



# The Urban Text of E.T.A. Hoffmann: the Stories “The Golden Pot”, “The Deserted House” and the Novel “The Devil's Elixirs”

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## Abstract

In this article the urban text of the German romanticist E.T.A. Hoffmann in the stories “*The Golden Pot*”, “*The Deserted House*” and the novel “*The Devil's Elixirs*” is analyzed. Three types of the city are noted: the real city in the fantastical environment (Dresden); the real and at the same time mystical city (Berlin); the enlightened city. The images of the city are studied in the connection with genres of the works. The traits of realism in the late German romanticism are noted.

**Keywords:** E. T. A. Hoffmann, urban text, romanticism, palimpsest

## 1. Introduction

A German romanticist E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) was a person of the urban culture. Hoffmann was born and educated as a citizen, this situation defined a space of his works and possibly the problem. Many towns and cities except the native Hoffmann's city, Königsberg, can consider Hoffmann as its citizen: Glogau, Poznan, Plozk, Warsaw, Bamberg, Dresden, Berlin. The city is an interesting place for the author as an object of description. The events in many of his works take place in the city. Some towns have a full name, some – only one letter and are marked by a little star; all are explained in the notes. The types of the readings of Hoffmann's urban text are different.

A city in the Hoffmann's works is multifaced. A city structure is interesting for Hoffmann topographically. But topography is important for the author only because it's spiritualized – by friend communication, art, psychological research, mystic. To realize the urban theme Hoffmann uses genres of novel, story, diary.

## 2. Methods

At present time the traditional conception of a text in the humanities was redefined, a text is considered as a function in context of the other texts and their interactive dialogue; an isolated text is now considered as an academic phantom. Hence, there is a variety of concepts that matches this definition; any conceptual entity may be considered as a text: a text collection, a dictionary, a library, a compositional complex, a genre, a literature, an art, a culture and etc (Lotman, 1981). Even the reality itself may be considered as a text (Nalimov, 2000).

In this article we use the definition of a text as a “complex device, which contains a variety of codes, and is able to transform incoming messages and generate new ones; as an information generator with traits of an intellectual person” (Lotman, 2002). A text and culture synthesize a concept of a supertext. A supertext is related to “the same culture concepts, literature universals, and stereotypes, on the one side realizing intertextual links, defining its position in the text concept sphere, thus establishing a relation network, points of interaction and intersection with other text, on the same side, they combine, resulting in a constant signary in the text assembly, establishing supertextual links and actualizing metatextual functions” (Loshakov, 2007).

Works of N.P. Antsiferov (1991), Yu. M. Lotman (2002), and V.N. Toporov (2003) were the first supertextual studies. They were dedicated to the St. Petersburg urban text in the Russian literature. They were followed by works on Crimean (Lyusiy, 2003), Italian (Kryukova, 2007), Venetian (Mednis, 1999), Permian (Abashev, 2000), German (Lebedeva, 2002) ones and others.

### 3. Results

The authors have studied urban texts in the stories “*The Golden Pot*”, “*The Deserted House*” and the novel “*The Devil's Elixirs*” by E. T. A. Hoffmann. The urban text of any of these works has its unique appearance. In “*The Golden Pot*” the real Dresden is depicted, which can be recognized by the names of streets, squares, gates and bridges. Dresden is connected to the upper world. Hoffmann considers opening of it to a reader his main purpose. “*The Deserted House*” is devoted to Berlin, but the author is interested in mysteries, so he shows obscure places and situations alongside with the places of interest of Berlin. “*The Devil's Elixirs*” depicts a new for Hoffmann kind of city: a baroque residence city. The image of the city combines real and ideal traits. The status of a ducal residence as an enlightened town in the scale of values of Hoffmann is extremely high.

#### 3.1 Dresden in the story “*The Golden Pot*” by E.T.A. Hoffmann

The story “*The Golden Pot*” (1814) was written by Hoffmann in Dresden and about Dresden. Hoffmann noted in his diary: “I am ill and at home — but I successfully began the tale “*The Golden Pot*” (Gunzel, 1987). The circumstances in which this work was formed are dramatic – there was a war, one of the episodes of the Napoleon wars. After the defeat in the Battle of Peoples at Leipzig 16-19. Oct. the Frenchmen didn't give up resistance. Dresden is sieged, it's hunger in the city, camp fever. In the letter to K.F. Kunz from the 17<sup>th</sup> November 1813 Hoffmann writes about the following facts: “...Even during the last week before the capitulation 200 citizen have died, in the hospitals 200-250 died every day, so the corpses mounted at the cemetery in Neustadt...” (Gunzel, 1987).

Nothing from the resonances of this terrible time gets in the novel: the Hoffmann's world as a snail is hidden from a war, from all the shocks of the reality. Existing within the confines of the Dresden's war space, Hoffmann lives at the same time in the parallel world – in the same Dresden, where the war is “removed” (Mishina, 2012).

Such Dresden – a city as it is – he makes a scene of action in “*The Golden Pot*”. The Hoffmann's heroes are mostly shown on the plainair, they don't move in the room or within the house but mostly in the city. The actors of the novel walk along the river, across the bridge or in the garden, go through a gate, along the streets and squares, go to a market or to a suburb; as far as Dresden isn't a fictional city but real, so all the city names in the work are real: river Elbe, Elbe bridge, Linkscher Bad, Linkscher Garten, Koselscher Garten, Antongarten, Schwarzes Tor, Seetor, Pirnaer Tor, Schlosstrasse, Neuer Markt, Neue Stadt, Pirnaer Vorstadt. The key places are Elbe, Elbebrücke. Schwarzes Tor. The most important events of the novel take place there: a clash of the main hero Anselmus with a witch Lisa at the Schwarzes Tor, that's a beginning of the action; the first meeting of Anselmus with the envoys of the fantastical world – the emerald snakes – on the shore of the Elbe; the Elbebrücke is tied with the mystical events such as a visit of Veronica to the witch Lisa; a disposal of the attributes of the witchcraft (pieces of mirror) and staying of Anselmus in the glass can.

The most important element of the structure of an European city is a house. Philosophers and cultural historians write about a special attachment of the Germans to their house. G. Gachev in his work “National images of the worlds” thinks, even a German word is “like a house”: “As Haus – a vocal closed by consonant walls, Gans, Fritz, Wolfgang, Traum, Verstand. A word is constructed of the closed syllables” (Gachev, 1998).

G. Gachev compared the German with the Italian, which words consist mostly of the opened syllables, and then compared a Southern and a Northern way of life and house: “An openness of a life and manners and houses (colonnades, porticos) – all is in the open air – the opened syllables of the words correspond. In the Northern climate the people are closed, they close a door and their inner life, where it concentrates as at the fireplace (Gachev, 1998). A typical German house in the novel is the house of the Conrector Paulmann. A reader knows much about this house: it is situated in the Pirnaer Vorstadt; the house is peaceful, an order is kept by the daughters of Paulmann Veronica and Franzchen; the house is welcoming and hospitable. This general image consists as a mosaic panneau of different, sometimes fugitive notes of the author. By reading about the cabinet, cups and coffee-pot, stove with the creaking register, about the pretty shuttle of Veronica, it's easy to imagine a hospitable house. Even written by the author about the house of the Conrector Paulmann – “engagement at the smoking soup plate” – creates a feeling of coziness.

A cozy house can't be not filled with things. It's known, that Hoffmann, following the Jena romanticists, adheres to an aesthetics of life, not to an aesthetic of thing. Nevertheless a thoughtful reading of his works makes to find in them also an aesthetics of thing, succeeded by the writer not only from the Heidelberg romanticists, but also from the German literature of the XVIII-th century. By acknowledging the expansion of the material world in the Hoffmann's work, F.P. Fedorov writes: “...At Hoffmann appears a poesy of corporality, way of life...an art leaves the romanticism but doesn't come to the realism; this art situated in the interval art receives a name Biedermeyer” (Fedorov, 1988). This process A.V. Mikhailov names “domestication” of the German romanticism (Mikhailov, 1997).

Hoffmann shows precisely a situation of every house, that figurates in the novel: Paulmanns live in the Pirnaer Vorstadt; Veronica, after marrying registrar Heerbrand, - at the Neuer Markt; a witch Lisa - at the Seetor and an archivist Lindhorst - in the direction of the Schlosstrasse. As it was in the medieval traditions a house isn't depersonalized, isn't marked just by a number. “Almost every house had its own “face”: a coat of arms over an entrance, a figure of a saint, Virgin Mary, a lion...The houses were named as: “White deer”, “Black horse”, “Three swans” (“A City in Western Europe Medieval Civilization”, 1999). The houses were recognized by its outer look, or by a name, or by a specialty of place, where it stood. The address of Lindhorst in “*The Golden Pot*” is a “far old house”.

There is no information in the novel about only one personage – main actor Anselmus. It's not precisely known, where his house is situated and what it is. The writer says about it only with words: “small room” and “poor bed”. It's hardly that Hoffmann wanted to show an income inequality between the participants of his intended action. Most likely that the writer was guided by the desire to show that the world of the common things, a traditional house isn't for Anselmus – an authentic coziness and authentic beauty wait for him in the world for the chosen ones, in Atlantis. “Guck in deinen Topf” (Graf, 1960), says a German proverb that is translated as “Everyone spins his yarn”, and verbatim means “Look in your own pot”. A direct correlation with the name of the story “*The Golden Pot*”.

### 3.2 Berlin in the Hoffmann's story “*The Deserted House*”

The structure of a medieval city is seen in every urban Hoffmann's story, but there is always an individual action in these decoration, and this action goes out of the city borders. That's why the story is included in the two circles of Hoffmann's works - “The Berlin stories” and “The night stories”.

Noting Hoffmann's interest to a city, Honore de Balzac who was also an urbanist named the German writer “Berlin teller” (Gunzel, 1987). In the Hoffmann's stories “a Shakespeare's gallery of images of the Berlin life is opened. The names of Berlin squares and streets, drinking houses and bakeries, the names of the bankers and antiquarians constantly are used...” (Gunzel, 1987). The author brings to a reader a soul of the urban life. There is not only “topography of the city”, but an order of the urban life, a common image of Citizen in the story. The inner state of the author in this period-1816-1817-was calm and joyful and it helped Hoffmann to include himself into the urban atmosphere. “...And I could give a full freedom to my old passion to walk alone along the streets, to stop at every hang picture, at any announce or to enjoy learning the faces I met and to define the future fate of these people” (Hoffmann, 1992), - this passage from the story “*The Deserted House*” is of course autobiographical.

Every personage in the story “*The Golden Pot*” goes his own directions, has his own way of life. But in the story “*The Deserted House*” the image of Citizen is created. Hoffmann knows, when a Berliner walks, visits bakery, in what he is interested. A Berlin citizen is together with the teller in the two main scenes, when he opens the mysteries of the “*Deserted*” house.

A picture of the urban life in the novel “*The Deserted House*” differs from this picture in “*The Golden Pot*” by once more main element: an action takes place not only at open air or in a private house, but in the public house, for example, in the former bakery of Fuchs, that is situated in the Unter den Linden, 8, near the “*Deserted House*”, number 9 (Lagutina, 1992). “The Berlin bakeries in the beginning of the XIX-th century were very important in the urban life, it was possible not only to eat sweets, to drink a cup of tea or a glass of wine, but to exchange news. Businessmen, merchants and statesmen visited the definite bakeries, journalists and writers – another bakeries, officers - their bakeries, aristocratic young men – their bakeries” (Lagutina, 1992). In the Berlin bakeries the teller receives an information about a supposedly deserted house and met two of its inhabitants – the old valet and the old dog, which appearance destroys definitively a hypothesis about its uninhabitableness of the house.

An opening of the public houses meant an appearance of the new type of a citizen – a man who had to meet and serve the clients and deal with them. In the novel of Hoffmann this is the salesman, a brother of the bakery master. Although the author makes no allusion on his look and character an image is full. A hero is put by Hoffmann in such circumstances that he characterizes himself – later one names this method, offered by G. Flaubert, “indirect feature” and his manner - “objective style”. The salesman speaks about the strangenesses of the neighboring house, then serves the “decrepit unsocial manager”, who entered the bakery with a dog, – and we see an attentive to all, accustomed to all sorts of strangenesses man with an analytic mind, he's also artistically educated, he knew many excellent singers in Italy, France and Germany” (Hoffmann, 1992). As it is known in the conception of the Jena romanticists and in the aesthetics of Hoffmann an interest in music is the most important characteristic of a person.

The bakery in the description of Hoffmann looks out rich, it's decorated with the mirrors, in the crystal vases are candies. At the same time a room is “domesticated”; the writer himself spent many hours of his life in such institutions. The Hoffmann's phrase “blowing at this time a hot foam from the served to me chocolate” (Hoffmann, 1992) completes a picture of coziness and comfort. The writer loved “beautiful things in the widest understanding”. His first biographer Julius Eduard Hitzig writes about it: “Being already sick he dreamed about the structure of his new apartment...he wanted to decorate one of the rooms with household goods in the old German style on his own taste” (Hitzig, 1988).

Berlin in “*The Deserted House*” stands farther from the medieval city structure than Dresden in “*The Golden Pot*”. It isn't closed in the ring of gates; in the tale only one gate, the Brandenburger Tor are mentioned. There is a wide avenue, Unter den Linden, in the city center. The houses in Berlin have a numeration. Nevertheless the absence of the “names” doesn't level a meaning of a house. Hoffmann admiringly tells about fabulous buildings in the main street: here the wealthy people, the envoys of the “mighty countries” are living, the best hotels are situated; here is a luxury life. The uglier looks in this row the house, that became an object of learning of the author: “Imagine, Hoffmann writes, a pinched between the high beautiful buildings low little house with four windows by the side at the gate, that replaced a door to the house, there was no bell as is the case, even no doorknob” (Hoffmann, 1992).

That is the initial image of the house. There are several of them in the novel. As a suite of rooms appears in the house of Lindhorst, a suite of events appears in the deserted house. The events that happen in both houses are wider, than the houses' physical limits. Nevertheless, “*The Golden Pot*” describes a hidden upper world in details, which are unlikely for the Berlin tales. They do not let the reality transform in the fantasy world (The History, 1978). They still have a niche that only a mystical essence can fill. In “*The Deserted House*” mystical traits of a human soul are such essence. Hoffmann made them as interesting for his beloved reader, as Atlantis.

### 3.3 The enlightened residence-town in the novel of E.T.A. Hoffmann "The Devil's Elixirs"

In the novel "The Devil's Elixirs" appears a new kind of city: a baroque residence-town, visited by the main actor of the novel, monk Medardus, during his dramatic journey (Mishina, 2013). A more deeply than in his previous works social and geographical characteristic of a town is possibly tied to the changes of the literature method of the writer. The approaches of the late German romanticists to the realistic conception are noted by the researches. A discovering of the reality by the German artists of the 1810-1820-s F.P. Fedorov considers as a "discovering of a power of the reality over a man" (Fedorov, 1988). V. Mikushevich notes an "eccentric but fully motivated" realism in "The Devil's Elixirs" (Mikushevich, 1993).

Duchies were one of the components in the disjointed Germany of the XVIII-th century. The duke residence becomes almost the main point in the travel of Medardus. Here the very important events take place, the deep layers of the very involved family history of the main character are opened. The observations of Medardus and also narratives of the keeper of the duke's painting gallery are filled with facts and reasonings. To a certain extent this material lays off the artistic structure of the novel – here are the political, economical, organizational and moral sides of the court life so fully depicted that the handwriting of Hoffmann lawyer, analytic is seen.

The life in the duchy is so well thought-out and variable that one can name the residence a place of enlightenment. According fully to the enlightenment conception a monarch plays the ruling role in the development of the sciences, arts and refinement of manners. A duke guides the town and residence life. His subjects note a constant change of duke's interests. His interests in architecture and gardening, then in theater, music and painting, all having a practical result are showed in the novel from two positions: on one opinion it's absence of the superficiality and soul depth; on other opinion - "exclusive soul moving" (Hoffmann, 1992).

The author, however, is not interested in others' opinions of the duke. Hoffmann values such kind of a personality: an open-minded, educated monarch, a sponsor of arts. Such person was not a representation of romanticists' ideas of art and an artist as transformative powers of society, but was a protector of art in the divided Germany; we may recall Karl August, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach in this regard, his name is tied with the Weimar period of Goethes work.

Soon Medardus had to leave the residence. The description of life in the duchy and Medardus' presence is pointed at both starting and ending chapters of the novel, like two-faced Janus. It is the place, where mysteries are revealed and the further development of the mysterious family history, skillfully implemented in the history of Germany of the XVIII-th century, starts (Mishina, 2014).

#### 4. Discussion

There are some discussion questions in this theme. The first is connected with literary method of Hoffmann and other German late romanticists. It's interesting to research the traits of realism in this method and co-existence with romantic method. The second is proportion of geography and literature in the process of researching of such theme as the urban text.

#### 5. Conclusion

The urban text by Hoffmann is a palimpsest. The initial text is a medieval structure of every described by Hoffmann cities. Individual features of city – unique buildings, traditions, local freaks – lay upon this structure. There is a third text in the stories: the author describes the upper world invisible for normal people, but topographically precisely known for Hoffmann. The main Hoffmann's goal – to include a reader into the "upper world".

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