



The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr

E.T.A. Hoffmann , Anthea Bell (Translator) , Jeremy Adler (Introduction)

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It was E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) who first explored many of the themes and techniques which were later used by writers from Dickens to Dostoyevsky, Poe to Kafka, Baudelaire to Marquez. His career reached a glorious climax in *The Tomcat Murr*, perhaps the strangest novel of the nineteenth century.. "Hoffmann was a follower of Cervantes and Sterne, a pioneering 'magic realist', fascinated by Gothic horror, extreme mental states and supernatural events occurring within sharply (and sometimes satirically) rendered social settings. A talented composer and painter, he portrayed himself in the guise of Johannes Kreisler - the hypochondriac, antisocial and moody but brilliant musician. In this astonishing book, a vain and very bourgeois tomcat sets out to write his memoirs, using a biography of Kreisler as a blotting pad. By a printer's error, the two lives get spliced together into a bizarre double narrative. A supreme example of literary bravado, *The Tomcat Murr* is also shot through with the warmth, humanity and almost uncanny ability to captivate his readers which make Hoffmann the greatest of German story-tellers.

The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr Details

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From Reader Review **The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr** for online ebook

J.T. Wilson says

It's always rewarding when you read a book like this - two hundred years old and full of references to bourgeois German society - and find that it is genuinely funny, that the humour transcends cultural and historical boundaries. Here, the characteristics of the pretentious, deluded cat Murr and the intense, anti-social composer Kriesler are easily identifiable in any era.

Murr engages in a sort of bildungsroman, starting off as a precocious kitten fond of half-reading classics and amusing himself with "naughty pranks" and passing through marriage, fraternity life and a dabble with high society. Kriesler wanders into the banana republic of Sieghartsof only to find himself drawn towards the haunted Princess Hedwiga and her charming friend Julia, and drawn into a gothic mystery featuring mysterious figures in the woods and sinister princes. The deliberately haphazard cutting between the stories and the surreal nature of the stories give the novel a distinctive feel; a proto-magic realism novel. The abrupt ending, necessitated by Hoffman's death, leaves the book forever incomplete. Still, if you can countenance a lack of narrative closure, there's a lot to enjoy in this witty, inventive work.

Edward says

Introduction

Further Reading

Note on the Illustrations

--The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr

Editor's Postscript

Notes

Brian Baker says

Sometimes one good book leads to another, and as 'Tomcat Murr' is referenced in a recent favourite of mine - Andrew Crumey's 'Mobius Dick'- I thought I'd give it a go. It's a really nice idea: two manuscripts, one a satirical biography of a tortured musician and the other an autobiography of an educated cat, get accidentally spliced together at the printers (so that's where Calvino got his idea from) into a single book whose narratives constantly interrupt eachother. The problem I found, however, is that the 'human' story, satirising such a distant social mileu, is as dull as most 'old' comedy is (see Shakespeare), so I found myself skipping these sections as the book went on. The toadishly boastful and self-satisfied 'Murr' sections are much better, although as Hoffman never finished the final volume, it too is ultimately unsatisfying. An extra half a star for the effort though.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

E.T.A. Hoffman, the author of this odd, unfinished book, was born in 1776 and died in 1822. Experts in Literature describe 'The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr', of which Part One was first published in 1819 and Part Two was published in 1821, as proto-postmodernism because it shares many of the characteristics that define such novels. The link below describes those characteristics.

http://www.writing.com/main/view_item...

I am not a Literature expert of any kind, but I have been reading some of the books which are considered early 'masterpieces' or simply examples of early novels which inspired experimentation and development of the format 'The Novel'.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novel>

If you don't have time to read the above link, I'll simply say I feel the Novel format that our generation is comfortable in reading began in the 18th century. The invention of the printing press in the middle 1400's meant the printing of stories (The Gutenberg Bible) began in the 15th century, but I would not say these 'books' are comfortable to read, speaking as an ordinary person of grocery store aisle tastes. However, I must recommend making an effort to read these earlier 'novels' because so many books refer to them, if not steal the basic plots. But, again speaking as an ordinary person, I try to pick up Literary Canon versions with lots of notes, which means reading a book published by a respectable publishing company and making sure the editor has a long descriptive foreword prefacing the story.

I have struggled to read these early 'novels', so I was happy that the Penguin English translation of Hoffman's book is comfortable to read. It is not too far from our own time, so that many details are familiar. That said, I was shocked to see the protagonist is a cat.

A literate cat!

Murr tells the story of his birth, youth, education and maturity. At the same time, he is clearly a kitty from beginning to end of his autobiography. He lives a cat life, and he tries to hide his literacy from his master, Master Abraham. He loves eating a nice fish head after digesting one of his owner's books..

"For the edification of hopeful young tomcats, I cannot neglect to remark that if I wanted to study I would leap at my master's library with my eyes closed, then tug out the book to which I was clinging and peruse it whatever its contents. Through this mode of studying, my mind acquired that wide-ranging flexibility, that diverse and brilliant wealth of knowledge, which posterity will admire in me."

Hoffmann, E.T.A. (2006-02-23). *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* (Penguin Classics) (p. 45). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.

On his explorations of the roof of the house where he lives, he meets a hottie, a female with a lovely singing voice.

"It is the first duty of an honest biographer to be scrupulous and not on any account to spare himself. In all honesty, therefore, paw on heart, I will confess that despite the inexpressible zeal with which I devoted

myself to the arts and sciences, yet the thought of lovely Kitty would often rise suddenly before my mind's eye, wholly interrupting my studies."

Hoffmann, E.T.A. (2006-02-23). *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* (Penguin Classics) (p. 167). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.

Murr also falls in with a cat crowd of clubbers.

"Let it suffice to say that for some time I continued to lead a cheerful, merry life on the roof-tops of the neighbourhood as a feline fraternity member, in the company of Muzius and other excellent, honest, trustworthy young fellows, white, ginger and tabby."

Hoffmann, E.T.A. (2006-02-23). *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* (Penguin Classics) (p. 205). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.

Murr makes an astonishing friendship with a poodle, and on that account learns 'poodlish'.

"My new friendship had made a deep impression on me, so that as I sat in sun or shade, on the roof or under the stove, I thought of nothing, reflected on nothing, dreamed of nothing, was aware of nothing but poodle, poodle, poodle! I thereby gained great insight into the innermost essence of poodlishness which dawned upon me in brilliant colours,..."

Hoffmann, E.T.A. (2006-02-23). *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* (Penguin Classics) (p. 47). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.

"I adduced several examples from the two languages, drawing the reader's attention to the identical roots of bow-wow- miaow-miaow- yap-yap - snap - grrr - purr - huff-huff - hissss, and so forth."

Hoffmann, E.T.A. (2006-02-23). *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* (Penguin Classics) (p. 47). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.

The book title is a satire of another book, also an early satire, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, while the content satirizes a type of novel circulating in Germany at the time, 'Romances'.

(One of the confusions for today's readers in determining what an earlier century's book is about is they used the descriptor Romance or Comedy to describe what we would call a Fantasy or Adventure Drama.)

Unfortunately for the General Reader (my opinion), Murr's funny autobiography is mixed in with 'waste paper' Murr used to blot his opus, a biography of another person, a human by the name of Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler. Murr accidentally sends in the 'blotting' paper to the printer with his own pages, and so his printed book ends up in alternating pages between his own writings and that of the biography of Kreisler.

I did not enjoy Kreisler's pages so much. Kreisler's life was written in a dull dull dull manner, despite the fact it was a satire of German gothic novels. Kreisler fixes organs, and he is a musician. His skills permit him access to various classes of society, as well as involvement in various adventures. He is of a nervous disposition, a bit of a frail personality; but this was a time period when some artists were considered to be of delicate emotional constitutions. His acquaintances are aristocrats, some of whom go mad, common folk, religious priests, and merchants. Psychology was a new science, lately introduced to European society, and it

was interesting to read a book which was one of the first to use psychological terms, not just elements, as part of a gothic story. There is a magician (Master Abraham, a character in both intermingled pages), a seeress who sees the future, automatons, possible ghosts, attempted murder, etc. The aristocrat family is full of the arranging of marriages and other corruptions which were usual at that time and in previous centuries.

As befits a novel written for the educated European reader, who were considered elites of these times, there are also tons and tons of literary and cultural references of high-culture Art books and theme paintings, especially those of German, French, Latin and some Greek studies, although satirically inserted and used.

Many historians think of 1815 as the date when our modern times began, so that places this book on the cusp between medieval world values and the beginning of the industrial ages. In my opinion, that makes this book an interesting novel, seeing a bit of the intersection of the two periods of European/German idea and philosophical development. I also adored Murr. However, I did not enjoy reading about Kreisler; I thought his sections a chore to read through. Other readers have felt exactly the opposite of what I felt. If you read this book, let me know which protagonist you liked best!

K8 says

Fabulous! I just wish that Hoffmann had lived long enough to write the third book/section. We're left with a cliffhanger that will never be resolved (although I can imagine all sorts of fan fiction possibilities).

The stories of both Murr and Kreisler are fragmentary, fun, suspenseful, action-filled romps. And with all of that, they also contain fantastical and gothic elements.

I will need to read this again so that I can better explain the ways this book works for me.

Nikki says

MOST HONEST PORTRAYAL OF A TOMCAT EVER. (Not for children.)

Sergio says

They have a party tonight in Königsberg - Mr E. T. A. Hoffmann and his friends the writers: The Tomcat Murr, Edgar Poe, Gogol, Franz Kafka, Dostoyevsky, Bulgakov, Marquez and Calvino.

Alex says

If the phatasmagoric Kater Murr were published tomorrow as the work of a young Brooklyn hipster, it might be hailed as a tour de force of postmodern fiction.

- New Yorker piece about fictional composers

None of that sounds tempting but the book does sound cool.

dely says

3,5

Murr è un gatto colto e intelligente che ama la lettura e si dedica con impegno anche alla scrittura. Il libro, infatti, è un'autobiografia in cui Murr non solo parla della sua vita ma esprime anche le sue considerazioni sulla società. Murr, però, per scrivere la sua biografia, usa dei fogli che contenevano la biografia di Kreisler, un altro personaggio di Hoffmann. Le due biografie in questo modo si sovrappongono e l'editore stampa un libro che contiene le due biografie che s'intrecciano e si alternano.

Ecco, sarò scema io, ma non sono riuscita a capire quando si stavano leggendo le parti scritte da Murr e quando quelle scritte da Kreisler. L'io narrante sembrava sempre lo stesso, ovvero il gatto Murr. Quando verrà a trovarmi il mio amico intelligente lo obbligherò a leggere il libro e poi mi farà indicare da lui quali parti sono di Murr e quali quelle di Kreisler.

E' un bel libro, a tratti con osservazioni profonde e a tratti umoristico, l'unica pecca è che non sono riuscita a vedere differenze tra lo scritto del gatto e quello di Kreisler perché l'io narrante sembra sempre lo stesso. Un giorno lo leggerò in lingua originale perché sono curiosa di vedere se è colpa della traduzione, se è Hoffmann che ha usato uno stesso linguaggio per entrambi i personaggi o se sono una povera fessa.

25/02/2013

Ho letto finalmente l'edizione in lingua originale.

Posso affermare di non essere una fessa (lo sono comunque ma per altri motivi) perché l'editore Ugo Mursia ha avuto la splendida idea di mutilare senza ritegno un classico della letteratura tedesca.

Nell'edizione tedesca ci sono, com'è giusto che sia, entrambe le biografie: l'autobiografia del gatto Murr è completa mentre quella del maestro di cappella Kreisler è frammentata perché interrotta dall'autobiografia di Murr che ha usato i fogli che contenevano la biografia di Kreisler per annotarci le sue riflessioni e la sua vita. Si tratta quindi di due storie separate e indipendenti collegate solo dal fatto che il padrone di Murr, il maestro Abramo, è un caro amico di Kreisler il quale ha ospitato il gatto per un breve periodo durante il quale il micio ha pensato bene di iniziare a scrivere la sua autobiografia utilizzando i fogli contenenti la biografia di Kreisler.

Mentre l'autobiografia di Murr è completa, quella di Kreisler è volutamente interrotta e incompleta ma ciò non toglie nulla alla trama della storia, anzi, questa si arricchisce di mistero e di suspense.

Nella storia di Kreisler ritroviamo le ambientazioni e le tematiche tipiche di Hoffmann: il mistero, un omicidio, un po' di magia e segreti che verranno svelati.

Se volete leggere *Le considerazioni filosofiche del gatto Murr* NON comprate l'edizione della Mursia perché manca tutta la storia di Kreisler. L'unica spiegazione che posso dare a questa mutilazione è che *Le considerazioni* della Mursia fanno parte della collana *Felinamente* e quindi la parte dedicata alla biografia di Kreisler è stata consapevolmente omessa per mantenere solo quella del gatto Murr.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYDHDK...>

Dan says

I've been wanting to read this book ever since I read a collection of ETA Hoffmann's stories 2 years ago-ish. So far it is as enjoyable as I had hoped and expected it to be.

After finishing: I must say after the initial novelty of the form, characters and setting wore off, I didn't enjoy this book all that much and it was a struggle to see it through to the end. My main criticisms: The Kreisler plot is so convoluted and every time it begins to pick up, a Murr chapter breaks the momentum. Murr's plot and voice didn't do all that much for me either. Also, Hoffmann's digressions about music and the arts and constant references to the hot composers and playwrights of his day were pretty tiresome. The book interests me as a curiosity in that it represents one of the earliest forays into anthropomorphized animal writing for adults I've ever heard of. I have to give it credit for being such a surreal read, as well, although in remaining true to the tendency of dreams to have no clear beginnings, middles, or ends, its conclusion left me pretty much--to use one of Hoffmann's favorite words--vexed.

Nickolas the Kid says

Ο Μουρ είναι ο γιος του εφευρητή/μου της αυλής του Δούκα Ειρηνάου.

Είναι ένας πολύ ιδιαίτερος γιος μιας και ξέρει να γράφει και να διαβάζει. Είναι προβληματισμένος, οι σκέψεις του συμβαδίζουν με τον Ευρωπαϊκό Διαφωτισμό, γράφει σονέτα, ποιήματα και μικρά διηγήματα.

Δεν θα μπορούσε λοιπόν μια τέτοια σημαντική προσωπικότητα να μην αφήσει παρακαταθήκη για τις επόμενες γενιές των γατών, την βιογραφία του η οποία θα ήταν μάλιστα γραμμένη από τον ίδιο... Ήτσι ο φιλόρεσκος γιος θα διαλέξει να βιβλίο από την βιβλιοθήκη του κυρίου του για να γράψει τα απομνημονεύματά του. Τυχαία θα διαλέξει την βιογραφία ενός γνωστού μουσικοσυνθέτη του Γιοχάνες Κρσίστερ!!

Το αποτέλεσμα όμως είναι αλλοπαρσαλλο και διασκεδαστικό! Οι 2 βιογραφίες μπλέκονται και ο αναγνώστης διαβάζει για τις ζωές του Γίου Μουρ αλλά και του Κρσίστερ! Δύο εκ διαμέτρου αντίθετων χαρακτήρων.

Του ορθολογιστή, αξιοπρεπή και φιλόρεσκου γιου και του ρομαντικού, περιθωριακού και ονειροπλούτου δημιουργού Γιοχάνες Κρσίστερ.

Ο ETA Χόφμαν σατιρίζει μέσω του γιου, τις ιδέες του Διαφωτισμού και τον καθωσπρεπισμό εν μέσω του Κρσίστερ μας υπενθυμίζει ότι ο Ρομαντισμός είναι κάτι το οποίο μας συμπληρώνει σαν ονότητες.

Ο ίδιος ο Χόφμαν ήταν μουσικός, ζωγράφος και συγγραφέας. Παράλληλα όμως ήταν και δημοσιόπαλληλος υπάλληλος. Ήταν ένας καλλιτέχνης ο οποίος προσπαθούσε να συμβιβαστεί τη δημοσιοπαλληλική του ιδιότητα με την θυελλώδη δημιουργική του φύση. Αισθάνταν απήχθεια για τις μικροαστικές αντιλήψεις και τον καθωσπρεπισμό κάτι το οποίο διαφάνεται σε όλα τα βιβλία.

Βρήκα το βιβλίο αριστουργηματικό σαν σάλληση και σαν δημιουργία. Θάμασα τον Γιοχάνες Κρσίστερ για την απίλυτη προσήλωση του στις δημιουργίες του και γλάσα με τις γκόμενες και τις θεωρίες του Γίου Μουρ.

Οι γοτθικές αποχρώσεις και οι πινελιές μυστηρίου δίνουν στο βιβλίο μια επιπλέον γοητεία.

5/5 για να από τα καλύτερα βιβλία που έχω διαβάσει!!

Nathan says

This was a strange one. Two interwoven and overlapping stories, one written by a cat about his life and adventures and the other a version of 19th century courtly melodrama. Both were widely interspersed with rambles on Art, Music, Poetry and so on, which made them hard to wade through at times. But there were also sections of sublime foolishness and flights of whimsy (the cat duel is a doozy). I think of this one as fibre in my mental diet. 2.5/5

Melda says

:3

Petra says

What a fun book! Told in two parts (Tomcat Murr & Kappellmeister Kreisler's stories) this book is funny and intriguing.

Murr's segments are a staid, city life...a more "ordinary" life of social customs, education, society, rank, etc. Murr educates himself by learning to read & write. He has polish, civility, class.....but always the cat in him comes out: a fried herring head is too hard to resist, the claws come out at fright and anger, he arches his back. There's no getting away from one's true nature.

Kreisler's side of the story has a fairy-tale aspect to it with kings, queens, intrigues, sword fights, magic....all set in an idyllic landscape. It's exciting and charming.

The writing technique is jarring. Just as one is consumed with one story, it stops in mid-sentence and the other's story continues. This happens throughout the book.....start getting comfortable and the story switches. It works well in this book.

The third book was, unfortunately, never written. This book ends abruptly. However, in thinking it over, it ends in a good place to leave the imagination to roam.

Very enjoyable; a fun read.

Katie says

I am so glad I picked up this book (enticed by the cover engraving of the handsome titular cat). Murr will make you laugh out loud. Highlights were his encounters with Ponto the poodle, especially their first meeting. The other story, about the composer Kreisler, was not as immediately accessible but soon pulled me in. It's really a pretty amazing technical feat for Hoffman to have pulled together these two stories that are so different in tone in such a way that they're pretty much equally enjoyable and, strangely, seem to nest together. I didn't end up frustrated that it's an unfinished novel; I think that makes it more of a fun romp than a polished, tied up story would have been. I don't want to give away any more than that--I recommend you just dive in and enjoy. The introduction notes Hoffman's influence on Pushkin, Gogol, Bulgakov, Mann, Kafka, and others, and traces how Hoffman was influenced by Cervantes and Sterne.

Orcun says

Birinci harika fikir: Bir kediye, insanlar? hicveden bir otobiyografi yazd?rmak. ?kinci harika fikir: Kedinin yazd?klar? aras?na bir orkestra ?efine ait ba?ka bir biyografinin sayfalar?n?n kar??m?? olmas?, s?zde yay?mc?n?n bunu fark etmemesi ve romanda iki metnin (c?mleler yar?m kalarak) bir arada ilerlemesi. Bu, muazzam bir roman. G?rkemi, sadece karma??k kurgusal yap?s?ndan de?il, bu kurgunun sonucunda farklıl?klar aras?nda keskin ge?i?ler yapabilmemesinden, komik ile traji?i, hiciv ile ?iirselli?i, mani ile melankoliyi, ba??bo? gevezelik ile ?rk?t?c? s?rlar? bir araya getirebilmesinden kaynaklan?yor. Bir de tabii, Hoffmann'a ?zg? o tekinsiz, tuhaf, gizemli atmosferden...

NOT: ??üncü cildi yazmaya Hoffmann'?n ?mrü yetmemi?, ama bir önemi yok: Zaten paramparça bir metne, kim yar?m kalm?? diyebilir ki!

David says

Always a fan of E.T.A. Hoffmann I was not disappointed by this tale of a self aware cat and his journey through life. Though not as compelling as The Tales of Hoffmann there was a lot to recommend this work of Fabulist Satire. Though considered his masterpiece, I found the Tales of Hoffmann more enjoyable -- but this is a personal choice and not meant to be read for an objective statement.

Essentially, it is the story of the self-taught cat Tomcat Murr who has written is own autobiography which, because of a printer's error, has caused his story to be spliced with the biography of the composer Johannes Kreisler -- in some ways Hoffmann's book is almost postmodern...in the same way that The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy is almost postmodern. So much for postmodernism.

Murr and Kreisler are polar opposites in temperament and this allows Hoffmann to play with the fantastic, the ridiculous and the sublime at almost the same time. Much of the book is concerned with everyday life and the genius of the work comes within the format of observations and reactions to life.

This satire is one of the most engaging novels of the 19th century.

Highly Recommend -- 4 out of 5 stars.

Vit Babenco says

Cats are supreme and disdainful creatures so in their judgments of humanity they show no quarter...

I don't see why an agreeable domestic pet with a happy natural disposition shouldn't be taught to read and write, or indeed why such a little creature couldn't rise to become a scholar and poet. Is that so unprecedented a thing? I won't go so far as to quote the Thousand and One Nights as the best historical source, and a source full of pragmatic authenticity; I will just remind you, my dear fellow, of Puss in Boots, a tomcat of great magnanimity, penetrating reason and deep knowledge.

The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr is so many things simultaneously – to a modernist it is modern, to a symbolist it is symbolic, to a psychedelic head it is psychedelia, to a postmodernist it is postmodern and to a magician it is magical realism...

Cool cats are the much better aesthetes than hot yahoos...

Deanne says

Good but it could have been better if the two stories didn't keep breaking off when the story was getting interesting. The story about the music master was the more convoluted plot, with strange characters and plot devices which appear frequently in books of this age.

Wendy says

This was an initially fun read--I love the concept of a cat's autobiography spliced with a human Kapellmeister's shuffled biography, which the cat supposedly found in the wastepaper basket and wrote on the back of. The cat Murr, as are most cats, is very full of himself and his scholarly, poetical abilities and enjoys namedropping constantly in a hilarious manner. The Kapellmeister Kriesler, however, is supposedly a thinly disguised version of the author Hoffman himself, and his story becomes convoluted in the second half and ended up being a real chore to get through.
