

INTRODUCTION

As a topic for twenty-first-century critical analysis, the role of alcohol in E.T.A. Hoffmann's life and works has the dubious honour of being neither fresh nor fashionable. It is not just the case that recent criticism, resistant to reading lives through works and to allowing moral judgements to override aesthetic ones, has been sceptical of the usefulness of viewing Hoffmann solely through the lens of an upturned wine glass. In the years immediately following the writer's death, his supporters were already starting to tire of the importance attributed to alcohol in his personal and artistic legacy. Friends such as Hitzig were eager to reiterate their claim that he was no common alcoholic, 'was auch die Verläumdung darüber verbreitet haben mag'.¹ Those who wished to promote Hoffmann's work to new readers, such as the French translator Henry Egmont, questioned why, just because 'il aimait, comme tout le monde, à boire de bon vins', engravings of him doing so needed to go on the front of his works.² Such quibbles did not, of course, prevent the hard-drinking Hoffmann of Offenbach's opera from attracting widespread attention as the nineteenth century drew to a close, nor have they enabled us to dismiss alcohol fully as a subject for Hoffmann scholarship in more recent times.³ However, it is comforting to think that we now have a more reasoned attitude towards it. We no longer reduce Hoffmann to a cardboard cut-out of the alcoholic artist, his genius fuelled solely by punch and wine, and in consequence we can do justice to the writer's humanity and to the subtlety and artistic strength of his works. The importance of alcohol in Hoffmann's life and works is something most critics are aware of, since it is an issue which has never gone away, yet it is also an issue that they take a step back from, as too dogmatically contested and clichéd to be useful as a tool for ongoing analysis.⁴

The purpose of this study is not to be perversely anti-fashionable or to prove every wary critic wrong, but rather to use alcohol, and its specific fate as a topic in literature, biography, and criticism, as the prompt for a re-evaluation of certain key tenets of Hoffmann criticism which have developed over time. In particular, I believe that a re-examination of the role of alcohol in Hoffmann's life and works has the potential to shed light not just upon how the life and works have been understood within distinct cultural and temporal contexts, but also on the processes by which such contextualized understandings develop. It is my contention that, as a subject, alcohol provides a useful focus for understanding how critical approaches have adopted and discarded different themes, symbols, and ideas in accordance with wider agendas. It goes without saying that literary criticism has altered since the time when Hoffmann was writing, but it is also the case that evaluations which no longer seem important to us now have affected and continue to affect our understandings

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of the writer and his works. While it will always be possible to identify particular ideas as misconceptions or distortions, it can be valuable to recover the motivations and mistakes which underlie such ideas, as these can tell us more about the wider critical conditions in which a text was written and received. Precisely because the critical narrative of Hoffmann's relationship with alcohol is identified as difficult and prone to exaggeration and bias, it can offer us an outline of many of the problems and resolutions which have preceded the arrival of Hoffmann's work in the twenty-first century.

This study is not, however, merely an overview of what one thorny issue in Hoffmann criticism can tell us about the reception of Hoffmann's works in general. I also believe that the role of alcohol within different literary works by Hoffmann demonstrates much about the nature of these works, and about the structural, aesthetic and genre-based concerns which are present within them. Alcohol is an interesting subject within Hoffmann's stories because it performs many different functions, yet many of these functions have thus far been overlooked owing to an excessive concern with associating alcohol in Hoffmann's works with his status as an artist. While this may offer a good example of the effect of wider reception issues on in-depth literary analysis, it prevents us from recognizing the subtleties in many of Hoffmann's less-discussed depictions of alcohol, and hence from placing the more famous examples in a more nuanced context. There is a richness of perspective which comes from recognizing that divisions and definitions are more fluid than they may at first appear, and that if, for instance, there is more than one way of understanding the function of a particular drink throughout Hoffmann's works, there may be more than one way of reading what this drink has come to mean to critics.

What I hope to have made clear thus far is that, in assessing the role of alcohol in Hoffmann's life and works, I am not just embarking upon an internal inventory of the effects and implications of one particular critical bugbear, but wish to use this to make wider points about critical practice and categorizations. In tracing the various meanings, both internal and external to Hoffmann's works, with which alcohol has been aligned, and the various categories to which alcohol has belonged and from which it has been excluded, I wish to show how Hoffmann's own status and readings of his works have been dependent on changing relationships within various cultural and critical contexts. Furthermore, I also wish to demonstrate the many ways in which, as a writer, Hoffmann is engaged in repositioning himself within the contexts of his own times, and how this has influenced the development of his iconic status both as a degenerate drinking writer and as a respected member of the German national canon. I have divided this study into two parts, and shall now explain the function of each one in my overall project.

Part I

The two parts of this study fall very roughly into the categories ‘life’ followed by ‘works’, but this division is not fixed, and the close relationship between the two parts should emerge through the critical reassessments of Hoffmann’s work which I wish to undertake in the second part. In Part I my primary aim is to address the idea of the drinking writer in relation to Hoffmann in three different ways: first, through evaluations of supposedly caricatured, fictionalized representations of Hoffmann as a drinker; second, through representations of Hoffmann as a drinking writer in relation to external aesthetic, cultural, and political programmes; third, through assessments of the drinking writer’s status and artistic approach, both within Hoffmann’s works and in responses to them.

The first thing I would like to make clear in Chapter 1 is that the caricature of punch-soaked Hoffmann was not simply an invention of spiteful critics or over-enthusiastic supporters, both of whom could be attracted to such a caricature for different reasons. There is a significant amount of evidence to support the view that Hoffmann was a heavy drinker and that he was interested in alcohol to an unusual degree. He was, moreover, capable of exploiting the prejudices and myths of his own times in order to present himself in a caricatured light. The images he produces both in his private correspondence and in his literary works show that he was sensitive to how drinking habits could be used to reinforce particular character traits and social stereotypes. All this means that it is evidentially very difficult to recover a single ‘authentic’ perspective on Hoffmann and his relationship with alcohol. Nevertheless, it is still possible to compare different representations of Hoffmann as a drinker in order to demonstrate that supposed dichotomies between the ‘real’ and ‘fictional’ Hoffmann are suspect, and hence that some of the conspiracy theories which underlie more recent, allegedly fairer readings of Hoffmann’s life and work require more nuance. In this chapter I shall compare representations of Hoffmann’s drinking in the writer’s own letters and diaries with those in fiction, biography, and medical dissertations, and look at the similarities and differences in emphasis which go towards the creation of drinking Hoffmanns for varying purposes, not least for the writer’s own.

Chapter 2 begins by looking at how depictions of Hoffmann as a drinker have coloured assessments of him as an artist, often very explicitly.⁵ Clearly such assessments do not operate in a cultural and historical vacuum; indeed, part of their value lies in what they tell us about the critical conditions of a particular era and how these may or may not relate to our own. In exploring such conditions, I wish to move beyond the idea that specific prejudices regarding drink, personal behaviour and/or artistic practice are invariably the starting point for damning or indeed positive judgements of Hoffmann’s life and works. During the early to mid-nineteenth century the primary aim of many critics was to create and exploit a type of ‘Nationalliteratur’, which was to promote German nation formation on cultural instead of, or as a conscious precursor to, political terms. Such critics were able to attach particular meanings to alcoholism and intoxication in order to define Hoffmann’s relationship with external literary programmes and social trends. It is

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not the case that influential figures such as Goethe and Eichendorff, both of whom were particularly scathing of Hoffmann as a drinking writer, merely lacked the methodological sophistication required to separate distaste at Hoffmann's personal habits from unbiased readings of his works. On the contrary, as I shall demonstrate, the linking of biographical and literary detail often had a much subtler didactic function.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics are more self-conscious about making overt connections between literature and biography than their predecessors were. Even so, an engagement with intoxication and the altered state as symbols for modernity coincides with Hoffmann's increasing appropriation as a 'modern' writer, and even those who resist drawing direct comparisons are able to exploit and manipulate the applicability of alcohol metaphors to analyses of Hoffmann's life and aesthetic approach. Critics such as Aniel Jaffé have deconstructed Hoffmann's descriptions of punch in order to piece together a vision of the writer as the 'Vorläufer einer kommenden Zeit'.⁶ Jaffé's and later Manfred Momberger's careful explorations into Hoffmann's 'Punschsymbolik' are, in appearance, not just temporally but ideologically distant from studies which saw in Hoffmann's alcoholism 'das letzte aufflackernde Knistern der Flamme, die bereits allen Inhalt verzehrt hatte'.⁷ Yet there is a link not only between the meanings nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics seek to attach to Hoffmann, but also between the ways in which such critics describe and develop such meanings. Alcohol has continually provided a focus for explanations of what to some is instability and nihilism, to others fluidity and modernity. There remains a consistency in the correspondences and oppositions which govern readings of Hoffmann's work, and alcohol, both as literary symbol and as biographical feature, has been a significant support in the creation and maintenance of such correspondences. This matters because, in studying alcohol in Hoffmann criticism, one comes closer to the inner workings of the wider critical narrative, not only engaging with familiar categories but starting to deconstruct them. This is a dominant theme throughout my research, but is discussed most directly in Chapter 2.

In the third and final chapter of Part I, I will relate perspectives on the drinking writer more closely to different conceptions of artistic practice, and analyse how theories of the creative process can become entangled with more general beliefs about the artist as a person. On the one hand I shall look at how Hoffmann's artistic practice, and by extension capabilities, were perceived by others. Such perceptions were affected both by the transient demands of contemporary cultural programmes, and by continually evolving theories about the drinking artist and the nature of genius. On the other hand I shall also examine how Hoffmann himself approached the aesthetic currents of his day. I will argue that, while he did absorb the artistic attitudes of his own environment, he did not wholly accept the dualistic pairings which governed much aesthetic rhetoric. Hoffmann subscribed to key critical assumptions supported by his contemporaries, but was capable of recognizing that subsidiary categorizations, such as, for instance, those between artistic and non-artistic substances and states, could be unnecessary and inappropriate. In his literary works which link drinking with artistry he was able to

exploit these false categorizations to ironic effect. Moreover, in his use of language relating to drunkenness and intoxication it is noticeable that Hoffmann refuses to follow standard distinctions between artistic and non-artistic register. Throughout Chapter 3 there is hence a move towards looking more closely at the use of alcohol-related images and language in those works. However, I do not think the role of alcohol in Hoffmann's literary works should continually be brought back to issues of artistic process, genius, and inspiration, and the more varied approaches that are possible will be demonstrated in Part II.

Part II

In the second part of this study I shall engage in much closer textual analysis of Hoffmann's literary works. I would not wish to assert that alcohol was the central theme of Hoffmann's works, nor would I wish to suggest that he was using his works to produce definitive statements on the issue of alcohol in society or in the creative process. A tendency to regard Hoffmann's most famous drunken set-pieces as offering this level of commentary has obscured a clear view of the varied roles alcohol plays. Like many writers of his time, Hoffmann was influenced by ideas from fields now considered discrete and drew on them in his literary practice. Nineteenth-century views on alcohol and intoxication were available to him in texts on medicine, mysticism, natural sciences, religion, and mythology, as well as in other literary works. As a result the range of viewpoints open to Hoffmann allowed him to represent alcohol differently in different works.

In Chapter 4 I will focus on the role played by alcohol in individual texts in relation to characterization, structure, and symbolism, and compare this with existing beliefs about the ways in which Hoffmann uses alcohol in his literary works as a whole. I shall argue that, in his approach to characterization, Hoffmann makes far more subtle use of the alcohol theme than has previously been recognized, and that it is misleading, for instance, to assert that there are clear-cut differences between how artistic and philistine characters drink, since this depends very much upon other circumstances in the narrative. It is not simply the case that artists are always metaphorically intoxicated while philistines are merely drunk, nor is it necessarily true that the state of drunkenness either reinforces personal traits or uncovers new ones. The primary function of the drinking scene need not be that of locating a particular character within a pre-ordained arrangement of relationships and identities. The drinking scene can serve as a potential means of connecting different ideas in a specific narrative, of developing a particular progression of ideas, or of putting certain concepts in doubt. I shall explore these differing and often overlapping functions in a variety of works, several, such as *Das Majorat* and *Meister Floh*, previously neglected in discussions of Hoffmann and alcohol.

Chapter 4 ends with close examinations of the roles performed by two alcoholic drinks, punch and wine, in *Der goldne Topf* and *Meister Martin, der K ufner, und seine Gesellen*.⁸ Whereas Chapter 2 looks at 'Punsymbolik' and other forms of alcohol symbolism historically and ideologically, in terms of meanings drawn out and reworked over two centuries of Hoffmann reception, here I wish to return to the

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internal workings of individual texts, in order to test out and challenge specific assumptions. Previous critics have been correct to identify *Der goldne Topf* as a text crucial to any analysis of the role of alcohol in Hoffmann's works. However, several of them veer into straightforward misreading and inaccuracy in their attempt to use the 'meanings' of intoxication and punch in one story to decode a world-view spanning Hoffmann's entire oeuvre. A fresh look at what happens both within and beyond the 'Punschgesellschaft' of *Der goldne Topf*'s ninth vigil offers a corrective to understandings of the story which home in on one drink and one event to reinforce categories that may exist, but are by no means universal, not even within the structural and thematic confines of the story, let alone Hoffmann's work as a whole. By extension, analysis of *Meister Martin*, where the focus is on 'edler Wein' rather than 'Feuerzangenpunsch', further undermines the ascription of blunt symbolic equivalences to particular drinks, equivalences which have in previous readings been used to support unambiguous critical agendas. My belief is not that texts must be read in isolation of any external context, but that the historical, cultural, and imaginative birthplace of *Der goldne Topf* and *Meister Martin* is not critical debate itself; looking beyond the text has to be a process of illumination, not self-cannibalization.

The final chapter of this study looks at alcohol in Hoffmann's works in relation to health, sickness, and therapy. This is a delicate area, since these terms were frequently appropriated as metaphors, often to widely differing ends. Much German literary criticism of the early nineteenth century posits health as a moral, aesthetic, and even political value, without divisions. Hoffmann's literal sickness — his alleged alcoholism — helped to build the case for the perceived moral inferiority of his work and influence. At the same time, many of Hoffmann's Romantic contemporaries were using health and sickness metaphors in their literary works to challenge received ideas about moral and political well-being. These metaphors jostle alongside and indeed overlap straightforward explorations of the human body and mind. Hoffmann and many of his fellow writers were genuinely curious and knowledgeable about contemporary medical research, fuelling a highly creative tension between science, art, and idealism.

Chapter 5 is roughly divided into two parts, a split which cannot be described as literal versus metaphorical, or science versus art, since such categories are hard to reclaim in isolation. I shall first look at ideological representations and interpretations of therapy in Hoffmann's work, and at how alcohol-based research, metaphors, and treatments are incorporated into these. The symbolic potential of alcohol within a broad aesthetic, moral, and medical framework is examined, with special attention paid to the 'Träume sind Schäume' discussions of *Der Magnetiseur*. A reading of *Ignaz Denner* then explores the presentation of alcohol as both a comfort and a device with which to manipulate and create dependencies. Such dependencies can be physical, psychological, or even political in their implications, with the position of the patient reinforced by his encounters with alcohol without this necessarily bestowing a specific 'drinker' status upon him.

In the second part of Chapter 5 I look more specifically at nineteenth-century medical research into and beliefs about alcohol and its effects, and ways in which

Hoffmann exploits these in particular literary works. After considering how some of the more outlandish assumptions about alcohol's effects may have influenced Hoffmann's narratives, I go on to re-examine the role of the elixirs in *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, as both relic and 'Syrakuser'. Here Hoffmann unites structural, moral, medical, and aesthetic concerns within a single motif, and uses their effect on Medardus's mental state to condition the work's drive towards personal redemption and narrative resolution. I shall demonstrate how, in order to conceptualize and develop this effect, Hoffmann makes use of Immanuel David Mauchardt's 'Der Verlust der Personalität in der Trunkenheit' and Johann Christian Reil's *Rhapsodien über die Anwendung der psychischen Curmethode auf Geisteszerrüttungen*. Hoffmann's use of these works illustrates how psychiatric ideas explored in his texts are not merely pre-emptive proto-versions of modern concepts, but are fully consonant with coherent contemporary theories. More specifically, it shows that a heavily drinking writer need not see alcohol and its effects in one artistic, chemically modified vision, but also via the ideas and inventions of others.

Some of the close readings I have chosen to undertake in the second part of my study may not seem to focus on texts that are most appropriate for the alcohol topic. While works such as *Der goldne Topf* and *Meister Martin* may appear obvious choices, *Ignaz Denner* and *Meister Floh* seem less so. However, I have adopted an approach which seeks to avoid mining Hoffmann's works for specific drinking scenes and analysing them out of any overall context. The most famous alcoholic scenarios, such as the 'Punschgesellschaft' in *Der Topf* and the 'Katzenpunsch' evening in *Kater Murr*, have distracted critics from a fuller engagement with the way in which Hoffmann uses alcohol in diverse social, medical, metaphorical, and moral contexts throughout his work as a whole. As it is my intention to give a fully contextualized overview of the role that alcohol has played in Hoffmann's works and the reception of them, I do not wish to represent the works in a way which is skewed by an excessive focus on texts where drunkenness is most frequent, as such texts do not tell us all there is to know. Punch is not the only drink of interest in Hoffmann's writing on alcohol, nor does it symbolize his artistic practice in the way in which some twentieth-century critics have been eager to claim.⁹

By widening the field of analysis, I hope to show how, both in self-image and in artistic practice, Hoffmann was a writer working within Romantic norms but, like any member of an amorphous cultural grouping, was capable of contesting some of the associative frameworks produced by these norms. This will be achieved not just by reassessing Hoffmann's status as a drinking writer and the role of alcohol in his works, but also by using this reassessment to look again at how we view the distance between our own critical practice and that of those who dismissed Hoffmann because he drank. Through this it should be possible to come to a fairer reading both of how Hoffmann stood in relation to his own times, and of how recent Hoffmann criticism stands in relation to the earlier approaches it has been eager to dismiss. I thus hope to introduce some 'Besonnenheit' into a debate which has become somewhat 'berauscht'.

Notes to the Introduction

1. *Aufzeichnungen*, p. 709.
2. Henry Egmont, 'Notice sur la vie et les ouvrages de Hoffmann', in *Contes fantastiques de E.T.A. Hoffmann*, trans. by H. Egmont, 4 vols (Paris: Camuzeaux, 1836), I, pp. v–xxxii (p. xxii).
3. See, for instance, Fritz Felzmann, 'Der Wein in E.T.A. Hoffmanns dichterischem Werk', *MHG*, 24 (1978), 1–13; Lee B. Jennings, 'The Role of Alcohol in Hoffmann's Mythic Tales', in *Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing*, ed. by Michael M. Metzger and Katharina Mommsen (Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1981), pp. 182–94; Claudia Liebrand, 'Punschrausch und paradisi artifiels: E.T.A. Hoffmanns "Der goldne Topf" als romantisches Kunstmärchen', in *Literatur, Imagination, Realität: Romantik*, ed. by Monika Fludernik (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2000), pp. 33–49.
4. Pierre Péju, for instance, starts and ends his 1992 Hoffmann biography with the emblematic exclamation 'Champagne!', but in between is keen to insist that 'il serait absolument faux d'établir un rapprochement entre l'état d'ébriété et [Hoffmann's] écriture'. See Pierre Péju, *L'Ombre de soi-même: E.T.A. Hoffmann, une biographie* (Paris: Phébus, 1992), p. 9; p. 232; p. 126.
5. See, for instance, Walter Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann', *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1 (1827), 60–98; Thomas Carlyle, 'E. T. W. Hoffmann', in *German Romance: Specimens of its Chief Authors with Biographical and Critical Notices*, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Tait, 1827), II, 173–99.
6. Aniela Jaffé, *Bilder und Symbole aus E.T.A. Hoffmanns Märchen "Der goldne Topf"* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1978), p. 226.
7. Joseph von Eichendorff, 'Die neuere Romantik', in *Werke*, ed. by Wolfgang Frühwald, Brigitte Schillbach, and Hartwig Schultz, 6 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker, 1985–93), VI: *Geschichte der Poesie: Schriften zur Literaturgeschichte*, ed. by Hartwig Schultz (1990), pp. 86–290 (p. 270).
8. Throughout this study I use the original spelling *Der goldne Topf*, rather than *Der goldene Topf* as in the Deutscher Klassiker edition of the *Sämtliche Werke*.
9. For instances of twentieth-century critics focusing excessively on punch in Hoffmann's works, see Arthur Gloor, *E.T.A. Hoffmann: der Dichter der entwurzelten Geistigkeit* (Zurich: AG Fachschriften, 1947) p. 37; Jaffé, pp. 225–26; Manfred Momberger, *Sonne und Punsch: die Dissemination des romantischen Kunstbegriffs bei E.T.A. Hoffmann* (Munich: Fink, 1986), p. 69.