethe, among others. Unlike the Schlagintweits, Bartholomäus is also in constant communication with all expedition members. When Bartholomäus, at several points in the novel, wishes to depart from the expedition, the Schlagintweits desperately beg and then order him to stay. The fictional form here allows Kloeble to emphasize facts that are easily dismissed, namely Western travelers' utter dependence on Indigenous guides, cooks, porters, and merchants, resulting in an inversion of traditional power structures.

In his role as an often unwilling and poorly compensated translator, Bartholomäus begins to devise his own goals for the journey: these goals partly overlap with the Schlagintweits, partly with the Indian struggle for independence, and partly with his personal quest of finding Father Fuchs and creating his museum of India. In this multifaceted endeavor, he develops several strategies as a translator, underscoring the forceful potential of multilingualism: Bartholomäus adds his own questions regarding Father Fuchs' whereabouts into conversations with local officials, he mistranslates phrases like "soon" into "later" in order to extend the brothers' time in Bombay, he omits sentences he dislikes such as when he is ordered to be quiet, he changes names ("Nrupal" into "Nobody" (*Museum* 50)), and alters statements: "I transformed the precise instructions given by an official into diffuse statements" (*Museum* 40). In all these examples, Bartholomäus cleverly and successfully uses acts of mimicry to undermine the Schlagintweits' agenda for his own purposes. Even after he is caught and punished for his translation liberties, Bartholomäus continues more carefully, still fashioning translation into an act of defiance.

Overall, the novel illuminates the imaginative but also material power of translation as mimicry. Through his multilingualism, Bartholomäus enjoys hitherto unknown privilege and access: he is served imported frozen ice cubes and rides in horse-drawn carriages and on elephants, he is allowed to enter buildings and partake in gatherings frequented by Europeans, and even meets the Governor of Bombay, the Scottish Thirteenth Lord Elphinstone (1807–1860), the Governor-General of India, the Scottish First Marquess of Dalhousie, James Broun-Ramsay (1812–1860), and the head of the opium trade, Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy (1783–1859), all authentic historical figures. Later in the novel, multilingualism becomes a means of survival when Bartholomäus acquires mysterious powers

through his use of German that remains unintelligible to the porters and is able to convince them to cross over a mountain pass rather than stay behind in fear of the Hindu Goddess Nanda Devi.

Through the tool of translation, Bartholomäus has the power to expand or restrict the transfer of knowledge, and to deliver his own thoughts. Knowing languages thus renders power, and multilingualism becomes a tool of the resistance, granting Bartholomäus first hope and later literal aids for the Indian Rebellion:

> Every language gives me another home. And all of them together give me the confidence to know that the Vickys will soon go away. They will never be able to plant their English over our innumerable languages. (*Museum* 58)

As Bartholomäus provocatively predicts monolingualism to be the downfall of Empires, it is no coincidence that Eleazar, the character who eventually convinces him to join the resistance, is also a translator, speaking Malayalam, Hindi, English, Portuguese, Dutch, Chinese, and Hebrew. Moving between privileged and unprivileged spaces, knowing different languages provides Eleazar and Bartholomäus the freedom to remain understood, misunderstood, or not understood altogether in each of these spaces, an immense advantage and tool of mimicry for both adaptation and resistance.

IV

In the novel, the Schlagintweit brothers come across as sometimes likable, sometimes pitiful, but mostly arrogant, preposterous, and privileged travelers hopelessly overextended and unprepared for their proposed task. Bartholomäus terms Hermann *Haarbüschel* (Tufty) for his quivering moustache, Adolph *Pausbacke* (Chubby Cheek) for his puffed cheeks, and Robert *Fledermaus* (Bat) for his pointed protruding ears. Moreover, he mocks their white skin, flushed red faces, impractical clothing and constricting footwear, their measured steps and gesticulating arm movements, as well as their verbosity.

Even though Bartholomäus initially becomes impressed with the Schlagintweits' scientific quest, he recognizes both its unsound dimension and inherent racism. In this vein, he wonders why the so-called explorers exclusively pursue accommodation and company with fellow Europeans rather than locals (*Museum* 45) and choose to spend more time at official receptions and celebrations rather than in the remote areas they seek to explore (*Museum* 189). As a picaresque hero, Bartholomäus is given agency to expose the Schlagintweits' preposterousness and hypocrisy, as they judge and evaluate from an isolated position those

they call "natives" (*Museum* 32) or "the Indians" (*Museum* 38). This becomes evident when Bartholomäus is tasked with reading a portion from Hermann Schlagintweit's notebook at Consul Ventz's residence in Bombay. The account describing "all races in India" (*Museum* 35) as lacking ambition and work ethic is as denigrating as it is ludicrous when the literate and multilingual boy is forced to read aloud a characterization of his race penned by someone who has not spent more than a few weeks in Bombay and does not speak local languages. Even in his third year on the subcontinent, Hermann Schlagintweit holds on to his derogatory beliefs when stating "that Indian cities have a uniform appearance and that it is difficult to distinguish between the races as well as the individuals" (*Museum* 345) in letters to his brothers from Bhutan and Assam that Bartholomäus once again reads (and translates) aloud. In both of these examples, Kloeble uses Bartholomäus as an interlocutor to recast historical sources and refute traditional topoi of exploration.

While the Schlagintweits engage in brotherly quarrels and competition, they are united in their bigotry and discrimination when deeming "natives" unclean, deceiving, and incapable of strong values and deep emotions. Unsurprisingly, this conforms to the racial reasoning of Western philosophy of the time, and Kloeble has Hermann quote from Kant's lectures: "In hot countries man matures earlier in all aspects, but he does not achieve the perfection of the temperate zones" (*Museum* 128). While alike in privilege, self-importance, and condescension, Kloeble endows each of the brothers with different personality traits. Hermann as the oldest is domineering and considers himself entitled to lead the expedition. Adolph as a more sensitive and artistic character grows closest to Bartholomäus but disappoints the child repeatedly. Robert is more reserved and chiefly concerned about his photographic mission and camera equipment; as the youngest brother (who was officially only hired as an assistant), he continuously seeks to prove himself and can be particularly callous. Harboring deep-seated jealousies, insecurities, and obsessions, the brothers appear stiff, out of place, and boastful.

Bartholomäus begins to realize that the scientists' incessant measuring and naming fails to capture his country's peculiarities: "By subordinating places I had always known to his numerical system, he [Hermann Schlagintweit, C.S.] was taking them away from me" (*Museum* 37). While the act of counting cities' square feet and inhabitants appropriates the land and its people, Bartholomäus questions both the numbers themselves ("Who had counted them [the residents of Bombay, C.S.]?" *Museum* 37) and their validity in representing the country. He also registers the Schlagintweits' disregard for Hindu religion and culture when the brothers scavenge corpses from the sacred Hooghly River for their studies. With the unabashed bluntness and simplicity in the voice of a child, the narrator exposes and questions European science's biases and practices during colonial times.

Bartholomäus however remains a more unconcerned observer in one of the most uncomfortable passages of the book, which describes the brothers' ethnographical practices at a prison in Calcutta. As such, the naked Urdu prisoner, by the force of cane beatings and with the help of Bartholomäus' translations, is photographed by Robert Schlagintweit, then measured by Hermann using pliers painfully pinched deep in the flesh, and finally, still in great fear and under more gentle instructions by Adolph, subjected to a gypsum facial casting. Surprisingly, Bartholomäus views the latter procedure not as denigrating but empowering, recalling that at the orphanage, Father Fuchs likewise produced facial casts of every child, then painted and collected them.[6] The passage reveals that the ethics of scientific research methods greatly depend on power relations and particular contexts. If for Bartholomäus the procedure became a festive celebration of his racial identity on his tenth birthday, for the prisoner it is a coerced and terrifying violation of his subjectivity and well-being.

Once again, the novel's description of the above procedures fictionalizes historical records, which reveal that the Schlagintweits indeed took many photographic portraits of prisoners, became preoccupied with measuring the bodies of various races they encountered,[7] and took facial plaster casts from living persons.[8] These artifacts objectify Indigenous subjects and foreground colonial violence, racism, and power relations. They also provide vivid images and names of those encountered. In this way, the Schlagintweits' immense collection of sketches, photographs, and human facial casts provides insights into deeply disturbing practices in early ethnography and colonial science, while also giving some evidence to the brothers' collaboration with and reliance on Indigenous laborers, assistants, and companions.

As part of their scientific mission, the brothers sought to climb various Himalayan mountains. In August 1855, Adolph, Robert and eight unnamed companions advanced to 6,788m on Abi Gamin in their attempt to summit what they believed to be Mount Kamet – a height that broke Humboldt's previous altitude record of

6 In a footnote, Kloeble details that Father Fuchs learned this technique from the Scottish scientist and editor of the *Bombay Times*, Dr. George Buist (1805–1860).

7 As is evident in Robert Schlagintweit's photographs and his chart "Measuring of Human Races" (n.p).

8 This was a new practice as facial casts had only been taken from dead persons. There is no evidence that these facial casts were taken under force, but the procedure was quite arduous, involving 4–5 pounds of gypsum on one's face and having to lie still with closed eyes and paper rolls in the nostrils for several hours. Breaking with Humboldt's beliefs that integrated Europeans and non-Europeans into one common system of human cultures and languages, the newfound interest in facial features reflected contemporary anthropologists' research on "race theories." For more information, see Moritz von Brescius, Friederike Kaiser, Stephanie Kleidt.

5,760m on Mount Chimborazo.[9] They abandoned their attempt in deteriorating weather conditions, greatly exhausted from the onset of altitude sickness (H. Schlagintweit 348–349). The descriptions of their ascent in the 1920 entry of the *Alpine Journal* (Meade) but also the current Wikipedia page fail to mention guides and companions. In Trenker's retelling in *Helden der Berge*, Adolph and Robert likewise act on their own, focused on their advances on the Himalayan mountains that are depicted as a grander extension of the European Alps:

> Dies war nun der höchste Punkt, bis zu dem Menschen emporgedrungen waren, und die Leistung der beiden Brüder blieb auf viele Jahre hinaus zweifelsfrei der Höhenrekord der ganzen Erde. Sie waren die ersten Bergsteiger, die mit alpiner Erfahrung an die „Weltberge" herangingen, aber doch noch nicht über die Himalajaerfahrung und die besondere Ausrüstung und Taktik verfügten, denen die Pioniere der jüngsten Zeit ihre Erfolge verdanken. (*Helden* 80)

In a similar vein, Rudi Palla's recent description of the ascent in *In Schnee und Eis* celebrates Robert and Adolph as pioneers of high-altitude mountaineering, barely mentioning their companions (*Schnee* 104–110).

Conversely, in his fictional recasting of this mountaineering achievement, Kloeble makes Bartholomäus the person who reaches a world altitude record on Abi Gamin. In the literal high point of the novel, Bartholomäus rests on Adolph's shoulders and proclaims: "I am the highest point of the world. [. . .] One of the smallest Indians has reached the hitherto highest points in the world" (*Museum* 295). In another fictional reversal, Bartholomäus is carried by the German scientist rather than the other way around, as was customary. Using once more acts of mimicry, Bartholomäus' words echo the boastful posturing of many mountain conquests. By juxtaposing the superlative language of mountain feats ("highest") with superlative diminutives ("smallest"), Kloeble heightens the importance of travel companions who are often excluded from historical records and even many recent depictions of mountaineering. At the same time, the novel's mimicry subtly mocks and undermines the record-seeking Western tradition of scientific exploration in the manner of Alexander von Humboldt.[10]

9 As has been established, however, twenty-one Andean peaks above 6,000m bear signs of Inca occupation on or near their summit, making Humboldt's claim obsolete. See Echevarria 48.
10 See also Schaumann 2020, 48–72.

V

In his chapter "The Inner Life of a 'European' Expedition: Cultural Encounters and Multiple Hierarchies" in *German Science in the Age of Empire*, Moritz von Brescius meticulously researched various travel companions and the complex network of diverse languages, religions, and cultures that formed the Schlagintweit expedition. As von Brescius makes evident, the Schlagintweits were often not the main actors of their own undertaking. Kloeble's novel embellishes this historical information to imbue each travel companion with their individual backstory, caste, religious beliefs, languages spoken, and other characteristics, from the Hindi physician Harkishen, the caretaker of the collection Mr. Monteiro, the draughtsman and surveyor Abdullah, to the Sikh mountain guide Mani Singh. The novel's representation strives to remain historically accurate: according to von Brescius, Harkishen was employed as a "Native doctor" who saved Hermann's life through a surgery that removed an abscess (von Brescius 189). The Indo-Portuguese Mr. Monteiro served as the "general superintendent of the collectors" (von Brescius 183) and continued his scientific work independently after the Schlagintweits left India. The Muslim assistant called Abdul provided valuable data and sketched landscapes and river systems. Mani Singh mediated and guided the illegal forays into Tibet.

Going beyond the historical record, however, Kloeble outfits his narration with stories and fictional figures not found in historical documents, such as the illiterate cook Maasi Smitaben who arrives at the orphanage after being beaten by her husband, and the Parsi bookkeeper Hormazd whose mysterious death is apparently the result of Bartholomäus' imprudent actions. The translator Eleazar is both a historical and fictional character: he was indeed a travel companion working as a guide and personal assistant for the Schlagintweits,[11] but in the novel, he becomes a child abused by Catholic priests at an orphanage in Cochin. Kloeble fashions Eleazar into a fellow orphan and early friend of Mr. Monteiro who adopts a Jewish name and later collaborates with the Chinese to fight for independence from the British Empire, pressuring a reluctant Bartholomäus to join him. Toward the end of the novel, readers learn about Eleazar's former life and path into the resistance, which in turn prompts Bartholomäus' decision to actively collaborate with the movement. This implausible resistance narrative remains removed from the more realistic narrative of

11 Von Brescius describes Eleazar Daniel's important role, quoting from the Schlagintweits that he was "a coloured Jew from India [. . .] entrusted with the superintendence of the transport of our instruments and collections" (187).

the expedition itself but significantly widens the novel's focus, further decentering the Schlagintweits' mission.

While the fictional characters and stories allow Kloeble to include, albeit peripherally, intersecting layers of oppression such as domestic violence and abuse by pedophile priests, they sometimes overburden the narrative, further stretching its credibility. In this way, the author's aspiration to deliver information on colonial India can become overloaded by too many fictionalized details and backstories, and the novel's child perspective can seem forced, especially in the latter half of the novel. Nevertheless, Kloeble succeeds in drawing attention away from the Schlagintweit brothers to elucidate the expedition from below and pay tribute to some of the many companions and collaborators.

The novel also provides readers with details about influential historical figures in India to elucidate both colonial oppression and instances of subversion and resistance. For instance, the Scottish Thirteenth Lord John Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay, in Kloeble's rendering speaks Hindi and is smart but cruel, with signs of encroaching tuberculosis – the historical Elphinstone put down attempts at an Indian uprising by seizing their leaders during his governorship of Bombay. The General-Governor James Broun-Ramsay is depicted as a condescending despot with an expansionist agenda. Kloeble directly quotes the infamous words from the Governor's single-handed, unauthorized annexation of the Punjab: "Unwarned by precedent, uninfluenced by example, the Sikh nation has called for war; and on my words, sirs, war they shall have and with a vengeance" (*Museum* 153). Indeed, as is explained in the novel, Broun-Ramsay's Doctrine of Lapse legitimizing British control over any Indian state where the male heir lineage had "lapsed" led to the illegitimate annexation of numerous princely states. However, as Kloeble shows, power and influence were not exclusively held by the British. In the novel, Bartholomäus receives information about Father Fuchs from the Parsi drug lord Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy and his Chinese assistant. The historical record shows that Jeejeebhoy, in another example of subversive mimicry, made a fortune as a merchant in the cotton and opium trade with China and became the first Indian knighted by the British. Growing up poor – he lost both parents at age 16 and received no formal education – Jejeebhoy became a philanthropist who donated a substantial portion of his wealth to the poor and advocated non-violence; he was commemorated on a 1959 stamp of India. *Das Museum der Welt* freely employs these historical figures to illustrate hierarchies of Europeans, Indo-Europeans, Chinese, and Indians, but also to provide a glimpse into India's diverse and manifold cultures and religions that determine dietary restrictions, work schedules, languages and even intricacies such as currencies and weight systems.

In addition, the novel illuminates little-known facts of the German involvement in British colonialism when explaining Bartholomäus' family history. As revealed in a (fictional) letter by Father Fuchs, Bartholomäus' father belonged to the group of 2,000 Hanoverian soldiers recruited by George III (1738–1820) who was concurrently King of Great Britain and Ireland and Elector of Hanover. As the latter, George III provided two regiments of German volunteers fighting along the East India Company in the Anglo-Mysar Wars (1869–1799) that resulted in much of the Mysorean territory annexed by the British (Historisches Museum Hannover). Germans from the Kingdom of Hanover thus actively aided colonial expansion in India.

VI

Historical accounts of the Schlagintweit expedition invariably culminate in the ill-fated conclusion of the Schlagintweit journey and Adolph Schlagintweit's premature death. In December 1856, the brothers parted ways: Robert, with the majority of the immense collection carried by hundreds of camels, horses, and porters, embarked on a monthlong trek via Karachi back to Bombay, where he boarded a ship back to Alexandria. There he met Hermann who had traveled to Lahore and Nepal, and the two brothers returned to Berlin in June 1857. Adolph had remained in Asia; his plan was to return to Germany via Central Asia and Russia, crossing war-besieged Turkestan despite safety warnings not to do so. In August 1857, he and his companions were captured by the Turkestan warlord Wali Khan during the Kashgar uprising, and Adolph was swiftly beheaded as a presumed spy without being granted a hearing. Most of his travel companions were also killed or forced into slavery, and only a few were eventually able to flee and preserve some documents.[12] Robert and Hermann were left not only with the tragic loss of their brother but also the examination of their extensive research collection, a task that proved insurmountable. As the Schlagintweits' expertise, methods, and findings were increasingly questioned in the British press and beyond, they tried to salvage their scientific reputation and financial standing by unsuccessfully lobbying for an Indian museum in Berlin. Eventually, they sold or auctioned many

12 There had been longstanding conflicts between the Chinese military and Muslim clans, with Wali Khan seizing a short but violent control over Kashgar. With his European instruments and official letters of the British Empire, Adolph immediately raised suspicion – he was taken hostage and beheaded in front of Kashgar's gates on August 26, 1857.

pieces from their collection that, as a result, remains dispersed over various countries and continents, with many artifacts missing to this day.

Adolph Schlagintweit's death usually comes front and center in biographical portrayals of the Schlagintweits' expedition: in Trenker, a depiction of its gruesome details follows the exclamation "Adolf's Schicksal war besiegelt!" (*Helden* 44) at the heart of the essay. The execution is also mentioned on the cover of Palla's book and forms the introduction of von Brescius' study. Conversely, the violent death receives only brief mention in a short chapter at the end of Kloeble's fictional rendition. In it, Wali Khan's troops capture Adolph, Eleazar, Abdullah, Mr. Monteiro, and Bartholomäus, and violently inquire whether they are spies for the British, Russians, or Chinese. When the soldiers start to break Bartholomäus' fingers one by one, Adolph admits to being a spy for the East India Company to spare Bartholomäus further torture and is then promptly beheaded. Mr. Monteiro is likewise killed for being a Christian, Abdullah is sold into slavery, and Bartholomäus and Eleazar are imprisoned. As Eleazar grows weaker, Bartholomäus recalls the objects of his museum in his memory, in a passage that echoes the first chapter verbatim when Bartholomäus explained his museum to Father Fuchs before his death. Eleazar dies in captivity shortly before the Chinese reconquer Kashgar and free all prisoners. In the novel, Adolph Schlagintweit died to save Bartholomäus, and the latter succeeds where the Schlagintweits failed, in the creation of an Indian Museum. Yet in another turn of events, Bartholomäus becomes skeptical of the universal scale of priorities leading to a "museum of the world" altogether and instead decides to join the Indian resistance. The final chapter concludes with Bartholomäus affirming his Indian identity, swearing off speaking English and German, and naming himself Eleazar.

As a European author intimately familiar with and knowledgeable about the subject matter, Kloeble writes from a position of power and privilege.[13] In the picaresque tradition and from the perspective of Bartholomäus, Kloeble embellishes a precocious and imagined perspective of the Schlagintweit expedition, the country they cross, and people they meet. While this move cannot adequately deliver the realities and consequences of oppression from the perspective of the colonized, it brings into focus historical and fictional travel companions, shedding light on how guides, informants, and translators creatively used their skills to serve and at the same time subvert the expedition's goals and the colonialist agenda in general. Employing historical and fictional characters with and without power, the novel conveys information about life under the colonial rule of the British East India Company and elucidates the German complicity in the colonial

13 See also Nora Koldehoff's review of Kloeble's book.

system, while also calling into question the very process of historical transmission. Through Bartholomäus' fictional travels with the Schlagintweits, Kloeble's work encourages readers to realize and imagine European exploration and its aftereffects, providing insights into how aesthetics, science, and colonialism became intricately and unpredictably intertwined.

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