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E.T.A. HOFFMANN'S NACHTSTÜCKE: TALES OF HUMAN BONDAGE

by

Darrell R. Fitzwater

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Modern Languages and Literatures

Under the Supervision of Professor D.E. Allison

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 1974

**TITLE**

E.T.A. HOFFMANN'S NACHTSTÜCKE:

TALES OF HUMAN BONDAGE

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**DEDICATED:**

-- To the fond memory of Professor William K. Pfeiler  
for his inspirational teaching  
and  
for his genuine interest  
in his students.

-- To my wife Eva  
for her faithful support,  
assistance,  
and  
encouragement.

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for introducing me  
to the German language  
and  
for directing this dissertation.

PREVIEW

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822) began his literary career by contributing several short narratives to a musical journal, the Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung. His first work, "Ritter Gluck," appeared in 1809 and was followed by a number of other fictional sketches, essays, and tales. It is not certain when Hoffmann conceived the idea of publishing a collection of his writings, but it was not until March of 1813 that he signed a contract with his friend, Karl Friedrich Kunz, a wine merchant turned publisher.<sup>1</sup> After acquiring a publisher, Hoffmann began searching for an appropriate title for his collected works.<sup>2</sup> He had to choose a title that would encompass

<sup>1</sup>See their contract of March 18, 1813, in E.T.A. Hoffmann im persönlichen und brieflichen Verkehr: sein Briefwechsel und die Erinnerungen seiner Bekannten, ed. Hans von Müller, II (Berlin, 1912), 104-106.

<sup>2</sup>According to Walther Harich, Hoffmann wanted to incorporate the name of a painter in his title. He had almost decided upon the artist Hogarth because the "Enraged Musician" was a painting that so appropriately depicted Kreisler, the central figure in several works of the collection, when Kunz introduced him to the etchings of Jaques Callot (1592-1635). The moment Hoffmann saw the Frenchman's works, he chose to call his collection Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier. See E.T.A. Hoffmann: Das Leben eines Künstlers, I (Berlin, 1920), 195.

works which had already been published separately.<sup>3</sup> Hoffmann decided to call his four-volume collection, which was published in 1814-15, Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier.<sup>4</sup> It is evident that the young artist-musician-poet had found in Callot a kindred spirit rather than a model for imitation.<sup>5</sup>

The author of Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier, as Hoffmann often referred to himself after the success of his publication,

<sup>3</sup>Such works as "Ritter Gluck," "Kreislers Musikalische Leiden," "Kreislers Gedanken über den hohen Wert der Musik," "Don Juan," "Kreislers höchst zerstreute Gedanken" and "Beethovens Instrumental Musik" had appeared in print prior to their inclusion in the Fantasiestücke.

<sup>4</sup>Friedrich Schnapp states in the recent edition of Hans von Miller's E.T.A. Hoffmanns Briefwechsel that the expression "Ein Gemälde im Geschmacke des Calot" first appeared in Wieland's Don Sylvio von Rosalva. Schnapp further points out that Hoffmann used the word Stücke as a synonym for Gemälde five times in his first letter to Hippel written after the choice of his title. Schnapp concludes that Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier means "phantastische Gemälde in der Art Callots." See Briefwechsel, I (München, 1967), 379.

<sup>5</sup>Hoffmann wrote a concise essay entitled "Jaques Callot," which was to serve as an introduction to the Fantasiestücke. He admired the Frenchman's acute gift of observation which was very broad in scope; each element in society came under his scrutiny. Hoffmann was also impressed by the vast number of heterogeneous elements that Callot could incorporate into one scene and still retain complete harmony. At the same time, the smallest entity, when isolated, was complete in itself. Hoffmann expressed a desire to capture the essence of Callot's unique art in the medium of language. The poet, however, must have felt that he had already achieved this goal to some extent, for he included a number of previous publications in the collection of works "in Callots Manier." See E.T.A. Hoffmann, Poetische Werke, ed. Gerhard Seidel, I (Berlin, 1958), 62-63.



entitled his second collection of short stories Nachtstücke (1816-17).<sup>6</sup> Although he had chosen the title of the Fantasiestücke to describe stories that had already appeared in print, there are definite indications that Hoffmann selected the title of the Nachtstücke before he wrote the tales.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, it would seem logical to expect this later group to be more thematically unified than the former collection of heterogeneous sketches, stories, and essays.

Hoffmann's reason for calling his second collection of tales "night paintings" can only be surmised from the work, for the author gives no explanation. Walther Harich expresses the opinion that Hoffmann selected his title in order to attract the reader with the expectation of more suspenseful stories.<sup>8</sup> Gerhard Seidel believes that the poet chose the title for the purpose of indicating that his eight stories

<sup>6</sup>Most critics agree that Hoffmann intended the complete title to match his first collection of tales: Nachtstücke in Callots Manier and that Hoffmann again uses Stücke as a substitute for Gemälde as he had done in his Fantasiestücke. For example, see Georg Ellinger, E.T.A. Hoffmann, sein Leben und seine Werke (Hamburg, 1894), p. 113.

<sup>7</sup>See Hoffmann's letter to the publisher, Georg Reimer, in Briefwechsel, II, 77. The one exception is "Ignaz Denner," the first version of which had been written in 1814 under the title of "Der Revierjäger." Kunz rejected the tale as being unsuitable for the Fantasiestücke because he felt it did not fit in with the other tales. After Hoffmann's completion of "Der Sandmann," the poet revised "Der Revierjäger" and changed the title in order to incorporate it into the Nachtstücke where it is more appropriate. Harich is of the opinion that "Ignaz Denner" would have completely changed the nature of Hoffmann's first anthology. See Harich, II, 23.

<sup>8</sup>Harich, II, 115.

concerned the dark, mysterious, and gruesome side of existence:

Mit der Wahl seines Titels wollte Hoffmann wohl andeuten, daß es ihm in den hier zusammengestellten Novellen und Erzählungen um die Darstellung der Nachtseite des Lebens ging, um die poetische Fixierung des Dunklen und Geheimnisvollen, des Grausigen und Schrecklichen, das er im Leben aufspürte.<sup>9</sup>

Seidel expresses, in essence, a prevalent attitude concerning Hoffmann's purpose for writing the Nachtstücke. Such critics have a tendency to regard the eerie, gruesome effect of the "night paintings" as being Hoffmann's primary achievement. Gabrielle Wittkop-Ménardeau, who is typical of this "horror for horror's sake" point of view, calls Hoffmann "der Mann mit dem Eulengesicht."<sup>10</sup> She presents a rather ominous picture of the author of the Nachtstücke:

Eigentlich sind aber alle Texte Hoffmanns „nocturn“, auch wenn ihre Handlung mitten am hellen Tag und unter der italienischen Sonne spielt. Denn er ist der Dichter der Finsternis von Seele und Geist, der Dichter der dunklen Gefilde, in denen der Mensch noch mit den geheimen Kräften verknüpft, der Dichter der Abgründe, die unsägliche Gestalten verhehlen, der Tiefen, aus denen der Doppelgänger, das Gespenst oder die Gühle aufsteigt. Hoffmann ist der Sänger Hekates, der Göttin der Hunde, der Schlafwandler und der Zauberei.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, Walter Jost asserts that the horror theory is a common fallacy among Hoffmann critics:

Man kann Hoffmanns Schöpfungen der Nacht zu einseitig

<sup>9</sup> Poetische Werke, II, 738.

<sup>10</sup> E.T.A. Hoffmann in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten (Hamburg, 1966), p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> Wittkop-Ménardeau, pp. 121-122.

nächtig interpretieren, man kann weiterhin über diesen Erzeugnissen die Dichtungen von hellerer Farbe vernachlässigen und verkennen. Wer in Hoffmann von vornherein den eingefleischten Pessimisten und Melancholiker sieht, wird beides tun.<sup>12</sup>

To be sure, Hoffmann presents many facets of darkness in his Nachtstücke, but not for the sole purpose of horrifying his readers. These nocturnal tales are more complex artistic achievements than simple spine-tinglers.

With the exception of a few articles which have usually centered upon individual tales such as "Der Sandmann," most critics have treated the Nachtstücke as a minor part of Hoffmann's works by incorporating their brief discussions of these tales in chapters on other works of Hoffmann or in chapters dealing with the author's style or his treatment of the occult.<sup>13</sup> In the great majority of these critical studies, the Nachtstücke are represented by only a brief plot summary.<sup>14</sup> Detailed studies, devoted exclusively to a critical examination of the entire group of tales, are rare. Hoffmann's most recent bibliographer, Jürgen Voerster, does not record any such research.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, there have been few attempts

<sup>12</sup> Von Ludwig Tieck zu E.T.A. Hoffmann (Darmstadt, 1969), p. 131.

<sup>13</sup> A good example is Harvey W. Hewett-Thayer, Hoffmann: Author of the Tales (Princeton, New Jersey, 1948).

<sup>14</sup> See Harich, II, 114-133, and Ellinger, pp. 113-118.

<sup>15</sup> See 160 Jahre E.T.A. Hoffmann-Forschung: 1805-1965 (Stuttgart, 1967).

to give a detailed explanation and analysis of the correlation between the general title and the individual stories. Critics such as Seidel have attempted to explain the appropriateness of the title by such broad generalizations as "die Darstellung der Nachtseite des Lebens" with few specific references to individual stories.<sup>16</sup> In addition, very few scholars have considered the Nachtstücke as a whole for the purpose of investigating whether or not there is thematic unity within the collection. Since Hoffmann chose his title before writing his tales, he must have written them with the title in mind as descriptive of a thematic pattern.

Although Kenneth Negus, the author of E.T.A. Hoffmann's Other World, does not focus his attention on the Nachtstücke alone, he does make an attempt to relate the main title to the individual stories and endeavors to examine them in terms of a particular theme.<sup>17</sup> Negus, who regards night as symbolic of many types of Satanic forces of darkness and ruin, interprets the tales according to the myth of destruction. He discusses "Der Sandmann" and "Ignaz Denner" under the chapter heading of "Tales of the Satanic" and the remainder of the Nachtstücke under the title of "The Underworld." By the term "underworld" he seems to mean the realm of various

<sup>16</sup>Poetische Werke, II, 738.

<sup>17</sup>Philadelphia, 1965, pp. 87-104.

kinds of Satanic forces of darkness and destruction. Negus, however, has limited success in tracing his "nocturnal underworld" concept in the majority of the Nachtstücke. He himself admits that the mythic elements are not coherent and that "the exploration of the demonic nocturnal underworld involved false starts and blind alleys, especially in the second volume."<sup>18</sup> But he attributes the inconsistency to Hoffmann and not to the weakness of his own thematic idea as applied to this collection of tales. Negus makes the assumption that Hoffmann's criticism of his own stories was based on their failure to measure up to an adequate expression of a nocturnal underworld:

Hoffmann experimented with various forms of his underworld. Consequently there were varying degrees of success in creating the appropriate means of expression. He himself recognized this unevenness in Nachtstücke when he wrote in his letter of March 8, 1818, to Kunz: "Im zweiten Theil der Nachtstücke empfehle ich Ihnen das Majorat und das Gelübde; das öde Haus, taugt nichts und das steinerne Herz ist so--so!"<sup>19</sup>

It is doubtful whether Hoffmann made such a statement with any particular philosophy of a "demonic nocturnal underworld" in mind.

Negus regards the literal darkness of night as the ideal symbol of his Satanic underworld, but discovers that in such

<sup>18</sup>Negus, pp. 102-103.

<sup>19</sup>Negus, p. 95.

stories as "Das Sanctus" and "Das steinerne Herz" actual night is of no importance. He admits that Hoffmann also uses the nocturnal in the sense of "psychological darkness" in such tales as "Das Gelübde" and "Das Sanctus."<sup>20</sup> Negus is dissatisfied with this type of mental darkness because it does little to support his idea of night as a symbol of the demonic realm. Even though this critic mentions that there are other types of darkness, he does not explore the subject; he implies that the stories which do not support the underworld theory are weak. He, therefore, concludes that the Nachtstücke "contain a tangle of successes and failures" as "Hoffmann experimented with various forms of his underworld."<sup>21</sup> It is more probable, however, that the failure lies not in an inconsistency in the Nachtstücke but in the attempt to fit the tales exclusively into this myth hypothesis. Negus's idea of night as a symbol of the kingdom of evil has some merit, but it is too restrictive; the underworld theory is only one possible explanation of the kinds of darkness explored by Hoffmann in the "night paintings."

Another recent critic, Robert Mühlher, has confined his study to three of Hoffmann's Nachtstücke: "Der Sandmann," "Das öde Haus" and "Das steinerne Herz."<sup>22</sup> Although he

<sup>20</sup> Negus, pp. 103-104.

<sup>21</sup> Negus, pp. 104, 95.

<sup>22</sup> "Zum Verständnis der Werke," E.T.A. Hoffmann Nachtstücke (Hamburg, 1964), pp. 97-136.

suggests a number of motifs which the three "vereinigten" tales have in common, one theme in particular seems especially significant and worthy of investigation as an important unifying principle in the entire collection of "night paintings:" the concept of "Freiheit bzw. Unfreiheit des menschlichen Willens."<sup>23</sup> Mühlher asserts that the three tales are held together by "ein einziges, allerdings vielgliedriges und schwierig zu durchschauendes Problem: durch das der Willensfreiheit."<sup>24</sup> This critic sees Hoffmann's title as a significant key to the poet's treatment of "Unfreiheit." He interprets the word Nachtstück to mean the animation of lifeless objects through artificial light, and suggests that the term was borrowed from the vernacular of painters. He proposes that this artificial illumination is for Hoffmann "eine Höllenglutbeleuchtung," or in other words, the work of the Devil.<sup>25</sup> Mühlher believes that Hoffmann's treatment of false light (darkness) versus genuine light parallels the

<sup>23</sup>Mühlher, p. 99. Lothar Köhn, in his discussion of "Der Sandmann," points to the important question of "Verhängnis und Freiheit." Köhn sees the protagonist experiencing the opposite of "Befreiung und Erhellung." He concludes that determinism wins out in this tale. See Vieldeutige Welt (Tübingen, 1966), pp. 100-103.

<sup>24</sup>Mühlher, p. 99.

<sup>25</sup>Mühlher, p. 98.

Christian idea of the antithesis of Satanic darkness and divine illumination as elaborated upon in the Pauline writings.<sup>26</sup>

Like the Apostle Paul, Hoffmann associates light with the concept of freedom and darkness with the idea of human bondage:

Wenn schon Paulus in jenem Umflossensein vom Licht des Auferstandenen die Freiheit vom Gesetz gewinnt, so ist auch bei Hoffmann das Himmelslicht wie das Augenlicht Zeichen der eigenen Freiheit, der Trug aber, der von jenen Instrumenten auf den Beschauer ausstrahlt, stellt den Menschen „unter die Natur“, d. h. macht den Menschen einem magischen Zwang untertan.<sup>27</sup>

Mühlher affirms that Hoffmann presents man "auf dem Kampfplatz zwischen Himmel und Hölle und damit zwischen Freiheit und Versklavung."<sup>28</sup> This scholar is, therefore, convinced that the conflict between the forces of freedom and the powers of bondage is an important theme in the three Nachtstücke under consideration:

So zeigt Hoffmann teils die Tragödie des unfreien jungen Menschen im „Sandmann“, die Stellung des Menschen zwischen Verlockung und Freiheit im „Öden Haus“, wie auch die Komödie des sich nur selbst täuschenden Fatalisten im „Steinernen Herz“.<sup>29</sup>

Although Mühlher asserts that the three tales are unified by this "einziges" theme, his treatment of the subject is brief;

<sup>26</sup>Mühlher, p. 98.

<sup>27</sup>Mühlher, p. 99.

<sup>28</sup>Mühlher, p. 102.

<sup>29</sup>Mühlher, p. 102.



he gives few specific examples from the works to support his idea and does not clearly develop very many facets of this "vielgliedriges" subject. He does discuss a number of topics which the three stories have in common, but he neglects to relate them directly to the concept of "Willensfreiheit." Mühlher's emphasis on the unified nature of the three stories raises a legitimate question whether the other five tales contain the same theme. The selection of these three particular tales indicates that he discusses a representative sampling (the first, middle, and last story) of the Nachtstücke. There is definitely a need for a full-length examination of this topic as it relates to the Nachtstücke as a group.

Even though Mühlher labels "Willensfreiheit" as a major idea expressed in Hoffmann's three tales, he spends more time discussing the lack of freedom or "Unfreiheit des menschlichen Willens" as an important element in the stories. It is this concept of human bondage which appears to be of importance in the Nachtstücke that deserves to be examined at greater length. The main purpose of this research is to explore the bondage-and-darkness theme as a unifying element in Hoffmann's eight tales of the night.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BONDAGE-AND-DARKNESS THEME

An examination of the Nachtstücke reveals the frequent occurrence of the Unfreiheit motif in each of the tales. Hoffmann does not limit himself to a single term to convey the lack of freedom, but utilizes many similar nouns such as Gefangenschaft and Bande and verbs like fesseln and einsperren in both figurative and literal meanings. The English word "bondage" will be used to characterize this predominant theme in Hoffmann's collection because the meaning of the term seems broad enough to encompass the many facets of confining, fettering forces that the protagonists in Hoffmann's stories encounter. "Bondage" not only conveys the literal condition of being in servitude or in the confines of a prison but is also used in a figurative manner to suggest subjugation that is nonphysical in nature. Hence, the word bondage is inclusive enough to incorporate the many variations of Unfreiheit that appear in the Nachtstücke.

The bondage theme gives meaning and a deeper significance to the frequent references to darkness throughout the Nachtstücke. Most critics have agreed that Hoffmann's use of darkness is

symbolic of the demonic influence in the tales; Robert Mühlher has gone a step further and has equated not only evil but the idea of "Unfreiheit des menschlichen Willens" with darkness.<sup>1</sup> He asserts that Hoffmann's treatment in these "night paintings" definitely echoes the Biblical interpretation of the conflict between freedom and bondage in terms of the images of light and darkness. Both Mühlher and Walter Jost see Hoffmann's utilization of darkness in the Nachtstücke as having been influenced by Biblical ideas.<sup>2</sup> They affirm that the poet's dunkle Macht concept clearly has its origin in the Christian tradition. If the assertions of these critics are true, then the concepts of darkness and bondage are closely connected, for the association of nocturnal imagery with bondage is an integral part of the heritage of the Judeo-Christian world.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Mühlher, "Verständnis der Werke," pp. 98-99.

<sup>2</sup>See Mühlher, pp. 98-99; Jost, Von Tieck zu Hoffmann, p. 131.

<sup>3</sup>The Old Testament writers, who proclaimed that God is light (Ps. xxvii.1.), used darkness as a contrast to divine light, and they wrote that man was given the agency to choose between the forces of good or light and the powers of evil or darkness (Gen. ii.16-17.; iii.1-6). Because Adam and Eve chose darkness rather than light, they brought about a condition which is described by Biblical prophets as a state of bondage; through sin, man became entangled in the chains of the Devil. The New Testament writings express a message that those who refuse to follow Christ remain in darkness and the bondage of sin. Men were, therefore, admonished by the New Testament leaders to choose light which would make men free rather than darkness which would entangle the individual with the yoke of bondage. Hence, a typical Pauline admonition is: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. v.1.).

In the Nachtstücke, Hoffmann explores a variety of types of restrictions that affect the different parts of the whole man. Physical bondage involves the imprisonment of the flesh; psychological bondage is the fettering of the mind while spiritual bondage is the condition of the captive soul. The range of human limitations that human beings experience in Hoffmann's night world is brought about by several different factors. The Nachtstücke present both external and internal forces which bring about disharmony and the eventual condition of restraint in the life of Hoffmann's protagonists. The disruption of human freedom can originate from outside the individual; these external influences may be objects, places, or supernatural powers. Inanimate objects such as an eyeglass, jewelbox, mask, stone heart, or even such places as a dark forest, dungeon, or desolate house may have an inhibiting effect upon the protagonist's freedom in Hoffmann's tales. Other individuals frequently exert a coercive effect upon a character by means of physical restraints or imprisonment.

The recurring symbol depicting the external, enslaving forces is the darkness which originates from outside the individual. This type of darkness not only includes such natural phenomena as the darkness of night or the blackness of a forest or dungeon, but also encompasses the dunkle Mächte from the realm of the supernatural; for this reason, external

darkness can often be equated with actual diabolical forces which threaten the life of man as in "Ignaz Denner."

Another variation of bondage results within a character when one facet of his being tyrannizes or dominates another. The body, mind, and spirit must function as a harmonic whole for the individual to remain free from bondage. The Nachtstücke affirm that whenever any of these parts become disproportionate in power to the others, disharmony and eventual disaster result. Although a human being's dark state of bondage may have been prompted by an outside force, the individual himself ultimately chooses the course that leads to his darkness in these "night paintings." This type of inner restraint stems from a self-imposed or internal force which may result in a loss of freedom. Both Mühlher and Jost have hinted that the metaphor of night is associated with a number of restricting influences which exist within the individual. Although Walter Jost does not directly associate internal darkness with bondage, he strongly indicates this idea when he emphasizes that Hoffmann's inhibiting dunkle Macht does not always originate externally:

Es ist falsch, in Hoffmanns dunkler Macht immer nur ein tückisches Schicksal zu sehen, das von ungefähr in das Leben des Menschen einbricht, die Tatsache der psychologischen Immanenz ihres<sup>4</sup> Wirkens wird zuweilen mit aller Deutlichkeit betont.

The facets of internal darkness such as ignorance, emotional

<sup>4</sup>Jost, p. 131.

turmoil, and fear also result in bondage. Hoffmann's analysis of human freedom is by no means a simple description of one kind of restriction by an external demonic force.

Hoffmann is particularly concerned with exploring the inhibiting and confining effects of a darkened mind upon the freedom of the individual. He shows how a character may become paralyzed by an extreme fear or enslaved by an irrational passion as does Nathanael in "Der Sandmann." Hoffmann presents another type of inner force in the form of a guilt which results in a physical disorder in "Das Sanctus." In a later story, "Das Gelübde," an irrational physical act leads to intense feelings of guilt. In these tales of darkness, Hoffmann portrays the danger of becoming possessed by an idea to the extent that this belief becomes the ruling power over an individual's life. Hoffmann presents psychological darkness as the mental condition of obscured vision, clouded insight, and even insanity. His characters are blind to reality or truth and grope about as if they were in a world of eternal night.

Another type of inner power determines the individual's freedom from spiritual bondage. This spiritual liberty is dependent on the character's moral goodness and integrity. The free choice of the individual is all important; he is left spiritually free as long as he remains true to divine

principles. If he chooses evil or is morally unstable, he is immediately subject to the power of an external evil force.

Walter Jost supports this interpretation of Hoffmann's point of view in the Nachtstücke when he states:

Nur feige Widerstandslosigkeit geben der dunkeln Macht die Möglichkeit, uns in Sünde und Schuld zu verstricken, so stand es in den „Elixieren“; nur Schwäche, passives Entgegenkommen verschaffen ihr auch die Gewalt, unsere Sinne zu verwirren und uns in Wahnsinn zu stürzen, so verkünden es die Nachtstücke „Der Sandmann“ und „Das öde Haus“; der Glaube erst schafft die Gespenster, die den Menschen vernichten.<sup>5</sup>

In "Ignaz Denner," Hoffmann juxtaposes physical and spiritual freedom; when the protagonists are in physical bonds, they are spiritually free because they remain true to divine principles. However, once they accept stolen goods, they find themselves in spiritual darkness, subject to the chains of the Devil. Spiritual darkness is associated with a person's depraved moral condition and symbolizes his estrangement from the divine light. In the Nachtstücke, Hoffmann delves deeply into an examination of the variety of fettering influences upon a person's life.

The "night paintings" reveal the searching mind of a man probing the problem of human limitations as brought about by outside forces and internal conditions. The bondage motif adds to an understanding of the Nachtstücke in that it gives

<sup>5</sup>Jost, p. 131.

a significant explanation why internal and external dark forces are so threatening to the individual. When freedom is usurped either by pressures from without or forces from within, the protagonists are adversely affected and can no longer function as autonomous human beings. The term bondage encompasses several levels of meaning in describing the kind of compelling powers that threaten to dominate the heroes and heroines in these stories. At the same time, the idea lends unity to the varied situations of the persona depicted in Hoffmann's "night paintings." The bondage-and-darkness theme is a major concern of Hoffmann and is reflected not only in the Nachtstücke but also in his personal life.