Nagy commentary for Tales of Hoffmann film by Powell and Pressburger ch.1-5
Frame by frame, video and audio

ch.1
London Films. Big Ben says 11:00. {0:30-43}
An arrow hits bull’s eye {0:43-0:48}
Next, ‘A Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger Production’.
Next, ‘Colour by Technicolor’.
... with the British spelling of ‘color’ and with the American spelling of ‘Technicolor’... {0:54-57}
Then the ‘stars’...
Moira Shearer ‘by permission of the Covent Garden Opera Trust’
   Ludmila Tcherina
   Ann Ayars
   Pamela Brown
   Leonide Massine
   Robert Helpmann
   Frederick Ashton
   Mogens Wieth
   AND
   Robert Rounseville
   With
   Lionel Harris
   Philip Leaver
   Meinhart Maur
   Edmond Audran {1:00-12}

The orchestra is warming up in the background-a humming continuum {1:12-17}

‘in Jacques Offenbach’s...

The Tales of Hoffmann
In the background, we see a château, all dark except for a lit window showing two frames separated by a vertical bar, with two figures in each of the two frames on each side of the bar. The orchestra keeps warming up in the background – a continuous hum of excited anticipation. There is a similar effect created at the start of the later Powell and Pressburger film, The Red Shoes {1:17-25}

As the same blue background continues into the next frame, we read ...
‘A fantastic opera
English libretto by
Dennis Arundell
From the French text by Jules Barbier’ {1:26-33}

‘Conductor
Sir Thomas Beecham [Bart.]’
Against the same blue background.
The orchestra keeps warming up in the background – a continuing jittery hum {1:33-39}. 

1
Again against a blue background ...
‘with
The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
And sung by
Robert Rounseville
Dorothy Bond
Margherita Grandi
Ann Ayars
Monica Sinclair
Joan Alexander
Grahame Clifford
Bruce Dargavel
Murray Dickie
Owen Brannigan
Fisher Morgan  Rene Soames
The Sadler’s Wells Chorus’
The orchestra keeps warming up in the background – a continuing jittery hum, and the anticipation is building \{1:39-2:02\}.

Next,
‘The film was
designed by       Hein Heckroth
photographed by   Christopher Challis
art direction by  Arthur Lawson
edited by         Reginald Mills

Assistant Producer  George Busby
Assistant Director  Sydney Streeter’
Again against the blue background.

The orchestra keeps warming up in the background – a continuing and increasingly jittery hum, and the anticipation is building up even more.

Next, the most familiar melodies of the opera start emerging from the hum. The first to emerge is the theme of Olympia’s waltz \{2:02-11\}.

And then the frame for the lettering, which has been static up to now, starts rolling downward, and, under the last line of the static frame, which was, ‘Assistant Director Sydney Streeter’, we now see the following additional lines:

‘choreography by Frederick Ashton
assistants       Alan Carter
                  Joan Harris’.
I highlight here the name of Frederick Ashton, the choreographer. As we will see, his choreography is vital for the plot as developed by the film.

recorded by Ted Drake
recording supervision John Cox
assistant musical director Frederic Lewis
WESTERN ELECTRIC RECORDING camera Fred Francis
assistant designers Ivor Beddoes
Terence Morgan II
scenic artist F. Lindegaard
make-up artist Constance Reeve
hair stylist Joseph Shear
continuity Pamela Davies
dialogue coach Molly Terraine
Technicolor colour consultant Joan Bridge
composite photography E. Hague
chief electrician W. Wall
wardrobe Ivy Baker
costumes for Miss Shearer
and Miss Ayars executed by Josephine Boss

John Wright’s Marionettes’

At the visual mention of the marionettes, we start hearing traces of another familiar melody from the opera; this one is linked to the dancing of the marionettes in Tale of Olympia. {2:11-39}.

We continue reading...

‘released by
Lopert Film Distributing Corporation
produced at
London Film Studio
Shepperton, England.
Copyright MCMLI British Lion Film Corporation Ltd’ {2:39-48}.

Now comes an altogether new frame...
‘written, produced and directed by
Michael Powell
and
Emerick Pressburger’

I highlight here the names of Powell and Pressburger, who are the all-important “auteurs” of this film.
Now the melody of the Olympia theme fades, and we are back to the indistinguishable hum of the orchestra as it continues to warm up. The anticipation keeps mounting {2:48-50}.

Meanwhile, the viewing eye of the camera starts moving to the right. We start seeing the château all over again, with the one lit window and the two figures inside each of the two frames of the lit window {2:50-53}.

Once the image of the château is fully framed, we read in fraktur lettering

‘Characters in the Prologue’

Underneath is a listing of the characters:

‘E.T.A. HOFFMANN, a poet ROBERT ROUNSEVILLE
NICKLAUS, his faithful friend and companion PAMELA BROWN
COUNCILLOR LINDORF, sinister opponent of Hoffmann throughout his life ROBERT HELPMANN
STELLA, prima ballerina, loved by Hoffmann, desired by Lindorf MOIRA SHEARER’ {2:53-3:19}

I highlight here the name of Moira Shearer, a prima ballerina in ‘real life’. Shearer is also the would-be operatic prima donna for this film version of the opera. ‘In real life’, of course, Moira Shearer only dances and does not sing. But she ‘sings’ as well as dances in the film version of the opera.

Meanwhile, another melody emerges from the orchestra: this time, it is the song that a chorus of merry students will sing just before they settle down to hear the first of Hoffmann’s three Tales.

Then this melody as well fades back into the continuing hum made by the orchestra’s instruments as they keep on warming up.

Now we see a new frame, with more characters listed, and, meanwhile, the eye of the camera starts closing in on the lit window. What we can now make out is that there is a beautiful young woman in the left frame and an attentive young man in the right frame, holding a lit candle. That is why the window is lit and why we can see through it, because of that one single lit candle.

Meanwhile, a list of further characters appears:
ANDREAS,
STELLA’S SERVANT, A ROGUE, PHILIP LEAVER
KLEINZACH FREDERICK ASHTON
HIS LADY-LOVE MOIRA SHEARER
LUTHER, MEINHART MAUR
of Luther’s Tavern

Students, waiters, theatre-goers’

Here I take a moment to make three observations about this part of the opening credits.

First, about the name KLEINZACH ...
Interestingly, there is no description given here for the rôle of this Kleinzach, unlike the other rôles. As we will see later, it is relevant that the rôle of Kleinzach is played by FREDERICK ASHTON, who was the choreographer of the film.

Second, about the rôle of HIS LADY-LOVE ...
I like the use of the term ‘lady-love’ in the opening credits, for reasons that I will explain later on.

Third, about the person who plays the rôle of the beautiful lady, who is for Kleinzach HIS LADY LOVE ...
She is Moira Shearer, the prima ballerina of the film. As we will see later, this anonymous composite ‘lady-love’, as played by the prima ballerina Moira Shearer, is mute. She dances rather than sings while Hoffmann sings about Kleinzach and about his hopeless love for her.

Now the viewing eye of the camera closes in on the lit window. We see more and more clearly the lady and the attentive lover holding the lit candle. Meanwhile, a new melody emerges from the hum of the orchestra as it continues to warm up. This time, it is the signature theme of the Barcarolle. The words of the Barcarolle are all about a song of love on a moonlit night.

The attentive lover moves closer and closer to his lady-love. They are about to kiss, and, at that moment, his lit candle is extinguished and the lit window turns dark. Meanwhile, the melody modulates into another familiar theme from the opera {3:19-36}.

Next, the lettering announces:

‘The action takes place in Nürnberg.’ {3:36-42}

Now the viewing eye starts moving to the right, and we start to see a skyline of roofs and towers and weathervanes. {3:42-53}
The eye of the camera closes in on one weathervane, a cockerel that faces to the right and will soon face to the left and then back to the right. The timing of the shifts by the cockerel in this opening image corresponds to the music of the overture, which now gets underway in vigorous bursts of intensity.

The cockerel that shifts left and right is a visual cue for a song waiting to be sung later on in the opera. In that song, the shifting of directions by a cockerel will be compared to the shiftiness of a lady’s love.

Meanwhile, the viewing eye of the camera is moving to the right. We see more weathervanes, facing in one direction and then in the other direction. All are in silhouette, against the same dark blue background. Next in view is a grotesque brazen dragon, it seems, and next after that is a turnstile \(0:00-15\). The turnstile is turning clockwise. Standing on this turning round platform is a set of human figures, characters from a story yet to be told. They are wearing splendid medieval costumes. We notice most of all a figure wearing the costume of a jester. He looks grotesque. He is Kleinzach, as we will soon find out. The jester seems jittery: he is nervously looking right and then left, shifting from one direction to the other as abruptly as the cockerel had shifted directions just a moment ago \(0:15-24\). The turnstile, as we notice while the eye of the camera continues moving to the right, is situated on top of an elaborate roof, and the next thing we see is a series of seemingly contiguous towers and turrets silhouetted against a dark blue skyline. As the viewing eye continues moving to the right, the background rapidly turns black, foregrounding a tilted pediment bearing the relief sculptures of a tragic face on the left and a comic face on the right. These are the masks of Tragedy and Comedy in classical theater. Standing on top of the pediment is a shining bronze statue of a winged goddess of Victory, Nike, who is holding a garland of victory. The lettering at the base of the pediment reads ‘THEATRE’. The eye of the camera now starts to back off, slowly, until it frames perfectly the picture of the pediment with its presiding goddess of victory. Evidently a victory is to be achieved in the theater \(0:24-35\). Meanwhile, the musical flourish of the orchestra concludes with a triumphant drum roll. The next thing we see is a new image. It is a chandelier that suddenly lights up. It is slightly tilted, but not as tilted as the pediment we saw a few seconds ago \(0:35-38\). This lighting of the chandelier signals the beginning of the first scene, which will take place in Luther’s Cellar, a tavern patronized by a merry chorus of carousing students. The orchestra restarts with a merry melody signaling the entry of the carousing students. But the students will not enter till later.

The eye of the camera keeps moving to the right. We start to see what appears to be the garderobe of a dressing room for actors. It must be the backstage to some stage. We see hats with tassels, long robes. In the foreground is a table. We spot a silver tray with gold coins on it, and a set of five sheets. The sheets are theater-programmes \(0:38-46\). The eye of the camera closes in on the top sheet. It reads: ‘The Enchanted Dragonfly: Ballet’. So, are we about to see a ballet, not an opera? The eye of the camera moves downward, reading the programme. We see the picture of a greenish ballerina, the Dragonfly, leaping into the air. Underneath is the lettering: ‘in three acts’. What is going on? Are we about to see three ‘acts’ of a ballet? Are we not about to see the three ‘acts’ that are the three ‘tales’ of Hoffmann in the opera called \textit{The Tales of Hoffmann}? \(0:46-54\).
All of a sudden, the merry melody of the carousing students shifts to an ominous theme, which will become the sinister melody of the Devil incarnate. The Devil is all-pervasive in *The Tales of Hoffmann*. The evil one will have four incarnations in the opera, and the first of the four is the sinister figure of Councillor Lindorf, acted by Robert Helpmann. Lindorf as played by Helpmann is a stand-in for the Devil in both the Prologue and the Epilogue, but Helpmann is also the Devil in each of the three ‘tales’ of Hoffmann, which are the three ‘acts’ of the opera. He is the evil Coppelius in the first ‘act’, the evil Dapertutto in the second, and the evil Doctor Miracle in the third. We will be seeing three variations on the theme of the Devil incarnate. In this film, Robert Helpmann acts the part of all three of these incarnations, not only the framing incarnation who goes by the name of Councillor Lindorf.

As the ominous theme of the sinister melody begins, the viewing eye of the camera shifts to a magnificent green double door that suddenly flies open. Enter Councillor Lindorf. He is emerging from a space with walls painted fiery red. His features are at first shaded over, against the background of the fiery red walls illuminating the space from which he came. As his features become visible, the eye of the camera backs away to take in the whole spectacular entrance. We can now see the floor of the space that the Devil has just entered, which is covered by a red carpet suffused with the same fiery red that we see on the walls of the space from which he emerged. At either side of the open double door that frames the entering Devil are the two slumbering figures of two footmen slumped over on their chairs. Instead of guarding the entrance, they have let the Devil pass by. And pass them by he will [0:54-1:00]. The eye of the camera closes in on Lindorf’s face. His eyes are burning with anticipation. The Devil is jittery: he is nervously looking right and then left, shifting from one direction to the other as abruptly as the cockerel and the jester had shifted directions. Then he makes his move [1:00-02]. With his walking stick, Lindorf jabs one of the footmen, who abruptly wakes from his slumber and nervously attends the master as Lindorf sweeps into the wide space ahead of him, with his long cape trailing and almost flying behind him, with a dragging tassel in tow [1:02-06]. From an overhead view, against the backdrop of the fiery red carpet, the eye of the camera follows Lindorf as he slithers past three chairs positioned at 11 and 9 and 5 o’clock in the space occupied by the frame. The Devil’s serpentine path takes him past the 11 o’clock chair on his left and the 9 o’clock chair on his right, and then past the 9 o’clock chair on his right and the 5 o’clock chair on his left. The light from stage left leaves elongated shadows of the chairs looming toward stage right. As the music becomes increasingly ominous, we see the Devil rounding the corner of a massive stone wall. Behind him are the fiery red wall and the fiery red carpet. The wall is on his left, while the formerly five-o’clock chair is now on his right. He is entering another space [1:06-12]. It has a cold marble floor, and we see an enormous marble column in the foreground. Off to our right we see a poster hanging on the stone wall. Carved on the top of the wooden frame of the poster are the matching masks of Tragedy and Comedy. These masks of Tragedy and Comedy are the same ‘faces’ that we had seen earlier on the pediment of ‘Theatre’. And underneath the carved ‘faces’ on the frame we see the lettering ‘OPERA’, which is carved into the top frame. Underneath is the paper poster, which reads ‘BALLET’ in printed lettering, to be contrasted with the carved lettering ‘OPERA’ that we had read in the frame above ‘BALLET’. Underneath the lettering for ‘BALLET’ we see the picture of a ballerina, and underneath the picture we read, in large printed lettering, ‘STELLA’. Underneath the name of Stella - and we can barely make it out because the eye of the
camera is reading the poster so fast - is the lettering ‘in’, and underneath the lettering ‘in’ is the lettering ‘DON GIOVANNI’.

In the ‘low opera’ of Offenbach, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Stella is the name of the diva who sings the rôle of Donna Anna in Mozart’s high opera *Don Giovanni*. This Stella is the ‘star’ loved by Hoffmann above and beyond all other women.

As Lindorf slithers into the space with the marble floor, he heads for the poster, sweeping past the gigantic marble column on his right. His long cape, which keeps trailing behind him, with the dragging tassel in tow, accentuates the sweeping motion of his choreographed movements. Now the Devil’s shadow begins to shade over what we have been reading on the poster. As of right now, it is the Devil’s turn to read the poster. We have had our chance to read it already. But then, surprisingly, we get another chance to read it ourselves. The eye of the camera looks at the poster for the second time. Our reading is hurried, however, and it gets cut off at the end. Before we can finish reading the whole length of the poster, the eye of the camera cuts to the sinister face of Lindorf as he reads through the letterings about ‘opera’ and ‘ballet’ and ‘Stella’ and ‘Don Giovanni’ - and as he gazes at the picture of Stella. As we had read in the cast of characters that we were shown at the opening of the Prologue, Stella is ‘loved’ by Hoffmann but ‘desired’ by Lindorf, that is, by the Devil. Here the Devil is gazing with desire at the picture of Stella. *To accentuate his reading and his gazing, the Devil takes out his opera glasses and sees it all through the prism of these glasses.* This theme of the opera glasses, as we will see, is all-important for the meaning of the opera.

In the next frame we get a Devil’s eye view of the poster, and we can read some of the lettering more clearly: ‘Ballet, Stella, in.’ And we can now see clearly the features of Moira Shearer in the picture of the ballerina. Shearer has that distinctive fiery red hair. But we cannot read clearly the lettering that is under the ‘in’. And the lettering that announces ‘DON GIOVANNI’ is not visible. The eye of the camera does not take in the whole poster. Instead, it abruptly stops looking at the poster. Now the eye of the camera nervously shifts back to the Devil. It happens very quickly, but the Devil is not visible any more, either. Lindorf is already making his exit from the hall. In fact, all we see of him now is the tassel that we have already seen dragging behind the long cape that drags behind him. That tassel is just now slithering past the base of the gigantic marble column. Evidently, the Devil has already slithered past the column, which he keeps to his right as he exits - just as he had kept it to his right when he had made his entrance. The eye of the camera nervously shifts back to the huge green double door, which is about to close, but not before we see the tassel dragging behind the cape dragging behind the Devil. The tassel almost gets caught in the closing double door, but it manages to slip to the other side just in time before the door closes. The tip of the Devil’s tail has escaped. The double door has been kept slightly ajar for a moment, to allow the tassel to slither through {1:12-24}.

Lindorf now heads toward a space on the right of the screen. This space is backstage. To the left of the screen is a stage. The ballerina with the fiery red hair, as pictured on the poster, is about to start her dance of the Dragonfly {1:24-30}.

[[I save for later my commentary on the dance. I note here only a few details about the ongoing plot. The ballerina sends a secret message to Hoffmann: the message, embroidered into a
handkerchief, reads: ‘I love thee, Hoffmann!’ Councillor Lindorf intercepts the message. He is evidently obsessed with Hoffmann and peers through a peep-hole to catch sight of the poet. This view of Hoffmann through a peep-hole matches the camera’s view, which starts ch.3.]

ch.3

The eye of the camera views Hoffmann sitting in a front seat of the opera theater where the opera Don Giovanni is being performed. Or is it really a ballet that is being performed - the ballet entitled ‘The Enchanted Dragonfly’? His gaze shows that he is lost in another world: he is evidently enchanted by the performance he has just witnessed and stays anchored in his seat while the rest of the audience gets up and moves on. It is intermission {0:00-09}.

The eye of the camera shifts to a new frame. A feminine hand lights the second of two candles being lit {0:10}, which throw light on a printed sign that reads

‘ENTR’ACTE
20 MINUTES INTERVAL
BEFORE
ACT II’ {0:13}

At first we can only read this much. But now the eye of the camera starts moving downward and reads on further … {0:13-17}.

Propped against the printed sign is a cardboard sign that reads

‘Students!
Art is long
The interval is short
Come to Luther’s Cellar for a snort’ {0:17}

We see a word-play here on the Latin aphorism: *ars longa*, *vita brevis* ‘art is long, life is short’.

A close-up frames the wording of these verses even more distinctly. Underneath the tempting words of these verses advertising the tavern called Luther’s Cellar is a black painted oval, which is a circular peep-hole that becomes ovoid only because it is shown in perspective. There is a hand reaching through the black peep-hole. The hand is coming out of nowhere, extending from a background defined by the oval blackness of the peep-hole and reaching out into the foreground of the cardboard surface that shows the painting. The hand is painted fiery red, and it points straight down with its index finger. The red finger of the red hand tapers off into an elongated fiery red claw. {0:17} It is the Devil’s fiery red finger pointing straight down toward hell - which is eagerly awaiting the pleasure-loving patrons of the tavern. Their hellish den of pleasurable iniquity is Luther’s Cellar, the setting for the low opera that is The Tales of Hoffmann.

Earlier, we saw the lighting of a chandelier, signaling the beginning of the first scene, which is to take place in Luther’s Cellar. Now the scene can begin in earnest. Enter the chorus of merry
students, rushing downstairs to Luther’s Cellar. There they will drink and smoke and sing songs to each other before they settle down to hear the singing of Hoffmann. All this singing is the stuff of the low opera that is The Tales of Hoffmann. After all, this is an opera, isn’t it? But the students are rushing downstairs from an opera that is already going on upstairs. That opera is a high opera, Mozart’s Don Giovanni. Act 1 of that opera has just concluded, and an intermission is underway - surely there is enough time for the students to rush downstairs to Luther’s Cellar for a quick drink …

The students who had left behind the high opera during the intermission between Act 1 and Act 2 of Don Giovanni will be enchanted by the three Tales of low opera that come to life in Luther’s Cellar. The pleasure-loving students willingly descend into the private hell of Hoffmann, eager to drink and smoke and hear the poet sing his three Tales about the hellish torments of love. By the time the high opera ends upstairs, Don Giovanni himself will willingly descend into his own private hell. So the students who descend to hear the Tales of Hoffmann in Luther’s Cellar are following a worthy precedent, set by the damnation of the pleasure-loving Don Giovanni himself.

Underneath the wooden tablet from which we have read ‘Luther’s Beer Cellar’ in fraktur lettering …

… is an arabesque in wrought iron showing a jester dancing ecstatically and a troubadour playing on a string instrument.

As we finish reading the sign for Luther’s Cellar, we hear the students sing:

‘Some drink, drink, drink, drink, drink, drink,
Do you hear us about
You lazy lout …’

‘We want some beer
we want some wine
We want some beer
we want some wine’

As they are singing, they are also dancing as they assemble merrily assembling in the Cellar.

They continue …

‘Pour out the wine
and drink and drink till morning
Pour out the wine,
for drinking is divine
Pour out the wine
and drink and drink till morning,’
Pour out the wine
And drink
for drinking is divine’ {0:58}

Meanwhile, the Devil in the shape of Concilor Lindorf makes his entrance. He enters from our right, scurrying down the stone steps leading down to Luther’s Cellar. This point of entry for the Devil is synchronized with the first words of the students’ song: ‘Pour out the wine’. {0:40}

As the Devil continues to scurry down the steps, he suddenly stops and looks backward furtively. It happens exactly when the students sing ‘for drinking is divine’ the first time around. {0:42}

A door with a stained-glass window opens, at the top of the steps, and the Devil comes through; then the door closes after him. {0:46}

By the time the students finish singing the stanza about pouring out the wine, Lindorf has descended half-way down the steps and has reached a landing that interrupts the steps. He stands at the landing before descending further, gathering his expansive cape with a dramatic flourish. {0:57}

There he stands, in the middle of the frame. {0:57}

Meanwhile the eye of the camera keeps moving further down beneath the landing. All along, the students keep on singing ... {0:58-1:18}

‘We want some wine {0:58}
and drink till morning {1:01}
We want some wine
and drink till morning {1:04}
We want some wine
We want some wine {1:07}
and drink till morning {1:08}
We want some wine {1:18}

Underneath the landing, in the shadows, stands Nicklaus, the faithful friend of Hoffmann. Nicklaus is really the Muse herself in disguise. With an inscrutable look, she is looking upward {1:04}. When you look at what happened before, you notice that the dragging tassel of the cape of the Devil had been hanging down from the landing {1:01}, and now the Muse is looking straight up at the tassel of the Devil. {1:04} Then she looks sideways, in the direction of the students {1:07}.

Next the viewing eye of the camera shifts from the Muse to the students {1:08}, who are by now assembled in a circle, around a round table replete with lit candles. The eye of the camera
is peering down, viewing them from overhead as they continue to sing until they conclude their exuberant stanza {1:18}.

It is becoming clear that these pleasure-loving will never make it back upstairs to continue with Act II of Don Giovanni.

Segue to Hoffmann {1:18}. We see him standing on the same landing where Lindorf stood earlier. Before Hoffmann descends the rest of the stairs and joins the students in the Cellar, he pauses and looks over the whole scene. His figure is framed in the middle {1:18}. Then he continues his descent {1:18-25}. Meanwhile, we see from behind that Lindorf is approaching, with his back to the viewing eye of the camera. He is moving away from the camera and toward Hoffmann (1:22-25). Nicklaus moves toward Hoffmann from the side {1:26-29}.

First, Luther offers Lindorf a choice seat in his Cellar (1:30-32). Then he approaches Hoffman, greeting the celebrated poet with an air of reverence {1:29-36}.

Hoffmann sings …

‘Good day, my friends, good day.’ {1:36-38}

Nicklaus, the poet’s faithful Muse, chimes in with ‘good day’. {1:38-39}

Hoffmann continues …

‘A chair, a glass of wine and a pipe.’ {1:39-41}

The Muse interrupts, singing …

‘Excuse me, Master if you don’t mind …’ {1:41-44}

The Muse continues …

‘I’ll sit, drink and smoke same as you. Fair’s fair.’ {1:44-48}

Hoffmann replies:
‘How true.’

‘Make a place for two, Come on, make a place for two.’ {1:48-53}

Hoffmann is seated at the round table in the company of the students, Nicklaus - that is, the Muse in disguise - sings the first words of the opera Don Giovanni …
‘Notte e giorno mal dormir’ [day and night, I have a hard time sleeping] {1:56-2:00}

Hoffmann does not take kindly to the reference, singing angrily ...

*‘The devil take you and Mozart’* {2:01-03}

I find it most significant that these words of damnation are spoken by the poet himself.

I say in the essay “The Fragmentary Muse”:

“The words and the melody evoke what the character of Leporello sings at the beginning of Don Giovanni. It is as if Nicklausse [that is the spelling of Nicklaus in the French version] as the disguised Muse in the low opera of Offenbach had the same relation to Hoffmann as Leporello had to Don Giovanni in the high opera of Mozart. Hoffmann reacts to the evocation made by his disguised Muse by invoking the devil in anger and telling Nicklausse to be quiet: Tais toi, par le diable ‘be quiet, I swear by the devil!’.”

In the original French, however, Hoffmann does not damn Mozart - or his Muse. He simply invokes the devil, which is even worse, really. The invocation is self-fulfilling, since the devil has just arrived in Luther’s Cellar and will soon engage with Hoffmann.

Still, the words of the librettist Dennis Arundell, as sung in the film, are well chosen. The wording manages to make the cross-reference to Mozart - and the theme of damnation for Don Giovanni - more accessible.

To repeat, the English-language libretto has Hoffmann singing ...

*‘The devil take you and Mozart’* {2:01-03}

To which the Muse of Hoffmann replies in a most telling way:

‘At once, sir!’ {2:06}

The sarcasm here is exquisite. In Offenbach’s The Tales of Hoffmann, whenever Hoffmann insults his faithful and long-suffering Muse, she expresses her hurt feelings in a sarcastic way, and that is what is happening here.

Here is the relevant wording of Leporello’s aria from the libretto of Mozart’s Don Giovanni:

Notte e giorno faticar,  
Per chi nulla sa gradir,  
Piova e vento sopportar,  
Mangiar male e mal dormir.  
Voglio far il gentiluomo  
E non voglio più servir...
Oh che caro galantuomo!
Vuol star dentro colla bella,
Ed io far la sentinella!
Voglio far il gentiluomo
E non voglio più servir...
Ma mi par che venga gente;
Non mi voglio far sentir.

Day and night, getting all tired,
for the sake of someone who doesn’t know how to be content.
Rain and wind to endure,
eating badly and sleeping badly.
I want to do the rôle of the nobleman.
And I don't want to be a servant anymore ...
Ah, what a dear gallant nobleman he is!
He wants to stay inside with the pretty woman
while I am doing the rôle of the lookout.
I want to be a gentleman
and I don't want to be a servant anymore ...
Wait a minute! I think people are coming.
I don’t want anyone to know I’m here.

Hoffmann’s Muse reads the mind of Leporello: ‘I don’t want anyone to know I’m here.’ *That is why the Muse must disguise herself as Nicklaus.*

After the curse of Hoffmann, ‘The devil take you and Mozart’ {2:01-03}, we hear ... {2:06-15}

‘What makes you so put out?’
‘Indeed we never would have known you.’
‘Now what on earth brought that about?’

Hoffmann replies in words that remind us of Leporello’s complaints about braving the elements as a lookout for Don Giovanni... {2:17-26}

‘Frozen earth, all dead or dying
There in the snow buried deep ...’

At this point the Muse joins in the singing, taking up where Hoffmann left off. What she fills in will make it clear that the subject of the story of Hoffmann’s song is Hoffmann himself ... {2:26-33}
'And outside where he was lying
The sight of a drunkard asleep'

As the Muse sings these words, she is looking off to stage right, looking upward as if she could visualize - somewhere in a space on the upper right, beyond the viewing eye of the camera - the words of her story.

Hoffmann takes up where the Muse left off ... {2:33-43}

‘That’s true
Seeing him there
a craving seized my brain ...
For drinking ...’

As he sings ‘For drinking ...’ {2:41-43}, Hoffmann reaches for a pewter carafe at hand and starts to pour from it a stream of gleaming red wine into a wineglass while he continues to sing ... {2:43}

‘Yes, drinking ...’

He keeps pouring as he sings. Now he raises his wineglass filled with the gleaming red wine ... {2:48}

‘Then do the same’

His face reveals a fiercely demonic look. And what is it, to ‘do the same’? Hoffmann continues ... {2:49}

Lie down there in the ditch'

By now we see what the Muse was visualizing from the start, when she was looking away, beyond the frame of the screen, far off into the space of her imagination. She was picturing Hoffmann himself when she sang of ‘the sight of a drunkard asleep’.

One of the drinking companions at the table - let us call him “A” - picks up the thought - and the image - where Hoffmann had left off ... {2:52}

‘And for the pillow ...’

Hoffmann fills in ... {2:52}

‘ ... The pavement’

Another one of the drinking companions at the table - let us call him “B” - continues the thought - and the image ...
‘And for the roof …’ {2:53}

Hoffmann fills in … {2:54}

‘ … The sky’

The eye of the camera closes in on Hoffmann’s face, which by now looks even more fiercely demonic.

The drinking companion “B” continues the thought - and the image - even further … {2:55}

‘What about sheets …’

Hoffmann fills in by answering … {2:56}

‘ … The rain’

The eye of the camera moves in for a close-up, closing in on the face of Hoffmann. The closer we look, the more fiercely demonic he looks as he stares intently at the gleaming red wine in his wineglass.

The drinking companion “A” now asks a pointed question … {2:57-60}

‘Are you having nightmares, Hoffmann?’

The wording of this question comes back full circle to the wording of the Muse of Hoffmann when she sang a reference to the Don Giovanni of Mozart …

‘Notte e giorno mal dormir’ [day and night, I have a hard time sleeping] {1:56-2:00}

Now we can see more clearly why Hoffmann did not take kindly to the reference, as he sang angrily …

*‘The devil take you and Mozart’* {2:01-03}

As I remarked the first time around: I find it most significant that these words of damnation are spoken by the poet himself.

Now we hear a call for Hoffmann to sing … {3:03-08}

‘The first song is yours, then
Don’t make us ask again
The chorus leave to us’

So the poet Hoffmann is becoming transformed into a choral leader whose solo parts will interact with the choral parts of his drinking companions.
The chorus of drinking companions join in urging Hoffmann to take on the rôle of a soloist leader for the chorus, while they will be the chorus ... {3:08-10}

‘Yes, leave that to us’

Hoffmann abruptly stands up from his seat at the table. As he stands, he sings in a burst of demonic intensity ... {3:10}

‘Right ...’

One of the drinking companions urges him on ... {3:12-13}

‘Choose something that’s gay’

The eye of the camera moves in for a close-up. The singer is our drinking companion “A,” who tells Hoffmann ... {3:15-18}

‘Sing the song of the rat’

The eye of the camera shifts abruptly to a close-up of the face of Lindorf, while the chorus goes on to declare, in contradiction of the first idea ... {3:18-22}

‘No, we’re all sick of that.’

The eye of the camera shifts to a close-up of the Devil’s face, whose pained expression shows that he too is sick of ‘that’. He too is sick of the ‘rat’. Maybe he *is* the rat.

Another voice interrupts, as the eye of the camera moves back to show the speaker. It is our drinking companion “B,” who sings ... {3:22-26}

‘I know’,
‘We’ll have to have the one about Kleinzach’

The chorus joins in ... {3:26-30}

‘Oh, yes, come on
We’ll have the song about Kleinzach’

**ch.4**
The camera is lifting upward as its viewing eye looks further and further downward. Then, suddenly, the camera’s view swoops down on the image of Hoffmann as he violently doffs his hat and, just as violently, throws it away while singing in another burst of demonic intensity ... {0:01-03}

‘Right ...’
He swivels, looking to the right of the frame that the viewing eye of the camera has made for him, and he declares in a singing shout ... {0:04-07}

... Here’s Kleinzach’

As he shouts the name of Kleinzach, Hoffmann is looking at a row of pewter carafes lined up on a shelf in the background. It is from one such carafe that Hoffmann had poured his own glass of gleaming red wine.

The hand of the poet is positioned to point toward one carafe in particular, and the camera closes in on both the pointing hand and the carafe itself {0:07}. There is an image carved in relief into the surface of this carafe. We can see that the relief carving shows the figure of a character whom we have already seen earlier. He was the jester standing on the turnstile and anxiously looking about - the one whose head was turning now to his right and now to his left. This character, as we now find out, is Kleinzach. He is grotesque.

The eye of the camera now shifts from the close-up frame to a frame that looks at Hoffmann looking at Kleinzach from farther away {0:08}. We have just enough time to notice seven other carafes on the shelf. They are of various shapes and sizes. We can make out various figures carved in relief into the elaborate surfaces of these carafes.

As the camera backs away {0:07-13} we still have just enough time to notice the elaborate arabesque of wrought iron that makes a background for the shelf of carafes. There is something very prominent embedded in this arabesque. We cannot help but notice the colorful figure of a beautiful lady costumed in medieval finery and wearing a tall pointed hat that trails off into an elegant long scarf flowing gracefully behind her. *She is gazing at her own reflection in a hand-held mirror.* From here on, I will refer to this beautiful lady as ‘a fair damsel’, in order to evoke the medieval aura of her elegant costuming.

In these same moments, as the eye of the camera backs away {0:07-13} we can see to the upper right and the upper left of this fair damsel the colorful figures of handsome young men also dressed in medieval finery. They are shown in a variety of dancing poses - and a musician is accompanying them on a drum. It seems as if the handsome young men were courting the fair damsel, showing off for her.

As the eye of the camera backs away {0:07-13}, Hoffmann swivels around, turning his back to the shelf of carafes, and he starts singing his tale about Kleinzach {0:13-16}.

‘Now long ago
the duke of renowned Eisenach …’

The chorus repeats after him ... {0:16-19}

‘... the duke of Eisenach
Hoffmann strides toward the chorus, continuing his story. The Muse crosses his path as the poet continues singing ... {0:19-23}

‘... Employed a tiny clown 
by the name of Kleinzach’

So the jester has finally been named. He is a ‘tiny clown’ named Kleinzach. The name Kleinzach means ‘tiny Zachary’, that is, ‘Little Zack’.

As Hoffmann continues singing, the Muse is striding closer and closer toward the viewing eye of the camera while the poet Hoffmann is striding farther and farther off into the background, off to the side.

The chorus sings in antiphonal responsion ... {0:23-24}

‘He had the name Kleinzach.’

All eyes are now on Hoffmann. That is, the chorus of drinking companions are all looking at him, riveted by his tale. All eyes are on Hoffmann, yes, except for the eye of the camera, which lets the figure of the poet recede farther and farther off into the background. We see him from a greater and greater distance as he gesticulates his tale for his enthralled audience who are the chorus of drinking companions. Meanwhile the poet’s Muse continues to move ahead toward the camera, moving closer and closer into view. As the Muse continues to move forward toward the viewing eye of the camera, we see that her head, topped with fiery red short hair, becomes aligned with the hovering image of the fair damsel in the background {0:25}. It is as if the Muse in the foreground were inspiring what Hoffmann is singing in the background.

Hoffmann continues singing his tale about Kleinzach ... {0:25-32}

‘He wore a busby big and black 
And his noddle

His noddle did go crick-crack.’

While the words of the poet bring to life the picture of the ‘noddle’ of Kleinzach that keeps going ‘crick-crack’ {0:32}, the Muse abruptly swivels to the side, thus making room for a view of the grotesque shape that her head has been blocking up till now. That shape is the central figure that we had noticed earlier. He is Kleinzach, and his shape is carved in relief into the surface of the carafe that we had seen positioned near the hand and the head of Hoffmann. Now we see it positioned directly under the colorful figure of the fair damsel. The view created by the eye of the camera is making mental connections here. The grotesque jester and the beautiful damsel are to be linked somehow.

Meanwhile, the eye of the camera moves to a close-up view of Hoffmann as he continues with the theme of the ‘noddle’ that goes ‘crick-crack’ ... {0:35-38}
‘Crick-crack
Crick-crack
So that’s
So that’s Kleinzach’

The sound made by the ‘noodle’ of Kleinzach is supposed to rhyme with the sound made by way of pronouncing the name of Kleinzach.

The face of Hoffmann looks demonically twisted and tormented as he sings the rhyme. It is as if he were possessed by the name and by the sound of the name of Kleinzach. As we will see, he completely identifies with ‘little Zack’ and with the sound of ‘crick-crack’. It is the sound of breaking, of ‘cracking’ - as we will see in later moments when the poet’s own heart breaks or ‘cracks’ over his loss of his lady-loves.

In a beautiful overhead view, we now see the chorus of drinking companions seated around the round table replete with lit candles. We hear then joining in the song of Hoffmann, singing the refrain ... {0:38}

‘Crick-crack’

And then Hoffmann resumes the lead as the chorus leader ... {0:39}

‘Crick-crack’

The exchange is repeated. The chorus sings again, viewed from overhead ... {0:40}

‘Crick-crack’

And now Hoffmann leads into a closure for what turns out to be the first stanza of the choral singing. He approaches the closure of the stanza by repeating the refrain in a sustained burst of intensity ...

‘Crick-crack’ {0:41-42}

Now Hoffmann as the choral leader winds up and closes the stanza, with the chorus joining in ... {0:42-51}

‘So that’s
So that’s
Kleinzach’

Now that the first stanza has come to closure, the viewing eye of the camera closes in on the face of Hoffmann, reinforcing the intensity of this closure.

But then the eye of the camera shifts abruptly. We see again the carafe we had seen earlier at the center of the shelf. Once again, we see the carafe in a close-up shot {0:51}. Its centrality is
highlighted by its positioning. On both the left and the right are two smaller carafes, and the relief shapes carved into their dark blue surfaces are visually overpowered by the glaring skin-colored image of the emerging relief shape carved into the surface of the central carafe. That carved shape is the figure of the jester Kleinzach. He is grotesque.

The eye of the camera shifts abruptly again. We see the ruddy face of Luther, smoking his pipe and waiting for the next stanza of the story to begin. {0:55}

The eye of the camera shifts abruptly again, back to Hoffmann. He now sings the opening of the next stanza, which continues telling the story of Kleinzach ... {0:57-1:01}

‘He also had a paunch
quite as stout as a stack’

The eye of the camera looks again at the beautiful overhead view of the drinking companions seated around the round table replete with lit candles. They repeat the refrain ... {1:02-04}

‘As stout as any stack’

Hoffmann continues ... {1:04-08}

‘His feet looked just like twigs
sticking out of a sack’

Now we look back at the drinking companions ... {1:08-10}

‘Like twigs in any sack’

Suddenly the eye of the camera shifts again, viewing Hoffmann from a different angle. Behind the poet, the whole shelf of carafes becomes visible. Hoffmann continues his singing ... {1:10-18}

‘He capered like a jumping jack {1:10-13}
And his knees cracked together {1:13-15}
And went click-clack’ {1:15-18}

Just before he sings ‘And his knees cracked together’ {1:13-15}, the figure of Hoffmann choreographs what he is about to sing: he spreads his knees apart and then cracks them together {1:10-13}. His whole lower body mimics the cracking of a nut in a nutcracker. And, the moment he cracks his knees together, the viewing eye of the camera shifts abruptly {1:15-18}. We suddenly see, close up, the figure of the jester Kleinzach carved in relief into the surface of the carafe. And, just as suddenly, the relief carving of the jester comes alive, jumping out of the surface that had held it frozen, immobile. Once freed from that two-dimensional surface, the relief carving of Kleinzach has suddenly become a fully three-dimensional figure, now unfrozen and mobile. So the jester is now truly a ‘jumping jack’, just as the song of Hoffmann has said he was, since Kleinzach has suddenly jumped out of the surface that had held him
back, boxed him in. The jester Kleinzach is now a three-dimensional jack-in-the-box, jumping out of the two-dimensional surface that was holding on to the relief carving.

The tiny figure of Kleinzach is now transformed into a life-size human dancer. He is Frederick Ashton, who is also the choreographer of this film version of The Tales of Hoffman. The choreographer here dances the rôle of Kleinzach. He dances the rôle that he himself has choreographed. And the platform of the stage for the choreographed dancing of Frederick Ashton is the same space that used to be the platform of the shelf holding the pewter carafes. The tiny relief figure of the ‘clown’ Kleinzach, which had just a moment ago been held imprisoned on the rigid surface of the carafe, has now been liberated to dance his own story while Hoffmann is singing that same story. And this story sung by the poet Hoffmann and danced by the jester Kleinzach is not only about Kleinzach. It is a story also about the poet Hoffmann himself.

As Hoffmann continues to sing about the knees of Kleinzach, and how they came together like a nutcracker, his words come to life in the dancing of Frederick Ashton in the rôle of Kleinzach. The jester begins to dance what the poet sings. The dance is synchronized with the words sung by Hoffman about the knees of Kleinzach ...

‘And his knees cracked together’ {1:13-15}
And went click-clack {1:15-18}
Click-clack {1:19}
Click-clack {1:20-21}
So that’s
So that’s Kleinzach’ {1:21-23}

The movement of the knees in the song will become primarily the movement of the knees of Frederick Ashton as he now starts to dance the rôle of Kleinzach. Just as the figure of Hoffmann had choreographed what he was about to sing by spreading his own knees apart and then cracking them together {1:10-13}, soon Kleinzach will do the same: he will crack his knees together. Just when we expect Kleinzach to crack his knees together for the first time, however, the eye of the camera shifts back abruptly to Hoffmann, and it is he who is shown as cracking his knees together as he sings ‘And went click-clack’ {1:15-18}. Then, as Hoffmann sings ‘click-clack’ one more time, the eye of the camera shifts back abruptly to Kleinzach, and this time it is he who is shown as cracking his knees together {1:19}. In his new dance, which begins immediately after he jumps out of his confinement as a carving on the rigid surface of the carafe, Kleinzach too spreads his knees apart and then cracks them together. The spreading of his knees is synchronized with the words ‘click-clack’ {1:19}. Then it is back to Hoffmann, who sings ‘click-clack’ one more time as he cracks his knees together {1:20-21}.

Kleinzach is off-camera when he is first cracking his knees together. But then, just as abruptly, the viewing eye of the camera shifts from Hoffmann to Kleinzach when the poet sings ‘click-clack’ a second time. This time Kleinzach is on-camera and Hoffmann is off-camera. Hoffmann is doing off-camera what Kleinzach is doing on-camera. They are both cracking their knees together. Their choreography and their stories are here completely synchronized.
From the very start of the choreography of the cracking knees, the frames showing the form of Kleinzach in the background also show a most interesting background: we notice again the colorful figure of the fair damsel costumed in medieval finery. This figure, embedded in an elaborate arabesque of wrought iron, is positioned as hovering over the figure of Kleinzach. Off to the upper right and the upper left of this fair damsel we see again the colorful figures of handsome young men also costumed in medieval finery.

Now back to Hoffmann. Once again we see him on-camera while Kleinzach goes off-camera. He is cracking his knees once again, while Kleinzach must be doing the same thing while he is off-camera. Again, the double choreography of the poet and the jester is synchronized. And their stories too will be synchronized.

The viewing eye of the camera stays with Hoffman as he sings the refrain ...

'So that’s
So that's Kleinzach’ {1:21-23}

Now the words start once again ...

'Click-clack {1:24}
Click-clack {1:24}
Click-clack {1:25}
Click-clack {1:25-28}
So that’s
So that’s Kleinzach {1:28-37}

But, this time, the viewing eye of the camera has shifted to a close-up of the wrought-iron arabesque featuring the colorful figures of the handsome young men who are shown in a variety of dancing poses, along with the musician who is accompanying them on a drum. The young men, held fast on the rigid surface of the wrought-iron arabesque, are immobile, frozen into their dancing poses, but their faces and their gesturing hands are animated for song. They now sing as a would-be chorus for Hoffmann as their soloist singer and for Kleinzach as their vicarious representative as soloist dancer ...

'Click-clack {1:24}

Then the viewing eye of the camera moves back to Kleinzach, who cracks his knees together once again while Hoffmann sings off-camera ...

'Click-clack’ {1:24}

The same sequence is then repeated ...

'Click-clack {1:25}
Click-clack’ {1:25-28}
The jester now swivels around as Hoffmann concludes ...

So that’s
So that’s Kleinzach  {1:28-37}

While Hoffmann is singing these concluding words, the mute jester mimes the singing. He is going through the motions as if he rather than Hoffmann were the true singer.

As Kleinzach circles around the carafe, which shows a gaping emptiness where his form had once been embedded before he jumped out of it, Hoffmann begins to sing the next stanza ...

‘Now what words
what words to paint those features?’  {1:42-47}

The chorus repeats the question of Hoffmann ...

Now what words to paint those features?’  {1:47-50}

Suddenly, a spotlight glares at the grotesque form of Kleinzach. He is visibly pained to find himself in that spotlight. Was the wording of the song referring to his grotesque features? The singing slows down. The melody of the tale of Kleinzach, which had started in a comic frame, now modulates into a tragic frame. The spotlight moves upward as Kleinzach swivels around, turning away from the viewing eye of the camera. That viewing eye now starts to move upward as well, following the spotlight. The dance of Kleinzach, which has slowed down under the weight of the spotlight, follows the view shown by the eye of the camera. Both arms of the jester now reach upward, worshipfully, toward the moving spotlight, which suddenly illuminates the vision of the fair damsel. The spotlight was all along aiming at her, not at him, and it has now found her. The viewing eye of the camera closes in on the fair damsel in the spotlight, who is all radiant in her beauty. It was her beauty that Hoffmann was seeking to ‘paint’ by way of finding the perfect words to match her perfect features. The viewing eye of the camera now closes in on her and gazes at her. Meanwhile, she is gazing at her own reflection in a mirror that she is holding in front of her.

The fair damsel is framed perfectly by the viewing eye of the camera as the words of Hoffmann echo the words he sang before ...

‘Now what words
what words to paint those features?’  {1:50-59}

The fair damsel swivels around from a profile view into a frontal view, showing off all the angles of her beauty in response to the refracted sound of Hoffmann’s words ...

‘... to paint those features ...’  {1:59-2:07}

She continues to swivel, past the frontal view and moving toward a profile view from the other side, while all along gazing at herself in the mirror that she keeps holding in front of her. The
mirror has by now moved around all the way from a nine o’clock position to a four o’clock position, and the gaze of the fair damsel has followed the mirror. By the time her gaze reaches four o’clock position, the words of Hoffmann conclude the thought that has been left in suspension till now …

‘… past comparing’. {2:07-11}

The fair damsel is incomparably beautiful. She is an ideal.

The viewing eye of the camera backs away, and we see Kleinzach, now a tragic rather than comic figure, grieving between the two carafes that had once framed the carafe that contained him. On the surface of the carafe to our left, we see the face of a beautiful woman who is looking straight into the eye of the camera. On the surface of the carafe to our right, we see the face of a grotesque man with a grimace. Kleinzach is reaching out tenderly toward the face of the beautiful woman {02:12}

The tragic song continues …

‘She is there …’ {2:14}

Kleinzach reaches out tenderly toward her.

The tragic song continues …

‘... Fair …’ {2:16}

Kleinzach starts running after her while the tragic song continues …

‘... Fair as dawn of the day …’ {2:17}

The tragic song continues as Kleinzach rushes past the carafe that had once been his home before he jumped out of its surface. A gaping emptiness is all that is left in the space that his grotesque form had once decorated. Meanwhile, the tragic song continues, evoking thoughts of the home left behind …

‘When love first bade me dare to leave the home of my youth’ {2:19-24}

Kleinzach keeps moving past the row of carafes. Each carafe has a surface decorated with a human form - except for his own carafe. The tragic song continues …

‘And in my heart to swear I would fly far away to a world we would share’ {2:25-34}
Who is leaving his home behind, ‘flying’ far away to a world to share with a lady-love? Is it Kleinzach? Yes, he is ‘flying’ toward the fair damsel. Or is it Hoffmann? As we will see, Hoffmann too has been ‘flying’ toward his own lady-love. When Hoffmann sings *in my heart* here, he is feeling the love in his own heart. In the words of the opera, without the imagined dance of Kleinzach as choreographed by Frederick Ashton, it is the heart of Hoffmann that is breaking for his own lady-love. In the words of the opera, Kleinzach does not have his own lady-love. He is just cracking his knees together, for the amusement of the drinking companions who hear the song of Hoffmann about the grotesque little jester.

Kleinzach starts to ascend to the heights of the wrought-iron arabesque at precisely the moment when Hoffmann’s words sing ‘I would fly far away’ {2:30}. As he ascends, the little jester extends his worshipful arms, reaching out toward the vision of the fair damsel, who continues to gaze at her own reflection in the mirror that she keeps on holding in front of her. As Kleinzach gazes at the fair damsel, with his worshipful arms outstretched, the tragic song continues ...

‘Oh, her hair
Oh, her hair with its curls entwining’ {2:35-41}

As if in response to these words, the fair damsel turns around, in the direction of the worshipful Kleinzach. She is still gazing at her reflection in the mirror that she holds in front of her, but it seems as if she is about to look beyond the mirror and toward her grotesque adorant. Meanwhile, the tragic song continues ...

‘Shed a warmth where the snow
of her bosom was shining’ {2:41-46}

The question is, can there be hope for warmth where you see snow, even if the snow you see is radiant in its whiteness?

There does seem to be some hope, since the fair damsel now starts to descend from the heights. She is heading in the direction of her adorant. She keeps on coming toward him and, the next thing you know, she reaches him and hands over to him the mirror that she has been holding in front of her {2:46}. He takes the mirror in his right hand while his left hand touches her right hand, which is no longer holding the mirror. As of right now, he is the one who is holding the mirror. While the mirror has passed from her right hand to his right hand, however, her gaze at her own reflection in the mirror has continued without any interruption. And the tragic song continues as well ...

‘Her eyes, her eyes
unfathomed lakes of blue’ {2:46-51}

Kleinzach is now escorting the fair damsel as she continues to descend from on high. She is moving forward while descending, but he is moving backward in his own descent, gently taking her right hand with his left hand while holding the mirror in his right hand, steadily
holding it up for her to continue gazing at her reflection, without interruption. And the tragic song continues as well, without interruption ...

‘Spread around where she trod
a reflection as true’ \{2:51-57\}

This theme of a lady-love’s *reflection in a mirror* will come back to haunt Hoffmann in the Tale of Giulietta.

Meanwhile, the fair damsel keeps advancing, gazing at the mirror that holds her reflection, and the hapless Kleinzach keeps receding as he continues to hold up the mirror to her gaze. She is like the proverbial skylark who is attracted to her own reflection in a mirror and crashes into it, losing her life. The skylark loses her life by crashing into the mirror just as a woman loses her soul by gazing at her own reflection. So says the Devil himself, in a song from the Tale of Giulietta ...

I quote here the relevant wording of a version of Offenbach’s *The Tales of Hoffmann* known as the “Censor’s Libretto” (1881; a facsimile of Acts 4 and 5 has been published by Heinzelmann 1988). The wording in this part of the libretto matches closely the relevant wording in Act 4 Scene 5 of the play by Barbier and Carré, *Les Contes fantastiques d’Hoffmann*, staged in 1851. The demonic character named Dapertutto (which is the Devil’s invocational name here, meaning ‘you see him everywhere!’) sings to a diamond intended for Giulietta, telling it to gleam or ‘sparkle’ so as to capture her soul:

(Tirant de son doigt une bague où brille un gros diamant et le faisant scintiller)

Turn, turn, mirror in which the skylark is captured.

_Gleam_, diamond, fascinate her, draw her near.

Woman or bird! The hunter is there.

The one who sees you, who stalks you.
The black hunter.
Skylark or woman
Toward this irresistible trap
go by wing or by way of the heart.
One leaves behind her life, and the other loses her soul.

_Tales of Hoffmann “Censor’s Libretto” Act 4_

Here we turn back to the doomed courtship of the fair damsel by the hapless Kleinzach...
As we saw, the damsel keeps advancing, gazing at the mirror that holds her reflection, and the hapless Kleinzach keeps receding as he continues to hold up the mirror to her gaze. And the singing continues ...

‘And as our pageant car
by cupids all attended’  {2:57-3:03}

Meanwhile the couple circles around a carafe decorated with the carving of a sad face. As they circle around, Kleinzach gallantly picks up the hem of the train of the long robe trailing behind the fair damsel. Now she is leading the procession, while her adorant is now following behind her. And the singing continues ...

‘Sped on with ne’er a jar
Her voice with triumph blended’  {3:03-12}

The eye of the camera views the couple’s procession from behind the wrought-iron arabesque that used to be the background and has now become the foreground. Their procession modulates into a dance. It is a graceful _pas de deux_ that is danced while Kleinzach manages to hold on to the train of the flowing robe of his lady-love with one hand while also holding on to the mirror with the other hand. For the moment, the lady-love is no longer staring into the mirror. Instead, she is staring directly into the eye of the camera. The singing continues ...

‘While mortals held their breath’  {3:13-19}

Meanwhile, the dancing becomes more and more passionate. And the singing too becomes more and more passionate as the tragic song continues ...

‘Sang out with heavenly art
While mortals held their breath
She sang with heavenly art’  {3:19-31}

A new frame suddenly interrupts the mood. It is a close-up, and we now see that the fair damsel has once again taken control of the mirror. She is once again holding it in front of her and she is once again gazing at her reflection in it. Meanwhile, the passionate singing of Hoffmann off-camera is reaching a climax ...

‘Till echoes melt in death’  {3:31-38}
In response to the echoing of these climatic words, Kleinzach desperately circles around his lady-love one last time, and she suddenly gazes at him. For this one moment, her gazing at the mirror has been diverted. Just as suddenly, while the climatic words about echoes melting in death is still echoing, she holds up the mirror to the grotesque face of Kleinzach. This moment is synchronized with the words *in death* {3:38}. When he sees what he now sees, he breaks down, abjectly turning away from the hideous sight of his own grotesque ugliness in the mirror. And while the grotesque Kleinzach turns away from his reflection in mirror, the fair damsel turns away from him and resumes her gazing at her own reflection while holding the mirror in front of her. Now we see her sliding away effortlessly while the miserable jester collapses in a heap of abject despair. As she slides away, she circles around the broken figure of Kleinzach one last time. Off-camera, the tragic song of Hoffmann resounds with the words

'Resounding
Through
My heart' {3:41-54}

Again I ask the question: whose heart is *my heart*? Is it the heart of Kleinzach? Or is it the heart of Hoffmann who is singing the tragic song?

As the tragic song concludes with the words *my heart*, the fair damsel takes one last look at the broken figure of Kleinzach. Then she gracefully glides into the center of the frame, and there her gliding motion is arrested at precisely the same moment as the tragic song of Hoffmann comes to an end. Now she has reverted to the same stop-motion picture that she was before she started coming to life in the motion picture of this tragic dance that is the tragic tale of Kleinzach. Now we see her exactly as we saw her for the first time, except that the wrought-iron arabesque that had been her background is now her foreground, standing between her and the eye of the camera. It is within this freeze-frame that we get to see for the last time the lady-love of Kleinzach - and Kleinzach himself.

ch.5

The eye of the camera moves away from the last frame showing this tragic scene and shifts to a new frame showing the poster we had seen in an earlier scene {0:0-10}. Here it is again, that poster hanging on a stone wall {ch.2 1:12 and following}. Carved on the top of the wooden frame of the poster, as we saw when we first looked at it, are the matching masks of Tragedy and Comedy. These masks of Tragedy and Comedy are the same ‘faces’ that we had seen still earlier on the pediment of ‘Theatre’ {ch.2 0:35}. Now we can understand the significance. The tale of Kleinzach, which had started as a ‘comedy’, has turned into a ‘tragedy’. But maybe it never was a comedy in the first place. It just seemed to be a comedy when Hoffmann started singing it.

There is an analogy here: The Tales of Hoffmann had started as a low opera, full of merriment, but maybe it is now turning into a high opera, full of sorrow and regrets.
As we now view the poster again {0:0-10}, the second time around, we note again the lettering ‘OPERA’, which is carved into the top frame. Underneath is the paper poster, which reads ‘BALLET’ in printed lettering, to be contrasted with the carved lettering ‘OPERA’ that we had read in the frame above ‘BALLET’. Underneath the lettering for ‘BALLET’ we see the picture of a ballerina, and underneath the picture we read, in large printed lettering, ‘STELLA’. Underneath the name of Stella is the lettering ‘in’, and underneath the lettering ‘in’ is the lettering ‘DON GIOVANNI’.

We noted earlier some facts about ‘STELLA’:

In the ‘low opera’ of Offenbach, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Stella is the name of the diva who sings the rôle of Donna Anna in Mozart’s high opera *Don Giovanni*. In the opera of Offenbach, this Stella is the ‘star’ loved by Hoffmann above and beyond all other women. As we will see, this Stella is the composite of the three lady-loves who are featured in the three ‘tales’ sung by Hoffmann in the opera *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

In the opera as originally composed by Offenbach, Stella does not get to sing a single note. In the film of the opera as conceived by Powell and Pressburger, Stella as danced by Moira Shearer the ballerina does not get to sing, either. Also, Shearer herself does not get to sing, since her singing voice is dubbed when she gets to act the rôle of one of Hoffmann’s lady-loves in the film. The dubbing happens in the case of Olympia in Tale 1, though not in the case of Giulietta in Tale 2 or of Antonia in Tale 3.

So, the poster we are viewing right after the tragic tale of Kleinzach concludes is a perfect fit for the film version of *The Tales of Hoffmann*, since it advertises a ballet, not an opera. In the film version, the figure of Stella is to be danced by Moira Shearer as a prima ballerina, not sung by her as an operatic diva. This fact, that Stella is a dancing rôle in the film version, is relevant to the fact that the figure of the fair damsel loved by Kleinzach has just been danced by Moira Shearer as a prima ballerina.

As we will now see, the tragic song of Hoffmann about Kleinzach and his love for the fair damsel is really about himself and his love for Stella. Just as the fair damsel was loved by Kleinzach, so also Stella is loved by Hoffmann.

I find it relevant here to return to three observations I made earlier about the opening credits of the film.

First, about the name KLEINZACH in the opening credits ...

Interestingly, there is no description given there for the rôle of this Kleinzach, unlike the other rôles. It is relevant that this rôle is played by FREDERICK ASHTON, who was the choreographer of the film. In the opera, Kleinzach can only be imagined by way of listening to the words of the story sung by Hoffmann. In the film version, by contrast, Kleinzach will be visualized directly, as he comes to life on the screen while Hoffmann is singing. Kleinzach has no singing rôle, and so he is mute in the film’s visualization as he dances the rôle that is choreographed for him by Ashton, who as a dancer is also mute throughout the telling of the tale.
Second, about the wording in the opening credits where we read HIS LADY-LOVE …

This wording here describes the rôle of the fair damsel loved by Kleinzach. I like the term ‘lady-love’ because it brings to life the equation of an idealized woman with the object of a man’s total and absolute love. As we are about to see, such an equation is actually being made in the song of Hoffmann about the diva named STELLA, a performing ‘star’ who is loved by Hoffmann and who will be revealed as a composite of the three ‘lady loves’ in the three Tales of Hoffmann. The anonymous ‘lady-love’ in the film, as choreographed by Ashton, is like Stella: she too becomes a symbolic composite of all the three lady-loves of all three of Hoffmann’s tales. This anonymous ‘lady love’, as we have seen, is so beautiful that she keeps on gazing at herself in a hand-held mirror. The mirror of Kleinzach’s ‘lady-love’ is just waiting to break, just as the heart of Kleinzach breaks when the anonymous lady-love turns her mirror away from her own beauty and aims it at the grotesque ugliness of her adoring lover.

Third, about the person who plays the rôle of the beautiful lady, who is for Kleinzach HIS LADY LOVE …

She is Moira Shearer, the prima ballerina of the film. As we have just seen, this anonymous composite ‘lady-love’, as played by the prima ballerina Moira Shearer, is mute. She dances rather than sings while Hoffmann sings about his hopeless love. In the opera, Hoffmann is singing not about any lady-love of Kleinzach but about his own hopeless love for STELLA, the operatic prima donna who has become the composite ‘lady-love’ of Hoffmann. In the film version, by contrast, Hoffmann is singing not only about his love for Stella but also about the hopeless love of Kleinzach for his own ‘lady-love’.

I find it ironic that Stella the opera diva does not sing in the opera of The Tales of Hoffmann, even though she is a ‘prima donna’ in the opera that is being sung ‘upstairs’ from the Luther’s tavern: that opera is the high opera of Mozart’s Don Giovanni. Meanwhile, ‘downstairs’ in Luther’s Cellar, the low opera of Offenbach’s Tales of Hoffmann is taking shape in the Prologue as Hoffmann gets ready to sing about his three lady-loves.

After the tragic song about Kleinzach, the mood in Luther’s Cellar has turned somber. And the music that now begins is likewise somber. As signaled by the frame that showed the poster featuring the ‘star’ named Stella, Hoffmann is about to sing about this ideal lady-love.

Hoffmann begins to sing … {0:20-56}

‘Oh Stella,
Three women blended as one,
Three souls
United as one

True artist
Tender maiden
And courtesan’
As he is singing, we notice the lighting of the punch bowl, the flames from which shoot upward with the greatest intensity. The eye of the camera will now align the head of Hoffman with the shooting flame, as if the burning intensity of his love for Stella were ready to ignite his own head in a burst of flame.

The dramatic alignment starts to take place as the words of Hoffmann continue ... {1:05-21}

‘My mistress ...
No, no, rather say my three
Three magic visions fair to see ...’

The alignment is about to happen with the next words of Hoffmann ... {1:22-30}

‘Of all my life they claimed a part’

At this moment, it looks as if the flame was bursting directly from his fevered brain. Abruptly, he swivels around and faces his drinking companions, asking them in song ... {1:33-37}

‘Would you hear
the three tales of my follow of love?’

To this question the drinking companions respond enthusiastically ... {1:37-39}

‘Yes, yes, yes’

One of his companions asks ... {1:39-45}

‘Now what do you mean
three magic visions?’

To which Hoffmann responds by getting ready to tell his tales. He sings ... {1:45-2:02}

‘Your pipe
And by the time you have to light it up again
You’ll know why
when all has been said,
Even you, who in this tale
of my heart and its pain ...

I note again the wording *my heart*. As he sings this, Hoffmann points at the ‘you’, and the camera’s eye shifts to a close-up of the poet’s faithful Muse ...

‘Showed good sense
and still kept your head’
The eye of the camera shifts to a frame showing the poster that reads ... {2:09}

‘ENTR’ACTE
20 MINUTES INTERVAL
BEFORE
ACT II’

We have seen this poster already, and this time we see only the lines that warn about the interval of 20 minutes.

The eye of the camera shifts to the figure of Luther, who rushes down the steps from upstairs to announce frantically ... {2:11-13}

‘Good sirs
the curtain is going to rise’

The drinking companions interrupt Luther ... {2:13-20}

‘Let it rise, then
Let it rise, then
For that we don’t care a pin
No, we don’t care a pin’

Now the waiters bring chests full of pipes to be lit for smoking, and they pass them out to the drinking companions {2:22-30}.

From an overhead view, as they light up their pipes, we hear them sing ... {2:30-46}

‘Right you are
Now we’re in our glory
While we drink
Listen to a story’

The eye of the camera moves to a close-up of Hoffmann himself as he lights his own pipe. The drinking companions continue their song ... {2:47-53}

‘At the clouds of our smoke we gaze ...’

At this moment, we hear the singing voice of the Muse merging with the singing voices of the chorus of companions. The chorus continues to sing ... {2:53-59}

‘And we see dreams in the growing haze’

The eye of the camera moves to a close-up of the Muse as she approaches the drinking companions. They respond by repeating the refrain ... {2:59-3:19}
‘At the clouds of our smoke we gaze
And see dreams in the growing haze’

Inhaling the smoke of his lit pipe, Hoffmann sings ... {3:20-23}

‘I’ll begin then’

The Muse stands behind him and urges him on, singing ... {3:23-25}

‘Begin then’

The chorus of drinking companions joins in ... {3:25-28}

‘Begin then’

The eye of the camera closes in on the face of Hoffmann as he inhales again from his pipe. Meanwhile, the figure of the Devil is closing in on him, to hear him better. The Muse has her hand on the shoulder of Hoffmann. The viewing eye of the camera moves in on him as he begins to sing, with a far-off look in his eyes ... {3:30-43}

‘Here’s the story of the first
Olympia was her name’

The eye of the camera shifts to a close-up of the sinister face of Councillor Lindorf, who has been moving toward Hoffmann. Lindorf places his long finger to his lips. After this uncanny gesture from the Devil, the camera shifts back to a close-up of the face of Hoffmann, with the far-off look in his eyes, and then back to a close-up of the face of Devil, whose evil stare begins to intensify. Perhaps the gesture and the stare are relevant to the telling of the First Tale.