



Portrait of an Old Man by Jozef Tominc (1790-1866) circa 1840

Part of a collection in the Museo Revoltella, Trieste

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IN TRIESTE

We met one morning in Trieste
A city linking east and west.
I was alone with time to spare,
An early summer in the air.
I dawdled in a small café
And watched the natives out at play.
A guilty cone of straciatella
Before I entered Revoltella.

And there he was, his eyes on mine,
A face perceptive, shrewd and kind.
A man whose mind reached deep and wide
From whom no frailty could hide.
Who must have walked the cobbled streets
And tipped his hat and watched the fleets,
Who'd traded, haggled, bought and sold
And loved and dreamed and felt the cold.

Who was this man? A duke? A lord?
Did his dark cloak conceal a sword?
I searched the frame where text began
And read: *Portrait of an Old Man*.
Jozef Tominc, what does it say
to name your subject in this way?
As if his age were all you saw
And nothing else was fit to draw?

And yet you chose him, begged his time
Compelled to paint him, light and line.

You must have seen, as I see now,
His character, his noble brow.
What hours you spent, what skill you honed
To capture eye and skin and bone,
And all the hard-won wit and vim
that drew us both to gaze on him.

He might have smiled and made you laugh
And told you tales of all that passed
In his Trieste, the streets, the squares
The merchants, ladies, thieves and fairs.
Perhaps he told you of his wife,
His sons and daughters, love and strife.
Are their genes living? Do they know
That he is theirs from long ago?

I lingered, sad to say goodbye
And once again he met my eye.
My flight delayed, I was not rushed
And had he winked I might have blushed.