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## THE IDENTITY OF KLESMER IN DANIEL DERONDA

by Rupert Christiansen

The identification of a source for Julius Klesmer, the expatriate pianist-composer in Daniel Deronda, has long provided a mild tease for readers and scholars. In 1885 Lord Acton pronounced him 'the embodiment of Liszt!', in the knowledge that George Eliot and Lewes had met the great virtuoso during their visit to Weimar in 1854-5. Broadly, the parallels between the two are obvious, and the matching generally held until in 1968 the late Gordon Haight published an essay in Imagined Worlds (ed. Maynard Mack), which made a strong case for the Russian Jew Anton Rubinstein, another Weimar acquaintance, who shared Klesmer's mane of hair and acerbic brusqueness. More recently, in The Listener (23 Sept. 1976), Marghanita Laski put forward the violinist Joseph Joachim, on the grounds that he was a more immediate presence in George Eliot's circle.

What is interesting about this is the underlying assumption that the source for such a peculiarly vivid, even grotesque figure must have been an actual living person. I would like to propose, for the first time, that the primary source was fictional, namely Johannes Kreisler, the pianist-composer who appears in E. T. A. Hoffmann's sketches and stories Kreisleriana and in his unfinished novel Kater Murr, written over his concentrated period of literary creativity, 1810-21.

The similarity between the two names, Johannes Kreisler and Julius Klesmer, is of course the most immediate piece of evidence, but their relationship goes further and deeper. At one level, they are both physical and sartorial eccentrics, awkward and gangling. Kreisler sports a red cap and Chinese dressing gown with the same unconscious flamboyance

as Klesmer wears his chimney-pot top hat; both are expert singing teachers (which Rubinstein was not), passionate about the soprano voice, as well as inspired pianists. Most significant, however, is that they are both Romantic artists cast among the Philistines (a term that Hoffmann popularized), their genius denigrated or comically misunderstood by a bourgeois-dominated society which wants its art for entertainment and decoration only.

Despite its extraordinary importance in German culture, Kreisleriana has never been translated into English - although substantial extracts may be read in R. Murray Schafer's E. T. A. Hoffmann and Music (Toronto, 1973) - for Hoffmann never won in England the influence and popularity that he achieved elsewhere in Europe. William Baker's catalogue of George Eliot's and Lewes's library (1977) contains no reference to any Hoffmann volumes; and there is no mention of him in Haight's edition of the letters or his biography of her. There is however a reference to Kater Murr as 'Murr the Cat' in Chapter Four of the First Book of Middlemarch: it counts as very esoteric, for Kater Murr had not then been translated into English either.

It would be interesting to know whether there is any further evidence for George Eliot's reading Hoffmann.