

## Stephan Klenner-Otto's E.T.A. Hoffmann Illustrations

### Abstract

With his illustrations for E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Rat Krespel* and *Der Sandmann*, the German artist Stephan Klenner-Otto enters into a creative dialogue which combines the writer's fantastic juxtapositions of the everyday and the supernatural with the artist's surrealist intertwining of the realistic, the quirky and the grotesque. The latter's self-irony amplifies the former's satire, expressing the kinship that forms the basis of Klenner-Otto's engagement with Hoffmann and his characters. From this 21<sup>st</sup>-century vantage point, the illustrator redefines the youthful hero and the beautiful heroine as middle aged and unprepossessing, the eccentric artist as disturbingly non-human, and the threatening 'supernatural' figure as a baleful member of the 'real' world. Klenner-Otto pays homage to Hoffmann through the intensely personal interpretation of his tales.

**Keywords:** E.T.A. Hoffmann, Stephan Klenner-Otto, illustrations, fantastic literature

Since the early 1990s, German artist, illustrator and engraver Stephan Klenner-Otto has produced more than 100 portraits of literary figures, with E.T.A. Hoffmann one of his most frequent subjects, and he has created illustrations for a number of literary works of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, including several by Hoffmann. In 2004 and 2008 respectively, he produced a series of etchings for bibliophile editions of Hoffmann's short stories *Rat Krespel* and *Der Sandmann*. This essay will examine the artist's visual interpretation of these two short stories, focussing on his distinctive characterisation of Hoffmann's protagonists and their experience of the duality of bourgeois and supernatural worlds, and on his individualistic articulation of the disconcerting skirmishes between the two realms that aim to transform the narrative uncertainties of the fantastic genre into visual art. It will be argued that Klenner-Otto lets himself be inspired by Hoffmann but creates his own stories, in which he foregrounds the restrictive and destructive aspects of 19<sup>th</sup>-century society, with the benefit and distance of 200 years of hindsight, and frames the creativity and the dangers of poetic imagination within the bizarre, grotesque distortions of 20<sup>th</sup>-century fantastic realism. In each case, the artist eschews any suspicion of Romantic sentimentalisation of his characters and their worlds.

To accompany this essay, I have created a website with a selection of Klenner-Otto's self-portraits and of his portraits of Hoffmann, along with the complete sets of his published illustrations for *Rath Krespel*, *Der Sandmann*, and of the portfolio of illustrations he prepared for *Der goldene Topf*: [www.klenner-otto-hoffmann.gla.ac.uk](http://www.klenner-otto-hoffmann.gla.ac.uk). All the art works reproduced here in black and white can be viewed in colour on this website.<sup>1</sup>

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**1** I am very grateful to Dr Luca Guariento for constructing the website and to the University of Glasgow for hosting it.

## The Artist

Stephan Klenner-Otto,<sup>2</sup> born in 1959 in Kulmbach, Upper Franconia, is a graphic artist and illustrator. He has held exhibitions from 1976 onwards, internationally most notably on Jean Paul and on Richard Wagner's *Ring* in the Goethe Institut in Dublin and at the University of Limerick in 2002, the former as an individual exhibition, the latter as part of a Wagner Festival. He has won many prizes for his art, including in 1999 the *Kulturpreis des Landkreises Kulmbach*, in 2015 the *Kulturpreis der Oberfrankenstiftung* and most recently, in July 2021, he was awarded the *Bayreuther Kulturpreis*. The artist works with mixed media, using pencil and coloured pencil, pen, watercolours and red chalk with white highlights. The main technical element in his pictures is shading, in particular cross-hatching, that is, closely spaced parallel lines, which render outlines far less important as a structuring element. His signature medium is that of etching, which he does without sketch or outline; on copper, to create fine lines, or on zinc to achieve irregularity and more colour. For his drawings, he uses Ingres paper as his canvas, but also paper from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as endpaper from old books, book covers and packing paper.<sup>3</sup>

Klenner-Otto has drawn self-portraits throughout his career to date, documenting different stages of his life as well as individual fleeting emotions and experiences.<sup>4</sup> The significance of this genre for the artist is clear merely in terms of the number he has produced, however, in addition to this, self-portrayal leaks into other areas of his creative output. He often literally includes himself within his subject matter, which not only draws from but eclectically combines the most diverse areas of high and popular culture; in particular – and this is another pillar of his aesthetic philosophy – German literature of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The artist is a voracious reader, and it has been argued that literature is at the centre of his artistic cosmos.<sup>5</sup> From the 1990s onwards, Klenner-Otto has produced portraits of literary figures: to date, more than one hundred. Mostly these are etchings and engravings, but there are also watercolours and drawings. The choice of subject is intensely personal: He only draws individuals whose works he knows well, whose biographies he has studied intensively, and to whom he feels a particular connection.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence of this, all these portraits contain facets of his own personality. This is particularly the case with the writers Jean Paul and E.T.A. Hoffmann, his “two heroes”.<sup>7</sup>

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2 My most grateful thanks are due to Stephan Klenner-Otto for his time and patience in discussing his work with me and for answering all my questions. For their kind and entertaining hospitality on many occasions, I am also greatly indebted to Stephan and his wife, Ingrid Otto. For reading drafts of this essay and making many pertinent suggestions I am also very grateful to Ricarda Schmidt and Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa.

3 For an overview of Klenner-Otto's technical methods see Jürgen Zinck/Stephan Klenner-Otto: *Lebensblätter. Werk und Leben des Stephan Klenner-Otto*. Kulmbach 2023, pp. 17 f. See also Alexander Kosenina: “Ein Meer aus Köpfen schenk' ich dir”. In: *F.A.Z.*, 23.10.2009.

4 See Zinck/Klenner-Otto: *Lebensblätter*, pp. 69–75.

5 Kosenina: “Ein Meer aus Köpfen schenk' ich dir”.

6 *Ibid.* See also the exhibition catalogue *Vernetzte Köpfe*. Ed. by Hannah Lotte Lund/Ute Pott/Christof Wingertzahn. Hannover 2018, p. ii.

7 <https://klenner-otto-hoffmann.gla.ac.uk/portraits-of-e-t-a-hoffmann/> (07.10.23).

Klenner-Otto has drawn E.T.A. Hoffmann most frequently of all his literary subjects. His starting point has been Hoffmann's self-portraits,<sup>8</sup> but also his own self-portraits.<sup>9</sup> A comparison of the ongoing series of Hoffmann portraits clearly shows how different aspects of the artist's personal style and persona come through, so that the former can express the latter's own feelings of annoyance, his experience of a hangover, and even his frustration at lockdown restrictions. Klenner-Otto draws himself without any illusions, and this is also true of his depictions of Hoffmann and Hoffmann's characters, in which he is intent on avoiding all romantic sentimentalism. In a visual exposition of *Was passiert, wenn man Hoffmanns 'Kater Murr' liest*, he draws himself as reader interacting with Hoffmann and characters from his works.<sup>10</sup> His sense of kinship with the romantic author, and the extent to which he immerses himself in Hoffmann's life and fictional world, is expressed by him visually transforming into his hero.

Since 1997, the artist has worked with publishers to produce illustrated editions of literary works. In 2007 he illustrated a translation of the romantic writer Achim von Arnim's short story *The Marriage Blacksmith (Die Ehenschmiede)* for the author of this essay.<sup>11</sup> He has illustrated limited bibliophile editions of *Rath Krespel* (2004) and *Der Sandmann* (2008), produced by Michael Duske in his publishing house *Serapion vom See* in Berlin, with each purchaser invited to choose which illustrations were included from an extensive selection.<sup>12</sup> A first collection of illustrations had been prepared for *Der goldene Topf* in 2002, however the illustrated book project was not realised, and these etchings were sold by the same publisher as a portfolio. Klenner-Otto has also produced individual illustrations for *Ritter Gluck*, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, *Klein Zaches* and *Kater Murr*,<sup>13</sup> a selection of which have been purchased by the State Library in Bamberg.<sup>14</sup> All his Hoffmann illustrations are colour etchings.

With these projects, the artist has added to a considerable body of graphic accompaniments to and interpretations of Hoffmann's works. An overview of this corpus was published by Elke Riemer-Buddecke in the 1970s, and she has recently contributed further to this research on the online portal of the Berlin State Library.<sup>15</sup> Here, Riemer-Buddecke emphasises the independent contribution that all illustrators make

**8** Ibid. See also Frank Piontek: Träume, Flüge, Monstren. Stephan Klenner-Otto. In: *Traumbilder – Bilderträume. Alfred Kubin – Caspar Walter Rauh – Stephan Klenner-Otto. Drei Generationen phantastischer Kunst*. Ed. by Wolfram Benda. Hannover 2009, pp. 73–83, here p. 78. The portraits are also available online on the following sites: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Portraits\\_of\\_E.\\_T.\\_A.\\_Hoffmann#/media/File:ETA\\_Hoffmann.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Portraits_of_E._T._A._Hoffmann#/media/File:ETA_Hoffmann.jpg); [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Portraits\\_of\\_E.\\_T.\\_A.\\_Hoffmann#/media/File:E.T.A.\\_Hoffmann\\_Selbstportrait.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Portraits_of_E._T._A._Hoffmann#/media/File:E.T.A._Hoffmann_Selbstportrait.jpg) (22.05.23).

**9** <https://klenner-otto-hoffmann.gla.ac.uk/stephan-klenner-otto-self-portraits/> (07.10.23). See also Elke Riemer-Buddecke: Illustrationen zum Werk E.T.A. Hoffmanns. Zur Einführung: Erscheinungsformen. In: E.T.A. Hoffmann Portal, [https://etahoffmann.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/erforschen/rezeption/illustrationsgeschichte/#\\_ftn1](https://etahoffmann.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/erforschen/rezeption/illustrationsgeschichte/#_ftn1) (22.05.23).

**10** <https://klenner-otto-hoffmann.gla.ac.uk/stephan-klenner-otto-self-portraits/> (07.10.23).

**11** Achim von Arnim, *The Marriage Blacksmith*. Translated with notes by Sheila Dickson. Illustrated by Stephan Klenner-Otto. Hannover 2007. [https://www.wehrhahn-verlag.de/public/index.php?ID\\_Section=3&ID\\_Product=249](https://www.wehrhahn-verlag.de/public/index.php?ID_Section=3&ID_Product=249) (22.05.23).

**12** Piontek: Träume, p. 76.

**13** See <https://etahoffmann.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/erforschen/rezeption/illustrationsgeschichte/illustrationsgeschichte-einzelne-kuenstler/#toggle-id-7> (22.05.23).

**14** See <https://etahg.de/ausstellungen/klenner-otto/> for illustrations on *Der Goldene Topf* (22.05.23).

**15** Elke Riemer: *E.T.A. Hoffmann und seine Illustratoren*. Hildesheim 1976 (2. Auflage 1978). <https://etahoffmann.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/portfolio-item/riemer-buddecke/> (22.05.23).

to a written text and argues that this author's use of narrative ambiguity and of the fantastic render his works particularly attractive to illustrators as they give the artist extensive creative freedom:

Die Illustration ist ein zusätzliches Deutungsangebot, kann eine Bereicherung der eigenen Perspektive oder auch eine Herausforderung sein, eine andere Sicht, ein anderes Leseerlebnis wahrzunehmen. Da E.T.A. Hoffmanns Werk vielschichtig ist und immer wieder den Leser verunsichert, ihn zur Korrektur gewonnener Leseindrücke und zu Perspektivwechsel aufruft, erscheint diese Form des dialogischen Illustrierens als angemessen. [...] Manche Illustrationen reflektieren einzelne Textstellen und deren Kontext oder größere Textpartien oder sogar ein Werk als Ganzes mit der Darstellung von Schlüsselszenen in einer Komposition. Beliebt ist ferner die freie Assoziation ohne leicht erkennbaren Bezug zum Text. Sie nimmt die Stimmung von Hoffmanns Dichtung auf, lässt einzelne seiner Figuren Revue passieren, betont Phantastisches und lässt irgendwo den Dichter selbst erscheinen, gern als geheimnisvollen Magier oder Humoristen.<sup>16</sup>

Riemer-Buddecke places Klenner-Otto in the group of artists who give their own interpretation to Hoffmann's works and also express their personal affinity to the writer and his fictional world.<sup>17</sup> In order to probe more deeply into the distinctive nature of the artist's graphic engagement with E.T.A. Hoffmann's stories, this essay will examine the illustrations in relation to the two aspects identified by Riemer-Buddecke, namely narrative ambiguity and the collisions between imagination and reality that characterise the fantastic. The short prose form lends itself particularly well to this kind of sustained ambivalence, and Hoffmann's best works are to be found in this genre. The following analysis of Klenner-Otto's illustrations for the short stories *Rath Krespel* and *Der Sandmann*, as the two published collections, will approach this by focussing on how the artist draws the main female characters, the male heroes and the (tor)mentor figures who try to help or manipulate them against a backdrop that juxtaposes the everyday and the surreal.

### **Rath Krespel<sup>18</sup>**

Klenner-Otto produced 20 illustrations between February and March 2023,<sup>19</sup> which were published in 2004 by Michael Duske in a bibliophile edition with the deliberately archaic spelling of 'Rath' to situate the text clearly in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> The name Duske chose for his publishing company, *Serapion vom See*, is a reference to

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**16** Elke Riemer-Buddecke: Illustrationen zum Werk E.T.A. Hoffmanns. <https://etahoffmann.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/erforschen/rezeption/illustrationsgeschichte/> (22.05.23).

**17** See also Benda: "Nicht um [...] die Wiedergabe von Inhalten des Textes geht es also, vielmehr um den Ausdruck innerer Welten und Anregungen, die die literarische Vorlage in der Seele des Künstlers evoziert und zum Schwingen bringt." Wolfram Benda: Jean Paul und Stephan Klenner-Otto. In: *Jean Paul und die Bilder. Bildkünstlerische Auseinandersetzungen mit seinem Werk: 1783–2013*. Ed. by Monika Schmitz-Emans/Wolfram Benda. Würzburg 2013, pp. 217–236, here p. 220.

**18** For all illustrations see <https://klenner-otto-hoffmann.gla.ac.uk/illustrations-for-rath-krespel/> (07.10.23).

**19** All illustrations were drawn over a period of six weeks, when the artist had a broken left shoulder. Some are dated 2004, which was when the collection was passed over to the publisher.

**20** See catalogue information given by the State Library of Berlin: "Diese Erzählung erschien 2004 in einer Gesamtaufl. von 80 Ex. und 10 Künstlerex. Stephan Klenner-Otto schuf 20 mehrfarb. Radierungen für dieses Buch. Diese Ed. gibt es in 4 Versionen von jeweils 15 Ex., von denen jede Version eine andere Folge von 5 Radierungen enth. Die Bücher erhielten die Nummerierung 1 – 15a, b, c, d. Zusätzlich ersch. 20 Subskriptionsex. Die Subskribenten wählten aus den 4 Grafiksuiten ihre individuelle Folge aus und werden im Impressum genannt. Diese Bücher erhielten die Ziffern 1 – 20s. Jede Radierung ist signiert. 5 Ex. wurden als Vorzugsausg. in Ganzleder geb. und werden von einer Kassette mit sämtlichen Radierungen begleitet." <https://stabikat.de/Search/Home>. Search term 'Rath Krespel'.

Hoffmann's artistic hermit. For this publication, the eponymous Councillor Krespel is introduced in two separate portraits (*Krespel Selbst* [Fig. 1] and *Selbst als Krespel* [Fig. 2]) as versions of Hoffmann and of Klenner-Otto, so that each purchaser is free to choose which visual affinity they prefer as a starting point.<sup>21</sup> However, the 'Hoffmann-version' is more a hybrid version of the two individuals, with Klenner-Otto's mouth and eyebrows and Hoffmann's eyes and side whiskers. The Hoffmann-Krespel could rather be seen as an older version of the Klenner-Otto-Krespel, with the face becoming thinner and more lined, the hair also having thinned, and the eyes requiring glasses.

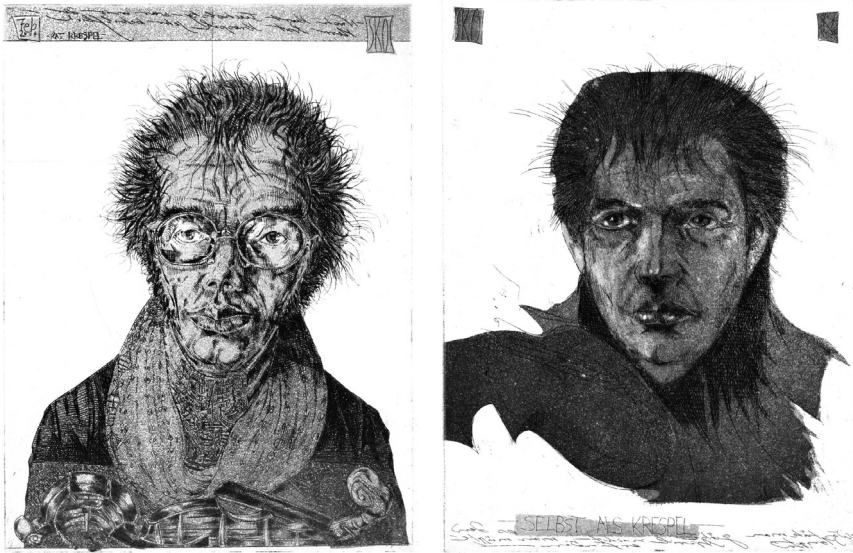


Fig. 1 & 2: *Rath Krespel selbst; Selbst als Krespel*

In the illustrations that follow, the various aspects of Krespel's persona are highlighted: He is a talented mechanic, creating a fantastical animal for his host's children to play with, an overtaxed husband, a single parent, an eccentric housebuilder and an ecstatic violin enthusiast. In many cases, the artist creates different versions of the same composition, each of which accentuates specific aspects. This again gives the purchaser a choice in constructing the portfolio, which can be compared to the onus placed on Hoffmann's reader to engage actively with the often fragmentary information provided by the narrator and the characters. Both alternative drawings of Krespel's failed relationship with his wife show Angela throwing a tantrum, the first with the aghast Krespel, looking small, weedy and helpless in comparison to his strapping, belligerent wife, watching his violin being destroyed, the second focussing solely on Angela's rage, with her husband's now destroyed love represented by a floating heart.

<sup>21</sup> An interpretation of these illustrations is given by Piontek: *Träume*, p. 78. See also Winfried Schleyer: *Literatur im Spiegel des Inneren. Drei phantastische Realisten als Illustrierten*. In: Benda (ed.): *Traumbilder – Bilderträume*, pp. 9–21, here p. 17.

In the latter (*Zornesausbruch II* [Fig. 4]), Klenner-Otto draws Krespel as middle-aged, in spite of the fact that the couple are newly married and their daughter, who is an adult at the time of the story's events, has not yet been born. This is a reflection of the artist's focus on the affinity between Krespel, Hoffmann and himself, and also of his refusal to allow any suspicion of romantic idealisation or sentimentalism to detract from the fantastic realism of his view of Hoffmann's characters. Thus, Angela is depicted as a shrew rather than as an "angelic beauty" ("Engelsschönheit").<sup>22</sup> Also typical for Klenner-Otto, the human heart in the first illustration of Angela (*Zornesausbruch I* [Fig. 3]) is drawn in grotesque anatomical detail, as a disembodied object. This is one of the many ways in which the artist combines the realistic and the distorted, the literal and the figurative, calling stock romantic motifs into question through satire. Klenner-Otto's style was greatly influenced by the work of his mentor, the graphic artist Caspar Walter Rauh (1912–1983), who was one of the early exponents of fantastic realism, and his oeuvre has also been compared to that of Alfred Kubin.<sup>23</sup>

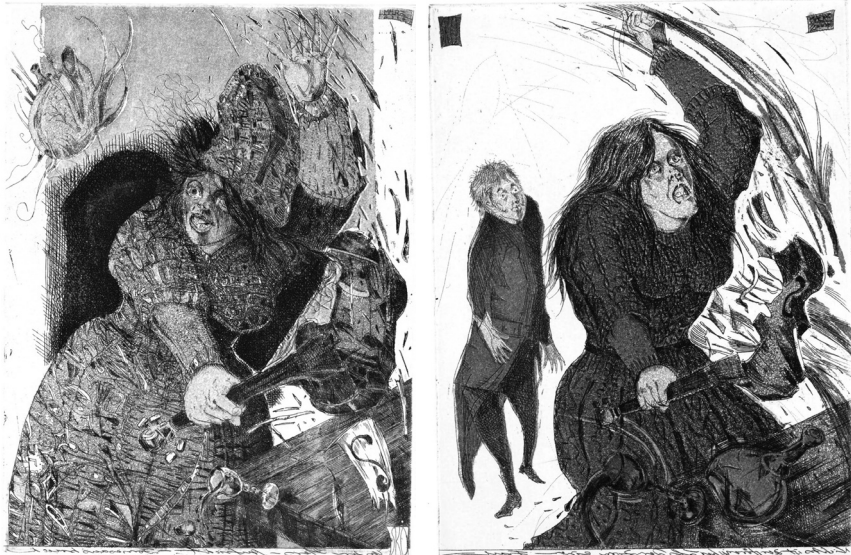


Fig. 3 & 4: *Zornesausbruch I and II*

A similar incongruous juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic is depicted in relation to Krespel's idiosyncratic, self-designed house. In Hoffmann's story it is made clear that, to everyone in the town of H- but the Councillor, the project design and management are eccentric and *Kopfgebäude* (Fig. 5) depicts the house – an idea

<sup>22</sup> E.T.A. Hoffmann: *Rat Krespel*. In: Id.: *Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden*. Ed. by Hartmut Steinecke/Wulf Segebrecht with contributions from Gerhard Allroggen et. al. Frankfurt/M. 1985–2004. Vol. 4: *Die Serapions-Brüder*. Ed. by Wulf Segebrecht with contributions from Ursula Segebrecht (2001), pp. 39–71, here p. 56. Subsequently referenced in the text with the abbreviation 'H 4' followed by page numbers. Another example is the children watching Krespel make toys for them (Fig. 7). They are almost as idiosyncratic as Krespel himself, bearing no resemblance to conventionally angelic cherubs.

<sup>23</sup> See Benda (ed.): *Traumbilder – Bilderträume*.

which, it could be argued, becomes an obsession – as literally growing out of Krespel's head.<sup>24</sup> The fantastic realism<sup>25</sup> and the humour that characterise these illustrations perform a function akin to Hoffmann's narrative collisions between the supernatural and the everyday, which confuse both the exalted romantic hero and the bumbling philistine, endearing them both to the reader by impishly but benevolently exposing the insecurities and incongruities behind the respective façade. Furthermore, by presenting Krespel with reference to the different areas of his life as metamorphosing between the henpecked, the eccentric and the pathological, Klenner-Otto's graphic storyline leaves the viewer unable to satisfactorily pin him down, much as Theodor, Hoffmann's narrator, struggles to identify the Councillor's 'real' character.

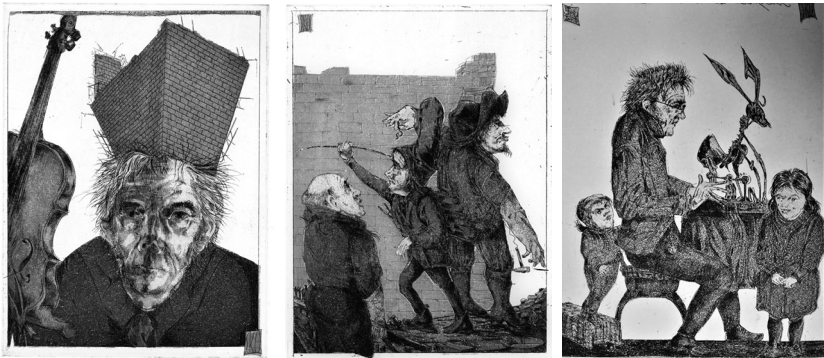


Fig. 5, 6 & 7: *Kopfgebäude*; *Die Handwerker*; *Krespel bastelt für die Kinder*

The more striking variances in the artist's portrayals of Krespel are created with reference to his relationship with music. The positive energy of the Councillor's musical creativity is illustrated by means of bright colours and radiant imagery. The *Frontispiece* (Fig. 8) has a sun accompanying his playing and *Die Suche nach dem Wohlklang* (Fig. 9) depicts Krespel in search of harmony as an abstract ideal. A comparison of these illustrations brings out a clear process of intensification. In the first, the character is focussed on playing the violin as a skilled musician, dressed for public performance. The personified sun adds to the impression of pleasure and beauty that can be created in the 'real' world through the artist's talent. In the second, Krespel appears as an allegorical personification of harmony, still linked to the instrument which he attempts in Hoffmann's story to deconstruct by physically dismantling it in an attempt to achieve this elusive state, but no longer playing it. This is Klenner-Otto's interpretation of the character's inner life; while the sun symbolises how music can light up our everyday lives, here we see Krespel dancing, not even playing, to a purely internal score. Krespel's attire would no longer be acceptable to polite society, and it is difficult to see how the violin slung over his shoulder will ever again produce music that can be enjoyed by others. Hoffmann himself is present here as a lightly

<sup>24</sup> Piontek interprets this figure as Hoffmann (Piontek: *Träume*, p. 78).

<sup>25</sup> On his work, see *Zeitzeuge und Phantast. Zum Werk Caspar Walter Rauhs*. Ed. by Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa. Hannover 2011.

drawn sketch in the background, linking the character and his creator through their passion for music, and by including Hoffmann in this illustration rather than in the frontispiece, the artist associates the writer with the worshipper of the essence of music, rather than with the practising musician which Hoffmann, of course, was, while being prevented by many factors outside his control from devoting himself long term to this vocation. In all his future artistic endeavours, however, music remained an ideal, as it does for Krespel.

With reference to *Die Suche nach dem Wohlklang*, Klenner-Otto has highlighted how his Hoffmann illustrations take on a life of their own:

Selbstverständlich mache ich mir meine eigenen Gedanken. Ich interpretiere. Doch ich lasse die Nadel in einem surrealen Sinn laufen. Da kommt erstaunlich Unbewußtes heraus. Beim *Rath Krespel* zum Beispiel die idealisierte Umsetzung von Wohlklang. Die eigentliche Kunst ist es, den Ton auch komplexer Texte richtig zu treffen und nicht ins biedermeierlich Süße abzugleiten.<sup>26</sup>

The references to the surreal, the unconscious and the idealised indicate the ways in which the artist interprets what he reads. Rather than focussing on the dismantling of violins as the behaviour that marks Hoffmann's Krespel as 'odd' to the inhabitants of the town, Klenner-Otto's Krespel turns inwards for inspiration; in both these illustrations he is completely self-absorbed and no reaction or response from his bourgeois environment is visible. The reference to "biedermeierlich[e] Süße" reflects the artist's rejection of sentimentalism, referenced above, but also more generally an increased concentration on Krespel's musical passion, which renders his relationship to the townspeople more peripheral.



Fig. 8 & 9: *Frontispiz; Die Suche nach dem Wohlklang*

<sup>26</sup> Klenner-Otto quoted in Schleyer: *Literatur im Spiegel des Inneren*, p. 17.



Further illustrations of Krespel take the development of his relationship to music into darker realms. He is depicted as a daemonic madman in *Auf zum Tanz* (Fig. 10), which shows an unnervingly destructive side to his obsession. Here, the countenance bears no resemblance to either Hoffmann or Klenner-Otto; it is grotesquely distorted, and the fantastical is designed to unsettle the reader, rather than amuse. Rather than a mask, which can cover up a 'normal' face, the human features seem here to be dissolving, their mortal humanity disintegrating, their flesh decomposing. The snail shell pattern on the figure's clothes is a further marker of ossification and death,<sup>27</sup> as is the disembodied eye where the heart should be: This eye is focussed in a way that has been lost by the 'human' eyes and, while piercing, it clearly does not act as a mirror to Krespel's soul. These visual motifs confirm the status of this figure as reflecting part of Krespel's true inner self, and it is unfocussed, unseeing, unconnected to the outside world and to the viewer, while the background is once again blank and empty. The illustration *Isola Krespel* (Fig. 11) takes this interpretation of Krespel's character to a further fantastical level in an allegorical representation of a hybrid living object or ossified mortal.<sup>28</sup> The title 'isola', Italian for 'small island', conveys the semantically related concept of isolation. Krespel has become the musical instrument, but it is distorted, ugly and unable to create music. Klenner-Otto's Krespel is stripped of almost all humanity in this etching, due to the monstrous, implacable nature of his fixation. The only living element remaining is the eyes, which stare blankly. The snail shells have openings, but they are empty and the musical notes that conveyed the melodies still possible in *Die Suche nach dem Wohlklang* are now completely absent.



Fig. 10 & 11: *Auf zum Tanz*; *Isola Krespel*

**27** The snail shell was a frequent motif in Rauhs's works, and Klenner-Otto often includes it as a tribute to his teacher. See Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa: Caspar Walter Rauhs Phantastik des Wohnens. In: Id. (ed.): *Zeitzeuge und Phantast*, pp. 83–115, here p. 84, pp. 102 f., p. 113. See also Zinck/Klenner-Otto: *Lebensblätter*, pp. 35–39.

**28** The hybridity of humans and objects is a characteristic of C.W. Rauhs's work. See Michael Niehaus: *Gebilde*. In: Schmidt-Hannisa (ed.): *Zeitzeuge und Phantast*, pp. 11–29; Armin Schäfer: *Jenseits von Figuration und*

By depicting Krespel's persona in such a broad range of different illustrations, Klenner-Otto is able to give visual form to the contradictions and complexity of Hoffmann's character while adding his own emphases to create a new version of the story. In particular, he accords more importance to Krespel's musical obsession; his role within bourgeois society is only depicted in illustrations of him with the housebuilders and with his dinner host's children, in each case engrossed with the task at hand rather than interacting with those present, who gaze aimlessly or helplessly in another direction (Fig. 6 & 7). In the final two illustrations reproduced above, the artist intensifies the focus on the dark side of Krespel's ruling passion by creating a far more modern and disturbing fantasy maniac than Hoffmann's quirky crank, leaving all humorous eccentricity far behind.

The main female character, Antonia, daughter of Councillor Krespel, is supposedly forbidden to sing because, if she does, she will die. The fairy-tale-like curse is presented by Hoffmann almost as a sideshow to that of Krespel, and this is reflected by Klenner-Otto's separate graphic storyline of Antonia, which only confirms the hierarchical (and patriarchal) dominance of Krespel as Antonia is pushed into the background by her father, her fiancé and by Death, personified in a grasping skeleton. In *Der junge Komponist* (Fig. 12) and *Der junge Komponist zeigt Krespel eine Komposition* (Fig. 13), her fiancé and her father discuss music, visually represented in the latter by sheet music and musical instruments. Antonia is shown in both cases to be excluded from the exchange, ostensibly in Hoffmann's narrative because of her 'curse', but the artist's intention here is also to demonstrate what was the normal situation for young ladies of the time.

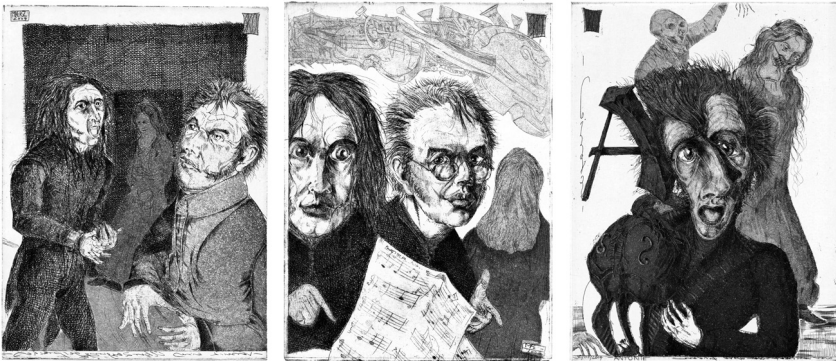


Fig 12, 13 & 14: *Der junge Komponist*; *Der junge Komponist zeigt Krespel eine Komposition*; *Antonia bekommt Gesangsverbot*

In *Antonia bekommt Gesangsverbot* (Fig. 14) Antonia's red dress pales behind the vivid green of her father, who unlike her is able (or permitted) to create as an independent subject. Klenner-Otto thus emphasises the emotional, even the existential importance of music (and thus of creativity, stimulation, beauty) for Hoffmann and

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Abstraktion. In: Caspar Walter Rauh. *Schwierige Verzauberung*. Exhibition catalogue of the exhibition in the Petrikirche, Kulmbach 2005. Ed. by Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa. Kulmbach 2005, pp. 29–36.

for both his characters, Krespel and Antonia, with the murky colours, coupled with the menacing presence of the skeleton that express his daughter's enforced abstinence, indicating her suffering. In this illustration, which brings the Krespel and Antonia strands of the story together, he depicts Krespel's face distorted around the letter A – almost a scarlet letter – expressing either his anguish at the danger that threatens his daughter, or his unhealthy obsession with his daughter as musician, which, along with the illustrations of Antonia's fate after being forbidden to sing, could be taken to convey the human cost of Krespel's obsession. Antonia is shown as banished and gagged in a very literal way. She is helpless in the face of Death's encroachment, and the following illustration, *Antonia wird vom Tod umschlungen* (Fig. 15), shows her being enveloped by it. She sits at either a table – symbol of her bourgeois life – or at a closed, and therefore silent, piano – symbol of her exclusion from the world of music – with Krespel's violin hanging over her. The violin is balanced by the snail shell of Klenner-Otto's private mythology: music versus the safety of her home environment in which all musical creation is forbidden. But that shell is being emptied of its content, and that content is shown to be cords that can only restrict, and which are in contrast to the violin, of which only a small part can be seen, and which is free from ties, thus representing freedom, tantalisingly visible but disappearing out of reach. In that sense it could be suggested to the viewer that Antonia might conceivably be content to embrace the death that frees her from these bonds, and one of her hands is holding the skeleton to her breast. This represents the moment in Hoffmann's story when she throws off the restrictions imposed by her father and opens her mouth to sing, although in the story this only happens in Krespel's dream. In *Antonias Ende* (Fig. 16), Death's embrace completely overcomes her, and the skeleton and she are now one, illustrated by the shared red dress. Her heart – Klenner-Otto's signature disembodied heart – has left her body, but significantly, it is still present at this point of death, and, even more significantly, it is shown to be hovering over the now open piano, played by the young composer who wanted to marry her. The constellation could signify the cause of her death as her love for music and for this young man who would let her sing, or, alternatively, it might be interpreted as a sign that her emotional wellbeing could have been fostered by music and by love. In the last two illustrations her red dress has regained its vibrant colour: the same red that Krespel wears when playing the violin. The viewer may conclude that Antonia can only achieve her musical epiphany at the cost of her life, or, alternatively, that Antonia is only rendered pale and mute when she is pushed into the background by her controlling father.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See the interpretation by John Ellis in his monograph *Narration in the German Novelle. Theory and Interpretation*. Cambridge 1974, pp. 94–112, who emphasises the dubiety of Krespel's explanation that he is protecting his daughter from certain death by preventing her from singing and, in contrast, the interpretation of Rat Krespel as a sensitive father whose dream contrasts him positively with the satirically exposed selfishness of the narrating enthusiast's dream, given by Ricarda Schmidt: *Nachttraum, Tagtraum und Rausch bei E.T.A. Hoffmann*. In: *KulturPoetik*. 19/2019, no. 1, pp. 68–84, here pp. 72–75.

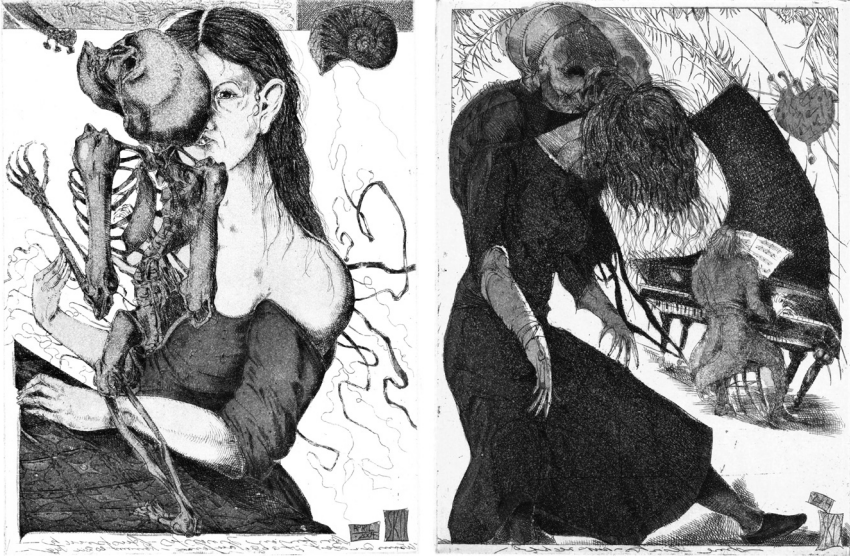


Fig. 15 & 16: *Antonia wird vom Tod umschlungen; Antonias Ende*

Klenner-Otto's depiction of the heroine, who inspires Hoffmann's narrator with her youth and beauty as well as her musical talent, is a 21<sup>st</sup>-century portrayal of the repressive nature of women's lives in Hoffmann's times. For this reason, Klenner-Otto's Antonia is not idealised; the viewer is not captivated by "dem blauen Auge und den holden Rosenlippen der ungemein zarten lieblichen Gestalt" (H 4, p. 49) as Hoffmann's narrator Theodor is. His Antonia is a shadowy figure who is denied individual development and whose unprepossessing countenance in the embrace of a skeleton reflects the cruel reality of the premature and possibly avoidable destruction of a young life. Similarly, her mother Angela, who bewitches Krespel, is presented only as a middle-aged shrew and not as a prima donna. In this way, the artist's depiction of Antonia's story reflects his desire to give expression to the unhappy side of female bourgeois existence in the patriarchal society of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Der Sandmann*<sup>31</sup>**

Klenner-Otto produced a total of 29 illustrations for this bibliophile edition, including a frontispiece, in 2006, and they were published by Michael Duske in his *Serapion*

<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that Hoffmann blithely accepted the contemporary stereotypical view of femininity expressed by characters such as Theodor, although he was by no means (and cannot be expected to have been) a protofeminist. Ricarda Schmidt argues that "questions of femininity were for Hoffmann always subordinate to his concern with the problems of art. But [...] within these limitations his depiction of femininity ranges from the stereotypical to the complex and subtle." Schmidt argues that Clara in *Der Sandmann* and Giacinta Soardi in *Prinzessin Brambilla* belong to the more complex presentations of femininity in Hoffmann's work. Ricarda Schmidt: Male foibles, female critique and narrative capriciousness. On the function of gender in conceptions of art and subjectivity in E.T.A. Hoffmann. In: *From Goethe to Gide: Feminism, Aesthetics and the French and German Literary Canon 1770–1930*. Ed. by Mary Orr/Lesley Sharpe (Exeter 2005), pp. 49–64, here p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> For all illustrations see <https://klenner-otto-hoffmann.gla.ac.uk/der-sandman/> (07.10.23).

vom See publishing company in 2008.<sup>32</sup> In the letters which form the first section of Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, the female protagonist Clara is set against Nathanael as a rational contrast to his emotional intensity. There is some (facetious) debate over whether or not she is beautiful: "Für schön konnte Clara keineswegs gelten; das meinten alle, die sich von Amtswegen auf Schönheit verstehen."<sup>33</sup> However, both the narrator and Nathanael, at least at the beginning of the events recounted, are captivated by her appearance and, significantly, by her eyes.<sup>34</sup> The narrative that follows focuses on Nathanael's interaction with Coppola and his infatuation with Olimpia. In his illustrations, the artist brings additional depth to Nathanael's new choice of love interest. A comparison of *Clara* (Fig. 17) and *Olimpia* (Fig. 18) reveals Clara, in classic Caspar David Friedrich window pose, looking away and outwards, wearing an apron that identifies her as a 'Hausfrau', while Olimpia is shown turning towards the viewers, looking at them coquettishly, appearing by far the more feminine – and alive – of the two, in spite of the fact that the colour red in her cheeks and her stockings, which would seem at first glance to indicate life and humanity, links to the red pieces of metal that hold her together. She also has a key to wind her up protruding from her back. Whereas Hoffmann's Olimpia is often illustrated, and interpreted, as 'merely' a mechanical doll, Klenner-Otto, who only looks at other illustrations after the completion of his own, as a comparison,<sup>35</sup> finds this inadequate. He has said of his version of Olimpia: "Ich zeige sie nicht mit einem künstlichen, sondern einem realistischen, menschlichen Duktus – warum verliebt sich Nathanael sonst in sie?"<sup>36</sup> Nathanael becomes the Caspar David Friedrich 'Rückenfigur' (figure seen from behind) here; and this time it is he who is in the background, again enhancing Olimpia's relative importance and establishing a connection between her and the viewer that even excludes the hero of the story, who is neither party to nor even aware of this communication. The eye is a common motif in Klenner-Otto's works,<sup>37</sup> however in *Der Sandmann* it also clearly has direct reference to Hoffmann's themes. The motif of the disembodied eye, which is present in almost all the illustrations for this story, is a further structuring device that can evoke a sense of communication and connection. Here it *does* seem to be watching. It fixes on the

**32** See catalogue information given by the State Library of Berlin: "Diese Erzählung erschien 2008 in einer Gesamtauflage von 60 Ex. und 15 Künstlerex. Stephan Klenner-Otto schuf 25 mehrfarb. Radierungen für dieses Buch. Diese Ed. gibt es in 4 Versionen von jeweils 10 Ex., von denen jede Version eine andere Folge von 6 Radierungen enth. Die Bücher erhielten die Nummerierung 1 – 10a, b, c, d. Zusätzlich ersch. 20 Subskriptionsex. Die Subskribenten wählten aus den 4 Grafiksuiten ihre individuelle Folge aus und werden im Impressum genannt. Diese Bücher erhielten die Ziffern 1 – 20s. Jede Radierung ist signiert. Eine Luxusausg. wurde in Pergament gebunden. Vor- und Rücks. wurden von Hand bemalt. Sie wird von einer Kasette mit sämtlichen Radierungen begleitet." <https://stabikat.de/Search/Home>. Search term 'Der Sandmann'. The 'Kasette' referred to here had 29 illustrations (the plan was for 30, but an additional portrait of Clara was never engraved); 25 illustrations were used for the book. The remaining four were *Clara Halbporträt*, *Wahnsinn*, *Turmsturz II*, *Der Sturz*.

**33** E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Der Sandmann*. In: Id.: *Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden*. Ed. by Hartmut Steinecke/Wulf Segebrecht with contributions from Gerhard Allroggen et. al. Frankfurt/M. 1985–2004. Vol. 3: *Nachstücke. Klein Zaches. Prinzessin Brambilla. Werke 1816–1820*. Ed. by Hartmut Steinecke with contributions from Gerhard Allroggen. Frankfurt/M. 1985, pp. 11–49, here pp. 27 f. Subsequently referenced in the text with the abbreviation 'H 3' followed by page numbers.

**34** *Ibid.*, p. 24 and p. 28.

**35** Klenner-Otto quoted in Schleyer: *Literatur im Spiegel des Inneren*, p. 17.

**36** *Ibid.*

**37** *Ibid.* The eye motif is one of several that Klenner-Otto adopted, and adapted, from C.W. Rauh. See Niehaus: *Gebilde*, pp. 20–23.

viewer in the picture of Clara, looking outwards as she looks inwards, thus removing her even further from the viewer's focus. In the illustration of Olimpia, on the other hand, the eye is directed to the side, turning from Olimpia to Nathanael, or the other way round, suggesting movement and [attachment](#) between [them](#).



Fig. 17 & 18: *Clara; Olimpia*

In spite of her flirtatiousness and femininity, it is not the case that Klenner-Otto's Olimpia has come alive, leaving behind the mechanical doll. Other illustrations show Olimpia literally in pieces: we can see the different stages of making her in *Die Robote* (Fig. 20), which presents a surrealistic and grotesque jumble of body parts (including a mechanical heart, yet to be attached), and *Olimpia wird gebaut* (Fig. 19), in which she is a work in progress. In *Am Fenster* (Fig. 21) she is almost complete; only her face mask has been taken off and is lying on the table beside the key to wind her up. In this illustration too, however, she is once again facing the viewer, not the window as Clara did; her empty face rendering her uncanny. This is one of the few illustrations in which there is no eye overlooking the scene, and Olimpia's eyes are also not visible, so that both these elements reinforce the visual representation of the sightlessness of the automaton. Although the viewer has to look very carefully to identify him, Nathanael is depicted watching Olimpia from his window in the top left corner. Thus, the motif of vision is maintained, with Nathanael as voyeur, but as he can only see the

back of Olimpia's head, he cannot identify her as a robot. Furthermore, in *Olimpia wird gebaut* as ongoing project and in *Olimpia* as the final product, the red background is constructed from mechanical components and tools: her 'guts'. A comparison of the red background in these illustrations with Clara's picture reveals that the latter is looking out the window towards Olimpia, that is, towards the competition, as if she too, like Nathanael, is captivated. Moreover, Olimpia's hair, her plump arms and her green dress with its wasplike waist retain a not insignificant level of femininity, and the love hearts that decorate her dress are coloured in the same red as her metal components.

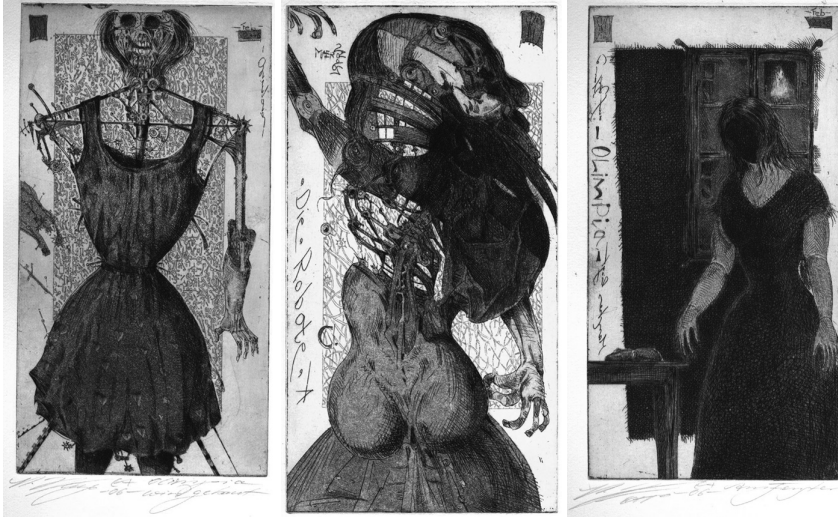


Fig. 19, 20 & 21: *Olimpia wird gebaut; Die Robote; Am Fenster*

*Clara als Totenbraut* (Fig. 22) illustrates Nathanael's frightening vision of Clara in the poem he writes to express his fears and premonitions that Coppelius will destroy their happiness. In this poem, Clara's eyes are removed by Coppelius at the marriage altar and fall onto Nathanael's breast "sengend und brennend" (H 3, p. 31). Klenner-Otto removes Nathanael from the composition, which means that we see Clara as he does; this is his perspective rather than an observer perspective of the scene. Coppelius's name is inscribed in the background, indicating his involvement in manipulating Nathanael's perspective, while the red background recalls the automata he creates (and provides with eyes from living humans). Clara's status as bride is indicated in the illustration by the wreath on her head; as in Nathanael's dream in Hoffmann's story her eyes have been removed, but they remain in the illustration as disembodied objects. In addition, Clara is reduced to a gruesome skeleton, that is, to a personification of death. This can be related directly to the conclusion of Nathanael's poem: "Nathanael blickt in Clara's Augen; aber es ist der Tod, der mit Clara's Augen ihn freundlich anschaut" (ibid.). According to this dream, marriage with her would be a nightmare, even a death knell, for Nathanael, but Klenner-Otto underlines the conviction, here expressed unconsciously by Nathanael, that everything about Clara is a threat to him, not just her eyes. In parallel to Olimpia's internal mechanical workings, *Clara als Totenbraut* reveals Clara's internal structure, in the form of a skeleton, which is no less terrifying.



Fig. 22 & 23: *Clara als Totenbraut; Clara Halbporträt*

Further justification for the interpretation that Clara's character as a whole is an existential threat to Nathanael is given in *Clara Halbporträt* (Fig. 23), in which she, the only character who has a 'happy ending', is drawn as a partial figure on one side, who once again bears minimal resemblance to a beautiful heroine, regarding quizzically the disembodied eye, Coppelius, the winged horse Pegasus and a quill: The disconnect between the two halves of the image make clear that Clara could never be threatened by madness, but also that she lacks the imagination and creativity of her ex-fiancé. As presented in both these – very different – illustrations, she cannot be seen as the 'right' choice for the hero. In other words, Klenner-Otto foregrounds Nathanael's perspective and minimises Hoffmann's narrator's attempts to balance his perspective



with that of Clara. The humour inherent in the Nathanael falling for a lifeless doll as the perfect woman is absent and, despite the disadvantages of being a robot, even a horrifying automaton, Klenner-Otto's Olimpia is by far the livelier and more appealing leading lady.

Nathanael is presented as a terrified boy in *Feuerkreis* (Fig. 24) and as an adult in *Nathanael* (Fig. 25). There are several illustrations of him on top of the tower and jumping from it to his death (e.g. Fig. 26). Coppelius and the disembodied eye dominate these images, which show Nathanael's loss of psychic self-control, or 'madness', and the skeleton presages death. Nathanael's resemblance to Klenner-Otto in all illustrations of this character is marked, and, reflecting the artist's signature style of (self-)portraiture, he appears neither as a sentimentalised child nor as a romantic hero.



Fig. 24, 25 & 26: *Feuerkreis; Nathanael; Turmsturz II*

However, the eponymous hero of the graphic story is the Sandman, not Nathanael, and, whereas Hoffmann's story focuses on Clara and Nathanael in the letters, then on Nathanael, the narrator figure (who pushes himself into the foreground by addressing the reader), and Coppola (who may or may not be the same person as Coppelius), throughout the series of illustrations it is Coppelius who is consistently given the greatest exposure: He is present in just under half. He is always closely linked with the eye motif, and also with the mechanical parts for the automaton, coloured red. Coppola as *doppelgänger* is not featured by name in any illustration, but in *Oke* (Fig. 28) he is portrayed as an optical technician, and in *Spalanzani* (Fig. 29) as a further – deliberately older – alter-ego.



Fig. 27, 28 & 29: *Coppelius*; *Oke*; *Spalanzani*

In addition to Coppelius's increased importance, the Sandman is separated from him by Klenner-Otto; they are juxtaposed in *Der Sandmann und Coppelius* (Fig. 30) as two distinct individuals. Coppelius is clearly the mechanic, with the instruments underneath his cloak linking him to Olympia (see also *Coppelius* (Fig. 27), which identifies him as a creator of automata in human form), while the Sandman is a magician, whose hat and cloak are covered with astrological symbols alongside eyes and a skull, which is, however, arguably less ominous than other skeleton figures in the series (e.g. in *Nathanael*). He embraces Coppelius with tentacles, showing his control over the 'human' character. In *Fütterung* (Fig. 31) and *Der Sandmann II* (Fig. 32), the Sandman is clearly drawn as a fairy-tale character, as in the story told to the young Nathanael by his nurse. He is a paternal, nurturing presence, feeding the clamouring hybrid human-bird babies in the nest, or submitting to their playful antics, and this distracts the viewer's attention away from the fact that he is in fact providing nourishment in the form of eyes. This is a fantastical rather than a gruesome scene that would appeal to a child's imagination. It is clearly the 'real-life' Coppelius who poses a threat in this graphic world, and not the fictional Sandman. In this way Klenner-Otto gives more emphasis than Hoffmann to the negative and destructive energy in the society of which Coppelius is a member and separates it more clearly from the creative and entertaining forces of the imagination, from which the Sandman hails.



Fig. 30, 31 & 32: *Der Sandmann und Coppelius; Fütterung (Frontispiz); Der Sandmann II*

## Conclusion

The kinship that Stephan Klenner-Otto feels with E.T.A. Hoffmann is clear from the illustrations discussed here, and it is also reflected in the fact that the artist continues to produce drawings based on the writer's other works without commission, for his own pleasure. However, the artist produces graphic stories that interpret Hoffmann's tales in a highly personal way, amalgamating himself with the author and his characters, and imbuing each scene with his own aesthetic frames of reference. His starting point across the range of his works, including the Hoffmann illustrations, is the fantastic realism of his teacher, C.W. Rauh, and he includes certain motifs as homages to him (e.g. the snail shells on Krespel's cloak). Like Rauh, Klenner-Otto shares the fascination for and scepticism towards the romantic world of the imagination given expression in the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Jean Paul. In his visual retelling of Hoffmann's stories, he remains true to the author's portrayal of the supernatural and the bourgeois as two sides of the same coin, neither of which can be unequivocally endorsed, however, his perception of both is additionally informed by the benefit of 200 years of psychological and social thinking. Each character and each object is drawn with the same unsentimental pertinacity with which the artist draws his own self-portraits, while being augmented by fantastical, often grotesque distortions that convey Hoffmann's dualisms and being informed by 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century styles and techniques. The result is a mixing of intricate with indistinct detail which makes it impossible to perceive the world without enlisting the imagination, creating collisions between reality and fantasy and producing ambiguities that leave room for the viewer to engage creatively with both E.T.A. Hoffmann's and Klenner-Otto's artistic worlds.

