

‘Eyes on Malta’. Fresh Light on Fiction and Reality behind Some Characters in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.*

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Abstract: In 1816 one of the most popular authors of the German Romantic movement, Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, published the novella *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* Its central figure is a Maltese connoisseur of the arts who is presented as a very strange and rakish character. He shows the principal character of the novella, the painter Berthold, a new track to see and perceive his environment and to express personal sentiments in his works. This very much parallels the then avant-garde concepts of Romantic art. Literary historians have not investigated the figure of this mysterious Maltese. What were Hoffmann’s sources and stimulations to create this character? The investigation of the genesis of *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* leads to an intriguing story and to the famous Maltese eye-surgeon and arts connoisseur Dr Joseph Barth.

Keywords: E.T.A. Hoffman, Joseph Barth, Goethe, Alexander Molinary, Philipp Hackert

Hoffmann’s novella *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* and Romantic Perceptions

In late 1816 the *novella Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* was published in the first part of the collection *Nachtstücke*. Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann had finished the manuscript in August of 1816. *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* published an English translation (*‘The Jesuit Church in G.’*) in 1845. *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* draws back to Hoffmann’s sojourn in the Silesian city of Glogau (= ‘G.’), then part of Prussia, in 1796/97, when he was an *auscultator* which was the first part of the studies of law. *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* focuses on the painter Berthold who, after intensive studies in Italy and high-flying hopes as landscape painter, ends as a travelling painter of architecture and architectural design. Only after some time does it filter

through that he was once married but had abandoned – or even killed – his wife and child – as he blamed them of killing his creativity. His beautiful Italian wife Angiola had unwillingly destroyed his desire to create. Berthold painted his last masterpiece, an altarpiece, for the Jesuit church of Glogau.

Let us first have a look at Hoffmann's experience in the city of Glogau. Besides his work in the law court and his studies the 20-year-old Hoffmann then dedicated a good part of his time to painting, composing, and writing. In the winter of 1796/97, he helped the painter Alexander (Alois) Molinary (1772–1831) to restore and carry out architectural paintings in the church of the Jesuit convent. The young Berlin-born Molinary was then busy with architectural design and painting although his main interest was portrait and miniature painting. He worked in various Prussian and Silesian cities, but he later went to Vienna, Weimar, and Russia. In 1816 he returned to Germany. We do not know much about the relation between Hoffmann and Molinary in Glogau; there are only scanty references in Hoffmann's letters but it appears that Molinary's personality had made a deep impact on the young *auscultator*. Hoffmann's keen interest in painting also needs to be pointed out. In his adolescence, he still was undecided which of his artistic talents he should give priority, be it music, painting, or literature.

On 21 January 1797 Hoffmann wrote to his friend Julius Eduard Hitzig:

For some time ... I was in contact with someone who brought new stimulation to my spirit or shall I say my fantasy. A person came along who was like someone I had imagined and idealized. He came like a sudden appearance and then disappeared again like a good genius who, in passing, spreads petals of roses in the air. He had a negative reputation and he – like many people – had been unrecognized. You have to imagine a person who is well-built like the Vatican Apollo. His features, however, resemble Fiesco – at least according to my impression. It is true that out of his cute eyes there sparkled a sort of malicious joy. His black, short, curly hair gives this impression even more emphasis. In the entire posture of his body there is pride – a sort of superiority which, however, is never arrogant. The name of this person is Molinary and he is a painter (Hitzig (ed.) 1986: 123).

Some years later Hoffmann still remembered Molinary:

... when I am with you [Hitzig] I do not have to be the senior civil servant but appear as ... the painter Molinari (sic). ... I have to deny my own name when I am just ten paces away from Thorn [A town in today Poland]. ... Give my best regards to your wife and tell her that I

'Eyes on Malta'. Fresh Light on Fiction and Reality behind Some Characters in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* recommended the painter Molinari (sic) to you. He could be the same person as the one who painted your portrait (Hitzig (ed.) 1831: 9).

Modern research has pointed out Molinary's influence on Hoffmann and his work:

The encounter with the painter Aloys Molinary was of a special long-lasting effect. Hoffmann helped Molinary to carry out decorative paintings in the Jesuit church of Glogau In the Nightpiece with the title Die Jesuiterkirche in G. which was written twenty years later, Hoffmann worked in his experience with this fascinating personality. For the young enthusiast in artistic matters, who then lived in the mediocre province, Molinary must have appeared as someone who stood in collaboration with mysterious forces. It is no coincidence that the demonic painter Berthold, of whom Molinary was the model, becomes a witness of an understanding of art which suffers a crisis. He is torn between the desire to aim for the ideal and the hard reality which makes him realize his limitations' (Günzel (ed.) 1984: 62).

Literary historian Rüdiger Safranski summarizes in his monograph on Hoffmann:

Molinary corresponded to this type of demonic artist marked by a strong sensuousness and sensuality. Which sort of fantasies he [Molinary] evoked in Hoffmann is shown in Die Jesuiterkirche in G. (1816). Hoffmann describes in this novella the history of an ambitious painter, who in reality encounters the idealized woman of his paintings. The painter enjoys the sensual happiness with this woman, fathers a child, founds a household, but then notices that his artistic creativity is declining. He leaves his wife and child – it remains unclear if he even kills the two. As a mediocre travelling painter he tours the countries; his reticence and his harsh cynicism make him appear as a mad character. One last time he succeeds to create a masterpiece – an altarpiece; then he disappears. One suspects that he committed suicide. The narrator encounters this artist in the Jesuit church in G. From the references it gets clear that G. stands for the town of Glogau. In fact Hoffmann – most likely under the tutorship of Molinary – participated in the decoration with architectural painting of this Jesuit church (Safranski 1987: 107).

The opening of *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* can be read as a semi-autobiographic account of what had taken place between young Hoffmann and Molinary in Glogau in the winter of 1796/97. The narrator is inseparably involved in the events:

'You are a capital assistant', said Berthold, quite delighted. 'And you', I retorted, 'are one of the best architectural painters possible. But tell me, have you applied your bold, ready hand to any other sort of painting but this? – Pardon my question.' 'What do you mean?' replied Berthold. 'Why, I mean', replied I, 'that you have the qualities for something better than painting church walls with marble pillars. Architectural painting is, after all, something subordinate; the historical painter, the landscape painter, stands infinitely higher. With them, mind and fancy, no longer confined to the narrow limits of geometrical lines, take a higher flight. Even the only fantastic part of your painting, that perspective which deceives the senses, depends upon accurate calculation, and the result therefore is the product not of genius, but of mathematical speculation (Hoffmann 1977: 125).

Even in the following – as in many of Hoffmann's works – real personages like the then famous landscape painter Philipp Hackert intermingle with fictitious characters:

It happened that about the time when Berthold received this letter of consolation from his old friend and instructor, Hackert's fame had become widely spread in Rome. Some of the paintings which he had exhibited, and which were distinguished by wonderful grace and clarity, proved the real genius of the artist, and even the historical painters admitted that there was much greatness and excellence in this pure imitation of nature. Berthold breathed again; he no more heard his favourite art treated with contempt, he saw a man who pursued it honoured and elevated, and, as it were, a spark fell on his soul that he must travel to Naples and study under Hackert. In high spirits he wrote to Birkner and to his parents that he had now, after a hard struggle, discovered the right way, and hoped to become a clever artist in his own style. The honest German, Hackert, received his German pupil with great kindness and the latter soon made great efforts to follow his master. Berthold attained great facility faithfully representing different kinds of trees and shrubs, and was not a little successful in those misty effects which are to be found in Hackert's pictures. He thus gained great praise, but it seemed to him as if something was wanting both in his own and his master's landscapes; – something to which he could not give a name, and which was nevertheless plainly apparent in the pictures by Claude Lorraine and the wild landscapes of Salvatore Rosa (Ibid.: 135 et seq.).

It is now that a mysterious figure appears who changes the whole harmonious scenery into an atmosphere of doubts and disquieting thoughts:

At Hackert's own suggestion he sent a large landscape, which he had faithfully copied from nature, to an exhibition, which was chiefly to consist of landscapes and pieces of still-life in the Hackert style. All the artists and connoisseurs admired the young man's faithful, neatly

'Eyes on Malta'. Fresh Light on Fiction and Reality behind Some Characters in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Die Jesuitenkirche in G. executed works, and praised him aloud. There was only an elderly strangely-attired man who did not say a word about Hackert's pictures but smiled, significantly, whenever the multitude broke out into extravagant praises. Berthold perceived plainly enough that this stranger, when he stood before his landscape, shook his head with an air of the deepest pity, and was then about to retire. Being somewhat elevated by the general praise which he had received, Berthold could not help feeling indignant with the stranger. He went up to him, and speaking more sharply than was necessary, said: 'You do not seem satisfied with the picture, sir, although I must say there are excellent artists and connoisseurs who do not think it so bad. Tell me where the fault lies that I may improve the picture according to your kind suggestion.' The stranger cast a keen glance at Berthold, and said, very seriously: 'Young man, a great deal might be made out of you.' Berthold felt deeply horrified at the glance and words of this man; he had no courage to say any thing more, or to follow him, when he slowly stalked out of the saloon. Hackert soon came in himself, and Berthold hastened to tell him of his meeting with this strange man' (Ibid.: 136).*

Hackert tries to calm his young pupil down and gives some more information about the strange figure which had confused Berthold so much:

'Ha!' said Hackert, smiling, 'do not take that to heart. That is a crabbed old man, who grumbles at everything, and is pleased with nothing; I met him in the ante-room. He was born in Malta of Greek parents and is a rich, queer old fellow, and no bad painter. All that he does has a fantastic appearance, and this proceeds from the absurd notion he has about art, and from the fact that he has constructed a system which is utterly worthless. I know well enough that he has no opinion of me, which I readily pardon in him, since he cannot throw any doubt on my honourably acquired fame.' Berthold had felt as if the Maltese had touched a sore place in his soul, like a beneficent physician, only for the purpose of probing it to heal it; but he soon drove his notion away from his mind, and worked on happily as he had done before (Ibid.: 137).

This figure of the Maltese is one of the many in the gallery of Hoffmann's eccentrics ('*Sonderlinge*') and strange enigmatic characters, like Rat Krespel (in the novella with the same name), Coppola (in *Der Sandmann*), and Johannes Kreisler. Like the others, even the nameless '*Malteser*' interferes massively into the lives of the 'ordinary' characters. Berthold at first continues working in the old manner and follows the pattern set by his master Hackert:

The success of this large picture, which was universally admired, encouraged him to begin a companion to it. Hackert himself selected one of the most lovely spots in the gorgeous vicinity of Naples, and, as the first picture had represented sunset, this landscape was to show the

effect of sunrise. He had a number of strange trees, a number of vineyards, and, above all, a good deal of mist to paint (Ibid.).

But again harmony and Berthold's perception of his environment is disturbed when all of a sudden the mysterious Maltese appears once more:

Berthold was sitting on a large flat stone, in this very spot, completing the sketch of the great picture after nature. 'Bravo – well done!' said a voice near him. He looked up. The Maltese was viewing his work and added, with a sarcastic smile, 'You have only forgotten one thing, my dear young friend. Only look yonder, at the wall of the distant vineyard; the one covered with green tendrils. The door is half-open, don't you see? You must represent that with its proper shading. The half-open door makes a surprising effect!' 'You're joking, sir', exclaimed Berthold, 'and without reason. Such accidental circumstances are by no means as contemptible as you imagine and for that very reason my master loves to employ them. Only recollect the suspended white cloth in the landscape of one of the Dutch painters that could not be omitted without marring the general effect. You, however, seem to be no friend to landscape painting in general and, as I have given myself up to it with heart and soul, I beg you to let me go on working quietly (Ibid.: 138).

The Maltese denies any intention of preventing Berthold from painting *vedute* but insists that the young German should abandon the 'cold' patterns of copying and listen to his inner, subjective feelings. The Maltese therewith propagates – without expressing it verbally – the Romantic concept of art, the subjective enchantment of nature and the environment:

'You are much mistaken, young man', said the Maltese. 'I tell you again that a good deal might be made of you, for your works visibly prove an unwearied endeavour to attain the highest; but that, unfortunately, you will never attain, since the path that you have taken does not lead to it. Only mark what I tell you. Perhaps I may succeed in kindling that flame in your soul, which you, senseless as you are, are endeavouring to smother, and in making it flash up brightly, so as to enlighten you. Then you will be able to recognize the real spirit that animates you. Do you think I am so foolish as to place the landscape lower in rank than historical painting, and that I do not recognize the common goal after which painters of both genres should strive? The apprehension of nature in the deepest import of that higher sense, which kindles all beings to a higher life, that is the sacred end of all art. Can the mere dim copying of nature lead to this? How poor, how stiff and forced, is the appearance of a manuscript copied from another in some foreign language, which the copyist does not understand, and is, therefore, unable to give the strokes, which he laboriously imitates, their proper significance (Ibid.).

There is some clear criticism of Philipp Hackert involved who, as the Maltese alleges lacks a deeper understanding of nature:

Thus your master's landscapes are correct copies of an original author in a language which is strange to him. The initiated artist hears the voice of nature, which from trees, hedges, flowers, mountains, and waters, speaks to him, and of unfathomable mysteries in wondrous sounds, which form themselves in his bosom to a pious feeling of foreboding; then, as divine spirit, the talent itself of transferring this dim feeling to his works, descends upon him. Have you not yourself, young man, felt strangely affected when looking at the landscapes of the old masters? Assuredly you did not think whether the leaves of the lime trees, the pines, the plane trees, might be truer to nature, whether the background might be more misty, or if the water might be clearer; but the spirit that breathes from the whole raised you into a higher region, the reflection of which you seemed to behold.' (Ibid.: 139).

The Maltese further advises Berthold once more:

'Therefore, study nature in the mechanical part, sedulously and carefully, that you may attain the practice of representation; but do not take the practice for the art itself. If you have penetrated into the deep import of nature, her pictures will arise within you in bright magnificence.' The Maltese was silent; but when Berthold, deeply moved by what he had heard, stood with downcast eyes, and incapable of uttering a word, the Maltese left him, saying, 'I had no intention of interrupting you in your calling, but I know that a higher spirit is slumbering in you. I called upon it, with strong words, that it might awake, and move its wings with freshness and vigour. Farewell.' (Ibid.).

The Maltese connoisseur and painter clearly hits a trigger that sets in motion what already existed in Berthold's mind and soul:

Berthold felt as if the Maltese had only clothed in words that which had already been fermenting in his soul. The inner voice broke forth. 'No! All this striving, this constant endeavour, is but the uncertain, deceptive groping of the blind. Away with all that has hitherto dazzled me.' He was not in a condition to accomplish a single other stroke. He left his master, and wandered about full of wild uneasiness, loudly imploring that the high knowledge of which the Maltese had spoken might be revealed to him (Ibid.: 139 et seq.).

The search for the miracles of creation keeps its thrills for the real artist:

Only in sweet dreams was I happy – yes, truly blessed! Then everything that the Maltese had spoken became true. I lay in the green hedge, while magical exhalations played around me, and the voice of nature sounded audibly and melodiously through the dark forest. ‘Listen, listen, oh! Thou initiated one! Hear the original tones of creation, which fashion themselves to beings accessible to thy mind.’ And when I heard the chords sound plainer and plainer, I felt as though a new sense was awakened in me and I apprehended with wonderful perspicuity that which had appeared unfathomable. As if in strange hieroglyphics, I drew in the air the secrets that had been revealed to me with characters of fire; and this hieroglyphic writing was a strange landscape, upon which trees, hedges, flowers, and waters moved, as it seemed, in loud delightful sounds’ (Ibid.: 140).

Artistic desires to get hold on ‘true nature’ and the search for perfection, however, create deep frustrations and depressions. Berthold avoids to be alone with his objects and joins a group of other young painters:

At last, however, the more these lively dreams consoled him, the calmer he became; nevertheless, he avoided being alone in the open air, and hence he associated himself with a couple of cheerful German painters, and took with them many a trip to the loveliest spots of Naples. One of them, whom we will call Florentin, was at this moment more intent upon the enjoyment of life, than upon the serious studies of his art, as his portfolio sufficiently testified (Ibid.).

Berthold studies and subsequently copies the painting of St Catherine in the church of a monastery at Rome and somewhat falls in love with the image of the saint. It is the similarity of this image with his future wife which was later to attract him to Angiolina.

In the conversations between the German artists there are echoes of the words of the enigmatic Maltese:

While Florentin was hastily sketching some group that he had met, Berthold took the opportunity of looking into his book, and tried to imitate the lovely figure of Catherine, in which he was tolerably successful, although, as at Rome, he failed in giving his figures the animation of the original. He complained of this to Florentin, whom he looked upon as far his superior in true artistic genius, and at the same time told him all that the Maltese had spoken about art. ‘The Maltese is right, dear brother Berthold’, said Florentin, ‘and I rank the genuine landscape quite as high as the deeply significant sacred histories, as depicted by the old masters. Nay, I maintain that one ought first to strengthen oneself by the representation of that organic nature which is nearest to us, that we may be able to find light for her darker regions’ (Ibid.: 141).

'Opening the eyes' – Hoffmann and 'the famous and rakish' Dr Joseph Barth

Is there – considering Hoffmann's interest in double meanings, his interest in outsiders and odd characters, and in the question of true and false seeing and perception – a deeper reading of *Die Jesuitenkirche in G.*? A few months before Hoffmann set down to write this novella, the German intellectuals were fascinated by an odd story around the spectacular acquisition of a classic statue by the Bavarian Prince Ludwig. Most readers found the news about the statue's former owner, the famous ophthalmologist Dr Joseph Barth, even more thrilling. Barth's 'strange personality' became the object of spicy discussion in the gazettes.

On 20 November 1814 the painter Joseph Anton Koch wrote to his artist colleague Friedrich Müller who was then living in Rome:

The prince [of Bavaria] has bought from the ophthalmologist H(ernn) Barth one of the most beautiful statues. Barth who was born in Malta sold this statue for 6,000 ducats. The statue lacks head and hands but is still one of the most beautiful works of antiquity. It represents a son of Niobe, kneeling down and trying to avoid Apollo's missile. ... This Dr Barth is a staunch cynic, he walks around – even when there are women around – in a sort of dressing gown without trousers. He is furthermore not shy to carry out the call of nature when he is with male visitors. I called on him with Freyberg to have a look at the statue. ... Together with Lady Humgold (sic) I paid another visit to this eccentric who is a very learned man and an entertaining character (Müller 1998: 706 et seq.).

'Humgold' is certainly a mistake. Koch is referring to Caroline von Humboldt, the wife of the Prussian ambassador at the Austrian court, Wilhelm von Humboldt. The stately sum of 6,000 ducats for the acquisition was criticized by many Bavarian court members and experts. The acquisition of this 'pearl of the Glyptothek (of Munich)' (von Urlich 1889: 35 et seq.) also found an international echo (Cf. *The New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register*: April 1815) and was also brought to the attention of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The sculptor Christian Daniel Rauch informed Goethe in a letter from 28 August 1829 that the statue allegedly once stood 'near the oven where the rakish ... Dr Barth cooked his pickled cabbage' (von Urlich 1889: 35 et seq.).

This short paper cannot discuss in detail the colourful life and deeds of the Malta-born Joseph Barth (Cf. von Wurzbach 1856: 166 et seq.; Cassar 1982; Fanta 1989: 195–201; *Medizinisch-chirurgische Zeitung* 1818: 446 et seq.;

Erneuerte vaterländische Blätter 1818: 133 *et seq.*) but a very short summary may suffice. Barth was born in Valletta on 18 October 1745 (1746 according to others) to the German Nikolaus Barth and his Maltese wife Maddalena Sciberras. After studies at the Anatomical and Surgical School at the Sacra Infermeria and in Rome at the Santo Spirito Hospital, Barth was invited to Vienna by the Knight of Malta Franz Paul von Smitmer in 1770. There he was helped by the famous physician Baron von Swieten to further his studies and in 1773 he was appointed public teacher in ophthalmology and anatomy. The following year he was appointed professor at the University of Vienna and became royal counsellor. In 1776 he was nominated private oculist to Emperor Joseph II. Barth was especially skilled in cataract removal and was praised for his ‘aptitude in finer anatomy’. In 1784 he opened up the first eye-clinic in Vienna. Thanks to his instigation the University of Vienna established an anatomical theatre and founded a medical library with over 1,500 titles (Gräffer 1918: 110). In 1791, only 45 years old, he retired and dedicated the rest of his life to private studies, the free treatment of the poor, and to the arts, especially ancient statues and cameos (von Schneider 1900: 271–81). His bad temper and lifestyle soon became legendary (Gräffer 1845: 238).

What brought Barth again to the attention of a wider circle of intellectuals in 1815/16 was a debate in the magazines and papers. The affair started when in 1811 the knight of Malta and then Russian imperial counsellor and diplomat Giovanni Battista di Mallia compiled and published a book on his vast and extremely precious collection of cameos and ancient artifacts (*Morgenblatt* 1813: 98 *et seq.*; *Leipziger Literaturzeitung* 1813: 604). Mallia had participated in the sea battle of Çesme and subsequently taken up Russian services. He remained in Russian service for long and in the early 1790s was employed as Russian diplomat at the Austrian court and had taken up residence in Vienna (*Allgemeines Europäisches Staats- und Adress-Handbuch* 1809: 590).

What interests us here is that Mallia contacted the German author, educationalist, and classical scholar Karl August Böttiger to help him publish the catalogue of his collection. Böttiger was an influential member of the Weimar circle of intellectuals and in 1814 was appointed director of the knights’ academy of Saxony and director (*Oberinspektor*) of the museum of classics in Dresden. E.T.A. Hoffmann might have met him during his sojourn in Dresden 1813/14. What is documented is that Hoffmann knew very well about Böttiger’s activities and memorizes him in his novella *Nachricht von dem neuesten Schicksal des Hundes Berganza* (1814) where is some mockery

about 'Böttigers kleinliche Antikenkrämereien' (Hoffmann 1993: 149). In 1811 Böttiger travelled to Vienna to inspect Chevalier Mallia's collection and to write the text for the catalogue. During this visit – most likely through Mallia's help – he was offered to visit Joseph Barth. This visit took place on 17 August 1811 and is described in Böttiger's private diary.

When Barth, because of the sale of the sculpture of the Ilioneus to Prince Ludwig, became the talk of the day, Böttiger – not without some personal vanity – did not hesitate to publish a description of this private visit. This description ('Besuch bey dem k. k. Rath Joseph Barth in Wien, den 17. August 1811') appeared in two parts in April 1815 in the then widely read *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* (*Morgenblatt* 1815: 329–31, 333–4). This article greatly disgusted Dr Barth and only a few weeks later he published a critical reply ('Erwiderung des Besuchs, welchen der Herr Hofrath Böttiger aus Dresden bey dem k. k. Rath, Dr. und Prof. Barth zu Wien, den 27. August 1811 abgelegt und im Morgenblatt vom 5. April 1815 beschrieben hat') in four parts in the magazine *Friedensblätter. Eine Zeitschrift für Leben, Literatur und Kunst* (*Friedensblätter* (1815; 240–2, 244–7, 248–50, 253–5). This article blistered with irony and – if it were known to him – might have pleased Hoffmann very much. Reading over Böttiger's description of Barth, one finds numerous parallels with the appearance of the mysterious 'Malteser', the 'eye-opener' for the young painter Berthold in *Die Jesuitenkirche in G.* Let us follow first how Barth countered Böttiger's descriptions.

The editors of *Friedensblätter* thus introduced Dr Barth's article:

In our magazine there was various talk about the beautiful ancient statue, which was sold from here [Vienna] to the art-loving prince of Bavaria. This statue is named Ilioneus, one of the Niobides. This and the article by Commander Bertuch in the Journal für Literatur, Kunst und Mode (Bertuch 1815: 110 et seq.) published in February 1815 motivated court counsellor Böttiger to check again the respective passages in his diary of his travels to Vienna in 1811. Böttiger then published this passage under the title 'Besuch bey dem k. k. Rath Joseph Barth in Wien' in nos. 83 and 84 of this year's (1815) Morgenblatt.' When Dr Barth got to know about this article, he decided for the first time in his long and glorious life to publish a counterstatement in his own defence and to correct the errors in this article. He sent his statement to us and we arranged it according to his wish so that his parts correspond directly to the passages written by Mr Böttiger. Because of these circumstances and for the sake of truth, we felt obliged to publish this reply. The famous name of the author and the fact that he rarely gives information to the public furthermore made us decide to publish his paper.

We found his writing important and full of correct information. ... We therewith obey a commission by a famous scholar who stands with his name for the correctness of his words (Friedensblätter 1815: 240).

Dr Barth is ironical from the start. Referring to the name of the magazine (*Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* = Morning paper for the educated classes) where Böttiger had published his article, he asks, 'if this is aimed only for these classes who, in our human age, are called educated?' (Ibid.). Böttiger's introduction of Barth as 'well-known personal eye-surgeon of Emperor Joseph, and anatomist in Vienna' (*'Leibaugenarzt des Kaisers Joseph, und Zergliederer bekannten Dr. Barth in Wien'*) is corrected by the doctor as 'not only personal eye-surgeon of the late Emperor Joseph but also of the late Emperor Leopold, and the living Emperor Franz' (*'nicht bloß Leibaugenarzt des verstorbenen Kaisers Joseph, sondern auch des verstorbenen Kaisers Leopold, und des noch lebenden Kaisers Franz'*) (Ibid.: 241). Dr Barth asks:

It is not clear from Mr Böttiger's article if his main target was to present important comments and information on an ancient statue or if he aimed to make satirical comments on its former owner, or if it was meant vice-versa (Ibid.).

For the Maltese doctor, the question remained why he had been victimized in Böttiger's disrespectful article, which was composed

'certainly not out of friendship towards me, someone who has lived here [in Vienna] as a citizen for fifty years ..., who is now 71 years old, and who has never fallen victim to insults or nasty words. I am professor emeritus of anatomy, physiology, and ophthalmology, an imperial-royal personal eye-surgeon of whom he [Bödicker] tried in public to make a fool of. What a respectful action of a previous consistorial counsellor!' (Ibid.).

There follow some scientific comments on the mistakes of Böttiger's descriptions of ancient statues. Böttiger had stated he had been informed beforehand that it would be very difficult to have a look at the Ilioneus and the collection of ancient artifacts as the 'owner who is very advanced in age lives as an Anachoret in Vienna and is a very moody and rakish personality and very difficult to approach' (Ibid.: 242).

Barth strongly denied that he was unapproachable:

I have never denied visitors the chance to see the original [of the Ilioneus statue] not even amateurs,

'Eyes on Malta'. Fresh Light on Fiction and Reality behind Some Characters in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Die Jesuitenkirche in G. and the ignorant who just came out of curiosity. Mr Böttiger admits himself that he had found no difficulty in finding the entrance in my house. What needs to be said on the term 'eccentric' is that this is used for people who do not follow the mainstream. It should be pointed out that what this mainstream does is very often not very wise; it is therefore not all too disrespectful and stupid to do the unusual and to be called eccentric. ... My social skills are proven by my collaboration with healthy persons as well as my treatment of sick people. This can be testified by Mr Böttiger's honourable friend from Vienna, who accompanied him on his visit [to my house] ... (Ibid.: 241).*

It was therefore thanks to a friend from Vienna – most likely the eye-doctor and connoisseur of the arts Georg Joseph Beer – that Böttiger had got access to Barth's house. According to Böttiger

'it was an honourable friend from Vienna, who as a physician and connoisseur of the arts enjoys the trust of old doctor Barth since many years [and who] guided me one morning to the 'Marokanergasse', opposite to the summer palace of Archduchess Beatrix, where his friend [Dr Barth] has his garden house. He thereby satisfied my desire to examine this torso (of the Ilioneus) at its owner's own house. The owner himself can be called a living artifact of the ancient times' (Friedensblätter 1815: 241).

Joseph Barth is quick to correct:

[My garden house is] in the Wagnergasse, 'Grund Landstraße', not in the 'Marokanergasse', and not far away but not opposite to the summer palace of Archduchess Beatrix. 'A living artifact from ancient times' is rather a modern term and therefore an expression which is hard to understand. Most likely the author is referring to a man advanced in age (Ibid.).

Böttiger subsequently describes an environment which recalls a Gothic novel:

When we entered the garden a black dog held by chains welcomed us. This garden was in a very wild and uncultivated state. The dog behaved very aggressively and had the attitude of a Cerberus. Here it is where Barth resides (Ibid.: 244).

Barth refutes this as pure invention:

'Everything in the garden is in order and well cultivated! Furthermore: What an important and useful observation of the travelling archaeologist about a medium-sized Pomeranian breed dog' (Ibid.: 244 et seq.).

Even the following descriptions by Böttiger recall the ambience of one of Hoffmann's tales of odd and rakish characters: ‘

We were received in a strangely designed garden house with a flat roof in the style of his home country (Barth is Maltese)’ (Ibid.: 245).

The owner of the house corrects:

‘It is a house with a flat roof, a type which one finds in many cities in countries with warm climate’ (Ibid.).

The visitors then had still not encountered the enigmatic owner:

‘We stepped down a narrow staircase to the cellar room. At its entrance we were welcomed by the owner’ (Ibid.).

According to Barth, all this was pure exaggeration:

‘The staircase is three-and-a-half shoes wide and should be comfortable enough for every visitor. The so-called cellar room (‘Kellergemach’) is situated in the second floor and orientated towards the hay stable’ (Ibid.).

Next Böttiger concentrates his attention on the famous retired eye surgeon and connoisseur Barth:

Barth is a handsome old man and has a stocky, strong figure. He was wearing a half-Asian dress, a sort of wide caftan or rather a dressing gown with stripes. This dress did, however, not cover his meaty neck or his strong naked chest. Around the hips, he wore a wide cloth as a sort of belt – it looked rather like a dirty kitchen apron. This was all that he was wearing (Ibid.).

Dr Barth comments on his dress:

This so called half-Asian dress in reality consists of a pavore français with some wider sleeves as normal. The astute observer is right about what he said on the kitchen apron; indeed I dress myself in that manner when I am carrying out my daily indoor business. Normally I do not like to be disturbed in this business; unfortunately this disturbance came along with this two-hour time-wasting visit of Mr Böttiger’s (Ibid.).

Böttiger was fascinated by '*a pair of glowing eyes, a full face without wrinkles, and a healthy red appearance, a head like a true Greek philosopher, as shown in the busts of Democritus or Epicure*' (Ibid.: 246). In response Barth pointed out that the description of his full figure must be wrong as he only ate once a day and did not drink wine (Ibid.). Böttiger continues the description of an odd character: '*Dr Barth only rarely leaves his house. If he happens to wear the same dress (as described before) he provokes a general sensation. Concurrunt pueri, comitantur non sine risu*' (Ibid.). Barth insists that all this was completely wrong:

Could it be that Mr Böttiger got this completely wrong information from his and my honourable friend? Everyone knows that in summer I leave my house every day and also pay visits to the city. But then my head is covered by a cap and I do not wear the so-called dirty kitchen apron. As to the concurrunt pueri, neither I myself nor others have noticed that; it is maybe just a witty thought of his companion and his and my honourable friend (Ibid.).

Finally Böttiger got the chance to see the treasured artifacts:

The friendly old man allowed me to take a seat and opened an inconspicuous wooden cupboard in this very meagrely furnished room. Out of this cupboard he took some cameos. These cameos belonged to the most precious I have seen in Vienna, except those which I have seen in the imperial cabinet of ancient artifacts (Ibid.).

According to Barth, even these descriptions of the interior of his house and his furniture did not match reality:

One might add that this meagrely furnished room is the chamber of my old cook. Mr Böttiger did not have the chance to enter my own living rooms, and he also did not have the chance to see my bronze statues, paintings, and such things. This was so because he had been invited elsewhere for lunch and he therefore lacked time to see all these things; at least this what was told to me by his companion and honourable friend (Ibid.).

Böttiger informs his readers that '*Barth worked on the edition of a printed catalogue of his inestimable collection of cameos*' (Ibid.). Instigated by that comment, Barth lashes out against the hypocritical society of so-called scholars: '*[I only do that] to spoil the market for the writing-obsessed scholars who copy a hundred times— or rather steal — information*' (Ibid.). The Maltese doctor then goes on to criticize contemporary scholars and to discuss the

real value of ancient artifacts. Things become again personal when it comes to Böttiger's comments on Barth's housekeeper and the adopted boy then living with him:

Barth employs an elderly woman as housekeeper; her son is employed as gardener and as the person to do the shopping. There was also a boy whom he calls Tory living in Barth's household. He is a child of nature with a pair of sparkling eyes under his jet-black hair. Barth brings the boy's hair in order by the natural comb, that is the comb which everyone has in his hands (Ibid.: 249).

Barth responds to that:

'[That is] not correct as I call him Thomy (Thomas) in the idiom of his home country England, where he was born. It is also not true that this "child of nature" has jet-black hair. His hair is light brown ... what a great observer!' (Ibid.).

This 'Thomy' was Thomas Benedetti (1795–1863) who, after the death of his father, was taken into guardianship by Joseph Barth under whose tutorship he became a famous engraver and draughtsman. Barth even made his last will in his favour.

Böttiger praises the boy:

He makes very good drawings, and also already knows how to carry out engravings. He is indeed more efficient than 'Famulus' in Werner's Weihe der Kraft and knows how to immediately find every single cameo in his master's collection. For his lord, who is now becoming a bit forgetful, the boy is like a second memory. ... Maybe he even shares the bed with his lord as in the corner of the room there was a big bed with a green mattress. This bed serves as a sort of sofa or couch, a true 'cubiculum' in the tradition of the ancients (Ibid.).

This is a reference to Zacharias Werner's dramatic play *Martin Luther oder die Weihe der Krafft*, first staged in 1806 in Berlin. The Maltese doctor replied harshly to that passage:

'Barth does not answer a comment for which the author deserves to be imprisoned. ... Incidentally, as already said, this room is not my living room' (Ibid.).

Böttiger then points out a few more details, stressing again the oddness of Barth's character and the strangeness of his environment:

From the ceiling hangs a rope, a sort of "swinging rope" for gymnastic training in winter. ... It was only then, when we had seen all that, that we were guided to the holy shrine (of the house): A storage chamber for cabbage, onions, and other garden products. For ventilation purpose, the hermetically closed windows had to be opened. That produced a creaking sound (Ibid.: 250).

The doctor's answer to that is short and full of irony: *'What an excellent memory when it comes to food, but what a bad quality of observation when it comes to artistic objects'* (Ibid.).

When the visitors were finally shown the alleged purpose of their visit, the statue of Ilioneus, Barth observed a funny scenery:

'At the very moment that Mr Böttiger saw the statue he started to jump and dance around like crazy. ... The "sparkling eyes" of Thomy turned to me and later, in a silent moment, he asked me if this man was a f(ool)' (Ibid.: 253).

The Maltese doctor summarizes:

'Everything what Mr Böttiger wrote about this statue is in most parts very different from what I know about it. It is just a mixture of what I told him and what he had read elsewhere' (Ibid.).

Böttiger states that Barth did not intend to sell this treasure for less than 1,000 ducats (Ibid.: 254). Barth comments on his alleged financial greed:

These are complete lies! If I had wanted, I could have sold the statue years ago for 5,000 ducats to Mr Milliotti [the antiquarian Alphonse Miliotti], an antique dealer. But I did not do it. I offered the statue several times for the price of 5,000 ducats to His Imperial Highness but I never received any answer. I therefore doubt if this offer was really brought to the attention of His Imperial Highness. Maybe ... one did not understand the value of this ancient treasure or, because of some patriotic reason, did not want to understand it (Ibid.: 255).

The Maltese doctor then closes his article:

'Under normal conditions I find it beneath my dignity to answer to these obvious attacks. ... This is my only and final statement. I only wrote this response pro bono publico and to inform the public about Mr Böttiger's quality of observation' (Ibid.).

What Barth did not mention and was most likely correct in Böttiger's article is the description of the farewell of the doctor's – rather unwelcome – visitors:

'When we walked through the garden to the gate – where our coach was waiting – we saw some well-dressed people working in the flower and vegetable beds. I got to know that Barth has the habit that when patients visit him he makes them work in the garden. By that they have some healthy movement. He is now mainly visited by people with eye diseases and he – who had once been the best eye-surgeon in Vienna – treats them without charging money' (Morgenblatt 1815: 334).

If we analyze the appearance of the 'Maltese' in Hoffmann's *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* the parallels to Dr Barth as described by Böttiger are striking. Barth is described by his 'unwelcome' visitor as a man advanced in age, wearing strange clothes (Ibid.: 330). Hoffmann describes the 'Maltese' as 'old and strangely dressed' (*'ältlicher, sonderbar gekleideter'*) (Hoffmann 1977: 137), while his behaviour and appearance are *'wunderlich'* (Ibid.). In Hoffmann's novella Philipp Hackert describes the 'Maltese' as *'brummiger Alter'* (Ibid.), a grumbling old man; according to Böttiger, Barth is grumpy and suspicious of foreigners (*Morgenblatt 1815: 330 et seq.*). The look of the 'Maltese' penetrates to the innermost part of Berthold's mind and thoughts. Indeed Berthold gets a fright when he is hit by his deep look (Hoffmann 1977: 136). Böttiger describes Barth's sparkling glowing eyes (*'funkelnde, feurige Augen'*) and deep look (*Morgenblatt 1815: 331*). There may even be some symbolical connotation: the eye doctor and cataract operator cuts through the outer façade of the eyes.

In *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* the Maltese physician, connoisseur, and art collector is described as rich and the owner of marvellous works of art (Ibid.: 333 *et seq.*); in Hoffmann's novella the Maltese is presented as *'ein reicher wunderlicher Kauz'* (Hoffmann 1977: 137), a rich and strange old bird and keen connoisseur of the arts. Maybe the most striking point is Hoffmann's description of the 'Maltese' as a sort of *'wohltätige(r) Wundarzt'* (Ibid.), as someone who, like a beneficent physician, tries to open eyes to the real qualities of life and the arts. Barth's altruistic facet is even admitted by Böttiger when he points out that 'he cured the poor for free' (*Morgenblatt 1815: 334*). Hoffmann's 'Maltese' condemns copying without understanding (*'How poor, how stiff and forced, is the appearance of a manuscript copied from another in some foreign language, which the copyist does not*

understand, and is, therefore, unable to give the strokes, which he laboriously imitates, their proper significance') (Hoffmann 1977: 138); Barth condemns the scientific 'thieves' of knowledge who 'a hundred times copy – or rather steal – information' (*Friedensblätter* 1815: 246).

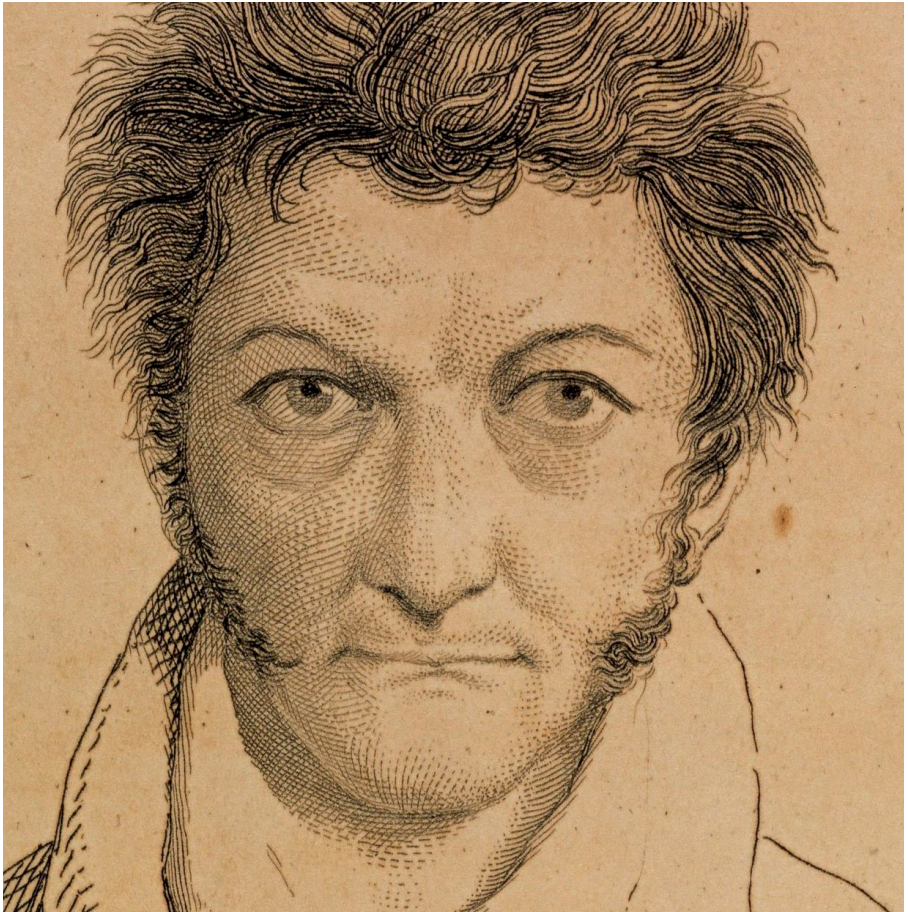
In Hoffmann's novella there might have been even a literary echo of Barth's efforts to introduce his young pupil Tommaso Benedetti ('Thomy') to 'real seeing and perception', to a real understanding of the fine arts, of taste, and of engraving. The metaphor of 'being blind' in *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* offers further parallels. As an eye-doctor the *Malteser* opens up Berthold's eyes and makes him see new horizons and perspectives. That is also pointed out by the literary historian Jörn Steigerwald (Steigerwald 1999: 346) who, however, does not make the link to an actual eye-doctor or ophthalmologist. The time frame of Hoffmann's working on the manuscript in the summer of 1816 surely fits chronologically in the Barth affair.

Wrong seeing, wrong perceptions lead to a false life, to wrong ways, to wrong feelings, and wrong attitudes. Hoffmann's fascination with eyes, with different ways of perception, his fear of the standard, his criticism of uniform perception, his desire for personal enchantment, remained strong in him until his death in June 1822 and finds a synopsis in the figure of the Maltese in *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.*

Hoffmann's *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* is not the only contemporary literary work which has echoes of Barth. In Adalbert Gyrowetz's *Singspiel Der Augenarzt* (The Oculist) (Vienna, 1811), based on a libretto by Johann Emmanuel Veit, the doctor is called Dr Berg. He is the physician of a rich count whose life he saves. This story parallels the real events concerning Emperor Joseph II whom Barth had cured from a persistent eye disease. The emperor subsequently made Barth his private physician and supported his brilliant career. In *Der Augenarzt*, the count shows himself very grateful towards Dr Berg and helps him gain status and reputation. To close the circle: The plot of this *Singspiel* was very well-known to Hoffmann who published a review of it in the highly reputed *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* on 30 December 1812 (*Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 1812: columns 855–64).



Dr Joseph Barth, engraving by Thomas Benedetti (State Library, Vienna)



E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Self portrait* (State Library, Bamberg, Germany).

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