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I, Acacia Moraes Diniz, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Germanic Languages & Literature.

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One Story, Three Centuries: Anachronism and Sociopolitical Commentary in the Graphic Novel Adaptation of "Das Fräulein von Scuderi"

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One Story, Three Centuries: Anachronism and Sociopolitical Commentary in
the Graphic Novel Adaptation of Das Fräulein von Scuderi

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by

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Abstract

The 19th century, more than any other it seems, has provided us a never-ending source for adaptation. From musicals involving Charles Dickens’ orphans and Victor Hugo’s French revolutionaries, to the inexhaustible work on anything ever put on paper by the Brothers Grimm, Western societies seem obsessed with the 1800s. Observing this obsession as a whole, I have come to the following hypothesis: stories written during the 19th century are still influential and draw contemporary audiences because their major themes – in a sociopolitical and historical perspective – have been haunting the Western world since those times.

E.T.A. Hoffmann’s novella *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* is an exemplary case. Adapted numerous times, as an opera, a film and, most recently, a graphic novel, its sociopolitical commentary on justice systems and violent interrogation techniques are as relevant now as they were in the 19th century. Alexandra Kardinar and Volker Schlecht’s graphic novel adaptation emphasizes these aspects of Hoffmann’s novella through the insertion of historical curiosities, documentation on historical figures and, more importantly, the use of anachronistic elements in scenes of the 17th century, which provide the reader with a link between the three centuries involved in this story: 17th, 19th, 21st. This study will explore how Kardinar and Schlecht move away from the discourse of fidelity in adaptations in order to construct a contemporary version of the sociopolitical commentary started by E.T.A. Hoffmann in *Das Fräulein von Scuderi*. 
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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction................................................................................................................................. 1
Chapter 2: Adaptation Theory .................................................................................................................. 4
Chapter 3: Graphic novels as specific medium.............................................................................................. 9
Chapter 4: Historical Background ........................................................................................................... 11
  4.1 Louis XIV's France ................................................................................................................................. 13
  4.2 E.T.A. Hoffman’s Germany ................................................................................................................... 14
  4.3 Historical context applied to commentary on the 21st century ........................................................ 17
Chapter 5: Das Fräulein von Scuderi in graphic novel format ................................................................. 20
  5.1 Close reading of panels ......................................................................................................................... 23
    5.1.1 Surveillance and the issue of CCTV systems ................................................................................. 24
    5.1.2 Fragments of reality: fictionalization of a historical crime ............................................................ 28
    5.1.2 Cardillac as puppet and the cost of a life ..................................................................................... 32
    5.1.3 Torture in the center of discussion ............................................................................................... 34
    5.1.4 Pop culture references .................................................................................................................. 37
    5.1.5 Public discourse, surveillance and violent repression of protest: the 21st century invades Versailles ........................................................................................................................................ 39
    5.1.6 Lies, religion and blind justice ....................................................................................................... 42
Chapter 6. Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 46
Bibliography.................................................................................................................................................. 49
Chapter 1: Introduction

A crime story, filled with murder, mystery, court intrigue and love, "Das Fräulein von Scuderi" was written by the German author E.T.A. Hoffmann as part of the series called "Die Serapionsbrüder," published between the years 1819 and 1821. Considered by many as the earliest example of crime fiction in German literature, Hoffmann’s novella has engendered numerous lines of interpretation. Some critics analyze it through the lens of crime fiction, establishing Mademoiselle de Scuderi as a detective, predating Edgar Allan Poe’s C. Auguste Dupin in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Other critics have focused on the sociopolitical aspects of the story, analyzing it as a critique of the legal institutions in Louis XIV’s France and, by extension, Hoffmann’s own social environment, 19th century Prussia. Finally, some interpretations focus on the psychological aspects of the novella, moving away from Scuderi as the main character and exploring the construction of Renè Cardillac as a criminal. The interest on this 19th century text has not diminished throughout the years, as can be proved by the many adaptations of the story, as an opera by Paul Hindemith in 1926, a film by Edgar Reitz in 1969 and a graphic novel by Alexandra Kardinar and Volker Schlecht in 2011.

This study will focus on the latest adaptation of "Das Fräulein von Scuderi," namely Kardinar and Schlecht’s graphic novel. Although there is value in most lines of interpretation and their variety emphasizes the complexity of Hoffmann’s novella, this thesis will only engage with some of these as they relate to the graphic novel adaptation, more specifically the sociopolitical critique constructed through historical commentary and reconstruction. The “original” narrative makes direct references to real places and people, as well as historically documented events, and

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1 The nomenclature “original” as it refers to adaptation theory will be further discussed on a following chapter. For now, the term was chosen as the simplest and most direct reference to E.T.A. Hoffmann’s story as it relates to its graphic novel adaptation.
Hoffmann’s stylistic decision to insert “reality markers”\(^2\) informs much of the sociopolitical branch of interpretation, which is further reinforced by the author’s biography and later works.

Kardinar and Schlecht’s graphic novel adaptation, although not realistic in style, follows in Hoffmann’s footsteps by using fragments of reality and playing with them, even going as far as adding details and curiosities about the story’s setting and 17\(^{th}\) century France. Kardinar and Schlecht produced a visual representation of Hoffmann’s novella that faithfully portrays the architecture and style of Versailles in Louis XIV’s time, however stylized through bright colors or modern collage techniques. Notwithstanding their intention to remain “faithful” to Hoffmann’s story and its setting, the graphic novelists inserted small anachronistic details in some panels that reinforce the sociopolitical critique of *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* while transporting this critique to the 21\(^{st}\) century. This study will focus on the insertion of anachronistic elements in the story and what commentary these insertions make about the 21\(^{st}\) century.

The following study will be organized into four different sections. Chapter 2 will deal with adaptation theory and the theoretical assumptions that will inform the analysis of the graphic novel. As will be demonstrated, contemporary adaptation theory approaches reworkings of source materials not as secondary products, but as texts that should be read both independently and as part of a complex cultural “tissue of quotations” (Barthes, 146). From this perspective, the graphic novel version of *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* has to be analyzed both as an independent work of art and as another interlocutor in the cultural dialogue started by E.T.A. Hoffmann.

\(^2\) The concept of “reality markers” will be used throughout this study as a way to reference the use of historically documented characters and events in a fictionalized manner. Hoffmann, and by extension Kardinar and Schlecht, use real historical names, dates and events in the story, but manipulate them for their own intentions, creating a form of fictionalized history. These “reality markers” provide the reader with interpretation keys and facilitate the access to the sociopolitical commentary by referring to names and events that are known by the reader.
After exploring adaptation theory and its importance for the interpretation of this particular graphic novel, Chapter 3 will engage with theories concerned with graphic novels as a relatively new medium and the interpretative specificities that accompany this type of medium. Chapter 4 will explore the historical background that informs both the text and the visual interpretation of Hoffmann’s novella, i.e. 17th century France and 19th century Germany, with a stronger focus on Hoffmann’s own time. This chapter will also describe the connections between the different historical layers developed in the graphic novel and how these layers interact in order to produce new meanings and sociopolitical commentary.

The last chapter will engage directly with the graphic novel, starting with a general analysis of its style, moving on to the close reading of different panels, focusing on the relationship between the reality markers from the 17th century and the anachronistic elements added by Kardinar and Schlecht, demonstrating how this relationship functions as a key for interpretation. Whether it is a CCTV camera hidden in the corner of a page, or a police office in modern riot gear, these details stand out in the otherwise historically accurate representation of 17th century France and, for that reason, become central for the contemporary reading of the graphic novel. This thesis will demonstrate that these elements, carefully inserted by Alexandra Kardinar and Volker Schlecht, contribute to the modernization of the sociopolitical commentary already existent in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s novella, demonstrating that issues of the 19th century are still very much a part of the 21st century reality.
Chapter 2: Adaptation Theory

Before delving into the analysis of the graphic novel itself, it is necessary to explore the theoretical background concerning adaptations. The choice between focusing on the text at hand without referencing the source material or interpreting the adaptation as part of a dialogue with the source material represents different perspectives in adaptation theory, an area of study that has evolved rapidly in the past years. Following the explosion of various “adapted products” that have hit the markets – currently, it is difficult to find a popular book series that has not been adapted to the film screen, or a blockbuster that has not become a spin-off series of comic books, for example – adaptation theory has broadened its field of study to something more than “literature to film adaptations”\(^3\). These new analyses also move past the “fidelity” discourse and explore the more complex and productive relations between texts. An adaptation’s success does not depend on its fidelity to the source material, but on the overall quality of the resulting work, which can be defined in many different ways.

While scholars have pulled from different theoretical traditions in the study of adaptations, post-structuralism provided some of the essential tools for modern adaptation theory, by pointing out the intertextual relationship between texts, regardless of their definition as adaptations, source material or “originals.” Much of the credit is due to Roland Barthes. In his 1967 essay “Death of the Author”, Barthes moved the focus of literary criticism from the author as an all-powerful creator and master of meaning to the text itself, and established the reader as the ultimate creator of meaning. He affirms:

\(^3\) Whether these are adaptations, franchising products, marketing stunts, or transmedia products will not be discussed here. This thesis has a very precise focus – one specific graphic novel adaptation – and, as such, cannot possibly bring enough arguments to engage in this conversation.
We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture (‘Death of the Author,’ 146)

This idea of texts as “tissues of quotations” certainly calls for a more active view of adaptations, not as secondary cultural productions – and for that reason necessarily inferior to the “original” – but as intertextual texts that actively engage with themes and characters from other sources, and create new meanings during that process. If every text or cultural production can be seen as an adaptation of pre-existing cultural artifacts, defining adaptations as secondary to an idea of “originality” is an outdated perspective. In that sense, although the nomenclature “original” seems like the easiest and most direct way to refer to a source text, the concept of “originality” is not helpful for adaptation theory, because in the grand scheme of cultural productions, there is no “original”. Even adaptations that clearly mark themselves as adaptations should be analyzed as any other work of art, and the intertextual relationships between source material and adaptation exist, to use Linda Hutcheon’s terms, laterally, not vertically – i.e. there is no idea of hierarchy between texts; source material and adaptation are owed the same reverence, and can be read as related or independent texts, because every text is a part of the cultural tissue of quotations.

In order to move forward, we need to take a step back and ask: what exactly is an adaptation? Julie Sanders, in *Adaptation and Appropriation*, emphasizes the concept of intertextuality already mentioned by Barthes in the quote above, referring to Julia Kristeva’s
idea that “all texts invoke and rework other texts in a rich and ever-evolving cultural mosaic” (17). For Sanders, adaptation can be a “transpositional practice” from one genre into another; it can also be an “amplificatory procedure”, adding to or expanding the source material; adaptation is also “commentary on a sourcetext”, or an attempt to “make texts ‘relevant’ or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships” (18-19). One can create an adaptation for various reasons, out of pure artistic desire, from a passion for a specific author, or simply for a search of financial success – which seems to be the reason behind many contemporary adaptation works, such as the seemingly never-ending list of Marvel and DC Comics film adaptations of comic book stories or the recent success of book-to-film series adaptations, like “The Hunger Games” or “50 Shades of Grey”. For theorist Linda Hutcheon,

Part of this pleasure [from adaptations], (…) comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise (…) Thematic and narrative persistence combines with material variation, with the result that adaptations are never simply reproductions that lose the Benjaminian aura. Rather, they carry that aura with them. (4)

The element of surprise, the new, is what differentiates the adaptation from its source material. Once again, adapting is also creating a work of art of its own, that can be interpreted fully on an independent reading. If we agree with Barthes that the author’s intentions are secondary to the reader’s reconstruction and interpretation, none of the reasons for choosing to adapt given above matter. The reader’s reaction and interpretation is independent of authorial intent. According to Nico Dicceco, “the experience of intertextual interaction depends on the audience’s imagination to fill in the implicit meanings, to see the adaptation as if it were the

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4 Sanders is referring to the theories developed in Julia Kristeva’s “The Bounded Text” (1980) and “Word, Dialogue, Novel” (1986)
adapted text” (132). The reader has the choice to look at an adaptation as part of an artistic history, or simply as a new work of art without external connections. This condition, this choice made by the reader, determines how successful an adaptation is.

If we do not know that what we are experiencing actually is an adaptation or if we are not familiar with the particular work that it adapts, we simply experience the adaptation as we would any other work. To experience it as an adaptation, however… we need to recognize it as such and to know its adapted text, thus allowing the latter to oscillate in our memories with what we are experiencing. In the process, we inevitably fill in any gaps in the adaptation with information from the adapted text… For an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be so for both knowing and unknowing audiences (Hutcheon 121)

According to Linda Hutcheon, the success of an adaptation – whatever the word “success” might mean for this theorist – is determined on whether the reader knows the source material or not, and if this knowledge is required. Some adaptations, however, force the reader to make the connection. The format of the graphic novel Das Fräulein von Scuderi hinders any chance of an independent reading by constantly referring to the source material, bringing E.T.A. Hoffman’s name in the title and his text as an appendix. Even the reader who might have never heard of the 19th century story will be aware of this relationship as soon as she opens the book – and the choice will be between with which text to engage first, E.T.A. Hoffmann’s or Kardinar and Schlecht’s. This forceful reference influences the interpretation of the graphic novel, which can no longer be read only in the context of the 21st century, but actually emphasizes the different historical layers involved in creating the final product. In the Nachwort for the graphic novel, Kardinar and Schlecht clearly state

In the simplest terms, Kardinar and Schlecht demonstrate that they subscribe to the idea that adaptation has – and should have – its own language and value, but there is also a necessary “reverence” to be paid to the source text. They pay this reverence in providing the reader with Hoffmann’s original story, unabridged. It is the reader, however, who will make the final decision whether to read only the graphic novel or engage with Hoffmann’s source text. Although the graphic novelists made the choice to emphasize the relationship between their interpretation and Hoffmann’s words, they have no control over the reader’s final decision.

In the specific case of Das Fräulein von Scuderi, the adaptation translated a narrative medium into a visual medium. This change in medium requires the reader to use a different set of skills to interpret the text; these skills are not the same used to interpret paintings or film, considering the specificities of graphic novels as a visual narrative medium. The following chapter will describe some of these specificities.
Chapter 3: Graphic novels as specific medium

Graphic novels, as a specific medium, bring about controversy and a history of prejudice and misconceptions. Paul Gravett, in his book *Graphic Novels: Everything You Need to Know*, discusses the preconceptions that arise from the term “graphic novel”. “Graphic” brings images of pornography, or maybe something extreme or “in your face”. “Novel” immediately echoes ideas of serious intent and traditional literature. Gravett argues, however, that graphic novels are all of the above, but also so much more. The term is “a misnomer... [and] has caught on and entered the language and dictionaries, for all its inaccuracies” (8). Historically, it has been around since the 1960s, when “American comics critic and magazine publisher Richard Kyle coined it” (8).

With the rise of what has been termed the "graphic novel" which backed the development of book-length comics dealing with "serious" matters, the interest in collaboration with literature increased once more [...] But - in contrast to previous projects like *Classics Illustrated* - these new adaptations of literature presented content and artwork worthwhile for an adult audience and thus aimed at demonstrating the comics' potential for telling complex stories in a unique style - as an independent form of narrative visual art. (Ferstl 61)

Visual interpretation and the search for “literariness” represent essential parts of graphic novels – and not only the ones labeled as *adaptations*. According to Jan Baetens, the turn towards a more literary view of graphic novels was initially a European phenomenon. The idea of graphic novel as literature calls for a non-hierarchical interpretation of image and text. Visual and textual collaborate in the creation of meaning (Baetens 79). Narrative analysis has been around for centuries, but the visual aspects of graphic novels come with new ways of looking at these narratives that were once only verbal. Baetens explains:
Although the graphic novel remains a sequential art, to quote Eisner’s pertinent formulation, the images in question are not only the links of a narrative chain, but also autonomous items that function not merely to bridge the gap between images

(80)

The images, in graphic novels, move the narrative forward while also functioning as autonomous texts, complete in themselves. Therefore, each panel, each image, can also be analyzed as an independent work of art, while still belonging to the narrative chain. Picking up the idea that each panel generates in itself an abundance of meaning, my interpretation of *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* will focus on a few panels and how details carefully added to those images construct another level of storytelling. Following the premise that readers will bring their own particular backgrounds to the interpretation, I have chosen a few pages of the graphic novel in order to look closely at the anachronistic details added to the story by Kardinar and Schlecht and interpret how these images develop a new layer of meaning to the narrative, which becomes a commentary on current events while maintaining its original references to 17th and 19th century events. The analysis will combine a historical perspective with a discourse theoretical approach to contemporary issues, which requires a step back to introduce some of the themes explored in the story. The next chapter will introduce the historical elements explored by Hoffmann in the novella and the possibilities for their reinterpretation in the 21st century context.
Chapter 4: Historical Background

The countries known today as Germany and France have had historical connections, whether through peaceful or war times, since the countries’ early history. German writers, especially during the 17th and 18th centuries, turned to French models in order to build their own national literary identity. Whether through praise or criticism, French literature and French history were very much ingrained in Germany’s literary culture. Events such as the French Revolution influenced German writers and politicians, which in turn caused significant changes to the lives of German citizens. It follows tradition therefore, that E.T.A Hoffmann chose to reference real characters from French history – Louis XIV, obviously, but also the Marquise de Maintenon, the title character Mademoiselle de Scudery, and other minor characters, in his novella Das Fräulein von Scuderi. His decision to represent French instead of German aristocracy permitted him to criticize certain aspects of his own national institutions without incurring any legal problems himself. This use of reality markers without any supernatural occurrences, coming from an author known for his use of fantastical elements, has influenced critics to write extensively on the sociopolitical themes underlying the story of Fräulein von Scuderi. These fragments of reality also provide a specific reference point for interpretation, bridging the gap between fiction and Hoffmann’s actual political environment.

Hoffmann wrote Fräulein von Scuderí sometime between 1819 and 1821. During those years, the states and principalities that would soon become what we know as Germany were going through numerous bureaucratic, political, and social reforms that affected its citizens directly. These sociopolitical changes did not happen overnight: they were the consequences of years of conflict and revolution, starting with the influence caused by the French Revolution in 1789 and culminating with the Napoleonic Empire and its downfall in the early 19th century.
Hoffmann was, in one way or another, a part of the bureaucratic structure of Germany’s judicial system at his time. Much of his work, even when set in fictitious lands or filled with fantastical elements, has underlying commentaries on the governmental institutions that surrounded him. *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* is no exception. The decision to set the story in Louis XIV’s France permitted Hoffmann to make his point without directly referencing anyone in power, protecting his position as a jurist in the Prussian government. Birgit Röder, when analyzing Hoffman’s novella, underlines his connections to the Prussian legal system and his commentary in the story:

There is, of course, a distinction to be drawn between the judgments of the judiciary and justice itself. Hoffmann, who was actively involved in the Prussian legal administration, naturally understood that a state cannot function without a judiciary. At the same time, he recognized that human beings are not infallible, and consequently any judicial system is likely to have its defects. In *Das Fräulein von Scuderi*, however, Hoffmann underlines two points: first, we should not lose sight of the shortcomings that are present in a given judicial system; and second, we should not imagine that these shortcomings will simply disappear if the state is allowed to pursue the criminal elements of society with a blind, fanatical zeal.

(43)

In the adaptation, Alexandra Kardinar and Volker Schlecht emphasize the historical aspects of Hoffmann’s story, not only through careful research on architecture, furniture and clothing from the period, but also by adding extra notes on certain aspects of Louis XIV’s court and customs. This constant focus on history requires us to take a closer look at and separate the
different historical layers intertwined in the graphic novel version of this story, which combine in order to create a new layer of reference to issues of the 21st century.

**4.1 Louis XIV’s France**

Louis XIV has gone down in history as “the Sun King.” As the main representative of the system of absolute monarchical rule, Louis XIV stands for a centralized power. During his reign, which lasted from 1643 to 1715, he succeeded in eliminating the last signs of feudalism in France, and centralized the aristocracy around himself and the new Palace of Versailles. Louis XIV also promoted numerous reforms, ranging from military to tax and legal issues. After revolts from the aristocracy during the early years of his reign, Louis XIV abandoned Paris for Versailles. However, historians disagree on whether Paris was effectively “abandoned” by the king or the move only meant that Louis XIV had to care for it from a distance, trusting his officers to keep the city safe. Whatever the correct assessment might be, the combination of centralized power and local police certainly opened the way for inaccurate reports and abuses of power.

The historical figure of La Reynie and the Chambre ardente were symbols of this abuse of power, and the affair of the poisons depicted in Hoffmann’s story was based on true events that led to numerous executions and deaths by torture. The absolutist form of government would grow in power until the French Revolution, in 1789, when Louis XVI and his famous wife Marie Antoinette faced execution before the people of France.
4.2 E.T.A. Hoffman’s Germany

The late 1700s had signaled the beginning of a German national discourse, if not in the political sphere, certainly in the cultural sphere. According to Hagen Schulze, the idea of a German nation was born “as a cultural entity without direct ties to politics” (91). This meant “its heroes were not princes and military leaders as in France and England but rather a collection of poets and philosophers” (91), among whom Goethe and the city of Weimar represented the “center of the nation” (91).

The late 1700s was also the period of the French Revolution. Reactions from the German intellectuals to the movement in France varied. Writers such as Christoph Martin Wieland, Ludwig Tieck, Friedrich Hölderlin and Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder were vocally supportive of the revolutionary spirit; philosophers such as Kant and Herder, Hegel and Fichte, also joined their voices to the movement. David Blackbourn reminds us, however, that “there were exceptions – Goethe kept a measured distance from all this rapture” (48). The French Revolution “tapped the twin German currents of Enlightenment and cosmopolitanism”, and, along with the previous movement of the Reformation, provided incentive to local revolutionary ideas that would push for a change in the way German-speaking lands were organized. Blackbourn describes how, even before the radical turn taken in 1792, there was unrest throughout Germany.

There were riots in 1789-90 in the Rhenish towns of Boppard, Trier, Koblenz, Aachen, Mainz and Cologne. Widespread rural disturbances occurred simultaneously in the Rhineland, the Mosel valley, the Saarland and the Palatinate… There were similar events in the east… In addition to uprisings, German states faced the formation of ‘Jacobin clubs’ and revolutionary propaganda flooding in from border towns like Strasbourg, Basel and Altona. (50-51)
The reactions of German rulers was mostly towards repression. Defiance of the government, gatherings or writing that could be considered as “hostile to the existing order” were declared illegal. Censorship became stricter and mentions of the French Revolution were completely also forbidden.

One of the main artistic movements of the period was Romanticism. In the realm of politics, Romantic artists moved away from revolutionary attitudes, as a reaction to the violent turn taken by the French Revolution during the years 1793 and 1794, in what has been denominated The Terror. Poets and philosophers turned to a “theoretical sphere” (Schulze, 93), retreating to fantastical and idealized worlds in order to escape the realities of war and revolutions. German sympathizers of the revolution turned away. Blackbourn quotes Caroline Schlegel’s feelings, which summarize much of the atmosphere of the time: “They have betrayed our ideals and dragged them in the mud, these evil, stupid and base people who no longer know what they are doing” (55). This turn away from the Jacobin terror of the French Revolution caused many intellectuals to develop a new appreciation for the idea of the Empire.

War between France and Germany during the period of 1792-1815 shaped an entire generation. The conflict was caused by a multitude of issues, stretching all the way back from the reign of Louis XIV to the consequences of the French Revolution. The losses suffered by Austria

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5 Blackbourn describes in more detail: “The Saxon Decree Against Tumult and Insurrection in 1791 was directed against defiance of government decrees or refusal to perform traditional obligations, and declared illegal any gathering or written text that could be construed as hostile to the existing order. In Prussia, the pursuit of pious orthodoxy took on an increasingly antirevolutionary colouring. The theological faculty and students of Halle were denounced as ‘spiritual and temporal Jacobins’: censorship became harsher; the minister for Silesia ordered the arrest of anyone who even mentioned the French Revolution. In Austria, the young and uncertain Francis II acceded to the throne in 1792 and came under strong pressure to adopt a similar policy. After the uncovering of the so-called ‘Jacobin Conspiracy’ in Vienna in 1794, he yielded to the entreaties of the hardliners” (51-52).
and Prussia reshaped the borders of Germany many times over, complicated even more the
definitions of a German state, and had direct consequences to the lives of the German people\textsuperscript{6}.

After 1806, during the Napoleonic years, states that aligned with France as well as
Austria and Prussia initiated a period of intense structural reform to institutions. Schulze
describes the reforms in Prussia as follows:

The new state was conceived as a previously unheard-of concentration of powers
and control. The reforms were carried out by civil servants, that is, by officials,
soldiers, and jurists who saw themselves as legitimate representatives of the
country as a whole (…) The old mercenary army was to be replaced by an army
of free citizens whose advancement through the ranks would depend on
achievements and merit rather than noble birth; the government and its
administrative bureaucracy were to be modernized and made more efficient;
serfdom east of the Elbe River was to be abolished. (103)

However, these changes did not last long. By 1814, Napoleon abdicated and the war
ended, but state leaders did not move on with their initial reform, opting in turn for a restauration
of the old regime. In 1819, leaders of German states decided on the “ruthless suppression of all
revolutionary and liberationist movements” (Schulze, 111). The new constitutions that had been
developed were tossed aside, Austria and Prussia returned to absolutist governments, and there
was an active effort to return structures to their old configurations.

\textsuperscript{6} Blackbourn: “This was a time of chronic uncertainty and insecurity. More than half of all Germans acquired new
rulers during this period, and there were places that experienced five or six changes in a generation… From the
Baltic to the Alps, from the left bank of the Rhine to the Vistula, local areas changed hands as armies marched and
counter-marched… Germany was the scene of intermittent hostilities for twenty years, its population subject to the
rape, looting, billeting and casual destruction of French, Prussian, Austrian, Bavarian, Polish, Russian, Swedish,
British and Portuguese soldiers (64).
This is the German/Prussian world of E.T.A. Hoffmann, and with this background in mind, it is impossible to read *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* without recognizing the references to the reality surrounding the writer. Kardinar and Schlecht do not emphasize this second layer of historical background in the graphic novel. However, their choice to bring the complete text of the novella as an appendix and directly refer to Hoffmann multiple times, whether in the title or in their commentary to the visual representation of his text, reinforce this connection indirectly.

### 4.3 Historical context applied to commentary on the 21st century

If 17th century France and 19th century Germany are only two layers of this historical narrative, where can the reader find the new addition by Kardinar and Schlecht? I believe that the graphic novelists comment on the 21st century by choosing to focus on this particular story. The connections are multiple. Julie Sanders dedicates an entire chapter of her book to the relationship between the 21st and the 19th century. Although focused on Victorian England, her comments are also productive for the analysis of German topics.

So the Victorian era proves in the end ripe for appropriation because it throws into sharp relief many of the overriding concerns of the postmodern era: questions of identity; of environmental and genetic conditioning; repressed and oppressed modes of sexuality; criminality and violence; the urban phenomenon; the operations of law and authority; science and religion; the postcolonial legacies of the empire (Sanders 129)

The topics of criminality and violence, and the operations of law and authority are discussed front and center in Hoffmann’s story. In an adaptation, reworking material from a different historical period means more than merely transporting the skeleton of the work to a new time. In order to comment on the same topics as Hoffmann, Kardinar and Schlecht’s graphic
novel does not need to update Hoffmann’s story, setting it in modern France, Germany or United States. Instead, they are able to construct their own sociopolitical critique by reproducing Hoffmann’s technique of using references located in the past, allowing the reader to connect the dots and observe the similarities between the three periods. If Julie Sanders is correct in saying that concerns of the 19th century still occupy center stage in the contemporary world, a reader of the graphic novel adaptation would recognize particular issues of contemporary Germany/United States in the details emphasized by Kardinar and Schlecht. Linda Hutcheon explains how the process occurs:

We engage in time and space, within a particular society and a general culture. The contexts of creation and reception are material, public, and economic as much as they are cultural, personal, and aesthetic. This explains why, even in today's globalized world, major shifts in a story's context - that is, for example, in a national setting or time period - can change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically and literally. (Hutcheon 28)

The same story, told in a different time, can achieve different results or criticize its contemporaries without openly naming the new players. Kardinar and Schlecht complicate the interpretation of their work by emphasizing the connection with 17th century France through little asides and notes on Louis XIV’s court – ranging from directly related topics of the legal system and safety in Paris, to anecdotes on the gardens of Versailles or its plumbing system. Other than these additions, the graphic novelists maintained much of the original dialogue, with some necessary editing to accommodate the spatial constraints of the graphic novel as a material medium. Description is, obviously, transformed into image. This focus on the French historical
layer might distract the reader from the “meat and bones” of the novella, its close connection with today’s topics. However, the use of contemporary imagery – the anachronistic elements inserted in certain scenes – leads the reader to a connection between, for example, the Chambre ardente and its violent methods and Guantanamo Bay and the current discussion on the effectiveness and legality of torture. The graphic novel was published in 2011, before some of these issues came to light, but one cannot read about the close surveillance system created in 17th century Paris – and in 19th century Prussia for that matter – and not relate it to discussions on online privacy and the NSA, especially when Kardinar and Schlecht utilize images of contemporary CCTV cameras and smartphones. Although not discussed openly by the graphic novelists, these issues are emphasized through visual symbols easily recognizable by the readers, which will be discussed in a close reading of some panels in the graphic novel.
Chapter 5: *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* in graphic novel format

Kardinar and Schlecht's style combines some expressionist color and design, with hints of Dada montage and other early-20th century modernist art. The opening pages of the graphic novel emphasize Hoffmann’s name on the left-hand side, with the full title of the work on the right-hand side and the description “novelliert and illuminiert von Alexandra Kardinar & Volker Schlecht.” With these words, the graphic novelists define their work as a revision, a reworking of Hoffmann’s source material – they never refer to it as an “adaptation.” The choice of verbs “novellieren” and “illuminieren” is both active and passive, critical and reverential. Kardinar and Schlecht are “illuminating” a text, adding a visual reference to its narrative, but they are also revising it – which implies the text needs revision.

The mixing of styles already appears on these opening pages, with each line written with a different font. The expressionist style translates the psychological aspects of Hoffmann’s story very effectively to a visual medium. Much has been written on the psychoanalytical interpretation of *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* and the dissociative personality disorders of René Cardillac, and the exaggerated, unrealistic characteristics of the expressionist style could represent the best visual translation for these issues. As an artistic movement that moved away from attempts to represent objective reality, expressionism shares many characteristics with E.T.A. Hoffmann’s stories, which also seem to represent an impossibility to observe and comprehend reality as something objective and representable. Although impressionism and expressionism similarly attempted to distance art from a realist depiction of the outer world, the expressionist style of the graphic novel accentuates its violent nature, while also making the connection to the early 20th century, another historical moment marked by doubt, war, and sweeping changes around the world.
However, I also believe that the graphic novel’s exaggerated “in your face” style increases its shock value, and keeps the reader at a distance. It does not attempt to recreate the world, because reality has multiple facets, each containing its own truth. This choice, in itself, is a commentary on the impossible task of the juridical system – finding an undeniable truth by which to judge whether someone has a right to live or die is an impossible task. Kardinar and Schlecht also use the busy, overcrowded panels to distract the reader, give him multiple paths through the story, mirroring Hoffmann’s style by never presenting a single, definitive interpretation of a coherent narrative. This will come to play an important part in the construction of the multiple historical layers imbedded in this graphic novel.

The design of the characters combines drawing and cutouts, with faces mostly done in black and white, while clothing and accessories have intense colors. Most pages do not have panels divided into smaller sections, but rather depict one main scene with multiple conversational balloons sharing the space with narration and historical footnotes. Kardinar and Schlecht structure the story through main scenes rather than multiple action panels, which allows them to insert a lot of information in one frame. Even when a page has more than one panel, those usually flow into each other, and the order for reading can become confusing, since there is not one single way of reading multiple panels or clear indications of which order should be followed.

Scott McCloud points out that the “literate graphic novel movement” seems to make use of “dynamic accents” less than traditional comics, “creating moods more akin to a stage play than a Hollywood blockbuster” (56). In *Das Fräulein von Scuderi*, however, Kardinar and Schlecht make use of extreme angles, graphic contrast, and exaggerated expressions in order to translate to a visual medium the atmosphere surrounding the events in the story. The confusing
structure of the graphic novel translates polysemy of Hoffmann’s text. The atmosphere of mystery and highly emotional responses surrounding the events in *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* are expressed through a strong color scheme and unorganized word balloons.

Kardinar and Schlecht did extensive research on 17th century French clothing, style, furniture, etc., so every detail on each panel could be historically accurate. In most cases, the historical asides and curiosities added by Kardinar and Schlecht do not relate directly to the “scene”; sometimes, they focus on details related to Louis XIV’s government which are indirectly related to Hoffmann’s story; the majority of the “history balloons” bring descriptive elements about the living conditions of the time, cultural curiosities and other unrelated topics.

Another stylistic choice is the representation of movement through the repetition of a certain character on the page, with little changes to their position each time. This representation is in no way “realistic”, and characters resemble cardboard puppets, with very angled and stiff movements. Although a direct consequence of the collage technique utilized by Kardinar and Schlecht, the unrealistic movement also contributes to a certain degree of alienation of the reader, who cannot see the characters as “real people” in any way. Interestingly enough, most characters in Hoffmann’s story were based on real historical figures, and this disconnect between reality and fiction is only emphasized by Kardinar and Schlecht’s decision to create cardboard cutout characters reminiscent of puppet theaters instead of using accurate representations of the historical characters. The cardboard cutout puppets emphasize the question of construction of “truth” and historical accuracy. By being represented as puppets, these “historical figures” lose the appearance of “historical documentation” and are shown as fragments that can be manipulated by different authors at different times. Hoffmann had already started this process, using names and dates taken out of historical documents, but inserting them in different contexts.
and attributing new roles to them. Kardinar and Schlecht reinforce this with the collage technique, putting into question how the concept of truth is a construct – and these “historical figures” are only puppets open to manipulation.

The emotional state of the characters, usually represented by their facial expressions or body language in most comics and graphic novels, comes out mostly through color combination and floating words outside of dialogue balloons, such as “Hilfe!” in one of the panels analyzed in the next chapter. The use of color accentuates certain objects and characters, occasionally appearing only as light-shadow effect, and Kardinar and Schlecht’s choice of color scheme contributes to the avant-garde look of the graphic novel, which resembles early 20th century Expressionist paintings, with strong contrast and lack of realistic color palette.

5.1 Close reading of panels
The panels chosen for the close reading represent a variety of styles and different stages of the narrative. Most of them are exemplary cases of the combining of historical layers described in the previous chapter, while also providing a number of anachronistic details, which I would like to emphasize, and develop an analysis based on their insertion in this story. These panels, when read in contrast to the more “historically accurate” depictions of scenes in certain examples, show how the interplay of historical references constructs a new meaning in Kardinar and Schlecht’s version of Das Fräulein von Scuderi, namely the sociopolitical commentary on issues contemporary to Hoffmann’s time which are still relevant in the 21st century. Some of these issues have already been named in previous chapters, such as the recently leaked documents on torture used as an “enhanced interrogation” technique or the controversy about surveillance and the right to privacy.
5.1.1 Surveillance and the issue of CCTV systems

Figure 1 appears early in the story, when Olivier Brusson, at that time still an unnamed character, pays a visit to Mademoiselle de Scuderi in the middle of the night. Three characters appear in the scene: Olivier Brusson, whose face remains half-hidden for most of the scene, in the middle of the left page; Martiniere, Mademoiselle de Scuderi’s lady in waiting, shown falling to the ground on the left page and talking to someone at the top of the right page; and Baptiste, Scuderi’s valet, shown in three stages of movement on the right page. The bright green and pink colors used on certain elements of the pages contrast with the dark background and the atmosphere of mystery and fear caused by Brusson’s surprise visit. The three characters wear
period-appropriate clothing, and nothing seems to indicate any “intrusion” from a different time period.

However, although difficult to see in the scanned reproduction of these panels, there is a small anachronistic element hidden in the otherwise historically accurate depiction of the scene. On the bottom right corner, almost blending in with the dark background, Kardinar and Schlecht have added a surveillance camera, of the type used in closed-circuit television systems (CCTV) throughout the world. The positioning of this drawing is not arbitrary – the graphic novelists inserted this CCTV camera directly below one of their “historical notes”, which in turn comments on the processes of surveillance in Louis XIV’s court. This addendum goes:


The historical note above the cited passage describes the installation of new lanterns on the streets of Paris and how these were intended as a way to give more comfort to the citizens, but were mostly used for their control. The graphic novelists do not make these visual connections gratuitously. By addressing the surveillance methods of 17th century France and immediately providing a contemporary visual reference, they guide the reader back to his own time, forcing him out of the world of the story and into his own world. Nothing else in the entire panel refers to the contemporary world. It is only this small, almost hidden detail that provides
the reader with new possibilities of interpretation. This single CCTV camera references the discussion on the uses of surveillance that has been happening throughout the world.

Writing in 2013 on the issues between the desire for privacy and the use of “smart CCTV” surveillance system on the grounds of necessary “security”, German scholars Norma Möllers and Jens Hälterlein surveyed the public discourse about the use of these surveillance systems and concluded that

Personal liberty in the context of smart CCTV was discussed in Germany predominantly as a regulative problem of privacy rights. This discourse staged its claim by referring to the expertise of data protection commissioners, whereas references to the potential social consequences of surveillance practices remained mostly excluded. References to public administration’s promises of control underlined the project of regulating constraints of liberty through sensible legal instruments. However, by making it a matter of effective bureaucratic control, the privacy discourse, in consequence, did not question the legitimacy of smart CCTV in general; rather, it configured meeting privacy requirements as its major necessary condition. (67)

Especially after the NSA surveillance scandal of 2013, German public discourse and news outlets have been discussing the pros and cons of the use of surveillance technology. An article in the online version of British The Guardian, also from 2013, describes the action of “Camover”, a protest/competition that took place in Berlin and involved destroying CCTV cameras and posting videos of this destruction on the group’s website – the irony of this last action might have been lost on them. The author of the article, Oliver Stallwood, calls attention
to the complicated dichotomy between the increase in violence, which calls for new methods of maintaining security, and the limits to which society is willing to go to ensure this security.

The use of surveillance cameras has become a thorny political issue in Germany. Inadequate CCTV footage was highlighted in the investigation of a bomb scare in Bonn last December ("Germans consider Brit-style CCTV," shouted Der Spiegel). This, along with the brutal killing of a man in Berlin's busy Alexanderplatz square in October 2012 spurred the interior minister, Hans-Peter Friedrich, to call for "efficient video surveillance and video recording in public areas."

Although the graphic novel predates these particular events and discussions, its commentary is made even stronger by them, as if Kardinar and Schlecht were merely anticipating some of these issues. In a post-9/11 (Western) world, these questions of “safety versus personal freedom” were already circulating in 2011 when the graphic novelists were working on their version of Hoffmann’s novella, and these questions play an important part in their visual interpretation. None of these questions are addressed directly in the graphic novel, but the analysis of other cases of anachronistic elements, combined with the original sociopolitical critique constructed by Hoffmann, allow us to reach those conclusions.
5.1.2 Fragments of reality: fictionalization of a historical crime

The pages seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3 appear as an insertion after Olivier Brusson’s first attempt to speak with Mademoiselle von Scuderi. In Hoffmann’s novella, the story of the “Giftaffäre” – the affair of the poisons – serves as the background to the depiction of a police state willing to go to extremes to solve a murder case and set the atmosphere of the story according to the consequences of this crime. A historically documented murder scandal, the affair of the poisons took place in Louis XIV’s Paris. More than 400 suspects were arrested, 34 people were condemned and executed and two people died under the tortures of the Chambre ardente. Hoffmann describes his version of the historical affair in *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* in great detail, referring to the historical figures involved in the scandal and the techniques used to apprehend and punish them. His description anticipates the actions of characters such as La
Regnie and Degrais, explaining how and why they are able to go to such extremes in order to solve a murder case and how the state gives them the freedom to act as they please.

Kardinar and Schlecht dedicate four pages to this side story. These pages present a white background with black text (the yellow tint of the scanned version is merely an effect of the lighting), which include excerpts taken directly from Hoffmann’s novella and the visual representations of certain aspects of the story. These visual representations rely on highly recognizable symbols, such as the skull and crossed bones representing poison and simple black silhouettes, usually found on street signs and other “practical” signage, in order to represent the actions performed by people in the story. These symbols appear mostly inside small square boxes, and the timeline is organized by the use of arrows going left to right. The story of the poisonings is intertwined with the mystery of the series of murders connected to young lovers and jewelry. Later on, it is revealed that these murders have been committed by René Cardillac.
What strikes the reader as odd is the opposition between the exaggerated and colorful expressionist style of the graphic novel, and the minimalist, black and white pages dedicated to the affair of the poisons. These pages are almost too bland and boring in comparison to the rest of the work, but they contain important details that guide the reader to a specific interpretation. The easily recognizable symbols create a bridge between historical fiction and contemporary symbolism, and anchor the story in a certain historical verisimilitude. It also shakes the reader out of his dive into the 17th century world constructed up until that point, by using symbols that are a part of the daily routine of Western countries. The message is that this is an old story, but a very much real one, and stories like this can be found every day on news outlets and social media.

The people involved in the affair of the poisons are represented by the same black stick-figures. They lack any identifiable characteristics; they have no personality, no name – even though the text cites the names of several historical figures, these names are not linked to any particular drawing, and every character is represented by the same generic human-like figures, in a commentary on the way the justice system sees them. They are criminals and their lives are not important enough for them to be represented with any form of singularity.

In contrast to this dehumanizing generic representation of the participants and victims of the affair of the poisons, the drawing of La Reynie – the historical figure on which La Regnie was based – becomes emphasized. The drawing resembles a stylized and twisted version of a 17th century painting of the real La Reynie. Kardinar and Schlecht’s version, however, has horns coming out of his temples; one of the most commonly used symbols for evil or bad characters. It introduces him as the “1er lieutenant general de police de Paris”, but the only object visible in the picture is a “Daumenschrauben,” a torture device used in interrogation that functions by
crunching the victim’s fingers and thumbs. As the first representation of La Regnie, this image will follow the reader as he moves on through the pages, informing his opinion on the character. Kardinar and Schlecht intentionally present La Regnie as a torturer, someone who is willing to do anything to find his answers – his only conversational balloon contains only a question mark, indicating his job as an interrogator.

The second character to receive “special attention” is Marc-Rene de Voyer de Paulmy, 1er Marquis d’Argenson. Although he is present in Hoffmann’s story only in the context of the affair of the poisons, Kardinar and Schlecht not only dedicate ¼ of a page to his image, but return to him in their appendix, describing a specific action he took as part of the French government:

Marc-Rene de Voyer de Paulmy, Marquis d’Argenson war Staatsminister und Generalleutnant der Polizei von 1697 bis 1718. Er führte das Instrument des "Lettre de cachet" ein. Diese vom König – durchaus auch blanko – unterzeichneten versiegelten Haftbefehle brachten, bis zu ihrer Abschaffung durch die Französische Revolution, missliebige Personen ohne Gerichtsverfahren in staatlichen Gewahrsam oder verwiesen sie des Landes (87)

This footnote describes the instrument of the “Lettre de cachet”, warrants of arrest used with or without the King’s signature – and completely outside a court of law – in order to arrest or expel “unpopular persons.” The combination between visual representation and text creates a new interpretation for the presence of a specific character. D’Argenson’s image, by itself, does not say much other than “this is a character named in Hoffmann’s novella.” The addition of the footnote accompanying his name, however, elevates his visual representation to the same level of interpretation as La Regnie’s – they are shown side by side, as two characters representative of a
strong police state and the abuse of the law by its main proponents. This interpretation will become stronger throughout the remainder of this study.

5.1.2 Cardillac as puppet and the cost of a life

Figure 4 is an exception in this study, since it does not contain any obviously anachronistic element. Nonetheless, it reinforces the interpretation pursued so far through its representation of Rene Cardillac in relation to the small historical addendum on the left page.

Cardillac, at this point in the story, is merely a goldsmith brought into the rooms of Madame de Maintenon, the King’s lover, in order to appraise the jewelry left for Mademoiselle de Scuderi by Olivier Brusson during his midnight visit. He recognizes the work as his own and, lost in thought for a few moments, decides to present Scuderi with the jewelry. She is hesitant to accept it, but Cardillac insists that it was made for her, and it would be an honor for him if she would keep his
work. At this point, Scuderi is not aware of Cardillac’s relationship to his own work, and how it affects him in a nearly psychotic manner. Therefore, she does not know that, by accepting this present, she is putting herself in danger.

Kardinar and Schlecht give the reader some indication of what is to come. Cardillac, who up until this point had been wearing period-appropriate clothing, is suddenly represented as mere cardboard. His bright red hair, a characteristic taken from Hoffmann’s description of Cardillac, loses its color, and his body resembles a rotisserie chicken: wide, brown, and most certainly not human. Why change the representation of this character now? These pages represent the first indication of the psychological issues that affect Cardillac. His reaction to seeing his jewelry and his internal conflict on whether to give them to Scuderi or not hint at the psychosis that leads him to kill. He is shown, therefore, as less than human because this is how the justice system will see him – in a Foucauldian sense, his actions define what he is. Cardillac is a criminal, that is his label, and his life is worth less than that of a “normal citizen.” This idea of how much a life is worth cannot be achieved without reference to the text at hand. The graphic novelists lead the reader to this connection by adding the following commentary:

Betriebsunfälle hat es beim Bau von Versailles nicht wenige gegeben. Überliefert sind die genauen Tarife für Entschädigungen: der Verlust eines Armes oder Beines kostete 30 bis 40 Livres, ein Auge 60, ein Menschenleben 100 Livres.

Accidents in the construction of Versailles had a specific cost. A life was valued at 100 livres, regardless of how this life was lost or who the guilty party was for the accident. If the lives of “honest workers” were valued at so little, how much would the life of a criminal be worth? The relationship between what is said and what is shown can only be reinforced by the reader’s knowledge of the novella, which indicates that this graphic novel is meant for re-
reading. But the connection can already be made on the first reading by focusing on the change of Cardillac’s representation and how that change sets him apart from the other characters.

5.1.3 Torture in the center of discussion

After meeting with Mademoiselle de Scuderi, Cardillac has another episode of his psychosis and Olivier Brusson, who had been a protégé of Scuderi as a child, decides to protect her. He follows Cardillac at night and witnesses his murder by a mysterious character. Brusson takes Cardillac’s wounded body back home, but ends up being accused of the murder and taken into custody. Figure 5 reproduces the scenes after Brusson has already been sent to the Chambre ardente and requests an interview with Mademoiselle de Scuderi. The law officer Degrais brings the request to Scuderi, reminding her that this leniency comes from her previous pleas for Brusson, who receives the mercy of the unscrupulous La Regnie on Scuderi’s behalf. However,
not only are the conversational balloons difficult to follow, the graphic novelists also inserted drawings of multiple torture devices that are not mentioned by name in Hoffmann’s novella: a “Brustreißer”, a “Mundbirne” and a “Daumenschrauben.” The conversation between Scuderi and Degrais never mentions the torture suffered by Brusson openly – it hints at it, surreptitiously. Kardinar and Schlecht, nonetheless, bring the topic to the foreground in a literal sense, setting the images of the torture devices above the small representations of the characters, and one of the conversational balloons brings the words “la torture” (“the torture” in French). The box on the middle right section of the second page brings the following historical addendum by Kardinar and Schlecht.

Um die Verdächtigen zu ängstigen und dadurch zu Aussagen im Verhör zu bewegen, gab es die sogenannte Territion, zu deutsch Schreckung, bei welcher ihnen die Folterinstrumente zunächst nur gezeigt wurden – oft als Vorstufe der Tortur, der „peinlichen Befragung“. Auch das pure „Anlegen“ einiger Werkzeuge, ohne der Person dabei schon Schmerzen zuzufügen, galt dabei als übliche Methode. Um die Einschüchterung besonders eindrucksvoll zu gestalten, wurde manchmal auch extrem grausam erscheinendes Equipment vorgeführt, das nur diesem Zweck diente, aber nie tätliche Anwendung fand. (Kardinar and Schlecht, 2011)

They emphasize the effect that the mere sight of these torture instruments could cause on a suspect, to the point where they never needed to be used in order to cause psychological pain and pressure. At the same time, the graphic novelists choose to draw some of these instruments into a scene where they originally did not appear, covered in blood, with the clear implication that they had been used. What kind of message do these contradictory texts, verbal and visual,
construct for the reader? It is possible to argue that, by drawing blood covered torture devices and denying their use on the same page, Kardinar and Schlecht point to the issues of historical accuracy or historical truth. Although their historical documents affirm that torture was mostly psychological and these types of instruments of physical torture saw no real use, the graphic novelists indicate a belief that these documents are not accurate descriptions of reality – and that the torture devices indeed saw more use than historians would like to admit.

An attentive reader can see through the lines and make connections to the governmental discourse in 21st century news media. The past decade has been filled with arguments about the use of torture as a legitimate interrogation technique and public opinion has swayed under the contradictions between the official discourse and the revelations of classified documents that have emerged in the past few years. In December of 2014, the US Senate Intelligence Committee released a 525-page summary on CIA torture of suspected terrorists. According to an article published on 9 December 2014 in “The New York Times”

The report describes extensive waterboarding as a “series of near drownings” and suggests that more prisoners were subjected to waterboarding than the three prisoners the C.I.A. has acknowledged in the past. The report also describes detainees being subjected to sleep deprivation for up to a week, medically unnecessary “rectal feeding” and death threats. Conditions at one prison, described by a clandestine officer as a “dungeon,” were blamed for the death of a detainee, and the harsh techniques were described as leading to “psychological and behavioral issues, including hallucinations, paranoia, insomnia, and attempts at self-harm and self-mutilation.”
This description could have come out of a history book describing the techniques used in the Chambre ardente. The information that has come to light in the past few months reveals how little the Western justice system has evolved in almost four centuries, and how violent techniques are still being used under the banner of safety and freedom. Once again, these events and reports only came to light after the publishing of the graphic novel. Nevertheless, they only reinforce the commentary made by Kardinar and Schlecht, proving that these issues are very much contemporary and need to be addressed by all cultural spheres. Whether these two pages address these issues directly or not is open for discussion. However, it is not impossible to make this connection, especially with all the other elements of this story in mind.

5.1.4 Pop culture references

Figure 6
Figure 6 references 20th and 21st century pop culture in a surprising way. The Comte de Miossens, the character responsible for killing Rene Cardillac, finds Mademoiselle de Scuderi to share this information with her, hoping to help her prove Olivier Brusson’s innocence. Miossens, however, is not willing to present himself to La Regnie, for fear of what might happen to him in the Chambre ardente. Even though he is a member of the police force and acted in defense of the citizens, Miossens does not trust his own justice system to see his situation clearly, and he fears he will be put through torture even after confessing. Kardinar and Schlecht decided to draw Miossens wearing period-appropriate clothing, but his face resembles Arnold Schwarzenegger’s very popular character from the 1991 American film “Terminator 2: Judgement Day”. One could argue that it is impossible to tell to which exact “Terminator” film the graphic novelists refer with this drawing; however, in the previous page, Miossens is shown saying the famous line “Hasta la vista, baby”, which happens only in “Terminator 2.”

This small nod to pop culture brings with it numerous references, provided that the reader possesses knowledge of the film. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s character is a type of humanoid autonomous robot, created by the military supercomputer Skynet to infiltrate and combat the human resistance. Skynet, in the “Terminator” universe, was a defense system designed by the US military to protect the world, but the systems artificial intelligence turned against its human creators and started a war. By choosing to represent a character using the “Terminator” reference, Kardinar and Schlecht engage with an entire universe of sociopolitical issues, once again dealing with how far governments are willing to go in order to keep its citizens safe and the nefarious consequences these actions might have. The “Terminator” series portrays a world where powerful governments sought total control of its citizens through the use of technologies and these technological advances turned against human kind. Although many would see these films
as mere science fiction, the recent technological developments in “security”, such as the use of drones, artificial intelligence and surveillance, have brought the world closer to this “science fiction” reality.

Another way to look at this reference is through the similarities between the Terminator character and Miossens. Although both work for a system that is putting its citizens in danger, either the future controlled by Skynet or the corrupt justice system of 17th century France, they end up protecting one of its younger members, i.e. John Connor in “Terminator 2” and Olivier Brusson in the graphic novel. The Terminator and Miossens are unexpected hero figures. In a graphic novel crowded with obscure references, these pages provide a very direct line to a contemporary interpretation of this story.

5.1.5 Public discourse, surveillance and violent repression of protest: the 21st century invades Versailles.

![Figure 7]
Figure 7 represents one of the main examples of anachronistic elements contributing to the construction of different historical layers. Observing the main panel on the left, the reader will be able to find a bodiless hand raising a digital camera, an aristocratic figure taking pictures with what looks like a modern smartphone, and a protester holding an electric megaphone – a device that was first developed in the late 1940s. In the smaller panel on the right side of the page, a police officer stands looking at the agitation, wearing 20th and 21st century-style riot gear. These different objects and clothing items might seem like a random combination of the old and the new, but taking in consideration everything that has been said in this study so far, in the context of this graphic novel, these objects assume new meanings.

Both the digital camera and the smartphone stand in for constant surveillance and our century’s issues with privacy. With the use of portable recording devices, everything can be and is recorded, every moment is captured from different angles, and each image tells a different story. The angle of a picture, its framing, may acquit or condemn a prisoner, and although obviously biased, visual aids are often used in criminal trials in order to influence the jury’s decision.

These devices also stand in for the process of news sharing and the influence of public opinion. Both 17th century France and 19th century Germany depended on writing or word of mouth for the exchange of news, which slowed the process of formation of a “public opinion”, but in no way prevented it, as one can see in Hoffmann’s novella. Although initially against him, the general population eventually sided with Olivier and demanded his release, which was an indispensable influence on Louis XIV’s verdict. In Kardinar and Schlecht’s 21st century world, public opinion can be influenced in a second, with the click of a camera or a mouse. The figure with the megaphone also reinforces the commentary on free speech and popular protesting.
These French citizens made their voices heard, from Paris all the way in Versailles, and influenced the justice system, which is supposed to rely on facts and scientific proof, but very often finds itself persuaded by public outcry and the influence of money and power.

The importance given to the protesters by reserving more than half of the image for them shows that people continue to have strength in numbers and the ability to cause significant political changes, which leads us to the character of the riot officer. Every action of rebellion leads to a (usually violent) reaction from powerful institutions. The police officer, although shown as static, not engaging with the protest in any way, wears riot gear. His hands are behind his back, but he stares at the reader, with a serious, almost angry look in his eyes, as if warning his interlocutor – the reader, not the actual protesters on the page – to stay away and not engage with the protest. His menacing look acts as a challenge: will the reader join the protest and participate or fear for his own safety and merely observe? These questions are directed to Kardinar and Schlecht’s reader in the 21st century, which in turn reaffirms this story’s connection to contemporary sociopolitical issues. The reader has to make a decision, whether to side with the public and Olivier or continue to watch the story develop without “interfering.” This question could be transported to the public as they read news stories about real legal cases, such as the atrocities committed in Guantanamo Bay or the recent racial profiling and abuse of force by the police in Ferguson and New York City, in the United States. Public outcry continues to challenge the status quo and, whether this popular reaction has affected significant changes in the system or not, these manifestations of discontent by the general population have historically had the power to influence discussion in powerful institutions and slowly cause changes in constitutions and law enforcement.
5.1.6 Lies, religion and blind justice

The last page of the graphic novel provides an important key for this entire interpretation.

At the end of the story, Olivier Brusson is released after his lover (and Cardillac’s daughter), Madelon, appealed to Louis XIV’s mercy, which led the King to press on with investigations and declare Brusson’s innocence. After this turn of events, Brusson and Madelon get married and move away to Geneva, where Brusson had lived with his parents beforehand. The last paragraph of Hoffmann’s novella describes the year after the couple had left, when a public proclamation declared that a “repentant sinner”\(^7\) had handed over all the stolen jewelry “under the seal of the confessional,” and the stolen articles would be returned to their rightful owners if they presented

\(^7\) Translation by Sally Hayward, in “Tales of Hoffmann”. Full citation in Bibliography page.
themselves and there was no doubt of the “rightfulness of the claim.” Whatever was left would be donated to the church of St. Eustace.

Figure 8 is the last drawing before the start of the reproduction of Hoffmann’s text. Kardinar and Schlecht transcribe the last paragraph of the novella in its entirety, going against what they had been doing throughout the graphic novel, where editing and selective transcription had been the preferred techniques. The visual representation, however, does not relate directly to the text. There are three main elements in the drawings: the necklace that had been given to Mademoiselle de Scudery, which the reader would recognize from its previous appearances throughout the story; a traditional depiction of Lady Justice, wearing a blindfold and carrying the scales and the double-edged sword; and finally, a pair of feet with a tag, usually used in morgues to identify the bodies. Verbal and visual are set in contrast to one another, and this contrast creates a new layer of meaning: Kardinar and Schlecht represent visually what Hoffmann had left between the lines.

What exactly is the underlying message? Hoffmann’s novella has what one could call a “happy ending”: Mademoiselle de Scuderi finds a way to help Brusson, who is able to marry the love of his life and leave Paris with his reputation restored. The series of murders is stopped by the killing of Cardillac, and the citizens of Paris are safe once again. But is the “solving” of the case really the point of the story? Instead of ending his novella with Brusson and Madelon’s happy life in Geneva, Hoffmann returns to the inner workings of the justice system, describing how the information given to the public was a lie, and how the church was involved in the creation of this lie. By contrasting the text with the images of Lady Justice and an unnamed dead body, the graphic novel emphasizes this issue – although all seems to be well in the end, Lady Justice had not participated in the process, and the loss of loved ones was still left unexplained.
The dead had no one to speak for them. Putting the image of Lady Justice front and center actually emphasizes her “non-presence” in the story.

The image of Lady Justice had appeared before, during Miossens conversation with Mademoiselle de Scudéri (Fig. 6). At the time, her blindfold had red spots, a symbolism that, in this graphic novel, implied that it was covered in blood. Lady Justice’s image stood for the actions of La Regnie – as he was the officer of the law and the representative of the justice system. Her “blindness,” in this context, comes not from impartiality or objectivity, but rather from the refusal to see the evidence in a clear way. La Regnie’s blood lust blinded him – and the entire justice system, for that matter – from getting to a just verdict.

Moving on from Lady Justice to a closer look at the text, the text extract from Hoffmann’s novella names Harloy de Chauvalon, Archbishop of Paris, as the main character responsible for dealing with the stolen jewelry after Cardillac’s death. The jewelry, if not reclaimed, would be donated to the church of St. Eutace. The graphic novel pages, however, bring no reference to religious symbolism or to the character himself. The commentary on religion comes from the combination between the graphic novel and the following reproduction of Hoffmann’s novella. Kardinar and Schlecht added a footnote on the character of Harloy de Chauvalon, signer of the proclamation that made it public the whereabouts of the stolen jewelry. The note says:

through the King, in which the French Protestants – the Huguenots –
through Ludwig's grandfather, King Henry IV, guaranteed full Bürgerrechte and Religionsfreiheit
zugesichert worden waren. The revocation, signed by the King in 1685 in the Edict of
Fontainebleau, drove hundreds of thousands of Huguenots from the land,
die daraufhin die Gesellschaften in den Ländern ihrer Emigration - especially in
Preussen – culturally and economically enriched. (150)

In this short description of Chauvalon’s “real world” connection, Kardinar and Schlecht
provide the reader with additional interpretative elements. Historically, Harloy de Chauvalon was
known as an influence to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which had given French
Huguenots freedom to practice their religion in France without persecution. This act drove many
Huguenots to seek asylum in neighboring countries, such as Prussia, and, by using their skills,
they helped improve the economy in those places. These consequences might not have any direct
link with the story of Mademoiselle de Scuderi and Rene Cardillac’s murders, but they relate to
the sociopolitical commentary constructed throughout the text. The reference to Chauvalon
indicates a critique of a state reliant on religious authority – his strict anti-Huguenot stance drove
important sections of the economy out of the country for no reason other than mere religious
persecution.

This final panel of the graphic novel brings us back to Birgit Röder’s analysis of
Hoffmann’s critique of the justice system and its shortcomings, by visually depicting the
ineffectiveness of the “blind, fanatic zeal” with which La Regnie and other members of the
government pursued criminals. Although this last page, in particular, has no direct connection to
the 21st century and no anachronistic element in the drawings, as the “closing statement” of the
graphic novel, it works as a final warning that these issues regarding justice systems are still
present, bringing the reader to a new interpretation of the story. If the reader decides to keep turning the pages and engage with Hoffmann’s source material, he/she will do so armed with a new set of interpretative tools acquired through the reading of the graphic novel.

**Chapter 6. Conclusion**

In the world of adaptation theory, the conversation about fidelity seems to be reaching its end. If every cultural production is in dialogue with an entire web of past and present cultural productions, the search for a “faithful adaptation” is pointless. Everything is an adaptation, in one way or another. But when an artist decides to directly reference their source material, the conversation takes a different form. Authorial intent and reader interpretation work together in order to create a new and fully developed artistic expression, that will have different meanings depending on whether the reader has knowledge of the source material or not. Some authors and film directors aim for fidelity – they want to please their public and know that being faithful seems to be the number one requirement. This is the case for many pop culture adaptations, which bring with them a loyal and very vocal following. Others are able to work with more freedom, and see the term “adaptation” less as a synonym for “translation” and more as a form of reinterpretation. These works usually reinterpret elements of the source material into new meanings and produce artworks that will be able to stand alone in the future.

The graphic novel *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* is one of these artworks. Alexandra Kardinar and Volker Schlecht set out to “novellieren und illumieren” E.T.A. Hoffmann’s novella, bringing with them a unique background and artistic vision. Their work does not hide the connection to the source material; it emphasizes it. But this emphasis on the relationship to a previous work, however, does not represent a search for fidelity. Kardinar and Schlecht’s
“version” of Scuderi’s story is a new interpretation of its themes; even though they pay reverence to Hoffmann’s work, they make it their own and give it their voice. The choice of this particular story is addressed in terms of its complexity and the possibility of historical research, but even in the “Nachwort”, the graphic novelists never address any intent to engage in sociopolitical commentary, whether by reinforcing Hoffmann’s or making new connections. Regardless of authorial intent, however, this sociopolitical reading is made possible by the complex interconnection of historical layers in the graphic novel, an interpretation that was described in detail through the close analysis of multiple panels of Kardinar and Schlecht’s work.

The historical layers worked into this story are the 17th century, the 19th century and, Kardinar and Schlecht’s own time, the 20th and 21st centuries. The 17th century appears both as image and as text, through the small historical notes added by Kardinar and Schlecht on the graphic novel, but also the footnotes added to Hoffmann’s source material. These footnotes were taken out of historical documentation, and most of them contain information about characters, street names, events, etc. that appear in French history. The 19th century creeps in through the knowledge of Hoffmann’s environment and political surroundings, which are being critiqued in the source material, but might not be of common knowledge for the reader. Considering the graphic novel’s target audience, which consists mostly of German readers since the work has not yet been published in other countries or in translation, it is likely that the reader has some knowledge of 19th century German history and will be able to fill in the blanks. Finally, the 20th and 21st centuries intrude in the story through the use of anachronistic elements creeping in the 17th century French environment. It is the combination of these three historical layers that provide the reader with new possibilities of interpretation for this story.
Multiple current events were cited throughout this study as evidence of certain sociopolitical issues that could be commented on by the graphic novel. Although most of those events had not come to light until after the publication of the work, it is possible to read them into the story without forcing this interpretation. The graphic novel was published in 2011, ten years after the events of 9/11 and their consequences throughout the Western world. The attack on the World Trade Center might have happened in the United States, but the consequences of this violence were felt everywhere and Germany, as an important member of the European Union and often the main representative of those countries, is always involved in major UN decisions and controversies that followed. After NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed the worldwide system of surveillance created by that agency, it was found that German chancellor Angela Merkel’s personal phone was on the list of lines tapped. Multiple cases of German citizens being held illegally in Guantanamo Bay also came to light in the past few years. These stories are ever present on news outlets and social media. With this context in mind, the graphic novel version of Das Fräulein von Scuderi updates Hoffmann’s critique through the combination of historical layers, without ever directly commenting on contemporary issues.

It is a story meant to be re-read, out of order and flipping through pages, reading into what is left unsaid. Every single element on a page, the narration, conversational balloons, drawings and historical notes, needs to be combined with others in order to construct a complete interpretation. And as the years pass and the issues of state violence and surveillance become even more central in public discourse, the story of Mademoiselle de Scuderi and its adaptations will continue to comment on them with a fresh perspective.
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