

**From Prose to Pointe Shoes:
E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King"
in the United States**



Robin Lily Goldberg

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Dedication

To my grandmother
for introducing me to *The Nutcracker*.

To my mother, father and sister
for supporting me through five holiday seasons in *The Nutcracker*.

To Elizabeth Goodenough and Beth Genne
for encouraging me to keep my childhood passions alive.

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Part 1: The Overture

Introduction

I swung my feet back and forth, impatient for the music to start. To create my own rhythm, I tapped my patent leather shoes steadily against the theater seat in front of me. After what seemed like ages to a three-year-old, Tchaikovsky's delicate overture drifted up from the orchestra pit. The heavy velvet curtain quivered, and my feet and breath stood still. As the curtain rose to reveal a snow-covered Christmas village, excitement sprang from my lips. "Oh, boy!" I shouted into the cavernous auditorium. My mother clapped her hand over my mouth, embarrassed yet pleased by my enthusiasm.

Upon realizing my violation of theater etiquette, I scooted silently to the edge of my seat to watch dancers trickle into the winter scene. From that point forward, my eyes never left the stage. From that day onward, my life became inextricably tied to "The Nutcracker."

For the past nineteen years, I have attended at least one *Nutcracker* ballet every December. My mother and grandmother started the tradition by taking me to see the Ruth Page production at the Arie Crown Theatre in Chicago. Meanwhile, they enrolled me in ballet classes where I emulated the dancers I admired onstage. At age six, I strove to earn my own role in *The Nutcracker*. I tried out for countless productions without success. Artistic directors told me I was too young, too shy or "just not good enough." Despite their discouragement, I left each audition determined to find another.

Ironically, my first successful audition found me. In 1995, the Joffrey Ballet moved from New York to Chicago and held *Nutcracker* tryouts just minutes from my home. Since every company within a one hundred mile radius had rejected me, I saw the Joffrey as my only hope. I poured everything into their audition. I even managed to smile for the judges in spite of my nerves. Ultimately, my performance paid off. The Joffrey saw something in me that the other companies had not, and they selected me to play the part of an angel in the snow scene. At age nine, I became part of a renowned production of a celebrated fairy tale.

According to writer Margaret Atwood, "fairy tales can both shape our way of experiencing the world and endow us with the power to restructure our lives" (Tatar xii). From fourth grade until eighth

grade, *The Nutcracker* shaped my life from September through December and gave me goals to work toward during the remaining months of the year. Even as I neared the top of the children's role hierarchy, I never considered retiring from my *Nutcracker* career. Abandoning the ballet would mean abandoning part of my identity. I dreaded the day when I would wake up over five feet two inches tall, the height limit for children's cast members. To my joy and relief, that day never came. According to my mother and father, five foot four and six feet respectively, I willed myself to stop growing to stay in *The Nutcracker*.

Unfortunately, although my height did not hinder me, high school did. In ninth grade my academic responsibilities increased and I had to give up my annual place with the Joffrey. Although I danced and performed with other companies, nothing could compare to my *Nutcracker* days. When I left for college, it seemed as if that part of my life was gone forever. Within the first semester, however, I realized that I did not have to leave *The Nutcracker* behind in my childhood.

As a freshman, I enrolled in a first-year writing seminar titled "Seeding the Future: Children's Literature." I revisited fairy tales from my youth and examined them from an academic perspective. Because I had danced in many of these stories, I decided to explore the transformation of literary fairy tales into ballets for my final project. I relived my early performance experiences and created diaries documenting the lives of two characters I had played: Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, and a party scene guest from *The Nutcracker*.

Through my final project, I developed an interest in how different art forms intertwine to influence people on both individual and universal levels. Hoping to explore this phenomenon further, I declared a concentration in "Arts and Ideas in the Humanities," with specializations in literature and dance history. Over the next three years, I continued along the path that my first-year writing seminar had paved for me. As graduation approached, I decided to fuse my specializations and develop my freshman year fairy tale project into a senior thesis.

I set out hoping to learn how E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" has evolved from a German fairy tale into an American ballet that attracts so many different types of people.

When I was performing in *The Nutcracker*, everyone I told was awed and eager to see the show. I was pleasantly surprised that my non-dancing friends, relatives and neighbors wanted to attend a nearly three-hour ballet. Sometimes I wondered if they acted interested simply to support me, but later I realized that this was not the case. Even after I stopped performing and would mention that I had done *The Nutcracker* in the past, people expressed fond memories of reading the story or seeing the ballet with their families in their youth.

To start my research, I went straight to the source of the *Nutcracker* phenomenon, Hoffmann's 1816 fairy tale. After taking me to see my first *Nutcracker*, my parents bought me a version of the original story illustrated by Maurice Sendak. Although I had read it as a child, rereading it as an adult revealed messages I had overlooked. I found the text so political and gruesome that I became even more curious as to how it has managed to survive and proliferate. Contrary to popular belief, the story goes far deeper than describing a young girl's journey from a Christmas party into a fantasyland of toys and sweets. It condemns the stifling nature of childhood in nineteenth-century Germany and recounts a child's daring fight for freedom.

Hoffmann's controversial presentation of German child-rearing practices impelled me to learn how his contemporaries reacted to his work. A decade after "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" was published, Sir Walter Scott wrote a review of Hoffman's tales in the *Foreign Quarterly Review*. "They are the feverish dreams of a lightheaded patient, to which, though they may sometimes excite by their peculiarity, or surprise by their oddity, we never feel disposed to yield more than a momentary attention" he declared (Zipes 88). After arguing that Hoffmann's work lacked quality and purpose, he concluded that it "ought to be considered less a model of imitation than as affording a warning how the most fertile fancy may be exhausted by the lavish prodigality of its possessor." His comments not only damaged Hoffmann's reputation in England, but persuaded many German critics to adopt similar stances on his writing (Gudde 1007).

Despite Scott's proclamation, many artists *did* imitate "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King." A few years after its initial publication, Alexandre Dumas wrote a more child-friendly, French version

entitled “L’histoire d’un Casse-Noisette,” or “The Story of a Nutcracker” (Anderson 25). In 1892, the Director of the St. Petersburg Theaters in Russia, Ivan Alexander Vsevolozhsky, turned Dumas’ story into a simplified libretto for a ballet. He enlisted French dancer Marius Petipa to choreograph and Russian composer Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky to create the score. Midway through the process, Russian choreographer Lev Ivanov joined the trio. When their *Nutcracker* ballet premiered, it looked unlikely to survive, just like Hoffmann’s literary tale. According to one critic, “the librettist apparently was not able to take full advantage of the subject matter or, perhaps, this story is too fantastic and complicated for pantomime” (Lev Ivanov 141). While Hoffmann’s dark tone unsettled readers, Vsevolozhsky’s light, bland scenario left audiences unsatisfied.

The ballet’s first run lasted only one month, but not everyone felt ready for it to disappear. In his review of *The Nutcracker*, Russian music critic Hermann Laroche wrote:

Say what you will against children’s fairy tales, you cannot deny that we fell in love with them as children and that they have become part of our psyche. You cannot deny that fairy tales contain some of the profoundest ideas that concern mankind. And it is a fact that in our eyes so-called children’s stories are becoming more and more stories for adults, revealing their profound significance. (Volkov 177)

Just as Dumas preserved Hoffmann’s story, the dancers who performed the ballet in St. Petersburg carried Petipa’s and Ivanov’s ballet into the twentieth century. They revived excerpts throughout Europe and brought it to the United States in the 1940s. Since then, artists have spread Hoffmann’s story throughout the country through picture books and ballets.

For nearly two centuries, writers, illustrators, choreographers, composers and costume-designers have integrated their personal experiences into *The Nutcracker* to make social statements about their childhoods. Ironically, many have preserved Hoffmann’s political undertones and gruesome imagery to spotlight the challenges of youth. While some versions are darker than others, they all focus on a young yet powerful protagonist whose insight and imagination enable her to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In her moment of triumph, she defeats an evil Mouse King with her ballet slipper and illuminates the interplay between reality and fantasy.

As I traced the Nutcracker's transformation from its literary to ballet form, I selected five versions that have played significant roles in the story's survival. In 1954, George Balanchine added American sentiments to *The Nutcracker's* European elements, creating a ballet that resonated with audiences in the United States. Since then, his New York City Ballet production has served as a standard to which many others are compared. Although numerous *Nutcrackers* have followed Balanchine's, some stand out as bolder productions than others. Created during the 1980s, both Mark Morris's *The Hard Nut* and the Pacific Northwest Ballet's *Nutcracker* honor Hoffmann's contentious story rather than Dumas' diluted one. *The Hard Nut* features scenery by horror-comic artist Charles Burns and *Nutcracker* showcases sets and costumes by Maurice Sendak. Sendak not only contributed to the ballet, but also revived Hoffmann's tale in its literary form by publishing a *Nutcracker* picture book translated directly from the German text.

The following decade, African American dancer Donald Byrd and Chinese American dancer Michael Mao drew "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" farther away from its European roots. Byrd created *The Harlem Nutcracker* to highlight African American family values, and Mao created *Firecracker* to document his migration from Shanghai to New York. Together, these multicultural ballets have invited minorities to join a mainstream American tradition. While I secured copies of Balanchine's and Morris's ballets and Sendak's book, copyright restrictions prevented me from seeing Sendak's, Byrd's and Mao's works in their stage form. For the Pacific Northwest Ballet's *Nutcracker* and *The Harlem Nutcracker*, I relied upon books that document the ballets with photographs and testimonies from their creators. For *Firecracker*, I turned to reviews and interviews from Mao's domestic and international tours.

With these five productions, I demonstrate how Hoffmann's tale continuously reaches audiences beyond nineteenth-century Germany. By creating *Nutcrackers* that appeal across ages, ethnicities and dance backgrounds, Balanchine, Morris, Sendak, Byrd and Mao have sustained the story's evolution. Along with adding themes germane to modern Americans, they have employed powerful artistic media. As a young musician and writer, Hoffmann described the creative process as a collaboration of different

art forms, a definition that still applies today. With words, illustrations, music, movement, scenery, costumes and stage lighting, contemporary *Nutcracker* creators engage people on multiple levels.

Throughout my paper, I explore *The Nutcracker's* impact on audience members as well as artists. I begin by unearthing the early experiences that compelled Hoffmann to write "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King." I also examine the elements of his tale that enabled it to overcome mixed reviews, develop into ballet and migrate to America. The following sections describe how Balanchine, Morris, Sendak, Byrd and Mao have channeled their childhood experiences into an array of *Nutcrackers* that attract diverse American audiences. Furthermore, I explain how books and ballets act as especially effective vehicles for spreading their stories.

After analyzing modern renditions to show *The Nutcracker's* intergenerational and intercultural effects, I include my own experiences to explain its intrapersonal effect. Like many children and adults, I have met Hoffmann's characters through *Nutcracker* books and ballets. On the other hand, my experience is unique because I have not only watched the ballets, but performed in them as well. As a child, I became the characters that brought the story to life for thousands of people. Although I am not a famed artist, I have helped *The Nutcracker* spread and survive. Along with Balanchine, Morris, Sendak, Byrd and Mao, I illustrate the participatory nature of *The Nutcracker*. Reading the story and watching the ballet have moved us, and we have endeavored to inspire others by creating *Nutcrackers* with widespread appeal. Hoffmann has revived our childhoods, and in return, we have revived his fairy tale.

E.T.A. Hoffmann and “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King”

Despite its 1816 debut as a divisive German fairy tale, E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” has captivated diverse American audiences through multiple media across the United States. Using childhood as a “catalyst for artistic creation,” Hoffman has inspired artists to re-situate his story in the context of their own lives (Cech 32). For nearly two centuries, their renditions of “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” have reached people of all ages, ethnicities and dance backgrounds. Through picture books and ballets, they have transformed a foreign fairy tale into an evolving staple of American culture.

The genius behind this phenomenon, Ernst Theodor Wilhelm Hoffmann, was born on January 24, 1776 into a tension-ridden family that led him to write “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” as a reflection of his repressive childhood. His parents divorced when he was two years old, leaving him with few adult role models. Because Hoffmann’s mother was too weak to take care of him, he was raised by her brother, Otto Wilhelm Doerffer. As an unemployed, middle-aged bachelor, Otto provided little inspiration for his nephew. As Harvey Hewett-Thayer, Hoffmann’s biographer, describes, he “kept an ever-watchful eye upon the growing boy and strove to inculcate in him the same habits of extreme orderliness, the same extravagant regard for traditional conventions and outward conformity that governed his own life” (Hewett-Thayer 6).

Stifled by Otto, Hoffmann preferred spending time with his great-uncle and inspiration for Godfather Drosselmeier, a future *Nutcracker* character. Unfortunately, he lived outside the immediate family and visited too infrequently for Hoffman’s taste (Hewett-Thayer 8). To the young boy’s relief, Otto had one redeeming quality: his musical talent. He gave Hoffmann private music lessons and encouraged him to study the piano, organ and musical theory. At night, Otto would invite the neighbors to bring flutes and horns to accompany him as he played the spinet. According to Hewett-Thayer, “musical evenings formed a constant feature of life in the Doerffer house, affording the small boy an infinite relief from the daily monotony” (Hewett-Thayer 8). These get-togethers provided Hoffmann with more than entertainment. They gave him the stimulation he needed to survive within his dreary home.

At age six Hoffmann enrolled at the German Reformed School of Königsberg, a progressive, Protestant institution. There, he developed a penchant for the arts, an orientation that made him an outcast among his peers. His only friend was Theodor Gottlieb Hippel, a motherless boy whose lively imagination matched Hoffmann's. They read together, made music and transformed themselves into ancient gods and medieval knights in games of pretend. Upon graduating, they followed separate paths. In line with family tradition, Hoffmann pursued a civil service career. In 1795 he wrote to Hippel, "I have to force myself to become a lawyer . . . If it depended upon myself alone, I would become a composer and would have the hope to attain distinction in that field while in the one I have chosen I shall remain an eternal bungler" (Hewett-Thayer 12).

Due to Otto's disciplined upbringing, Hoffmann had strong study skills that served him well as a lawyer. He began working for the Prussian government in Königsberg but taught music lessons on the side because the field of law dissatisfied him. "I should despair without my piano," he declared (Hewett-Thayer 16). At age twenty he moved to Berlin to prepare for his final law examinations. Living in a culturally rich city inspired him to unleash his creative side and after passing his tests with honors, he pursued a career in music (Zipes 94). He changed one of his middle names from Wilhelm to Amadeus in honor of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and wrote as a music critic under pseudonym Johannes Kreisler (*Serapionic Principle* 1). After that he wandered to Posen, Warsaw, Bamberg, Dresden and Leipzig, pursuing jobs in law for financial security and jobs in music for personal fulfillment.

In addition to composing two symphonies and ten operas and founding an orchestra in Warsaw, Hoffmann established himself as a successful writer. His inspiration sprung from a variety of sources. Enlightenment thinkers motivated him to embark on an eternal quest for knowledge while German Romantics helped him develop an idealistic perspective of the creative process. As comparative literature scholar Jack Zipes puts it, Hoffmann believed that "each one of us is to seek as earnestly as possible to capture the exact image, which arises within him, with all its shapes, colors, lights and shadows, and then, when he feels himself ignited by all of this, to transmit this portrayal to the outside world" (Zipes 100).

Hoffmann received significant support from the literary group he organized in Berlin. Starting in 1814, he met with artists at local salons to discuss the links between different forms of creativity. The core members included poet Friedrich de la Motte Fouque, novelist Adelbert von Chamisso, dramatist Karl Wilhelm Salice-Contessa, scholar Julius Hitzig, and actor Ludwig Devrient (Zipes xvii). Hoffmann named them the Serapion Brotherhood after the Polish Saint Serapion, and their encouragement propelled him into a prolific period during which he wrote “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King.” In 1816, he published this tale in a volume that arose from his collaboration with Fouque and Contessa (Hewett-Thayer 98).

While writing with his brotherhood in Berlin, Hoffmann’s ideas solidified into what he called the “Serapion Principle,” a plan for fully experiencing the artistic world:

The Serapion principle is based on a theory of an “ideal sight,” according to which the experienced internal pictures (fantasy and mood), can be made into external pictures (narration). In this product-aesthetics, the clarity of poetic contemplation is distinguished both from the everyday observation of reality and from the artistic manner. Its main point is a simultaneous apprehension of inner and outer cognition: a transformation of the real experienced inner images into outer images by poetic forming of the matter. (Bartha 130)

Hoffmann saw his salon gatherings as proof that joining with artists from different disciplines triggers artistic creation of the highest quality. When people produce art in isolation, it falls short of its potential richness. By grounding their work in their personal *and* shared experiences, it becomes a holistic form of expression that touches audiences on both individual and universal levels.

Instead of presenting his theories in conventional essays, Hoffmann wove them into fairy tales. As a contemporary of the Grimms Brothers, he experimented with the *Kunstmarchen*, or art tale. German writers lauded it as “a supreme method of expressing truth” and maintained that “the essence of divine wisdom that eludes the philosopher in his logical thinking can be grasped by the intuition of simple minds and bodied forth in the form of a *marchen*” (Hewett-Thayer 214). Hoffmann embraced this style to revolutionize the fairy-tale genre and to help readers see the world in a new light. According to Zipes, he strove to “express his dissatisfaction with the neatly trimmed bourgeois conventions of his time and the overly rational and disciplinary way in which children were being raised” (Zipes 88).

With this goal in mind, Hoffmann conceived “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King.” Because he did not have children of his own until two years before he died, his only experience with youths came from spending time with the Hitzigs, a neighboring upper-class family (Hewett-Thayer 240). He served as an uncle to the children, Marie and Fritz, and brought them toys and fantastical stories to enliven their dreary days. Mr. and Mrs. Hitzig controlled their children’s lives to an unhealthy degree and discouraged them from dreaming. Having suffered a stifling childhood himself, Hoffmann wrote “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” to condemn the Hitzig’s childrearing practices and to stress the importance of the imagination.

The story begins at a Christmas party in Nuremberg, a German city famous for its toymakers. The host family’s name, Stahlbaum, means “steel tree,” implying that rigidity pervades their household (Zipes 100). The protagonist, Marie, falls in love with an odd yet kind-looking Nutcracker sitting under the tree, and her Godfather Drosselmeier gives it to her as a gift. Then her mischievous brother, Fritz, steals the doll to crack giant nuts and breaks his jaw. After the party, Marie stays awake to comfort her Nutcracker. In the middle of the night, an army of mice invades the living room, attacking them from every angle. Her doll comes to life and leads Fritz’s toy soldiers into battle against the Mouse King. Desperate to protect the Nutcracker, Marie hurls her shoe at the King and he disappears.

The next morning, Marie awakes wounded and ill from the battle. To distract her from the pain, Godfather Drosselmeier tells her “The Story of the Hard Nut.” Marie enters the world of Princess Pirlipat, a beautiful baby whose parents go to extreme lengths to protect her from Madam Mouserinks, an evil rat that lives in the castle. When the King and Queen lure Madam Mouserinks’ relatives into mousetraps, she seeks revenge by biting their daughter and transforming her into a hideous-looking infant. The King and Queen employ an astronomer and the royal wizard, Christian Elias Drosselmeier, to find a cure for their daughter. Upon noticing Pirlipat’s fondness for nuts, they realize that she must eat the kernel of the world’s hardest nut, the nut Krakatuk, to restore her beauty. Drosselmeier finds the nut and brings his strong nephew to the castle to crack it. Pirlipat eats the kernel and becomes lovely again,

but Drosselmeier's nephew accidentally steps on Madam Mouserinks' tail. She transforms him into an ugly Nutcracker and Pirlipat banishes him from the castle in disgust. In order to regain his true form, he must kill Madam Mouserink's son, the Mouse King, and win the heart of a young lady.

"The Story of the Hard Nut" convinces Marie that her Nutcracker is her godfather's nephew, and she resolves to help him reverse Madam Mouserinks' curse. When the Mouse King returns, he threatens to kill the Nutcracker unless Marie gives him her most precious belongings. She sacrifices her possessions and gives the Nutcracker the sword that enables him to defeat the Mouse King once and for all. As a reward, the Nutcracker takes her to the Land of Dolls, the Christmas wood, and Candytown, a city filled with people from every country of the world. When Marie returns from her journey, she describes her adventure to her parents and they scold her for her foolish fantasies. A few days later, Godfather Drosselmeier visits with his nephew, assuring Marie not only that he is her Nutcracker, but that she has helped him resume his human form. Ultimately, they marry and move to the Nutcracker's kingdom, where Marie reigns as queen.

Throughout "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King," Hoffmann vilifies the strict Mr. and Mrs. Stahlbaum and glorifies their daughter as an imaginative agent of change. As Zipes puts it, his story is about "igniting the imagination of Marie so that she can act and realize her inner dreams and desires in opposition to a conventional and prescriptive upbringing" (Zipes 100). In order to emphasize the restrictiveness of her childhood, Hoffmann starts the story in a solemn tone: "For the entire twenty-fourth of December, the children of Medical Officer Stahlbaum were not permitted to step inside the intermediary room, much less the magnificent showcase next door" (Zipes 101). Instead of starting with the traditional "once upon a time," he opens with dry description of a nineteenth-century bourgeois family preparing their German Christmas celebration. Although this technique does not make the first paragraph particularly lively, it strengthens the story by emphasizing the stifling atmosphere in which Marie grows up.

According to Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, a long-time admirer of Hoffmann, “the bourgeois mentality or philistinism is essentially the inability to rise above the absolute reality of time and space” (Bartha 132). In “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” Hoffmann mocks bourgeois attitudes by imbuing adult characters with philistine qualities. On Christmas Eve, Mr. and Mrs. Stahlbaum forbid their children from entering the family parlor and force them to “huddle together in a corner of the little back room” (Hoffmann 1). Later, when Marie tells her parents about saving the Nutcracker from the Mouse King, they refuse to believe her story. Instead, they diagnose her with “wound fever,” prescribe her horrid medicine, and confine her to bed without acknowledging her imaginative capacity (Hoffmann 35). The adults in “The Story of the Hard Nut” are even more oppressive than the Stahlbaums. Hoffmann presents the King and Queen as greedy and overly protective. Their primary concerns are eating fatty sausages and preserving their daughter’s beauty. The Queen orders two sentries to guard Princess Pirlipat’s door and two ladies-in-waiting to stand beside her cradle (Hoffmann 42). She also requires six nurses to sit in her bedroom, stroking tomcats to scare away any mice.

Marie counters the adults’ stubborn mentality with a shrewder one. In contrast to most children’s authors of his time, Hoffmann suggests that the relationship between age and wisdom is not directly proportional. The Stahlbaums and the King and Queen are so set in their ways that they instantly reject any challenge to convention. Marie, on the other hand, believes that there is a world more beautiful than the black-and-white one she has been raised in. As she journeys from her family’s dull parlor into the battlefield and ultimately to the Nutcracker’s kingdom, she proves that dreamers do discover better worlds.

Despite Hoffmann’s exaltation of Marie, nineteenth-century critics deemed “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” inappropriate for children. In 1845, an article in the *Edinburgh Review* claimed that “The parent vice of German literature is want of distinct purpose and as consequence, want of masculine character, and chastened style” (Gudde 1008). Hoffmann published “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” at a time when adults viewed fairy tales with suspicion. They feared that fantastical stories would trigger a *lesesucht*, or reading addiction, that would seize youths and fill them with useless or terrifying

thoughts (Zipes 19). This widespread concern forced the Brothers Grimm to tame their tales and tailor them to children. Hoffmann, on the other hand, refused to censor his story.

Using irony, Hoffmann demonstrates how grisly fairy tales can be geared toward children as well as adults. When Drosselmeier sits down to tell Marie “The Story of the Hard Nut,” Mrs. Stahlbaum says, “I do hope, dear Judge, that this story won’t be as gruesome as your stories usually are.” Drosselmeier replies, “Oh no, dear lady. On the contrary, this is a fairy story.” Then he proceeds to describe how Madam Mouserinks attacks Pirlipat and leaves her in a horrific state: “Instead of the angelic red-and-white face framed in golden curls, they saw an ungainly fat head on a tiny shrunken little body; the azure-blue eyes had been changed into staring green popeyes, and the sweet little mouth had become a gash stretching from ear to ear” (Hoffmann 43). Just as Hoffman’s political tinges characterize the stern Stahlbaums, his ghastly passages characterize the evil Madam Mouserinks. Together, they elucidate why Marie dreams of a world beyond her immediate surroundings. Without these controversial elements, Hoffmann’s protagonist would have no motivation, and his story would have no force to drive its plot.

Like other techniques that at first glance make the story unfriendly to children, the complex narrative structure of “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” has an essential purpose. Hoffmann uses polyphonic narrative perspectives to engage audiences with his text. As Hilda Brown, an Oxford scholar of German Romanticism, explains:

The reader is being invited to participate in a seemingly open-ended process of inquiry and discovery and, as it were, to make his own contribution to the debate. In a sense it might even seem that Hoffmann is setting out deliberately to develop his readers’ critical faculties by presenting alternative ways in which to approach a text. (*Serapionic Principle* 6)

By evoking different narrative voices, Hoffmann encourages audiences to take an active role in the story. Although his shifts in narration challenge readers young and old, they help them relate to different characters and see connections between the physical realities of their lives and Marie’s magical experiences.

Hoffmann writes the first chapter in the third person omniscient. He describes Marie and Fritz waiting outside the parlor before their holiday party in an impersonal tone. By the second chapter, he

warms up to his readers and addresses them directly: “Kind reader or listener-Fritz, Theodore, Ernst, or whatever your name may be—I must ask you to think as hard as you can of your last Christmas table piled high with gifts” (Hoffmann 6). As the stories progresses he asks them to revive less pleasant memories. To help them identify with Marie when she becomes injured in battle he writes, “If any of my esteemed readers or listeners has ever chanced to cut himself on glass, he will know how painful it is and how wretchedly long such cuts take to heal” (Hoffmann 60). Whether encouraging readers to draw positive or negative recollections into the story, he involves them throughout the lengthy tale.

Halfway through the book, Drosselmeier becomes the narrator as he tells Marie “The Story of the Hard Nut.” This tale enables Marie to connect fantasy with reality, and to see her Nutcracker as Drosselmeier’s nephew: “As clever Marie pondered all this, thinking of Nutcracker and his subjects as living and breathing, it seemed to her that they ought really to live and breathe.” She turns to her doll and says, “Even if you can’t move or say the least little word to me . . . count on my help if you need it” (Hoffmann 61). After Drosselmeier concludes “The Story of the Hard Nut,” Hoffmann completes the narration cycle to emphasize the rewards Marie receives for believing in the Nutcracker: “Marie is believed to be still the queen of a country where sparkling Christmas woods, transparent marzipan castles, in short, the most wonderful things, can be seen if you have the right sort of eyes for it” (Hoffmann 99). Despite danger and discouragement, Marie stands by her convictions. To this day, her journey from a confining home to the Nutcracker’s utopian kingdom proves the power of the imagination.

Part 2: From German Pages to American Stages

A French Fairy Tale

“The Nutcracker and the Mouse King’s” strength lies not only in its inspiring heroine, but also in its ability to speak to artists of different origins and disciplines. In 1845 Alexandre Dumas published a French adaptation of Hoffmann’s fairy tale called “L’histoire d’un Casse-Noisette,” or “The Story of a Nutcracker” (Zipes 103). Since the eighteenth century, France had been a literary cultural center where the fairy tale genre flourished. While German writers like Hoffmann wrote fairy tales to challenge philistinism and absolutism, French writers like Charles Perrault wrote them to glorify the aristocracy and to acquaint children with national customs (Zipes 19). Historian Robert Darnton explained:

Where the French tales tend to be realistic, earthy, bawdy, and comical, the German [tales] veer off toward the supernatural, the poetic, the exotic, and the violent. Of course, cultural differences cannot be reduced to a formula-French craftiness versus German cruelty—but the comparisons make it possible to identify the peculiar inflection that the French gave to their stories, and their way of telling stories provides clues about their way of viewing the world. (Tatar 356)

Although Dumas greatly admired Hoffmann, he did not emulate all of his techniques in “The Story of a Nutcracker.” Dumas wrote to entertain rather than to posit his thoughts on social norms, so his tale lacked the depth, irony and complexity of the original. He excised Hoffmann’s political themes and gruesome imagery, and catered exclusively to children. He changed the name of the Stahlbaum family to Silberhaus, which means “silver house” and has pleasanter connotations than “steel tree” (Zipes 105). He also downplayed Marie’s development throughout the story and added emphasis on the final wedding.

Nevertheless, Dumas did preserve Hoffmann’s focus on children’s insight. In spite of several obstacles, their German and French Maries keep their dreams and curiosities alive. Hoffmann’s closing sentence reads:

Marie supposedly is still queen of a land where you can see sparkling Christmas Forests everywhere as well as translucent Marzipan Castles—in short, the most splendid and most wondrous things, if you only have the right eyes to see them with. (Zipes 105)

Dumas writes:

At this hour, Marie is still queen of the gorgeous kingdom, where we see brilliant Christmas Forests everywhere, rivers of orangeade, orgeat, and attar of roses, diaphanous palaces of sugar finer than snow and more transparent than ice. And finally, all kinds of magnificent and miraculous things—provided your eyes are sharp enough to see them. (Zipes 105)

Although Dumas' passage contains more flourishes than Hoffmann's, they both accentuate the eyes. Their Maries symbolizes children who look beyond societal prescriptions and find themselves in utopian worlds. More than any other element, this emphasis on the power of a youthful vision has survived in subsequent adaptations.

A Russian Ballet

From France "The Story of a Nutcracker" migrated to Russia, the ballet capitol of Europe in the late nineteenth century and the future home of the first *Nutcracker* ballet. Two years after Dumas published "The Story of a Nutcracker," French choreographer Marius Petipa accepted a position with the Maryinsky Ballet in St. Petersburg (Anderson 16). The Russian government ran the Maryinsky and employed Petipa not only as a choreographer, but also as a diplomat. His productions had to target the Royal family, Russian nobles, and wealthy "balletomanes" who attended the theater "religiously" (Anderson 18). Consequently, his ballets had a refined, conservative flavor.

In 1881, Ivan Alexander Vsevolozhsky became the Director of the St. Petersburg Theaters and allied with Petipa. As a writer, painter and costume-designer, he shared Hoffmann's fondness for artistic collaboration. He also shared Dumas' and Petipa's Francophile tastes. In 1890, he staged *The Sleeping Beauty*, based upon Charles Perrault's French fairy tale (Anderson 15). Vsevolozhsky wrote the libretto, Petipa choreographed the ballet and Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky composed the music. The production met with such success that the three artists decided to collaborate again. Two years later, they staged *The Nutcracker*, based upon Dumas' French version of Hoffmann's German tale.

Unlike *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker* did not receive instant acclaim. In *The Theatre World* Konstantin Skalkovsky wrote: "Generally, speaking, *The Nutcracker* was staged mainly for children; for the dancers it contains very little; for art-exactly nothing" (Anderson 51). Although Dumas had already tamed Hoffmann's original story, Vsevolozhsky diluted it even more. He removed "The Story of the Hard Nut" and condensed the tale into four scenes; the Silberhaus' mansion, the Nutcracker's battleground, a snowy pine wood, and Confiturenborg, or the Land of Sweets. When the ballet premiered

on December 6, 1892 at the Maryinsky Theater, audiences directed sharp criticism at Vsevolozhsky's libretto (*The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov* 138). They claimed that he subdued it to satisfy Russian theatergoers. Vsevolozhsky's successor, Vladimir Telyakovsky, wrote: "The principal goals toward which he strove were to please the court and not to be taken in by any extremes" (*Tchaikovsky's Ballets* 95).

In contrast to Hoffmann, Vsevolozhsky begins the protagonist's journey on a positive note. Hoffmann's opening scene reads:

For the entire twenty-fourth of December, the children of Medical Officer Stahlbaum were not permitted to step inside the intermediary room, much less the magnificent showcase next door" (Zipes 101).

Unlike the Stahlbaum's house, the Silberhaus' home has a magical, child-centered atmosphere.

ACT I, SCENE 1: *A hall in the house of the president, Silberhaus, where relatives and guests are preparing a luxuriously decorated Christmas tree for the children. The Silberhaus's children, Clara and Fritz, and also their little guests, who are let into the room, feast their eyes on the brilliant spectacle, receive presents that have been prepared for them, prance and dance around with the playthings they have been given (Tchaikovsky: A Biographical & Critical Study 337)*

In the first act, the protagonist, called Clara instead of Marie, receives the Nutcracker doll from her godfather, and saves the Nutcracker from the Mouse King. Then she follows him into a snow-covered forest where he transforms into a human prince. In the second act, they travel to the Land of Sweets where they enjoy a divertissement of dances representing delicacies from different countries. Because Clara proceeds from her comfortable home into the battle scene, and then directly into the lands of snow and sweets, she never sees the horrors of Princess Pirlipat's childhood. She has far fewer gruesome encounters than Hoffmann's Marie, although she does face the Mouse King in battle. To highlight Clara as a yet triumphant protagonist, Vsevolozhsky preserves the original scene in which she defeats him with her shoe.

From the start, Tchaikovsky spotted weaknesses in the scenario. While composing the score he wrote to his brother Modeste to complain: "The subject of *Casse-Noisette* pleases me very little. I am very tired and in reality suffer a great deal. Is it wise to accept the offer of the Imperial Theaters? My brain is empty" (Anderson 29). In addition to a lackluster libretto, personal problems plagued

Tchaikovsky while he worked. In 1891, his primary financial supporter ran out of money and his sister died unexpectedly (Anderson 33). These setbacks sent him into a series of nervous breakdowns and almost convinced him to abandon his project.

Fortunately, Tchaikovsky had an affinity for the ballet that enabled him to persevere. He had grown up reading Dumas, and although he disliked the content of Vsevolozhsky's story, it revived memories of his favorite childhood author (Volkov 43). Tchaikovsky's early adulthood also mirrored Hoffmann's, and he supported his belief in following creative passions. Both artists had been forced into law school by relatives, but eventually rebelled to pursue careers in music (Anderson 29). Furthermore, Tchaikovsky identified with Hoffmann's protagonist. Just as Mr. and Mrs. Stahlbaum disrespected Marie's fantasies, music critics slighted Tchaikovsky's scores. Balanchine once said: "Tchaikovsky is the greatest Russian composer. But you could never get all Russians to agree to that . . . Tchaikovsky was never fashionable" (Volkov 32). The Russians thought his music was not Russian enough, and the Germans thought it was too crude.

During a time of trauma and discouragement, Tchaikovsky turned to composing *The Nutcracker* as an emotional outlet. By March 1892, he had finished the score (Anderson 39). Petipa on the other hand, did not complete his role in the collaboration. Mere months before the premiere, he fell ill and left his assistant, Lev Ivanov, in charge of carrying out his choreographic plans. Some historians argue that Petipa abandoned his work due to fear of failure rather than disease. In 1909 one *Nutcracker* reviewer wrote: "Thinking himself less capable than Tchaikovsky and Vsevolozhsky to penetrate the reveries of children, Petipa, scenting failure, transferred the production of the ballet to L.I. Ivanov, his self-sacrificing, disinterested assistant" (*The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov* 136). No matter what prompted Petipa to leave, his disappearance precipitated criticism from the public.

Reviewers claimed that *The Nutcracker's* choreography was an awkward mixture of Petipa's plans and Ivanov's execution. Although Ivanov had talent, Petipa's stipulations hampered his final product. Soviet writer and librettist Yury Slonimsky wrote: "Here [in *Nutcracker*] he was deprived of the possibility of 'growing accustomed' to the extremely complex music, to seek for a time, patiently, the key

to its correct interpretation. There was little room for his original choreographic gift—Petipa’s half-finished work bound him hand and foot” (*Tchaikovsky’s Ballets* 203). In spite of this, Ivanov managed to produce some successful pieces, including the Waltz of the Snowflakes. Using simple steps like *pas de basques* and swift runs, he created complex patterns for a *corps de ballet* of over sixty women. He also tailored his movements to Tchaikovsky’s notes. Both elements begin gradually, intensify halfway through, and ultimately slow to a stop like a dying blizzard (*Tchaikovsky’s Ballets* 213). According to Alexandre Shiryaev, Slominsky’s colleague: “Bearing in mind the dramatic defects of this programme, one must admit that Ivanov unquestionably succeeded with the production of *The Nutcracker*. The individual numbers Ivanov stated were masterpieces in the full sense of the word” (*The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov* 135).

Ivanov disproved not only the claim that *The Nutcracker* had disjointed choreography, but also the allegation that its acts were unrelated. Act I consisted primarily of pantomime and Act II involved a series of separate national dances. Only Clara, the Nutcracker and Drosselmeier appeared in both halves, and critics argued that they failed to provide enough cohesion. Dancer Nikolay Solyannikov noted:

They attempted to make a somewhat simpler and more graphic ballet for children, but the absence of central danced parts for the ballerina and first danseur, and also the absence of a story line, [made the ballet] fall apart after the first scene into a series of little pictures and divertissement numbers, and was reflected in a fateful way on the success of the performance. (*The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov* 135)

What Solyannikov failed to realize was that by distinguishing the Act I and Act II settings, Ivanov preserved a staple of the original tale. According to Hewett-Thayer, “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” demonstrates the “perpetual conflict between the ideal and the real, the infinite and the finite, of the search for a dreamed-of paradise, and the finding of it, perhaps only in another world” (Hewett-Thayer 217). With contrasting representations of the Stahlbaum’s home, Princess Pirlipat’s castle and the Nutcracker’s kingdom, it proves that reality and fantasy both shape children’s lives. For Hoffmann and Ivanov, juxtaposing these realms was essential.

Dancing Westward

Due to its initial reviews, the original *Nutcracker* ballet had a fleeting first run in Russia. One month after its premiere, the Maryinsky cut it from the performance schedule because it left audiences unsatisfied. Although *The Nutcracker's* reputation fell short of *The Sleeping Beauty's*, several dancers saw potential in its fusion of fantasy, music and dancing and refused to let it die. On December 13, 1909, one month after Vsevolozhsky's death, Nikolay Sergeyev staged a revival of *The Nutcracker* (*The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov* 148). Ten years later, Alexander Gorsky, a pupil of Petipa's, mounted another version in Moscow for the Bolshoi Ballet (Anderson 86). Because Gorsky's production debuted just after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, it suffered from economic constraints and lasted only briefly.

Devastation from the revolution prompted dancers to take *The Nutcracker* elsewhere. They began by transporting excerpts rather than the full production. Throughout the 1920s, Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova toured the world performing a *pas de deux* to Tchaikovsky's Waltz of the Snowflakes that included Ivanov's original choreography (Fisher 20). Other Russian dancers joined Serge Diaghilev's innovative French company, the *Ballet Russes*, and performed medleys of dances from *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* throughout Europe. In 1934, Sergeyev brought *The Nutcracker* westward to London. With an impressive memory and scores of Russian classics recorded in the Stepanov system of dance notation, he staged it for the Vic-Wells Ballet (Anderson 93). Like Petipa's production, it featured adult professionals like Alicia Markova alongside child performers.

After Diaghilev's death in 1929, his admirers created the *Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo*, a multinational company that preserved his interdisciplinary artistic vision (Anderson 105). Former Maryinsky member Alexandra Federova developed a condensed version of *The Nutcracker* for the new group. Although she truncated the party scene and eliminated the battle, she used Ivanov's choreography and followed Petipa's plan by incorporating local children into the cast. In 1940, the *Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo* brought *The Nutcracker* to the United States. It debuted on October 17th at New York City's 51st Street Theater, starring Markova as the Sugar Plum Fairy (Anderson 105). With its straightforward

story and cosmopolitan vibe, the *Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo's Nutcracker* appealed greatly to Americans.

Four years later, William Christensen set *The Nutcracker* on the San Francisco Ballet. With the help of two members of the *Ballet Russes*, he produced the first full-length production in the United States. Alexandra Danilova, a former Sugar Plum Fairy, helped Christensen replicate Ivanov's steps as precisely as possible. George Balanchine, who had performed in the Maryinsky' *Nutcracker* as a child, encouraged him to take a more experimental approach. "Let him do his own choreography," he advised Danilova (Anderson 112). Together, they helped Christensen create a *Nutcracker* that honored its Russian roots and asserted its new American identity.

Part 3: *The Nutcracker's* American Identities

George Balanchine and *The Nutcracker*

As a Russian choreographer who had recently immigrated to the United States, George Balanchine saw *The Nutcracker* as the ticket to attracting Americans to ballet and to establishing himself as an artist in a new country. After assisting Christensen with his West Coast production, he developed his own in the East. In *Nutcracker Nation*, dance historian Jennifer Fisher writes: “As a godfather, he helped the immigrant *Nutcracker* establish a stable home in New York. After that, it was just a matter of time before the ballet found even more routes to becoming a naturalized citizen” (Fisher 39). Although Balanchine emulated Hoffmann by channeling his personal childhood experiences into Marie’s, his *Nutcracker* strayed beyond his German setting. With a blend of European and American elements, his ballet united theatergoers throughout the States.

Both Balanchine’s and Hoffmann’s relationships to *The Nutcracker* were rooted in their childhoods. Music shaped Balanchine’s youth even more than Hoffmann’s. His father worked as a composer and his sister played the violin. At age five, Balanchine learned to play the piano like Hoffmann. Four years later, his mother took his sister to audition for the Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg and encouraged Balanchine to try out as well. Out of one hundred fifty boys, he was one of only eight selected (*Balanchine’s New and Complete Stories* 487).

At first, Balanchine detested life as a dance student. Because he had never seen ballet, he had no appreciation for this disciplined art form. He missed his family terribly and ran away to his Aunt Nadia’s house, but she immediately returned him to the school. He also loathed his peers who nicknamed him “Rat” for his sniffing habit (Taper 38). Ironically, this name foreshadowed a part he would play in *The Nutcracker* years later. Balanchine’s first performance at the Maryinsky Theater reversed his negative attitude toward ballet. In his second year, he played the role of a cupid in *The Sleeping Beauty* and realized he was destined to dance. The combination of Petipa’s intricate choreography and Tchaikovsky’s rich score brought the fairy tale to life and convinced him that the rigors of ballet training were worth the joy and magic of performing.

Unfortunately, Balanchine immersed himself in dance shortly before the Russian Revolution. When the Imperial School closed in 1917, he moved in with his Aunt Nadia in case it reopened. He never saw his parents again (Taper 46). Although the Bolshevik commissioner for education reopened the school shortly after, an unsettling political situation tainted Balanchine's last years there. As Balanchine's biographer, Bernard Taper, describes it, the environment was "an incongruous and unresolved mixture of the old and the new—of royal modes and revolutionary ferment, of classes in the elegant, aristocratic and thoroughly artificial conception of movement known as ballet carried on amid near—starvation conditions on behalf now of Marxist materialism and the proletarian masses" (Taper 49). This dissonance both disturbed and intrigued Balanchine, and its influence eventually appeared in his choreography.

When Balanchine graduated from the school in 1921, he joined the Soviet Ballet and enrolled in the Petrograd Conservatory to study musical theory and piano (Taper 50). Like Hoffmann and Sendak, he felt an urge to engage himself in multiple art forms simultaneously. Three years later, he left Russia to join Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* in France. Diaghilev believed that "a choreographer should be cultivated in all the arts," so Balanchine spent time surrounded by painters, musicians and costume designers (Taper 77). When Diaghilev died in 1929, the *Ballets Russes* disbanded. Balanchine started his own experimental company, *Les Ballets*, but met with little success.

Meanwhile, Lincoln Kirstein, the wealthy cofounder of the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art, had his eye on Balanchine. He invited him to establish a ballet school in the United States and develop a style of dance unique to the country. Kirstein viewed European ballet as antiquated and sought to refresh the tradition in America. Balanchine accepted his offer and arrived in New York in 1933. He opened the School of American Ballet the following year (Taper 152). Despite a lack of support for the arts during the Great Depression, Balanchine thrived in his new home: "America has its own spirit—cold, luminous, hard as light. Good American dancers can express clean emotion in a manner that might almost be termed angelic" (*By George* 13). Although he trained people with little or no exposure to

classical ballet, they moved with agility and athleticism, elements that he highlighted in his new choreography.

After collaborating with institutions ranging from the Metropolitan Opera to Hollywood, Balanchine founded the New York City Ballet in 1948. With his own company, he finally felt stable enough to set *The Nutcracker*, a ballet he had longed to do since his youth. Ever since performing in *The Sleeping Beauty* at the Maryinsky, he had a fondness for the works of Petipa, Ivanov and Tchaikovsky. Because he eventually earned prestigious roles like the Mouse King and the Prince in *The Nutcracker*, he had a particularly strong personal connection to this ballet. Petipa's and Ivanov's pieces reflected "delight in the classic dance for its own sake, the elegant grace of deportment of the dancers, the conception of ballet primarily as a means of giving pleasure and not as a vehicle for transmitting a portentous message" described Taper (Taper 57). Because Balanchine believed that dance should be enjoyable above all else, their choreography suited his goals perfectly.

Balanchine also cited the "artistic abandon and spontaneity" of the score as a factor that drew him to *The Nutcracker* (Volkov 12). He admired Tchaikovsky for challenging classical canons and encouraging innovation among composers and choreographers. Like Diaghilev and members of the Serapion Brotherhood, Tchaikovsky promoted the synthesis of the arts. Because he understood how to integrate music and movement, his compositions were ideal for ballets. Balanchine once said:

Ballet is not dancing alone: it is a composite of music and dancing. The relation of dancing to music is not a literal one. It is not a matter of plotless interpretation, a note-by-note, bar-by-bar rhythmic picture of music. On the contrary, it is a complement to the music. (*Balanchine's New and Complete Stories* 430)

Additionally, Balanchine and Tchaikovsky shared a respect for childhood. According to Balanchine, "Tchaikovsky remained a child all his life, he felt things like a child. He liked the German idea that man in his highest development approaches the child. Tchaikovsky loved children as themselves, not as future adults. Children contain maximum possibilities. Those possibilities often do not develop, they are lost" (Volkov 183).

Because these sentiments run throughout Hoffmann's fairy tales, both artists latched on to *The Nutcracker*. While growing up in St. Petersburg, Balanchine saw the Russians embrace Hoffmann's

Romanticism and the Germans reject his critical tone: “The story was written by Hoffmann against society. He said that society, the grownups, really have no imagination, and that they try to suppress the imagination of children. In Germany, they were very strict—no nonsense. They didn’t understand that nonreality is the real thing” (Anderson 211). *The Nutcracker* not only reminded Balanchine of his Maryinsky days but also supported his belief in the importance of imagination.

When Balanchine brought the ballet to the United States, he embarked on the restructuring process carefully, aiming to preserve the most meaningful Russian elements while showcasing his new American style. To achieve this effect, he took the Petipa and Ivanov steps ingrained in his muscle memory and presented them with an intensified flair. His *Nutcracker* premiered on February 2, 1954 at the New York City Center for Music and Drama, starring Maria Tallchief and Nicholas Magallanes in the grand *pas de deux*. Alberta Grant and Paul Nickel played Marie and the Nutcracker, paving the way for students from the School of American Ballet to perform alongside professional dancers (Anderson 121). Edwin Denby, an American poet and dance critic, noted that they exhibited “an easy spontaneity with an old-fashioned look” (*Dancers, Buildings and People in the Streets* 96).

In the first act, Balanchine placed special emphasis on the tree, his favorite symbol of a Russian Christmas. He strove to replicate the Maryinsky’s tree, which was decorated with gold angels and silver tinsel and rose high above hundreds of presents. Although he had only forty thousand dollars to create his *Nutcracker*, he spent twenty-five thousand dollars on the tree (Zuckerman). Today, the New York City Ballet’s tree grows from twelve to forty feet onstage and weighs one ton (George Balanchine Trust).

Balanchine modeled the second act after another staple of Russian culture, Eliseyevsky’s sweetshop in St. Petersburg. When Marie and the Nutcracker arrive in the Land of Sweets, they are treated to a spectacle of dances inspired by delicious foods from around the world: hot chocolate from Spain, coffee from Arabia, tea from China, candy canes from Russia and marzipan from France. Balanchine took special care to replicate the candy cane dance after the one he had done with the Maryinsky. Tamara Geva, a Russian ballerina who followed Balanchine to the *Ballets Russes* and then to

America, boasted that “he performed the hoop dance in *The Nutcracker* as I’ve never seen it done before or since. He never touched the ground, flashing in and out of the hoop” (Mason 12).

Although Balanchine paid tribute to the Maryinsky production, he also took advantage of his freedom to innovate in America. Ever since graduating from the Imperial Ballet School and seeing a show choreographed by Kasyan Goleizovsky, he had desired to challenge certain ballet traditions. Like Hoffmann and later *Nutcracker* creators, he felt limited by cultural conventions. Both Balanchine and Goleizovsky had studied dance in St. Petersburg, but Goleizovsky went on to join the Bolshoi Ballet. After just a few years, he became frustrated by their superficial, standardized style and established his own school in Moscow (Taper 59). When Balanchine saw his company in Petrograd in 1921, their bare feet and revealing costumes shocked and inspired him. “Seeing Goleizovsky was what first gave me the courage to try something different on my own,” he confessed (Taper 61). In Russia, Balanchine received apprehensive reactions similar to those that Hoffmann faced in Germany. Critics considered him a threat because he fused traditional steps with movements taken from cabarets, acrobatic acts and Isadora Duncan, an eclectic approach similar to the one Mark Morris took with his *Nutcracker* thirty years later (Taper 68).

Fortunately, Americans accepted Balanchine’s experimental dancing more enthusiastically than the Russians. As he developed his *Nutcracker*, he found numerous ways to make it his own. “Balanchine’s dancers like to use their fine speed and sharpness, their rhythmic flexibility and musical ear; so he gave them the old steps with swifter displacements, in rhythms that are fresh, or in new virtuoso combinations,” Denby observed (Anderson 121). He made the most drastic changes in the Sugar Plum Fairy’s *pas de deux*. A *pas de deux* typically consists of four parts: a slow adagio, a male solo variation, a female variation, and a lively coda. Balanchine eliminated the male solo and placed the Sugar Plum Fairy’s at the beginning of Act II. He also added an impressive stage illusion to the adagio. When the Sugar Plum Fairy assumes an arabesque, she places her foot on a moveable disc so that as she balances in place, she appears to glide across the floor. “The effect was magical, and to this day audiences are

thrilled and baffled by the seemingly impossible feat,” said Suzanne Farrell, a former Sugar Plum Fairy of the New York City Ballet (Farrell 100).

Balanchine’s restructuring of the *pas de deux* underscored his respect for women. Because he viewed ballet as a feminine form, he honored women by casting them as queens and their male partners as humble consorts. In *The Nutcracker*, he cuts the male variation and lets the Sugar Plum Fairy steal the show. Unlike Ivanov’s Sugar Plum, Balanchine’s performs a series of unpartnered pirouettes to prove her skill and independence. “Ballet is a woman,” Balanchine declared. “And all my life I have dedicated my art to her” (*By George* 22).

In addition to women, Balanchine expressed his high regard for family in his *Nutcracker*. Unlike Hoffmann, he did not suffer under strict parental figures. Because he spent most of his youth away from his mother and father, he glorified the family experiences he never had. While fulfilling his personal goals with his *Nutcracker*, he also addressed the needs of audience members. During the 1950s, the Cold War dominated international politics and sent Americans searching for comforting domestic images. Balanchine fed them “home and hearth” elements and loving scenes between parents and children (Fisher). Fathers danced with their daughters, and everyone enjoyed edible treats. The Christmas Eve feast and the sweets in Act II promised prosperity and abundance. In his review of the 1954 premiere, Anatole Chujoy wrote:

At a time when the whole world seems on the verge of falling apart, at a time when nearly every facet of our life is being reduced to a state of primitivism, from which one can hardly see a return to a higher civilization, Balanchine’s creation of a classic ballet, in all its well-ordered values, is a reason for hope and joy. (Anderson 109)

Balanchine’s most notable domestic addition occurs as the party scene transitions into the battle scene. Mrs. Stahlbaum finds her daughter asleep on the living room couch with the Nutcracker doll. Rather than wake her to send her up to bed, she covers her with a shawl and leaves her to rest. Moments later, Drosselmeier appears and slides the Nutcracker from his goddaughter’s grasp. He mends his broken jaw and returns him to Marie’s arms without disturbing her. The interactions between Marie and her relatives demonstrate how genuine family ties establish harmony in the home.

Although Balanchine seems to distance himself from Hoffmann and Sendak by celebrating a middle-class childhood, he actually preserves their overall perspective. In an attempt to give children the festive Christmas they deserve, he presents the party scene relatively pleasantly. On the other hand, he agrees with Hoffmann that the young find their utopia, the Land of Sweets, by using their imaginations. According to Denby,

At the start of the piece, the effect of the pantomime scene—sadistic in content for all its upper-class Christmas party manners—is gloomy and oppressed; the dancers don't really get off the floor. What a relief when the dancing begins with leaps and airy lifts in the next snow scene. But the choreography here preserves a coolness and a remoteness that doesn't quite satisfy. The third, last scene, is friendlier, lighter, more open to the audience, more animated, more playful in detail, and in the end there is a happy sense that everyone on the stage has leaped about freely and sufficiently. (*Looking at the Dance* 101)

In Act II, the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier epitomize adults at their best. Their movements are airy, natural and respectful toward Marie and the Nutcracker. Angels greet them when they arrive, and all the members of the kingdom admire the Nutcracker as he describes his adventure with a stunning solo in pantomime. In the midst of imitating soldiers and mice, he reenacts how Marie saved him from the Mouse King and expresses his eternal gratitude to her. Afterward, the Sugar Plum Fairy leads them to their throne where they feast on sweets and watch dances from around the world. Marie and the Nutcracker represent children receiving the honor they deserve for envisioning better worlds and for persevering until they find them.

Despite the charming second act, some critics considered Balanchine's *Nutcracker* as inappropriate for children as Hoffmann's "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King." Like the adults of Hoffmann's era, American parents of the 1950s worried that *The Nutcracker* sent disturbing messages about childhood. With Freudian psychology at the height of its popularity, they analyzed art to extremes. They shuddered at the thought of an elderly, one-eyed bachelor giving a young girl a male nutcracker who whisks her off into another world. "Balanchine's *Nutcracker* is in a sense a far more *serious* ballet than any other *Nutcracker* we have known," noted *New York Times* theater critic Clive Barnes (Anderson 130). Denby, on the other hand, argued that no matter what psychological undertones parents suspected, "what you see on the stage is a suite of well-mannered dances, graceful and clear" (Anderson 212). Dance

historians like Catherine Gunther Kodat agreed: “In Balanchine’s version of the *Nutcracker*, there is nothing foolish or hypocritical or ridiculous, let alone sinisterly Freudian, about the joys of family life and conspicuous consumption”(Kodat 9).

Although the New York City Ballet invested more time and money in this production than any other, not all reviewers thought their dedication paid off. Balanchine’s ballet suffered some of the same criticisms as Petipa’s and Ivanov’s. In *The New York Times*, dance critic John Martin wrote, “It is not much of a ballet, and all the genius in the world can never make it one. There is no dancing to speak of until the last scene, there is no story line, and no characters to develop” (Anderson 128). In terms of its degrading content and overall inability to deter audiences, Martin’s review showed striking similarities to Skalkovsky’s from 1892.

Despite a smattering of negative reviews, Balanchine’s *Nutcracker* garnered more support than Petipa’s and Ivanov’s original. Arlene Croce, founder of *Ballet Review* and a dance critic for *The New Yorker*, deemed it flawless (Anderson 128). Denby declared it “Balanchine’s *Oklahoma!*” for providing a model of exceptionally executed ballet technique as well as a refreshing theater experience for families. He took great pleasure in “seeing children on stage who are not made to look saccharine or hysterical, who do what they do naturally and straight” (Anderson 213). They exhibit proper manners as well as mischievous tendencies. One moment they are bowing or curtsying to their dance partners and the next they are playing leapfrog. In one instance, Fritz pulls his sister’s hair for fun but quickly realizes his mistake. Marie’s friends peg him as an enemy and refuse to dance with him afterward. *New York Times* critic Alastair Macaulay proclaimed, “At this and every point of this *Nutcracker*, we’re children again. So much drama is about the loss of innocence or of paradise in some form, but here is an enthralling tale of innocence preserved and paradise discovered” (Macaulay 1). By progressing from scenes of everyday pantomime to gravity-defying ballet, Balanchine’s characters advance like Hoffmann’s, from the restrictions of reality to the freedoms of fantasy.

Mark Morris and *The Hard Nut*

Among the numerous *Nutcrackers* that sprouted after Balanchine's, Mark Morris's *The Hard Nut* stands out for its ties to the German fairy tale rather than the Russian ballet. Instead of Vsevolozhsky's libretto, Morris followed Hoffmann's text, complete with "The Story of the Hard Nut." While his Marie progresses from a physical to a fantasy world like Balanchine's, she has to overcome harsher societal constraints. Zipes contends that "especially since the 1970s and up through the present, the fairy tale has become more aggressive, aesthetically more complex and sophisticated, and more insistent on not distracting readers but helping them focus on key social problems and issues in their respective societies" (Zipes 25). By contesting traditional race and gender roles, the characters in *The Hard Nut* explore new identities and infuse Hoffmann's fairy tale with statements on American social norms.

Like Balanchine, Mark Morris grew up surrounded by artistic influences that planted his penchant for *The Nutcracker*. Born in Seattle in 1956, he was raised by parents who integrated music into their daily lives (Acocella 12). His father taught him to play the piano and his mother encouraged him to organize theatrical performances with the neighbors' children. Morris's older sister, Marianne, took ballet lessons and triggered his interest in dance. Whenever she practiced pointe work in the living room, he would wedge his feet into plastic orange-juice cups to emulate her steps (Acocella 20). Moving to music thrilled Morris, and when Marianne took him to see Jose Greco's flamenco company, he decided to become a professional flamenco dancer.

Maxine Morris enrolled her son in private Spanish dance lessons at Verla Flowers Dance Arts where his talent and persistence shined (*Dance as a Theatre Art* 251). "At the end of our half hour, he was still completely intent, ready to go on, and I was completely exhausted," said Flowers. "When he got home, his mother told me, he would go up to his room and practice what he had learned until she made him come down to dinner. Then he would go back up and practice until he had to go to bed" (Acocella 21). Because Morris had an undying urge to move, Flowers taught him ballet, modern and Russian dance as well. The Russian Balalaika Orchestra selected him at age eleven for their company, and he performed with them for three years (Acocella 22). He danced with the Bolshoi Ballet when they came to Oregon,

and studied with Greco's company in Indiana even though he was underage (Acocella 22). The Ford Foundation was one of the few groups that turned him down. Because he did not fit the Balanchine ideal, he did not receive a scholarship to study at the School of American Ballet.

Fortunately, Morris found a far more welcoming place to perform. In 1970 he joined the Koleda Folk Ensemble where he learned Yugoslav, Bulgarian, Rumanian, Pontic Greek, and Turkish dances (*Dance as a Theatre Art* 253). The fast, complicated rhythms and strong sense of community appealed to him tremendously. Just as Hoffmann's, Sendak's and Balanchine's peers shunned them, Morris's classmates teased him for being effeminate and outgoing. Koleda satisfied his artistic, social, emotional and physical needs and helped him see dance as a means of creating a utopia (Acocella 31).

Upon graduating from high school, Morris traveled throughout Europe, settling in Madrid to study flamenco. He quickly learned that focusing on a single movement style left him unsatisfied, and he moved to New York for its eclectic, creative atmosphere. There he worked with prominent choreographers such as Twyla Tharp, who revived his appreciation for classical ballet, and Laura Dean, who took him on tour to East Asia and triggered his interest in Kathak dancing (Reynolds 628). In 1980 he organized ten friends into the Mark Morris Dance Group. In the spirit of Koleda, he welcomed people of all ages, ethnicities, body types and sexual orientations. Although he incorporated elements of folk dance into his choreography, he used ballet as the "Latin" foundation for his company members (*Dance as a Theatre Art* 252). He taught a ballet class every morning to keep his performers strong and versatile, a ritual he learned from Twyla Tharp. "I want people to be able to do anything, so everybody can lift each other, and everybody can be light and delicate when they need to be" he reasoned (*Dance as a Theatre Art* 252).

After class, however, Morris ventured into new terrain. He considered ballet too frontal, artificial and hierarchical in its classical form. He preferred infusing the community element of ethnic dances to make each performance reflect everyday life. During an interview in Brussels he said:

People often complain that my dances look as though they could be done by anyone at all. They can't. They're hard to do. But it is true that I want it to look as though these are people who are dancing, as in folk dance or ethnic dance, where people are answering the call, "Come on, let's dance!" That's probably

the first thing that human beings did when they stopped throwing rocks at each other, and the history of dance begins with them, the first people who joined hands to dance together. (Acocella 116)

Morris modeled his company and the waltzes in *The Hard Nut* after his communal vision of dance. At first, the Mark Morris Dance Group received encouraging reactions. In her column entitled “Mark Morris Comes to Town,” Arlene Croce lauded his musicality and expressivity. Like Balanchine, he had “the raw gift of choreography” and the potential to pioneer the dance world. She described Morris as “the clearest illustration we have, at the moment of the principle of succession and how it works in dance: each new master assimilates the past in all its variety and becomes our guide to the future” (Acocella 56).

On the other hand, like Hoffmann and Balanchine, Morris strayed too far beyond tradition for some critics. They attacked him for mocking classical music by pairing it with grotesque or comical choreography. Others thought his work reflected too much of his flamboyant personality. “What cigarettes I smoke, how long my hair is, and if I’m fat or thin, or butch or femme . . . You can write anything you want about it, but it has zero to do with my dances,” Morris complained (Acocella 67). In 1988, dwindling support drove him to move his company to Brussels where he could work with live orchestras and choruses at the Monnaie opera house (Acocella 71). Ironically, Belgian audiences saw the premiere of his most American ballet, *The Hard Nut* (Parish). With Tchaikovsky’s score and sets inspired by horror-comic artist Charles Burns, it presented 1960s suburbia through the lens of Hoffmann’s “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King.”

Hoffmann lured Morris to his tale by glorifying children’s insights but not childhood itself. From the moment the curtain rises on *The Hard Nut*, the Burns-inspired sets and contemporary steps draw audiences out of nineteenth-century Germany and into twentieth-century America. With colorless scenery, set-designer Adrienne Lobel depicts the horrors of a home that stifles the imagination. “The Stahlbaum living room is a perfect suburban fright: white vinyl couch, white plastic drink caddy, white plastic Christmas tree with all the balls the same. Gone is the snugness and charm of traditional *Nutcrackers*” describes Joan Acocella, Morris’s biographer (Acocella 184). Party guests arrive in mini-skirts and leather pants to complete the unsettling atmosphere. They stumble around the living room

drinking cocktails, attempting dances like “the bump” and occasionally bursting into tears. As usual, Marie stands apart from the adults around her. In contrast to their suggestive costumes, she wears a pink skirt, polka-dotted blouse and white bow, signaling her youth and nobility.

To further contrast Marie with adult characters, Morris brings Princess Pirlipat’s parents back into the ballet. Instead of excising “The Story of the Hard Nut” like most choreographers, he uses it as a knot to tie the two acts together. While Marie recovers from the battle, Drosselmeier tells her this gruesome tale. As the pompous King and Queen saunter about in lavish purple velvet costumes, the audience watches an enormous rat leap into their baby’s carriage and attack her. Drosselmeier proceeds to explain how the Nutcracker saves Pirlipat yet still receives the curse of ugliness. At this point, Marie interrupts the story and declares her love for the Nutcracker, despite his outer appearance. From this moment forward, the ballet is presented from her point of view. Like Hoffmann, Morris shifts perspectives to help his audience connect with the protagonist.

Morris also shares Hoffmann’s view of *The Nutcracker* as a story about developing identities. “It’s important to be who you are, or who you think you are, or who you think you might want to be, which is, of course, exactly the same thing as who you already are,” he maintains (*Dance as a Theatre Art* 254). To illustrate this message, he adopts Hoffmann’s strategy of integrating reality and fantasy, and takes it one step further. Instead of only Marie, the Nutcracker and Drosselmeier traveling between the two worlds, he incorporates a plethora of Act I characters into Act II. Mr. and Mrs. Stahlbaum become the King and Queen, Marie’s sister becomes Princess Pirlipat, and Fritz and the housekeeper appear in the final *pas de deux*. All of his *Hard Nut* characters assume numerous guises. As a result, “every body appears as overtly, even festively constructed rather than passively or naturally received” contends art historian Sarah Cohen. “The action of Morris’s ballet while offering a revised version of the *Nutcracker* tale, highlights identity as an ongoing process which the characters actively try on and learn” (“Performing Identity” 487).

Morris’s waltzes and *pas de deux*s underscore his vision of dance as a communal and universal art form. As a child, Koleda provided him with a sense of belonging that male dancers rarely enjoyed. In

return, he used this ensemble as a model for the Waltz of the Snowflakes and the Waltz of the Flowers. His choreography implies that anyone can be anyone, and that anyone can love anyone. Socially-constructed labels of race, gender, beauty, and sexuality never constrain his characters. “This is a love story between two people but it’s also about the love that’s already in the world,” Morris explained (*The Hard Nut*).

In the snow scene, dancers of both sexes soar onto the stage in shiny, two-piece tutus that free their bodies and spirits. As Cohen describes:

They ravel and rewind tradition so that we find bodies doing what we have come to expect them to do with Tchaikovsky’s snowy music—grand limb extensions, large and small jumps, blustery variations of kinetic groupings—but with other, surprising elements blended in: chug-steps with both feet planted heavily on the floor; exuberant childlike gallops; and snow tossed from the hands rather than sweeping down miraculously from above. (“Performing Identity” 496)

Most choreographers cast women as snowflakes, but Morris includes men to reflect nature. “In this ballet, nature means everyone, women and men,” he stated (*The Hard Nut*). Because he lets them choose their own footwear, some male snowflakes challenge tradition by performing in black pointe shoes (Acocella 185). The Waltz of the Flowers evokes a different season but a similar sentiment. The barefoot dancers don hats that resemble cabbages and short skirts that jut outward like petals. They sway and roll across the stage, giving into gravity. As they suspend and then surrender to their natural weight, they pay tribute to the pioneers of modern American dance, Doris Humphrey and Isadora Duncan.

Morris employs the techniques of these revolutionary dancers to send ground-breaking messages. His choreography evokes their style and subverts gender norms simultaneously. In 1958, Balanchine paved the way for him to use the *pas de deux* to make social statements. To enjoy good works of art, Balanchine believed that “we must have an openness of mind in addition to information or their beauty will escape us. First of all, we must suspend our prejudices” (*Balanchine’s New and Complete Stories* 429). In a televised broadcast of the ballet, he challenged racial stereotypes by casting Diana Adams, a Caucasian, with Arthur Mitchell, an African American, as the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier (Genne 50). He proved that *pas de deux* are not reserved for white couples and motivated Morris to show that they are not reserved for heterosexual couples either.

Although both choreographers overturn stereotypes, their *pas de deus* display one significant difference. Balanchine's elevate the role of the woman whereas Morris's de-emphasize gender to promote universal love. Kodat asserts that "like Balanchine's *Nutcracker*, *The Hard Nut* demonstrates the continuing and powerful cultural work of the ballet in articulating a relationship between the domestic and the political realms. It simply does so for an audience whose 'family values' have changed dramatically" (Kodat 15). Between the battle and snow scenes, Morris adds a *pas de deus* for Drosselmeier and his nephew who has just become the Nutcracker. With extensive *port de bras* and *relevés*, they honor the nephew's transformation. Cohen writes: "If a *pas de deus* has an artificial structure, Morris seems to ask, why couldn't it be danced by anyone in the world? It's not as if the 'woman' and 'man' who traditionally perform it were biologically determined to do so" ("Performing Identity" 500).

In Act II, the traditional *pas de deus* between the Nutcracker and the Sugar Plum Fairy becomes an ensemble piece followed by a duet between the Nutcracker and Marie. Soldiers, snowflakes and flowers reappear, overturning conventional rules for partner dancing. Men partner men, women partner women, and the group hoists Marie and the Nutcracker into airplane lifts. Cohen asserts that "if traditional *Nutcracker* adults and children implicitly understand and respect their roles, *The Hard Nut* party seems always on the brink of discovery—and chaos—as the characters test out what to do both with themselves and with one another" ("Performing Identity" 497). In this convivial community, they feel comfortable trying on unconventional identities. They represent not only those who bring Marie and the Nutcracker together, but also those who realize Morris's belief that "love is not just a thing between two people; it is something to be shared by the whole world" (Acocella 146).

Ironically, Morris overturns social stereotypes not only by subverting them but also by exaggerating them. While Balanchine challenges traditional racial roles in the *pas de deus*, Morris challenges them elsewhere in the ballet. In the film of *The Hard Nut*, he casts an African American male, Kraig Patterson, in the role of the Stahlbaum's maid. Although Patterson occupies a role that would

typically portray both blacks and women as inferior, he disproves the assumption that he plays an insignificant part in the production. As Cohen observes:

The Maid counteracts ballet's implicit association of gravity-defying pointwork with the white female body, and she also forges new ways to wield pointwork itself, stabling out *bouffées* in place to denote irritation, and executing a long, languid arabesque as she stalks around the room with the Stahlbaum beverage cart. ("Performing Identity" 493)

In Act II, Morris casts his only Puerto Rican dancer, Guillermo Resto, in the Spanish section and his three part-Asian dancers in the Chinese piece (Acocella 187). Their impressive performances, along with Patterson's stylistic contribution, prove Cohen's theory that "the body's act of asserting anything at all is possible only by taking up the stereotypes and learning the moves, which in the end hold more possibilities than one might ever expect" ("Performing Identity" 487).

Like Hoffmann's characters, Morris's defy the social norms that inhibit personal expression. Hoffmann's Marie flees from her stifling German family who underestimates her as a child. Morris's Marie, along with her party guests, escapes from the prejudices of 1960s America. In the Nutcracker's kingdom, Morris lets dancers perform in drag, invites his minority company members to take their roles to extremes, and allows everyone to participate in the final *pas de deux*. By presenting their bodies as agents of gender construction and racial identification, Morris's dancers toy with the traditional link between physical movement and socialization.

Cohen maintains that "the layering, trading and flaunting of movement styles among the disparate characters" reveal how "identity can operate in ballet and, by extension, in the equally complex performances of our own social realm" ("Performing Identity" 487). Despite its revolutionary intimations, *The Hard Nut* received rave reviews when it debuted at the Theatre de la Monnaie in 1991 (Parish). Charles Philippon of *Le Soir* deemed it "a jewel of invention, humor, fantasy, and poetry." Even writers like Nicole Verschoore who had slandered Morris throughout his stay in Brussels praised his production as "dance theater at its best" (Acocella 236).

By celebrating the identity of the individual, Morris imbues his ballet with widespread appeal. *San Francisco Chronicle* dance correspondent Rachel Howard calls it "a humanly rich story of budding

sexuality and a vision of a crazily inclusive community” (Howard 2). Through *The Hard Nut*, Morris proves that anyone can become anyone. Men play women, adults play children, and black dancers play white snowflakes. Neither race nor gender determines their fates. Acocella writes:

If, in *The Hard Nut*, Morris does dispose of certain culturally ingrained and politically suspect conventions—above all, romantic love and classical ballet’s ideas about men and women—he replaces them not with a cold look at the division of power in the modern world but instead with an assertion that beneath its ugly surfaces the world is still full of love—that no matter what ignoble parts people are assigned to play in modern life, they are fundamentally decent, and that if you bring them together in a group they will naturally love one another. (Acocella 194)

By creating diverse communities onstage, Morris welcomes all types of dancers and audiences to his ballet. He presents stereotypes not as concrete categories but as shells destined to be cracked.

Maurice Sendak and *Nutcracker*

Fairy tales like “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” have served as motivational forces not only for dancers like Morris, but for artists from other creative disciplines as well. The German poet Schiller claims that “Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life” (Tatar 271). Margaret Atwood credits *Grimms’ Fairy Tales* as the compass to her writing career. “Where else could I have gotten the idea, so early in life, that words can change you?” she asks (Tatar xii). Author, illustrator and set-designer Maurice Sendak stands prominently alongside these fairy tale-inspired figures. By sparking Sendak’s imagination, fairy tales enabled him to survive a difficult childhood. He grew up among poor immigrant families in Brooklyn, New York in the 1930s and 40s. Just before World War I, his parents escaped from Warsaw’s Jewish *shtetls*, and they struggled to support their children in their new home. At age two Sendak contracted the measles and double pneumonia, and at age five he suffered from scarlet fever. Just as Drosselmeier consoled Marie with “The Story of the Hard Nut” when she had “wound fever,” Sendak’s father sat by his bedside telling stories throughout his early illnesses.

Sendak agrees with psychologist Bruno Bettelheim who describes fairy tales as critical tools for helping each child overcome adversity. According to Bettelheim, they “stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions; are attuned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems that perturb him” (Tatar 269). Speaking from personal experience, Sendak cites fairy tales as keys to surviving the stresses of youth and adolescence: “How all children manage to get through childhood from one day to the next, how they defeat boredom, fear, pain, and anxiety and find joy. It is a constant miracle to me that children manage to grow up” (Cech 19).

When Sendak was nine, his older brother encouraged him to channel his active imagination into his own stories. Like Hoffmann, Balanchine, and Morris, Sendak had few friends, so he dedicated himself to writing, illustrating and binding his own tales with decorative covers. As a teenager, his job at All-American Comics amplified his interest in visual art, and he illustrated classic works like Oscar

Wilde's "The Happy Prince" (Cott). After high school he worked as a window dresser at F.A.O. Schwarz toy store and took night classes at the New York Art Students League ("Maurice Sendak"). The combination of his child-centered job and his late-night drawing lessons prompted him to pursue a career as a freelance children's book illustrator.

Sendak disliked the "flat, oilcloth look" of the books he read in the 1950s, so he strove to create something more compelling (Cech 10). He emulated William Blake, an English poet who pioneered the picture book during the nineteenth century. In *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, Blake's poems about children surviving abuse and neglect in London fascinated Sendak. Later, Hoffmann captivated him with an equally high regard for children's insight and resiliency. "To me, the greatest writers—like the greatest illustrators—for children are those who draw upon their child sources, their dream sources—they don't forget them," Sendak declared (Cott). Hoffmann's portrayal of Marie as a young yet prevailing child resonated with Sendak and made Hoffmann's tales a good fit for Sendak's artwork.

Ironically, Sendak first worked with "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" in its ballet form. In 1981, he collaborated with Kent Stowell, the artistic director of the Pacific Northwest Ballet. Stowell began his dance training with William Christensen, the creator of the first full-length *Nutcracker* in the United States, and later joined Balanchine's New York City Ballet (Pacific Northwest Ballet Association). Sendak shared Stowell's desire to honor Hoffmann by "bringing a less sugar-coated version back to audiences" ("Maurice Sendak's Nutcracker"). He based his sets and costumes upon "the rich, exotic, yet strict lines of neoclassic design" and transformed the stage into Clara's "half-real, half-imagined battleground" (Hoffmann xii). For Act II, he created a radical alternative to the Land of Sweets with Moroccan-style scenery and an Ottoman Pasha wearing a giant turban in place of the Sugar Plum Fairy.

Like Morris, he refused to replicate the traditional Land of Sweets yet honored Hoffmann's tale by blending reality and fantasy and by confronting the difficult details of childhood. From his mysterious, one-eyed Drosselmeier to his 27-foot tall Mouse King, Sendak defended his work as a representation of reality. He focused heavily on Clara's overwhelming feelings about growing up: "She

was managing this all on her own . . . like most children do . . . the parents were on another planet for all the interest they showed” (“Maurice Sendak’s *Nutcracker*”). Francia Russell, the current director of the Pacific Northwest Ballet, appreciates the uniqueness of the production she has inherited. “With two fertile creative imaginations at work, completely in sync and at the same time paying homage to their artistic forbears, it is no surprise that the Stowell/Sendak production is ‘not just another *Nutcracker*,’ but richer and darker and with a spotlight trained on the private world of childhood” she says (Pacific Northwest Ballet Association).

After completing the ballet in 1983, Sendak stayed close to Hoffmann’s tale. The following year he published *Nutcracker*, a picture book translated directly from the German text by Ralph Manheim. Like Morris, Sendak wanted to revive the original story. To accentuate Hoffmann’s juxtaposition of the ignorant Stahlbaums and their astute daughter, he differentiates their eyes. The Stahlbaums have a shallow, lifeless look while Marie has wide eyes that emanate acumen and optimism. When Sendak depicts her traveling in a gondola to the *Nutcracker*’s kingdom, her expression extends miles across the sea (Hoffmann 77). In his final illustration, he poises her on her toes with a confident, upward gaze (Hoffmann 98). To complement Hoffmann’s gruesome passages, Sendak creates ghastly images. For instance, he fills an entire page to illustrate the sentence, “The horrid King of Mice sat down on her shoulder; blood-red foam poured from all seven of his mouths, and, gnashing and grinding his teeth, he piped and squeaked in her ear” (Hoffmann 67). His enormous rendition of the Mouse King highlights every needle-sharp nail, whisker and tooth.

Both Hoffmann and Sendak use their artwork to express dissatisfaction with forces that plague youth. While Hoffmann criticizes the stifling child-rearing practices and repressive government policies of early nineteenth-century Europe, Sendak condemns America’s dismissive attitude toward childhood one hundred years later. Despite the fact that forty million children in the world are homeless and parentless, “the innocence of childhood” remains a common phrase (Nodelman 91). Distraught by the tendency to gloss over pressing issues among youth, Sendak strays beyond safe subjects and soothing

artwork. In *Nutcracker*, instead of downplaying dangerous forces like the Mouse King, he emphasizes their evil with sharp lines and horrifying details like seven angry heads (Hoffmann 23).

While some argue that Sendak's fantastical images distort reality, they grab the reader's attention to emphasize a message, just like Hoffmann's graphic passages. The word "fantasy" means "bringing to light," and Sendak's style illuminates pressing social issues (Cech 23). For instance, his illustration of Madam Mouserinks attacking baby Princess Pirlipat is unsettling yet integral to the story. Innocent Pirlipat lies in her canopied cradle, propped up on copious pillows. When the Mouse Queen appears, her three hands reach toward the baby's enormous blue eyes and her teeth hover inches from her mouth (Hoffmann 48). While mice rarely endanger infants in modern America, Madam Mouserinks symbolizes problems that threaten youths today. In 1993, Sendak spoke out against the national policies of the Reagan and Bush eras that neglected children and led to rises in school shootings and AIDS cases among America's youth. "If we don't look, and if we don't listen, and if we don't do something, kids will be lost," he warned (Cech 246). By bringing pressing issues to the forefront of America's consciousness, he stresses that children's rights are human rights.

Sendak's identification with Hoffmann has helped him take children's literature to new heights. Since the 1960s, he has challenged American tendencies to censor this burgeoning genre. Because Sendak presents ideas that audiences may try to reject, he employs powerful artistic elements to make himself heard. According to literary scholar Jennifer Waller, he has "emancipated the children's picture book" by showing that it "may actually be about children, not just about lovable steam shovels or cute dogs or shapes—or even about the children we as adults want to remember or imagine" (Cech 34). He has devoted himself to understanding how children survive in his society, and he has produced artwork that prepares youths for the realities they will face as they age. As a result, he has been lauded "the Picasso of children's books," "a culture hero," and "one of the most powerful men in the United States" (Cech 2).

Part 4: Dancing, Designing, and Drawing Childhood

Nutcracker Artists as Fairy Tale Figures

Although Hoffmann, Balanchine, Morris and Sendak have imbued “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” with personal and stylistic differences, their masterpieces evoke a similar sense of wonder. Their stories glorify an individuating girl who sees the Nutcracker’s true identity and endangers her life to save him. By successfully defeating the Mouse King, winning the Nutcracker’s love and a life in his utopian kingdom, she proves that beneath her delicate appearance lies tremendous strength. Her story follows the pattern that Vladimir Propp proposed as the foundation of a fairy tale. In his 1968 book, *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, he noted that fairy tales begin with a protagonist who embarks on a journey because he or she seeks to improve his or her status (Zipes 3). Generally, these main characters are orphaned or neglected. Next, the protagonist encounters a villain and fights to continue. Suddenly, magical creatures appear and give him or her gifts to overcome the enemy. Eventually, the villain faces punishment or death while the protagonist wins marriage, money, wisdom, survival or a combination of these rewards. The end of the protagonist’s journey signals the beginning of a life of new understandings and freedoms.

Hoffmann’s upbringing followed Propp’s fairy tale pattern and inspired him to reflect his experiences in the character of Marie. Abandoned by his father and ignored by his mother, he had little support for his imaginative endeavors. At school, his peers avoided him because of his unconventional interests and unusual appearance. As a small boy with wild black hair, a prominent nose and piercing eyes, Hoffmann suffered from his physical inferiority. “To him it was like a striking birthmark, and at times it burrowed painfully into his inner self” wrote Hewett-Thayer (Hewett-Thayer 9). When Theodor Hippel befriended him, he gave Hoffmann the gift of encouragement to pursue the arts. Playing music and games of pretend with Hippel inspired Hoffmann to establish the Serapion Brotherhood as an adult. The collaborations he did within this literary society augmented his writing career and led directly to the publication of “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King.”

In this fairy tale, Marie also endures disrespect from her parents for her active imagination. Like Hoffmann turning to Hippel for help, she consoles herself with dolls like the Nutcracker. When the

Mouse King threatens the Nutcracker, she refuses to let him harm her primary source of support and the main character of her daydreams. Marie's toys come to life to assist her, but she makes the most substantial strike on the Mouse King on her own. Hoffmann writes:

Hemmed on all sides, Nutcracker was in dire peril. He tried to jump over the ledge of the toy cabinet, but his legs were too short . . . At that moment two enemy musketeers seized him by his wooden cloak and, squeaking triumphantly from his seven throats, the King of the Mice charged him. Marie was beside herself. "Oh my poor Nutcracker! My poor Nutcracker!" She sobbed. Without quite knowing what she was doing, she took off her left shoe and flung it with all her might into the thick of the enemy, hoping to hit their king. (Hoffmann 33)

This scene reveals how Hoffmann instills his own characteristics in the Nutcracker and Marie. The Nutcracker has Hoffmann's short stature and unusual countenance. Marie has his determination to fight forces that appear older, larger and stronger.

By casting his youngest characters as the bravest, Hoffmann expresses what Brown calls "an awareness and acceptance of the contradictions with which human beings (and especially authors) are confronted, and a recognition that there are nonetheless meaningful patterns to be discerned" (*Serapiontic Principle* 5). By hurling her shoe at the Mouse King and sacrificing her most prized possessions to distract him, the seemingly meek Marie enables the Nutcracker to conquer the enemy once and for all. "You alone, dear lady, gave me the courage and strength to fight the insolent varlet who dared to defy you," he says (Hoffmann 70). For her bravery, he rewards Marie with the Mouse King's seven crowns. For her ability to see his human soul within his wooden body, he asks her to become his queen:

Oh, my precious Mistress Stahlbaum, you see at your feet the happiest of men, whose life you saved on this very spot. You were kind enough to say that you would not scorn me as that nasty Princess Pirlipat did, for becoming ugly on your account. In that instant, I ceased to be a lowly nutcracker and regained my former, not unpleasant aspect. Oh, precious Mistress Stahlbaum, favor me with your hand, share my crown and kingdom with me, reign with me over Marzipan Castle, for I am king there now. (Hoffmann 99)

In *When Dreams Came True*, Zipes classifies "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" as a "wonder tale" because it reveals Marie's hidden insight and power:

The [wonder] tales seek to reawaken our regard for the miraculous condition of life and to evoke in a religious sense profound feelings of awe and respect for life as a miraculous process, which can be altered and changed to compensate for the lack of power, wealth, and pleasure that most people experience. Lack, deprivation, prohibition, and interdiction motivate people to look for signs of fulfillment and emancipation. In the wonder tales, those who are naïve and simple are able to succeed because they are untainted and can recognize the wondrous signs. (Zipes 5)

Ironically, these naïve yet powerful people exist not only in fantasies, but also in reality. Analytical psychologist Carl Jung contends that “in every adult there lurks a child—an eternal child, something that is always becoming, is never completed, and calls for unceasing care, attention, and education. That is the part of the human personality which wants to develop and become whole” (Cech 9). He defines this figure as the archetypal child who overcomes hurdles to reach individuation, the process that actualizes their unique identities (Cech 25). In “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” Marie epitomizes the archetypal child by embodying paradoxical characteristics. According to children’s literature scholar John Cech, she represents “all that is abandoned and exposed and at the same time divinely powerful; the insignificant, dubious beginning, and the triumphal end” (Cech 28).

Since 1816, Hoffmann’s personal childhood experiences, described through Marie’s story, have resonated with artists and inspired them to reflect their own lives through new *Nutcrackers*. Author Carolyn Heilbrun maintains that “we live our lives through texts . . . whatever their form or medium, these stories are what have formed us all, they are what we must use to make our new fictions . . . Out of old tales we must make new lives” (Tatar xii). Balanchine, Morris and Sendak exemplify her assertion. Because they struggled to maintain their creative pursuits as children, they identify with Marie’s battle to defend her imagination. They also understand her need to take risks and her unforeseen ability to conquer seemingly insurmountable challenges. Therefore, no matter when or where their stories take place, they contain a scene in which the young yet powerful protagonist defeats the Mouse King with her ballet slipper. This climactic event emphasizes the “wondrous” nature of Marie and the artists who define her.

Balanchine and Marie in Battle

Separated from his parents at age nine and shunned by his peers at the Imperial School of Ballet, Balanchine had a lonely childhood like Hoffmann. Alexandra Danilova, a ballerina one year above him, recalled him as “a shy boy who kept himself rather aloof from the others” (Taper 43). At age fourteen, the Bolshevik Revolution interrupted his training and severed him from his only artistic, educational and financial source of support. “Everything was free in those days—streetcar rides, food, goods—because

the millennium was here, the ideal society had been achieved,” he recalled. “The only trouble was that there wasn’t anything. No streetcars, no food, no nothing” (Taper 48). As he wandered the streets searching for food and work, he would dodge bullets and watch desperate neighbors consume their pets for dinner. “Self-sufficiency, resourcefulness, and adaptability were fostered in him then, and the lesson that most people never have to learn: that simply to survive can be a considerable achievement,” wrote Taper (Taper 47). Although the Imperial School did reopen, it disillusioned rather than stimulated Balanchine. At first he performed only at Communist party meetings, but when the Maryinsky reopened as the State Academic Theatre for Opera and Ballet, the unheated venue was no better.

Determined not to let the dilapidated world of Soviet ballet discourage him, Balanchine clung to his earliest memories of being onstage at the Maryinsky. Performing had been his greatest joy in childhood, and he resolved to bring this opportunity to others. Using classic choreographers like Petipa and innovative ones like Goleizovsky as sources of inspiration, he moved to the United States to pioneer ballet in America. When he arrived, *The Nutcracker* presented itself as the way to achieve his goal. Just as Marie turned to the Nutcracker as a doll, Balanchine turned to it as a ballet. In *Balanchine’s New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets* he wrote, “I have liked this ballet from the time I danced it as a boy . . . I accordingly went back to the original score, restored cuts that had been made and, in the development of the story chose to use the original story by E.T.A. Hoffmann, although keeping to the outlines of the dances as given at the Maryinsky” (*Balanchine’s New and Complete Stories* 270). In a tribute to the Maryinsky, he glorified the Christmas tree and replicated certain sequences from Ivanov. “Though Balanchine did take considerable liberties with music and scenario, his proves closer to the original 1892 conception than almost any other” declared *New York Times* reviewer Alastair Macaulay (Macaulay 1).

Although Balanchine began his ballet career on unstable ground, he used dance as a tool to deal with childhood challenges and triggered a new dance movement in America. In his *Nutcracker*, he depicts Marie as a child like himself who overcomes obstacles and realizes her dreams. Although he portrays more positive scenes of family life than the ones he saw growing up, he rejects the idea of the

home as the ideal destination, just as Hoffmann and Sendak. Mr. and Mrs. Stahlbaum express affection toward their children yet still stifle them. For instance, they reprimand Fritz for galloping among party guests on his new toy horse. They also prevent Marie from saying a proper goodbye to Drosselmeier's nephew. Before the children finish shaking hands, Mrs. Stahlbaum physically pulls her daughter offstage, as if disapproving of their relationship.

In spite of her mother's wishes, Marie manages to reunite with Drosselmeier's nephew. Balanchine specifically puts a child in her role and dresses her in a lace-trimmed nightgown and white ballet slippers. His casting and costuming choices emphasize that beneath Marie's innocence lies fearlessness and force. As the battle scene begins, Marie rises from her sleep to Tchaikovsky's swelling violins. Her gaze climbs as mice, toy soldiers and the Nutcracker grow into life-size figures. Like a military general, Marie directs the soldiers and whispers battle strategies into the Nutcracker's ear. Firm trumpets and quivering flutes alternate back and forth, underscoring the constant clashes between soldiers and mice. When the seven-headed Mouse King appears, Marie defends Drosselmeier's nephew, trapped in the form of her peculiar-looking Nutcracker. Like Hoffmann's Marie, she does not let her doll's ugliness blind her. She looks beyond his balding head and white beard and sees someone worth saving.

Drums rumble as the Mouse King towers over the Nutcracker with a thick, jagged sword. To accelerating violins, Marie runs to the center of the stage and hurls her ballet slipper at the enemy's largest head. The impact startles but does not kill him, and he chases her back to her bed. As he reaches toward her, the Nutcracker stabs him in the back with a small, thin sword. Balanchine positions him behind the Mouse King intentionally. Because the audience barely sees the Nutcracker, Marie's contribution to the Mouse King's downfall serves as the most visible climax of the battle scene.

To honor Marie's courage, the Nutcracker cuts off one of the King's crowns and carries it ceremoniously to her bedside. As she lies flat on the white sheets, in her long white nightgown, her bare foot stands out as a symbol of her sacrifice and bravery. The bed carries her out of Nuremberg and into the Land of Snow. To a clash of cymbals, the Nutcracker transforms instantly into a handsome human prince. When Marie awakes, he kisses her hand, places the crown gently on her head and bows in

deference to her. With these courtly gestures, he illustrates Balanchine's respect for women. As snowflakes drift down upon the couple, the Nutcracker leads Marie into a white, glittering forest, and eventually into the Land of Sweets.

Just as Hoffmann refuses to believe that the imagination corrupts children, Balanchine refuses to see it as a Freudian force that scars them. He rewards Marie for following her dreams into Act II, where she enjoys royal treatment, exotic sweets and dazzling entertainment. According to Jack Anderson, author of *The Nutcracker Ballet*, his *Nutcracker* "celebrates the powers of human imagination, powers that children possess in abundance, but which adults often allow to wither away under the pressures of ordinary everyday life" (Anderson 211). It presents the imagination not as a frivolous form of escape but as the key to personal fulfillment. "Actually, it's not a dream. It's the reality that Mother didn't believe," Balanchine stated (Anderson 211).

Morris and his Modernized Marie Moment

Morris's early obstacles mirrored Hoffmann's and Balanchine's because they were precipitated by insufficient social support and manifested themselves in Marie's battle with the Mouse King. Morris's mother accepted his dance career but his father did not. Although Bill Morris had introduced his son to the arts, he had envisioned him as a musician, not a dancer. Bill's brothers convinced him that his son would become a homosexual. "Tell Mark to go play basketball. Don't let him take ballet," they warned (Acocella 38). Their words planted concrete concerns in Bill's mind. Once, when he saw his son wearing a flamingo-colored shirt on his way to a school dance, he shouted, "You're not going anywhere dressed like that. You look like a homo!" (Acocella 38). Morris's classmates also disrespected him and made him a social outcast. "He looked like a junior vampire," recalled musical-comedy writer Chad Henry, who knew Morris in middle school. "He was thin, small, very intense, with big dark circles under his eyes" (Acocella 25). His effeminate persona and dedication to dance made him even less popular at school. While he acted as if his peers' degrading remarks did not bother him, they did.

To make matters worse, Morris's father died when he was only sixteen. Like Hoffmann and Balanchine, Morris lost his closest male role model before he reached adulthood. By failing to embrace Mark as a dancer, Bill left permanent scars on his son. According to Acocella, "his father, like everyone's, was a force in his mind, and his sense of struggle with the world is probably due in some part to the fact that Bill Morris died before his admiration for Mark could supplant his disapproval, or before Mark was old enough to feel free of that disapproval" (Acocella 40). After his death, Morris fled to Spain where his sexuality posed more problems. The police harassed homosexuals and arrested his friend for public effeminacy (Acocella 40). When Morris returned to Seattle, additional distresses awaited: his grandfather had died and the Koleda Folk Ensemble had disbanded. However, instead of burying his goals beneath these tragedies, Morris resolved to pursue a new life in New York, much as Marie did in the Land of Sweets.

In response to the discrimination he faced in adolescence, Morris reworked Hoffman's fairy tale to expose how traditional gender roles prevent children from expressing themselves and hinder their development into adults. He describes it as "the most autobiographical piece he has ever made" (Acocella 192). As Cohen puts it, he cast dancers in drag to show that when everyone is a stereotype, "no one appears more 'natural' than anyone else" ("Performing Identity" 4). He also choreographed *pas de deux* for males to demonstrate that gender does not define their roles. In the process of traversing reality and fantasy, his characters celebrate their individuality and the benefits of defying social categorization.

In *The Hard Nut*, Morris instills Marie with the same determination that drove him as a child. "Marie is our guide to the meanings of *The Hard Nut*: how everyone searches for love, how love must often be wrested out of ugliness," notes Acocella (Acocella 188). Like Balanchine's *Nutcracker*, Morris's ballet includes a shoe-throwing scene to stress her strength. However, Morris's tone contrasts sharply with Balanchine's. First of all, Morris casts a professional adult dancer instead of a nine-year-old student as Marie. He puts her in pointe shoes instead of flimsy ballet shoes, but disguises them as pink bunny slippers to retain their child-like appeal. Although she wears a nightgown adorned with pink pom-poms rather than white lace, she appears just as innocent as Balanchine's Marie. The Mouse King, on the

other hand, looks less menacing than usual. He has three heads instead of seven and wears tight glittery pants and sunglasses in imitation of Elvis Presley. Like many characters in *The Hard Nut*, he is played by a dancer in drag.

The female Mouse King wobbles onto the stage doing *bourrées* on bent knees. In contrast, Marie *bourrées* through the battle scene in a more stable, parallel position. As a muscular adult dancer, she exhibits more physical strength than Balanchine's Marie. On a weak foundation, the Mouse King fights plastic G.I. Joe figurines instead of traditional toy soldiers. Marie pulls his minions' tails and strikes them with her flashlight. Marching to the same steady, brass beat as Balanchine's Nutcracker, Morris's appears in a mask that flaunts his hideously large teeth and chops off two of the King's heads. Because the Nutcracker fails to decapitate him completely, Marie throws her pointe shoe at the King's remaining head. Upon impact, he drops dead instantly and she faints to the floor. At this point the scrim curtain falls, landing in the middle of Marie's body. Her top half lies hidden behind the curtain, but her feet remain exposed to the audience. Just as in Balanchine's ballet, her bare foot stands out as a sign of valor.

As in the original fairy tale, Marie and the Nutcracker reunite after "The Story of the Hard Nut." Morris's Marie takes a more assertive role in their modern relationship than Hoffmann's. Before the Nutcracker offers to marry her and whisk her off to his kingdom, Marie declares her love for him. Supported by a romantic, rippling harp, she usurps the Sugar Plum Fairy's role and performs the final *pas de deux* with her prince. To Tchaikovsky's tinkling celesta, she repeats steps done by her mother and in Act I but adds her own spin to prove that parental constraints no longer limit her. By adding deep lunges and airy *jetés* to earlier sequences of *glissades* and *sous-sus*, she expands her range of motion and confidence. Cohen observes that "Marie's dancing by the end of the ballet has gained its own, assured momentum, as if she is celebrating her hard-won choice with all the bodily resources she has to draw from" ("Performing Identity" 501). Like Morris, she performs to prove how far she has come.

Sendak and Clara Come of Age

Along with Balanchine and Morris, Sendak proves how effective artists can be when they integrate their past, present, and imagined experiences. Brian O’Doherty, a former senior staff member of the National Endowment for the Arts, dubs him an alchemist because he “mixes together the strange components of his life and enthusiasms, his memories and obsessions in the dark ‘soup’ of his imagination, all of which eventually is refined in the form of a book” (Cech 256). In literary and ballet renditions of “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” he reflects his childhood setbacks and resiliency. “Childhood is a hard story that comes from my own experience,” he confessed (Walker). As a targeted religious minority, he faced disillusioning socio-economic conditions in the 1930s and 40s. “My parents weren’t well-to-do, and we had only two beds—my brother and I slept in one, my sister Natalie in the other, and often we’d all sleep in the same bed” he recalled (Cott). He also lost numerous relatives to the Great Depression and the Holocaust. Although his parents survived, he often felt slighted by them. He believed his birth to be an accident and like Marie, resisted his parents’ expectations. Like Morris, he also felt disrespected for his sexuality. “All I wanted was to be straight so my parents could be happy,” he told an interviewer from *The New York Times* (Walker).

At school, like Hoffmann, Balanchine and Morris, he was ostracized by his peers and sought comfort in the arts. “I was miserable as a kid,” he admitted. “I couldn’t make friends, I couldn’t play stoopball terrific, I couldn’t skate great. I stayed home and drew pictures. You know what they all thought of me: sissy Maurice Sendak” (Cott). Although his father and peers did not support him, his siblings did. His brother encouraged him to illustrate and his sister gave him his first picture book, *The Prince and the Pauper*. “It was just such a beautiful object,” he recalled. “It was printed on particularly fine paper, unlike the Disney books I had gotten previous to that” (Cott).

Just as performing in *The Nutcracker* led to Balanchine’s future as a choreographer, Sendak’s early encounters with fairy tales shaped his career. Inspired by Blake and Hoffmann, he sought to infuse children’s books with deeper meanings and to elevate them to a higher level of respect. “What is too often overlooked . . . is the fact that from their earliest years children live on familiar terms with

disrupting emotions, that fear and anxiety are an intrinsic part of their everyday lives, that they continually cope with frustration as best they can. And it is through fantasy that children can achieve catharsis” (Cott). Unlike his contemporaries, Sendak created children’s books as sources of empowerment, not just entertainment.

In his stage version of *Nutcracker* for the Pacific Northwest Ballet, he designs the shoe-throwing scene in a way that highlights Clara’s progression from imperiled to powerful. “I endowed her with the wisdom and strength I conjure up to endow all my children and then surrounded her with a minefield of problems,” Sendak explained. Played by a student, Clara heads into battle wearing a long, white nightgown much like Balanchine’s Marie. The primary difference is that Clara’s purple ballet shoes stand out beneath her gown more than Marie’s white ones. Her Nutcracker wears a full face mask with bulging eyes, buck teeth and a beard, making him even more hideous than Balanchine’s or Morris’s Nutcracker. Therefore, the fact that she endangers herself to save him is particularly impressive. Using a 27-foot tall puppet with enormous green eyes and teeth the size of Clara herself, Sendak brings Hoffmann’s Mouse King to life better than most artists (Maxwell). By throwing her tiny shoe at the gigantic head of this menacing beast and killing him, she exhibits exceptional courage and strength. As the Mouse King lies dying, smoke erupts from his body to underscore the tremendous impact Clara has had on her enemy.

After the climax, the curtain drops and rises again to reveal the Land of Snow. Clara lies on the ground beneath a white blanket with one foot exposed. Unlike other Maries and Claras, her foot is not bare. Instead, it is encased in a shiny pointe shoe. The Nutcracker appears as a handsome prince in a gold-trimmed suit played by an adult. When he draws back the blanket, he finds Clara in the form of a lovely adult ballerina. She rises gracefully from the ground wearing jewels in her hair and a white sleeveless dress that sways effortlessly as she dances. For saving the Nutcracker, she wins more than his love and life in his kingdom. She also transforms into “the beautiful woman she had always dreamed of becoming” (Pacific Northwest Ballet Association). By having Clara grow from a child into an adult before the audience’s eyes, Sendak’s *Nutcracker* makes her development and achievements especially clear.

By presenting their individual yet parallel experiences through the *Nutcracker*, Balanchine, Morris and Sendak have intertwined their identities with Hoffmann's tale. Although they came from different regions and generations, they all identified with his young yet triumphant protagonist. Hoffmann's original title, "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King," spotlights the competing forces Marie contends with in her moment of victory; she risks her life to save the Nutcracker by battling the Mouse King. Since its initial publication, authors and choreographers like Sendak and Balanchine have truncated the title to *The Nutcracker* to feature the figure that sparks her bravery. Additionally, they have honored Marie by positioning the shoe-throwing scene as the climax.

While Balanchine preserves Hoffmann's Marie in a traditional manner, Morris takes a more contemporary approach. His sets, steps and costumes have both comic and profound foundations. "I think the more he goes in for parody, the more fun he makes of something, the more he is deadly serious," said Erin Matthiessen, Morris's partner. "Often, in his dances, when the audience is laughing really, really hard, that's when he's saying what he most truly believes" (Acocella 193). While *The Hard Nut* has the most assertive protagonist, Sendak's stage version of *Nutcracker* has the most mature one. Despite these differences, all four heroines symbolize what Cech calls "mankind's need to express—in the myths of the group or of individual fantasy and dream—a figure that could reconcile oppositions and thus create a wholeness and make possible an optimistic sense of the possibilities of the future" (Cech 27).

Part 5: Diversifying America's *Nutcrackers*

Donald Byrd and *The Harlem Nutcracker*

By honoring children in “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” Hoffmann has attracted individuals from other populations that American society often overlooks. For instance, minority choreographers Donald Byrd and Michael Mao have both created *Nutcrackers* that elevate their foreign roots. Byrd’s *Harlem Nutcracker* documents his African American childhood and Mao’s *Firecracker* details his Chinese American upbringing. Together, these productions prove that Hoffmann’s themes appeal to audiences beyond nineteenth-century Germany.

Born in 1949, actor and dancer Donald Byrd studied at the London School of Contemporary Dance, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, and Yale University (“Dance Archive: Donald Byrd”). In 1978 he established a dance company called Donald Byrd/ The Group that embodied community like the Mark Morris Dance Group. Over the past three decades, he has choreographed for classical ballet companies such as the Pacific Northwest Ballet as well as for prominent black modern dance companies such as Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Dallas Black Dance Theater.

A 1989 performance by the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra of Duke Ellington’s “Nutcracker Suite” inspired him to create a *Nutcracker* to honor his ancestors. Ellington’s reconstruction of Tchaikovsky’s music spoke to the African American experience, and Byrd decided to develop it into a ballet. Like earlier *Nutcracker* choreographers, he used the fairy tale to reflect his upbringing. Adopting a subtle political agenda like Hoffmann, he strove to revive the “warmth and resilience” of black communities that had become overshadowed since his youth (Gladstone). “My generation of African-Americans grew up in communities and families that were intact,” Byrd asserted (Kisselgoff). “Only very recently have violence and drugs plagued our community. We have a wonderful tradition of the generations supporting one another, which I wanted to dramatize” (Gladstone).

When Byrd proposed his idea to David Berger, the conductor of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, he responded enthusiastically. Berger had already approached Alvin Ailey about creating an African American *Nutcracker*, but Ailey argued that there were too many *Nutcrackers* (Gladstone). Byrd disagreed, and with support from Berger, he set out to create an authentic ballet. He sought dancers who

had grown up in Harlem, New York and could draw upon their personal experiences in performance. “I feel a lot of the story pertains to my family,” said Eleanor McCoy who debuted as Clara. “I remember the good parties, the good food, the dancing and usually someone getting a little tipsy. But something else was always going on, and Donald captures it: we all nurtured one another and we knew death couldn’t separate us” (Gladstone). When McCoy pioneered the role of a black protagonist, she proved that the *Nutcracker* story reaches choreographers as well as dancers, and white as well as minority audiences.

Byrd’s *Harlem Nutcracker* became a staple at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and had its world-premiere tour in 1996 (Gladstone). Byrd began with Morris’s concept of an adult Marie and took it one step further. The ballet opens with Clara, a widowed African American grandmother, reflecting upon her youth at her Harlem brownstone, Sugar Hill Mansion. Loneliness plagues her first Christmas Eve without her husband, Gus. When her children and grandchildren arrive in “Bill Cosby-style affluence” to cheer her up, they illustrate the strength of familial ties (Kisselgoff). According to Byrd,

Grandmothers are very important in the African American community. They represent an ancestral link to Africa—a symbol of respect for one’s elders and the honor for one’s ancestors. Also, the grandparents carry forward the traditions of the church. The church in the black community is not just about religion. It represents community, morals, and ethics. (Byrd)

While cleaning up from the holiday festivities, Clara receives visitors from her past and future. The Angel of Death arrives like the Mouse King, and her husband appears as the Nutcracker Prince to fight him off. The Nutcracker struggles against the inescapable force of Death, and Clara aids him by shoving the villain out the door. After their victory, they travel back in time to safety. They take a limo to Club Sweets, the art deco nightclub they frequented throughout the 1930s, where they re-live their romance through ballroom duets. Clara feels young again, and her troubles disappear. She loses herself in performances by the Sugar Rum Cherry and the Peanut Brittle Brigade, Harlem Renaissance versions of characters from the Land of Sweets. Suddenly, Death interrupts the divertissement and forces Clara to revisit darker memories. He leads her through the Great Depression, World War II, the Civil Rights Movement and her husband’s death. While witnessing disheartening historical events, she notices her community’s resiliency and its ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Clara returns home the next day, overjoyed to spend Christmas morning with her relatives. To pass on a family tradition, she gives her youngest grandson the Nutcracker doll that Gus gave her long ago. That night, Death returns yet fails to frighten Clara. She follows him up the stairs, content to join her husband. Her Christmas Eve adventure has reassured her that her immediate family and the African American community as a whole are stable enough to endure without her. Like Hoffman, Balanchine, Morris and Sendak, Byrd stresses Clara's strength. Unlike these artists, however, he shows how she derives it from her ancestors.

Michael Mao and *Firecracker*

Chinese American choreographer Michael Mao also honors his roots in his ballet version of Hoffmann's fairy tale called *Firecracker*. Born in Shanghai, Mao migrated to New York with his family at age five. There, he trained at the Martha Graham School, the Joffrey School and the Cunningham studio. He considered dance an ideal form of cross-cultural communication and used it to unite different ethnic and social groups. In 1993, he established the Michael Mao Dance Company consisting of twenty-four dancers of all races, religions, shapes and personalities ("Nutcracker gets some fire"). Their diversity represented not only New York City, but the entire United States.

As a performer and choreographer, he quickly became a role model for immigrants who strove to integrate themselves into American society while preserving parts of their past. In New York he runs arts education programs for children from over forty nationalities ("China Tour"). Through his ESL project, "Learning English through Dance," he has become famous for teaching modern dance to improve English speaking skills among immigrants. He also tours the world, demonstrating dance as a universal form of expression. His company has performed in Paris, Oslo, Mexico and Hong Kong, and the U.S. Embassy in Beijing has deemed him "a bridge between China and America" ("Michael Mao Dance").

Mao's 1999 trip to Shanghai sparked his interest in creating his own version of *The Nutcracker*. He spoke with relatives about their experiences in China during World War II and learned about his hometown's role as a safe haven for Jewish families. "Returning to Shanghai for the first time was very

emotional for me” he confessed (“China Tour”). He stayed at the Peace Hotel, formerly owned by a prominent Sephardic family named the Sassons. There, he heard stories about Shanghai’s thriving Jewish community that compelled him to add a religious element to his ballet.

Firecracker begins in the sophisticated setting of 1937 Shanghai. The protagonists, Tiny and her brother Junior, are the twins of a Chinese mother and a Jewish father. At a holiday party, Tiny receives a firecracker from her Godfather instead of a nutcracker. This Chinese symbol of celebration becomes the Fire Prince who takes the children on a trip to Hawaii, Venezuela, Puerto Rico and the Statue of Liberty. As they traverse the globe, Tiny and Junior participate in intercultural dances like the ones Marie observes in the Land of Sweets. When the children awake from their dream excursion, they find their family preparing for a real journey. The inevitable war between China and Japan forces them to emigrate. Instead of the Land of Sweets, they travel to New York harbor. They arrive on July Fourth greeted by patriotic music and a festive fireworks display. Like Balanchine’s *Nutcracker*, *Firecracker* tells a tale of migration. “It’s really a story about the human quest for freedom and safety,” Mao explained (Graeber).

The Nutcracker’s Widespread Appeal

As minorities in the United States, Byrd and Mao have adopted “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” to celebrate the aspects of their heritage that have become buried in America. While Hoffmann exposes the negative side of nineteenth-century German family life, Byrd revives the positive side of twentieth-century black family life. *The Harlem Nutcracker* refutes degrading assumptions about African American communities. Set during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1930s, it commemorates their contributions to American culture. When the curtain rises to reveal a prosperous household of convivial family members and neighbors, audiences forget sensationalized media images of black communities plagued by drugs and violence. Although Clara appears as a grandmother instead of a child, she still serves as the most admirable character. “There is a point in the show when all the children are gathered around Clara. It is so beautiful to see the love that these children have for this elderly woman. It’s that

bond between the seniors and the children, between the past and the present, between Africa and America,” Byrd said (Byrd).

Firecracker also brings the 1930s back to life, but in a different hemisphere. Mao takes the ballet beyond its Western, Christian setting to Shanghai. His goal in recreating the *Nutcracker* was to “re-set it in a way that is relevant to me, to the dancers I have who are usually diverse, and to today’s audience” (“China Tour”). Like Hoffmann’s Marie, Tiny and Junior refuse to let their child identities constrain them. As they circle the globe with the Fire Prince in their dreams, their biracial status frees them to try the music and dance of many cultures. Although Mao’s and Hoffmann’s works debuted nearly two centuries apart, they share what Brown identifies as an overarching theme: “the fictional is never entirely detached from the nonfictional” (*Serapiontic Principle* 13). Tiny and Junior’s fantastical journey transitions into a real one, and their imagined experiences prepare them for the adaptation process that awaits them in the melting pot of America.

Ironically, in attempts to enliven their distant origins, Byrd and Mao have become part of an American tradition. Since arriving in the United States in the 1940s, *The Nutcracker* has absorbed influences from the residents of its new country. Thanks to these foreign touches, the ballet speaks to people with a variety of ethnic and religious roots. As Fisher puts it, it has given “newcomers and non-Christians an instant community and a secular ceremony of sorts, something special to do during a holiday that dominates the North American landscape” (Fisher 50). Although Balanchine touted his production as American, it still has a Russian Orthodox flavor. Similarly, *The Harlem Nutcracker* and *Firecracker* have signs of their choreographers’ African and Chinese heritages. Vigi Prakash’s bharata natyam *Nutcracker* also fuses customs from far-away continents such as Asia. Her “Indianized” version includes a sari-clad Clara, a Sugar Plum Fairy who performs Indian *mudras* and a Nutcracker who resembles the Hindu deity Krishna. Like *The Harlem Nutcracker* and *Firecracker*, it demonstrates how dance links disparate cultures.

New *Nutcrackers* continue to sprout, spotlighting diverse populations within America. The Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre created the *Bayou Nutcracker*, set in antebellum Louisiana, and the Tuscan

Regional Ballet developed the *Southwest Nutcracker*, set in 1880s Arizona (Fisher 84). In San Francisco, Dance Brigade debuted the *Revolutionary Nutcracker Sweetie*, “a two-act treatise on what ails America and the world” (Fisher 107). The first act introduces Drosselmeier as a homosexual whose lover has just died from AIDS, and the second act features dances for plants and animals on the endangered species list. Fisher asserts that these “experimental and satiric Nutcrackers tend to highlight members of communities that have traditionally been excluded in ballet land” (Fisher 106). The most recent phenomenon epitomizing the story’s all-inclusive nature is the “dance-along” *Nutcracker*. Modeled after the “sing-along” Handel’s *Messiah*, locals gather to relish Tchaikovsky’s music while learning the Waltz of the Flowers. Thanks to these interactive performances, *The Nutcracker* has truly become “the people’s ballet” (Fisher 107).

Part 6: Continuous Paths to Proliferation

***Nutcracker* Books: Words, Illustrations and the Imagination**

The *Nutcracker* phenomenon has spread across cultures and generations through multiple media, primarily books and ballets. Balanchine maintains that “the exciting thing about all the arts is that they don’t confirm what we already know, so much as they inform us of something new. They contain, in words, in music, in movement, new visions of the world” (*Balanchine’s New and Complete Stories* 429). Each version of *The Nutcracker* provides audiences with a fresh view, preventing the story from losing its appeal. Furthermore, *The Nutcracker* manifests itself in so many different forms that it attracts an extensive following.

Since “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” debuted in 1816, its literary format has contributed to its captivating power. Psychologist and Jungian analyst Verena Kast asserts that “the fairy tale speaks to us in symbols and images. The symbol mixes experiences, psychic contents, and, especially, emotions into a sum total that cannot be represented in any other form” (Kast 509). Sendak’s *Nutcracker* exemplifies how accentuating words with illustrations makes picture books so powerful. When readers open up to his double-page spreads of the Nutcracker’s kingdom, they fall into his fantasy world. The billowing clouds, glassy lakes and turreted castles draw them far deeper than the surface of the paper.

“On first picking up a book, people of any age tend to look at the pictures before reading the words,” contends children’s literature scholar Perry Nodelman (Nodelman 274). This impulse may arise because the symbols on the page often match the Jungian archetypes of dreams. “Our personal symbol is also a collective symbol, a symbol which is important to many other people, and which has always been important to human beings, with only slight changes due to the spirit of the times in our human culture. Such collective or archetypal symbols can be found in fairy tales” explains Kast (Kast 514). In “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” Sendak’s depictions of Marie concretize Jung’s ancestral archetypal child. The narrative aspect of picture books also contributes to their unifying power. “As acts of communication, literary texts are communal,” states Nodelman. “Authors write them in hopes that readers will share a sense of what they mean and so become part of a community of mutual understanding” (Nodelman 53). When Hoffmann wrote “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” he

exposed the constraining elements of nineteenth-century German upbringings with the hope that adults would adopt less restrictive, more imaginative childrearing methods.

By giving his story an autobiographical basis, Hoffmann demonstrates how literary fairy tales “address universal human issues by means of the protagonist, whose difficulties, trials, and adventures can be compared to our own” (Kast 509). Identifying with familiar figures triggers emotional responses in readers. Theorist Roland Barthes calls this effect *plaisir*, “the pleasure of finding a mirror for oneself—of identifying with fictional characters” (Nodelman 25). When young readers meet Marie, they watch her transcend her confining home and realize that although they are children, they too are not powerless. “The psychodynamics and the symbols of the fairy tale offer a spectrum of possibilities for fantasies—and the hope that creative solutions can be found, that it is possible to deal with important problems in life,” stresses Kast. “In relating to the fairy tale solution, we can find our own, one which is more adapted to our actual sociological life” (Kast 516).

Along with *plaisir*, Barthes presents *jouissance*, or bodily pleasures, as another attribute of literary fairy tales. Words describe how people and places look, feel, smell and sound, and these textual clues to create mental images. Hoffmann’s rich imagery facilitates this process of “concretization” (Nodelman 57). Like philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, a proponent of German Idealism, he strove to “extend the bounds of perception” (*Serapiontic Principle* 11). One of his most successful examples appears in “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” when he describes Marie’s journey to the Nutcracker’s kingdom:

The arch was enriched by a gallery that seemed to be made of sugar, and on it six little monkeys in red jackets were playing Turkish music. The music was so beautiful that Marie hardly noticed the pavement they were walking on, which looked like mottled marble, but was really made of artfully molded nougat. Soon she was surrounded by sweet smells given off by the woods on either side of the path. Glittering lights in the dark foliage proved to be gold and silver fruits hanging from stems of many different colors. The trunks and the branches were decorated with ribbons and bunches of flowers like the members of some joyful wedding party. When the orange-scented zephyrs stirred, the leaves and branches rustled, and the tinsel tinkled and crackled like merry music, to which the sparkling lights hopped and danced. (Hoffmann 72)

This passage underscores the participatory component of reading that draws audiences into the story. In a single paragraph, Hoffmann’s words enable readers to taste the sugared archway, hear the

monkeys' music, smell the fruit and wind of the forest, and gaze after playful beams of light. These textual sparks transport audiences into Marie's utopia. "As long as the fairy tale continues to awaken our wonderment and enable us to project counterworlds to our present society, it will serve a meaningful social and aesthetic function, not just for compensation but for revelation," says Zipes. "The worlds portrayed by the best of our fairy tales are like magic spells of enchantment that actually free us. Instead of petrifying our minds, they arouse our imagination and compel us to realize how we can fight terror and cunningly insert ourselves into our daily struggles, turning the course of the world's events in our favor" (Zipes 31). Although Hoffmann and Sendak dabbled in many artistic disciplines, they capitalized on the interactive power of the children's book to spread and preserve the *Nutcracker* story.

***Nutcracker* Ballets: Dance, Music and a Multi-Media Experience**

Dance

Since the turn of the twentieth century, *The Nutcracker* ballet has elevated Hoffmann's literary tale in American society. Scholar Stephen Nissenbaum describes *reading* the Nutcracker story as "a secure yet exhilarating Christmas treat." Fisher agrees with this description yet argues that *dancing* and *watching* the ballet have become an even more vividly experienced 'carnival of the mind'" (Fisher 45). "The physical experience of dancing, or the communal and individual thoughts and feelings engendered by attending a performance, seem to offer more scope for the Nutcracker tradition to attain meaningfulness in the lives of participants," she asserts (Fisher 45).

Even when *Nutcracker* books and ballets present similar versions of the story, they affect audiences differently. Every December, newspaper, radio and television advertisements reveal the public's demand for the *Nutcracker* ballet. It is one of the original, live holiday shows that appeals to family members young and old. "It is hard for children in the audience to appreciate classical dance. They are used to talking, they need a story," Balanchine confessed. "But everything is clear in *The Nutcracker*, and children like that" (Volkov 184). Initially, the shiny toys, heart-stopping battles and delicious sweets catch their eyes. Along with expressive music and movements, these elements hold their attention for nearly three hours. "Just as a child has her ears open, she keeps her eyes open if you take her to the ballet," Balanchine assured. "Don't be afraid that she will be bored—with no trouble at all she'll become part of the magical world ballet is portraying and she'll not resist its impact" (*Balanchine's New and Complete Stories* 429).

For many families, going to a non-Nutcracker ballet is a daunting idea. They doubt not only their child's ability to sit through a lengthy production, but their own attention span. In a young country like America, an art form from King Louis XIV's court seems antiquated and difficult to understand. According to Balanchine, however, ballet is no harder to enjoy than a baseball game. "What ballet does is take movements we're all familiar with—running and jumping, turning and balancing, lifting and

holding—and mold attitudes that underlie these actions into a spectacle that entertains” (*Balanchine’s New and Complete Stories* 428). Dance has a universal appeal that those who watch will realize.

Along with entertainment, *The Nutcracker* provides audiences with physical and emotional benefits that compel them to return year after year. “Directed by the authentic or perverted magnificence, which is man’s spirit, movement is the most powerful and dangerous art medium known,” maintains Martha Graham, a pioneer of modern American dance. “This is because it is the speech of the basic instrument, the body, which is an instinctive, intuitive, inevitable mirror revealing man as he is” (*Dance as a Theater Art* 138). At the ballet, performers are not the only ones engaged in mirroring activities. As audience members watch professionals execute complex combinations, mirror neurons enable them to rehearse these steps in their minds (Hagendoorn 91). Located in the brain’s centers for movement, language and empathy, these neurons fire not only when people perform an action, but also when they observe one. “Where ballet is concerned, learning by doing is impossible for most of us,” admitted Balanchine. “We can learn, however, by seeing and by listening; we can learn nothing if we don’t go see the ballet” (*Balanchine’s New and Complete Stories* 430). Although most people cannot pirouette on their toes like the Dew Drop Fairy or slide into the splits like Arabian Coffee, they can experience these movements internally. This phenomenon underlies the unifying quality of dance.

Mirror neurons communicate performers’ actions as well as emotions, enabling audiences to understand mime and non-imitative movements. Therefore, *Nutcrackers* with traditional pantomimes like Balanchine’s and ones characterized by abstract steps like Morris’s both have dedicated followings. According to researcher and choreographer Ivar Hagendoorn, the connection that mirror neurons create between perception and action explains why “a dancer balancing in a virtuoso position may inspire awe and be literally breathtaking: we hold our breath as we internally simulate the movement” (Hagendoorn 92). The gliding arabesque executed by Balanchine’s Sugar Plum Fairy continually astounds audiences and exemplifies this sensation. Even though they remain still, they feel the thrill of her feat. “When watching dance, the brain is submerged in motor imagery . . . the observer is in a sense virtually dancing

along,” says Hagendoorn. “Just as actual movement when exercised produces a state of arousal, so may virtual movement” (Hagendoorn 96).

The Nutcracker ballet engages audiences physically as well as emotionally. As dancers move across the stage, observers absorb them as images with representational momentum. When the light particles that carry visual information about moving objects reach the retina, it takes the visual cortex fifty to one hundred milliseconds to process them (Hagendoorn 83). To compensate for the delay, the brain predicts their path. In sports, this skill enables outfielders to position themselves to catch a baseball before it touches the ground. In the theater, it arouses audience members. When their brains correctly predict a dancer’s path, they perceive beauty. For instance, they enjoy Balanchine’s symmetric *corps de ballet* patterns in the Waltz of the Snowflakes because of their regularity. “When the movement trajectory as simulated by the brain, and the actual perceived movement as it unfolds in front of the eyes, coincide . . . this feeling is intensified if the perceived movement is performed seemingly without effort” explains Hagendoorn (Hagendoorn 100). Because a dancer strives to express effortlessness, this happens often in *The Nutcracker*. In Balanchine’s version, the male Chinese dancer’s lively split leaps serve as a perfect example.

Ironically, unpredictable occurrences trigger similar levels of stimulation. When audiences encounter unexpected moving images, they experience “a moment of intense awareness, following an initial moment of disorientation, during which attention peaks and the self is filled with awe” (Hagendoorn 102). Contemporary *Nutcracker* choreographers specialize in creating these situations. Morris, for example, sends the *corps de ballet* on unusual paths across the floor and choreographs heavy lunges to the tinkling celesta of the *pas de deux*. At first, these scenes fill the theater with tension. Then they transform into positive sources of suspense and anticipation.

According to Hagendoorn, dance has a “double route to pleasure. One operates through the increased allocation of attention and by promoting a general state of arousal if a movement deviates from its predicted path, the other by rewarding the correct prediction of the motion trajectory” (Hagendoorn 98). While these routes appear in many ballets, people are most likely to find them in *The Nutcracker*.

Although the public's interest in dance has increased within the past decade, *The Nutcracker* remains the most approachable production for dance novices. Therefore, it plays a critical role in introducing Americans to the compelling aspects of dance and garnering support for this creative discipline.

Music

In his essay on *The Nutcracker* entitled "Ballet's Present Eden," W.H. Auden, a poet and friend of Balanchine's, writes that "every art form has a particular nature which allows it to express some things better than any rival medium" (Anderson 217). Ballet benefits not only from dramatic physical movements, but also from the music, costumes, scenery and lighting that enhance these movements. Like dance, music sparks emotional reactions. In a 1992 study that asked listeners to describe how music shapes their lives, they said it helped them identify and release their feelings. "Music reconnects me to myself when my emotions are ignored or suppressed through sheer busyness," explained one study participant. Slow, low-pitched pieces like the one that concludes *The Nutcracker's* party scene bring out sadness. Fast, loud pieces like the Russian Trepak bring out excitement (Slobada 220). Following songs through different psychological states helps listeners find "a sense of relief from anxiety that is seldom experienced in the extra-musical life of a particular individual" (Slobada 203). Just as Hoffmann's fairy tale reunites audiences with childhood memories, Tchaikovsky's score reunites them with feelings buried beneath adult responsibilities.

As "the world's most often danced to composer," Tchaikovsky fuses music and movement with striking results (Anderson 57). According to music critic Edward Lockspeiser, his score touches people with "an almost hysterical emotionalism" (Anderson 57). As soon as the first pianissimo notes rise from the orchestra pit, the music mesmerizes the audience. Without cellos or double basses, the overture shimmers with a light magic that floats above the entire ballet. To transition seamlessly between scenes, Tchaikovsky blends orchestral colors. Woodwinds evoke darkness as the Nutcracker heads into battle. Then rippling string arpeggios whisk him into the Land of Snow. As musicologist and dance historian Marion Kant describes it,

All semblances of reality and evil disappear and the characters as well as the audience enter a childlike fairy-tale world. In this fantasy-land, the harp—aside from evoking the magic of the place—is used to create a whirlwind within the Waltz of the Snowflakes. By writing the harp glissandos for two parts in contrasting directions, Tchaikovsky achieves a blustery effect, demonstrating both his expertise in composing idiomatically for the instrument and his creativity in finding new ways to simulate non-musical sounds. (Kant 171)

The three-part structure of Act I flaunts the composer's talent for building climax. When Fritz breaks the Nutcracker, Tchaikovsky raises the key a semitone from C major to D flat major to match Clara's heightened feelings towards her doll. This change emphasizes the main character's awareness of a new reality, "an eminently Hoffmanesque touch" (*Tchaikovsky's Ballets* 238). Galloping strings take her into the battle scene where snare drums, woodwinds and brass horns make military calls (Kant 170). Toys leap to instruments in the higher registers while mice crawl among the lower ones. When the Christmas tree grows, the triplet fluttering of the woodwinds resembles the flickering candles on the branches (*Tchaikovsky's Ballets* 223). Harps and violins carry the melody's volume higher and higher until cymbals crash at the tree's peak. According to Kant,

Although the audience can see the tree magically grow on stage during the performance, we can hear the fantastic change take place even without any visual aids. As Tchaikovsky's short ascending phrase gives the Christmas tree its height, the harp arpeggios add breadth as they cascade up and down the instrument. Simply by developing a short phrase, Tchaikovsky was able to create one of the most effective illusions in nineteenth-century theatrical music. (Kant 173)

Tchaikovsky's theatrical abilities derive from his wide range of influences. Just as Morris drew from ethnic dance styles, Tchaikovsky drew from foreign musicians. He admired French composers such as Bizet, Massenet and Delibes for their melodies and modesty (Anderson 57). As a tribute to these men, he used the French folk song, "Bon Voyage, Monsieur Dumolet," for the children's march (Kant 172). To acknowledge his German sources of inspiration, he chose a *Grossvater* tune for the Grandfather's Dance. In Act II, he based Arabian Coffee upon a Georgian lullaby, Russian Tea upon a Russian folk tune, and the Nutcracker's variation upon an Italian tarantella. Throughout the ballet, he also incorporated instruments from other countries such as the German glockenspiel and the French mirliton and celesta (Anderson 73).

Because Tchaikovsky's score includes a variety of international flavors, it appeals to listeners from many different backgrounds. It preserves Hoffmann's views on physical and emotional

transformation and inspires modern artists such as Sendak and Mao to honor them through illustrations and choreography. According to musicologist Julia Rozanova,

Tchaikovsky saw in Petipa's plan not a fantastic féerie, effective and astonishing, having only exterior points of similarity with Hoffmann's literary basis, but a serious work, profound in content. In it is revealed not only the child's soul with its special view of its surroundings, but also a decisive turning-point, a moment of qualitative change and transformation in a persona on the threshold of youth, of a new discovery of the world, its joys and alarms, and before all else an enormous confidence in happiness. This psychological hidden meaning became the content of the music. (*Tchaikovsky's Ballets* 199)

By reinforcing universal messages from the original fairy tale, the score speaks to every generation.

Dance critic Mary Clarke claims that it “seems always to have been part of our consciousness . . . we do not remember it ever being quite new. It tinkles, sparkles and enchants and takes us nearer to the world of the fairy tale than any other music by Tchaikovsky” (Anderson 75). Like the inner child, it lives inside us, waiting to be rediscovered.

A Multi-Media Experience

The interplay between music and movement exemplifies a theme that unites two centuries of *Nutcrackers*. Music has motivated *Nutcracker* creators and shaped how their characters convey the original story through dance. Hoffmann used the piano as a creative outlet during his rigidly ruled youth. His early exposure to music spurred his interest in the arts and led him to establish the Serapion Brotherhood. Among actors, poets and playwrights, he gained an appreciation for fusing different forms of expression. Both Balanchine and Morris followed Hoffmann's lead by starting with the piano and progressing to other arts. Consequently, they have been lauded as two of the most musical choreographers of the twentieth century.

One of Balanchine's most famous phrases, “See the music and hear the dancing,” captures his choreographic goals (*By George* 16). He believed that because music contains a reason for dancing, he should honor the music with steps that match its sentiment. “You have to have sound in order to dance,” he maintained. “Music is like an aquarium with the dancers inside it. It's all around you, like fish moving through water” (Ballet Society 134). Instead of treating the movements as supreme, he gave them the same respect as the notes.

Tchaikovsky's music had a particularly profound impact on Balanchine. "Imagine yourself in a church and suddenly the organ starts playing overwhelmingly grand music in all its registers. And you stand there mouth agape in astonishment," described Balanchine. "That's how I always felt about Tchaikovsky. He's like a father to me" (Volkov 32). Although Balanchine was born ten years after Tchaikovsky's death, he found striking similarities between their lives. As children, their parents sent them away to study in St. Petersburg. Balanchine attended the Imperial School of Ballet and Tchaikovsky went to the School of Jurisprudence. Separated from their families, they suffered from homesickness and consoled themselves with books. Coincidentally, Balanchine also sought comfort in performing Tchaikovsky's ballets at the Maryinsky.

In a 1981 interview with Balanchine, musicologist Solomon Volkov noted an intense personal connection between the artists: "I heard a genius speaking about a genius," he said. "I could see that Tchaikovsky was still alive for Balanchine, that he actually felt himself to be in continual communication with the composer" (Volkov 14). In a children's book Balanchine created about Tchaikovsky, he confirmed this to be true: "In everything that I did to Tchaikovsky's music, I sensed his help," he confessed (Volkov 35). As an adult, Balanchine choreographed over a dozen Tchaikovsky ballets. Although he valued each one individually, he declared that "*The Nutcracker* is Tchaikovsky's masterpiece" (Volkov 175).

In his *Nutcracker* ballet, Balanchine complemented the music with costumes by Barbara Karinska, an Oscar-winning designer who worked alongside him for nearly fifty years. She became so integral to his production that he honored her by asking her to play the Grandmother in the party scene (*A Very Young Dancer*). When not attending to costumes, Balanchine focused on stage lighting to enhance Tchaikovsky's emotional score. Today, *The Nutcracker* is one of the brightest ballets in the New York City Ballet's repertory. "The scenery is all white, and it requires that much light to stay crisp and to carry the intensity of the dance to a large audience," explained lighting designer Mark Stanley. "One of the unique qualities of the NYCB lighting is how electric the air can become because of the enormous

amount of sidelight in the plot. *Nutcracker* is one of the shows that benefits from this” (“Five Questions for Mark Stanley”).

Another production that benefits from artistic elements other than choreography is *The Hard Nut*. Morris correlates each step to Tchaikovsky’s score. “Just about every dance I do starts directly from a piece of music,” he says (*Dance as a Theatre Art* 251). He shares Balanchine’s fondness for putting modern movement to pieces by early classical composers. Tchaikovsky’s rich instrumentation gives him multiple layers of sound to work with. It also builds a foundation for distinguishing characters. For instance, violas and muted horns set a sinister tone for Drosselmeier’s arrival, and the light celesta signals the entrance of Marie. Initially, Tchaikovsky selected the celesta for the Sugar Plum Fairy, but in *The Hard Nut*, Morris uses it to accompany Marie when she usurps her variation. Although this delicate keyboard instrument was not originally meant for her, it matches her youthful nature.

In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Howard claims that “the real reason *The Hard Nut* never loses its laughs runs far deeper than sight gags, and it has to do with Morris’s musicality. In *The Hard Nut*, his response to Tchaikovsky is often so simple that it’s deep. Almost every movement is both parody and tribute to the score” (Howard 1). Robert Cole, director of Cal Performances and conductor of many *Nutcrackers* agrees: “It’s the most brilliant choreographic treatment of that music in history” (La Rocco 2).

The sets and costumes in *The Hard Nut* are also notable. While the production concept came from horror-comic artist Charles Burns, Adrienne Lobel and Martin Pakledinaz executed the sets and costumes. In the Stahlbaum’s stark, black-and-white living room, party guests jive in red and green bellbottoms, halter tops and knee-high leather boots. In Act II, the backdrop of a globe supplements Morris’s ethnic dances and his vision of an intercultural utopia. With choreography that combines traditional and contemporary steps, Morris prevents foreign and retro elements from clashing with the score’s European, nineteenth-century undertones.

Musicality stands out not only in Morris’s choreography, but also in Sendak’s scenery, costumes and illustrations. Even though music was not one of the many art forms Sendak dabbled in, he used it as

a foundation for his work. “To conceive musically for me means to quicken the life of the illustrated book,” he wrote in his essay entitled “The Shape of Music.” “Music is a metaphor for everything” (Cott).

Just as Tchaikovsky led Balanchine to Petipa’s *Nutcracker* ballet, Mozart led Sendak to Stowell’s. In the introduction to *Nutcracker* he wrote:

When I began *Nutcracker* I was beady-eyed, looking for a proper sign. It came from Herr E.T.A. Hoffmann himself, who out of the love for that most lovable and best of all artists, Mozart, changed one of his middle names to Amadeus. Tchaikovsky had adored Mozart and had written a number of compositions in homage to this master and my own particular hero. (Hoffmann xii)

In a tribute to his musical muse, Sendak includes a bust of Mozart on top of Clara’s toy cabinet in his set for the Stahlbaums’ Christmas party. Although he held Mozart above all other composers, he found Tchaikovsky’s score well-suited for the tone of his book and ballet. “His music, bristling with implied action, has a subtext alive with wild child cries and belly noises. It is rare and genuine and does justice to the private world of children,” he said (Hoffmann xi). To expose this often frightening world to the public, Sendak begins the ballet with a scrim curtain depicting Hoffmann’s most menacing figures; the Mouse King and Princess Pirlipat in her cursed form. Throughout the production, his costumes correspond to the nature of the characters. For instance, the mice have strikingly realistic heads with beady eyes while the soothing snowflakes and spring flowers wear pale, simple dresses.

Ultimately, collaborating with Hoffmann, Tchaikovsky and Stowell made the intimidating task of creating a unique *Nutcracker* gratifying for Sendak. “The premiere of *Nutcracker* in December 1983, in Seattle, was a superb moment for Kent, the company, and me,” he wrote. “While we see the flaws and wince at near misses, we are satisfied that our individual creative selves have found a comfortable and handsome partnership in this vast, unwieldy work. It is, from the opening bars of Marie’s dream, to the unpredictable apotheosis, truly our *Nutcracker*” (Hoffmann xiv).

The Harlem Nutcracker also emerged from the close collaboration of artists. While Byrd devised the story, David Berger took the music in a radical direction. Instead of Tchaikovsky’s score, he started with Duke Ellington’s “Nutcracker Suite.” He added elements of rap and hip-hop and arranged to have a Brooklyn gospel choir called the Lafayette Inspirational Ensemble sing in the party scene (Gladstone).

Byrd responded by integrating everything from classical ballet to jazz into his choreography. To celebrate American movement styles, he used funk and hip-hop in the party scene and “Busby Berkeley-style dancing” in the snow scene (Slingerland). “Artistically, Mr. Byrd’s glittering stylization of social dancing and show dancing is what his *Nutcracker* is about,” wrote *New York Times* critic Anna Kisselgoff (Kisselgoff).

Selecting lively steps helped Byrd infuse his ballet with attitude. “Like a good theater director, Donald knows exactly how to get emotions out of performers,” said Gus Solomons Jr. who played Clara’s husband. “He demands that every movement be a manifestation of an emotional state or dramatic action” (Gladstone). Gabriel Berry designed over two hundred inventive costumes to help Byrd’s performers get into character. He made clear plastic tutus for the snowflakes, champagne bottle headdresses for the performers at Club Sweets, and poinsettia skirts for the Dance of the Floreadores. “We were trying to get a sense of festivity,” Berry said. “I tried to combine a contemporary profile with showgirl stuff. Sort of the 30s meets the 90s” (Slingerland). Lighting designer Eduardo V. Sicangco also fueled the energetic atmosphere. “I wanted the stage to be a riot of color,” he declared (Gladstone). Inspired by the paintings of Romare Bearden, he shifted from natural lighting in Act I to vivid reds, greens, golds and blues in Act II. Fortunately, his flashy colors enhanced rather than obscured Byrd’s initial goal. “The traditional *Nutcracker* is pretty, but it isn’t about us. I wanted to bring a sense of inclusion to African Americans. I wanted this *Nutcracker* to invite black people to the theater,” he revealed (Byrd).

Like Byrd, Mao toys with music, costumes and lighting to attract an atypical *Nutcracker* crowd. Forty percent of the score consists of Tchaikovsky’s original music. Jonathan Faiman arranged the rest, incorporating Chinese, American, Jewish and Mongolian songs (Sun). His additions include selections from Dudley Buck, Henry Cowell, Edward MacDowell and Charles Ives (“*Nutcracker* gets some fire”). He also re-orchestrated the score for thirty-six musicians rather than seventy. “In all cases, the alterations both preserve the spirit of the original and help bring a new and unique musical focus to the action on stage,” Faiman explained (“*Nutcracker* gets some fire”).

To recreate an authentic Shanghai atmosphere, Mao turned to Broadway set designer Ming Cho Lee. Although Lee had worked with both the Joffrey and Pacific Northwest Ballets, he had never seen a *Nutcracker*. Nevertheless, Mao sought him out for his familiarity with the *Firecracker's* setting. "I grew up in Shanghai during the 1930s . . . I remember it having a very multi-cultural identity. It was the predominant characteristic of the city," Lee said ("China Tour"). Upon agreeing to collaborate with Mao, Lee attended several *Nutcrackers* and agreed that the time had come to create a Chinese version. Despite its Asian focus, he felt confident that it would attract a varied audience.

With a mixture of eastern and western elements that represent Shanghai, Lee's sets stray far beyond the traditional. "The style I employ is inspired by art deco with traditional Chinese elements thrown in such as the use of color," he said. "Also I am using 'pop' art as a tool to translate the magical qualities of the production. Having a portrait of Shirley Temple in the bedroom is a touch I am particularly fond of because of its references and appeal" ("China Tour"). To emphasize the child's perspective, Lee enlarges everything to three-quarters of its normal size. He also uses highly saturated colors and distinct stylistic themes for each region. "My goal is to have a background that is never static but helps in illustrating the journey the children make throughout the work" he said ("China Tour").

Along with Lee's scenery, Linda Chao's costumes enhance the ballet's physical appearance. Ancient Han dynasty artwork inspired the one hundred eighteen pieces she created for *Firecracker* ("Michael Mao Dance"). Additionally, Tony-award winner B.D. Wong narrates the ballet. Thanks to his contribution, *Firecracker* intertwines more creative disciplines than most versions of *The Nutcracker*. "I think to do a *Nutcracker* is every designer's dream, especially a version where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," declared Lee. "This project essentially is larger than any one collaborator. And, as a result, there is a lot one can artistically 'sink one's teeth into,' which is why I feel fortunate to be involved in this particular production" ("China Tour"). By blending dynamic movements with rich music, detailed sets, elaborate attire and vivid words, *Firecracker* enlivens all the senses and revives Hoffmann's Serapion principle. The *South China Morning Post* proclaims: "it unveils strata of human emotions not explicit, but deeply felt. It speaks volumes" ("Michael Mao Dance").

Part 7: Encore

Onstage at *The Nutcracker* Ballet

While watching *The Nutcracker* provides stimulating benefits, the experience pales in comparison to performing in the ballet. “Performance completes our understanding of dance,” says Anna Paskevka, the Dance Department Chair at the Chicago Academy for the Arts. “It puts our long hours of practice into perspective and gives us an opportunity to share what we know and what we feel with others” (Paskevka 85). As a dance scholar and teacher, she sees firsthand the natural connection between children and ballet. “We have forgotten how our ancestors danced or why they danced, but children remember,” she says (Paskevka 3). Infused with Hoffmann’s respect for youth, *The Nutcracker* captivates this young population and compels them to bring its characters to life year after year.

In *A Very Young Dancer*, Jill Krementz reveals the forces that drive young ballerinas to subject themselves to intimidating auditions and to sacrifice four months of the year for relentless rehearsals and performances. Like Sendak, Krementz studied at the New York Art Students League and developed a unique style of children’s literature (*Booknotes*). As a writer and photographer, she documents the lives of accomplished young artists, from actresses to circus performers. Her books address both the challenges and rewards of being dedicated to the arts as a child. With black-and-white photographs, she captures her subjects with stunning depth. She says her colorless scheme “translates the moment into something I’ve seen and not everybody’s seen. If you and I were to stand and look at almost anything, we would see it in color; we would see it the way it is. So what you see isn’t any different than what I see, whereas when I translate it into black-and-white, I think I am seeing something that you haven’t seen” (*Booknotes*).

In *A Very Young Dancer*, Krementz follows ten-year-old Stephanie as she earns the role of Mary, the female protagonist in this version of Balanchine’s *The Nutcracker*. Readers meet Stephanie just days before the audition. She has been dancing for four years, two at the School of American Ballet, and belongs to a long line of ballerinas. Her mother used to dance and choreograph, and her older sister has performed in *The Nutcracker* for three years. Along with her family, Stephanie considers the New York City Ballet’s production a significant source of inspiration: “When the tree starts growing it’s the most

exciting thing. It gets gigantic! It's the scene I remember most from all the times I saw *Nutcracker* before I was in it" (*A Very Young Dancer*). Clearly, Balanchine's expensive attempt to recreate the Maryinsky's remarkable tree has been effective.

Stephanie approaches the audition hoping to be cast in the party scene, and leaves astounded by her starring role. "I was so scared, and when I'm scared I always think I won't get picked," she says. Throughout the fall she practices up to five days per week. During the holiday season she does nineteen performances, sometimes two in one day. "I was too excited to be tired," she says after opening night, "but when I finally did get home around eleven I fell asleep before Mommy even turned out the light" (*A Very Young Dancer*).

While this schedule seems demanding for a ten-year-old, it is standard for *Nutcracker* cast members. Since Petipa's time, children have been vital to the ballet. Before 1892, youths were rarely seen in leading roles. "By assigning students of the theatre school to the important parts of Clara, Fritz, and the Nutcracker, Petipa was going beyond the tradition," wrote musicologist Roland Wiley (*Tchaikovsky's Ballets* 200). Their acting abilities made up for the ballet technique they lacked, so they did not limit the quality of the performance. Petipa cast children in main roles that emphasized pantomime, and he cast adults in secondary parts that required more difficult dancing. Like Hoffmann, he honored youths and highlighted the insight they brought to his work of art.

Petipa endangered his reputation with a child-centered ballet, but his risk proved worthwhile. Had he not insisted on using young dancers, *The Nutcracker* may have lost momentum and never made it to America. In 1940, the *Ballet Russes* toured the United States with a condensed version and held contests in each town to choose Claras from the community (Anderson 108). By involving local families, these competitions heightened interest in the production. In 1955, the *Ballet Russes* brought *The Nutcracker* to Cincinnati and gave Suzanne Farrell her first glimpse of professional dance (Farrell 26). They chose her to play Clara in Act II, not knowing that this role would lead her to become one of Balanchine's muses and most lauded company members.

With the School of American Ballet, Balanchine automatically had a pool of young dancers to draw into his production. Because his early years with the Maryinsky convinced him to pursue professional dance, he included students in *The Nutcracker* to inspire them to join his company. “It was what all the of-age kids did at Juilliard’s School of American Ballet,” recalled Jason Stell who played Fritz in 1973 (Stell). “I followed suit. They needed boys.” Balanchine also involved children for financial reasons. Their friends and relatives boosted ticket sales tremendously. Most importantly, Balanchine enjoyed working with youths and coached them individually. He had “a special feeling for childhood and children, a feeling shared by so many people who become professional musicians, dancers, or athletes early in life, moving abruptly from childhood to adulthood” noted Volkov (Volkov 18). Consequently, he filled his ballet with details to delight his students. From Drosselmeier’s magical dolls to Clara’s reindeer sleigh, he always had them in mind. As Nancy Reynolds, director of research for the George Balanchine Foundation, has observed, “Balanchine’s *Nutcracker* spoke to all children who had ever aspired to dance, as well as to youngsters in general, for it dealt with the hopes and fears of childhood, the nurturing presence of the family, and the magic of Christmas” (Reynolds 304).

Today, the New York City Ballet’s *Nutcracker* involves ninety company dancers and two casts of fifty children from the School of American Ballet (Zuckerman). They rehearse from September to November and perform approximately four times per week throughout December. According to Reynolds, “it was probably Balanchine’s use of children that did the most to establish *Nutcracker* as a holiday ritual in America. In this he was only following the custom of the Imperial Theaters, but it was a custom largely unknown in America, where dancing children were equated with the worst in amateur recitals” (Reynolds 304). By inviting children to perform and glorifying their roles, Balanchine successfully fueled his tradition. “*The Nutcracker* is the ballet I danced the longest, and I never grew tired of dancing it—with its feeling of family, Christmas, and celebration, it was always like a piece of happiness” said Violette Verdy, one of his Sugar Plum Fairies (Verdy 41)

In contrast to Balanchine, Morris chose not to include young dancers. To prove that anyone can be anyone, he had adults play children. In *The Harlem Nutcracker*, Byrd made Clara not only an adult

dancer, but an adult character as well. In his 1987 production, Robert Joffrey also put company members in child roles. He choreographed complex sequences for Clara and Fritz that demanded professional talent. Today, students who audition as mice, dolls and soldiers must adhere to a strict height limit. In order to appear shorter than the “adult-children,” they cannot be over five foot two. By absorbing the energy of the young dancers beside them, the professionals portray Clara and Fritz convincingly and maintain the ballet’s youthful orientation.

Joffrey’s production presents *The Nutcracker* as a ballet for all ages as well as abilities. Unlike the Balanchine version which exclusively selects students from the School of American Ballet, the Joffrey version recruits aspiring dancers from throughout the Chicago metropolitan area. It attracts students from elite suburban studios as well as those from the inner city. Oftentimes, their dance background consists only of occasional participation in the Joffrey’s youth outreach programs. According to Carla Graham-White, former children’s ballet mistress for the Joffrey, “It doesn’t always matter if a child’s foot points beautifully or they have a high extension. One of the things they have to have is a sense of rhythm, musicality, ability to pick up combinations. There’s a naturalness you want to look for onstage” (Graham-White). Each year she would cut some of the best technical dancers at the audition because they lacked expression. “What I look for are children who look like they’re going to be comfortable onstage, enjoy dancing, and can smile even through the audition process.” Even for the most professional productions, technique is not all that matters.

In *A Very Young Dancer*, Stephanie explains that basic movements are as integral to *The Nutcracker* as intricate choreography. “He [the children’s ballet master] told me that the most important thing about dancing was to make it look as natural as possible and that running and walking are the hardest things to do on stage. I agree” (*A Very Young Dancer*). Although pedestrian steps are difficult to replicate onstage, they provide beginners with paths into the dance world. “Ballet takes our natural impulse to move, to make signs, to make ourselves as attractive and graceful as possible, and turns it into something new, something entirely different,” Balanchine maintained (Balanchine 428). By beginning with everyday movements, the roots of dance vocabulary, anyone can develop into a dancer.

“For human beings, dancing is as natural as breathing,” said Paskevka (Paskevka 3). *The Nutcracker* embraces this notion by involving aspiring ballerinas of all skill levels. According to legendary modern dancer Mary Wigman, “dance is a language which is inherent, but slumbering in every one of us. It is possible for every human to experience the dance as an expression in his own body, and in his own way” (*Dance as a Theatre Art* 150). As early as 1641, M. Saint-Hubert emphasized the non-discriminating nature of ballet. In *How to Compose Successful Ballets* he wrote, “It is possible to have many types of individuals dance in ballets, even lame persons, who in certain things can be as successful as others” (*Dance as a Theatre Art* 34). The Joffrey upholds this assertion by including students with physical disabilities in its *Nutcracker*. These children perform in their wheelchairs as party guests, participating in everything from the tree lighting to the gift-giving ceremony. Along with their peers, they create a dynamic, realistic atmosphere onstage that underscores dance as a universal art.

With a welcoming attitude, *The Nutcracker* draws an abundance of young performers and enables all kinds of children to participate in a historic production. The ballet also lets them transcend limiting aspects of their identities, which compels them to return year after year. “In ballet, the clumsy become graceful, the hesitant, inarticulate thought is expressed in direct, eloquent gesture, and nothing appears impossible,” said Balanchine (Balanchine 428). Human children become mischievous mice, righteous angels and steadfast soldiers. No matter how unusual the roles, the transformative power of dance makes them assumable.

In its literary and ballet forms, *The Nutcracker* frees audiences from the factors of daily life that inhibit self-expression. According to psychologist Kate Hefferon, dance is “a mimicry activity that makes us feel more than what we are through fantasy, pretense and disguise . . . It allows the participant to escape ‘reality’ and create an alternative world for themselves” (Hefferon 144). This medium has magnified Hoffmann’s original messages and empowered young performers, especially girls. When *Nutcrackers* began blossoming in the United States during the 1950s, ballet was one of the few acceptable extracurricular pursuits for females. Through performance opportunities, *The Nutcracker* showcased their talents, boosted their confidence and provided them with role models. In Balanchine’s 1954 production,

women played the most venerated parts. Marie revealed her strength by directing the battle, and the Sugar Plum Fairy flaunted her feminine power in the Land of Sweets. “She’s not some flighty fairy,” explained a member of the National Ballet of Canada. “She’s definitely a fairy who has control over the people and the situation she’s around. And she’s definitely chosen her partner, as opposed to being won-over in a very Jane Eyre-esque way” (Fisher 149).

For over fifty years, *Nutcrackers* have freed American dancers from the constraints of social roles. Sociologist Angela McRobbie describes dance as “a participative myth . . . a way to taking one’s destiny into one’s own hands (Fisher 66). Like members of the Mark Morris Dance Group, *Nutcracker* children subvert gender stereotypes onstage. Because females outnumber males at the auditions, girls get cast as boys, especially in the party scene. As Fisher articulates it, “dance operates as a metaphor for an external reality which is unconstrained by the limits and expectations of gender identity and which successfully and relatively painlessly transports its subjects from a passive to a more active psychic position” (Fisher 66). At first, many girls dread giving up tutus for trousers. Nevertheless, they find freedom and adventure in developing their male roles. “It has been my experience that dancers drop naturally into their parts,” assured Balanchine. “They gradually come to live them” (Balanchine 527).

Because *The Nutcracker* provides copious roles for children, it creates more aspiring professional dancers than any other ballet. By placing children, adults, amateurs and professionals onstage together, it dissolves the ballet hierarchy and encourages young dancers to pursue their dreams. According to Wigman,

The professional dancer must have the divine capacity to portray the difficult language of the dance: to recreate and objectify what he feels inside himself. The same desire for artistic liberation, for exaltation, for personal ecstasy, for bodily movement, in short, for activating his own imagination is also present in the non-professional dancer, and therefore gives him the right to seek for himself the intense expression of the dance. (*Dance as a Theatre Art* 150)

In her autobiography, *Holding on to the Air*, Suzanne Farrell admits to worshipping members of the New York City Ballet. “I learned everything, including the Sugar Plum’s *pas de deux* and the Dewdrops dance and secretly planned and hoped that if anyone in the whole second act was injured I could save the day and dance their part, any part” (Farrell 48). In *A Very Young Dancer*, Stephanie reveals a similar level of

admiration. She gets advice from principals like Patricia McBride and collects autographed pointe shoes from Sugar Plum Fairies like Kay Mazzo.

In *The Nutcracker*, professionals serve as motivational forces. Collaborating with them is “such an incredible experience for children to have,” Graham-White stressed (Graham-White). Seeing how close they are in age motivates them to work hard and fast to achieve professional status. “I looked up to a number of principals,” said Stell, who rehearsed alongside Edward Villella and Mikhail Baryshnikov. “Jacques D’Amboise was the one who insisted I audition in the first place” (Stell). Because dancers turn professional fairly young, *Nutcracker* children have no trouble envisioning themselves as company members. As they advance from the rehearsal to performance phase, so do their chances of achieving their dreams. “Not only does it make the dancer want to continue performing,” says Hefferon, “it pushes them to return day after day to the grueling practice sessions that will eventually propel their career” (Hefferon 148).

Even for dance students without professional aspirations, *The Nutcracker* drives them to achieve. “It’s one of the ballets that has a really large children’s cast and you can use really young children to pretty advanced teenagers and still have them look like children,” says Graham-White. “If it’s a ballet company that does it year after year, the children can work their way up. It gives them a sense of pride of what they’re doing and a measurement of how they progress as dancers.” Because of its intrinsic rewards, performing in the annual *Nutcracker* becomes an addiction. It helps children to master new challenges and to free themselves from the constraints of self-consciousness and time. Onstage, they dedicate themselves so sincerely to their tasks that they enter flow, “a psychological state in which the mind and body ‘just click,’ creating optimal performance” (Hefferon 141). This state enhances the experience that Hoffmann intended his audience to gain from reading about Marie ascending into the *Nutcracker*’s kingdom. As Hefferon describes, it provides “a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality” (Hefferon 144). Zina Bethune, one of Balanchine’s first Mariés, expressed feeling “a kind of high in which everything works in harmony. I guess you could say that such a moment has become my frame of reference for everything else in life” (Fisher 73).

In a phenomenological study involving in-depth interviews with nine professional dancers, Hefferon explored the environmental conditions that enhance flow onstage. She found two significant factors to be the correlation between the music and choreography, and strong social ties between performers. Both factors are prevalent in *The Nutcracker*. Balanchine and Morris were praised for their musicality, and their versions create tight connections between Tchaikovsky's notes and the steps. Furthermore, their party scenes serve as opportunities for the youngest and oldest cast members to develop realistic relationships. In rehearsal, they memorize movement sequences as well as strengthen interpersonal ties. By opening night, their interactions look and feel genuine.

Additionally, Hefferon found that flow instills dancers with confidence, freedom, and spirituality, three sensations that *Nutcracker* participants agree they experience. She concluded that performing liberates them from doubts, criticisms and negative mental thoughts (Hefferon 149). "You are completely comfortable with yourself and relaxed and open to your body and how you approach the movement," explained one of her study respondents (Hefferon 150). With their subversion of gender roles, Morris's dancers exemplify this state of acceptance in *The Hard Nut*. Balanchine observed a similar attitude among his New York City Ballet members. "Dancers don't worry about people watching them from behind," he said. "They move unself-consciously; their grace is confidence, an attribute to the whole body" (Balanchine 519). In *Nutcracker* ballets, costumes aid children in abandoning their stage fright. When they don Victorian party dresses or massive mouse heads, they "enter an alternative state of reality, therefore eliminating fears and vulnerability as they took on a character on stage" (Hefferon 153). "As a dancer you are putting on this kind of aura that you are this something else," said one of Hefferon's study respondents (Hefferon 153).

For many *Nutcracker* cast members, the ballet takes on a religious role. "In the theater we felt we were on hallowed ground," said Merrill Ashley, a principal with the New York City Ballet in the 1980s. "In fact, we often heard Balanchine say that we should think and act as if the theater were a church" (Fisher 177). Suzanne Farrell regarded *The Nutcracker* with the same level of awe when she debuted as Clara at age ten. "The curtain went up, and I was in heaven" she recalled (Farrell 26). Participating in

The Nutcracker becomes a ritual, not simply because of its Christmas setting, but because performers intertwine their lives with their stage identities. “One thing inspires something else,” said Graham-White. “I think that’s mainly what my job is, besides getting a good show on . . . to inspire children, to enjoy themselves, to love dance, to come back” (Graham-White).

Inside *The Nutcracker* Ballet

For five years, Graham-White convinced me to return to the Joffrey production. By offering me the opportunity to immerse myself in *The Nutcracker* as a child, she inspired me to continue engaging with the ballet as an adult. Fisher describes *The Nutcracker* as “an artistic aspirant and itinerant adventurer, an immigrant and citizen, and finally, a kind of spiritual mentor” (Fisher 193). For the past nineteen years, *The Nutcracker* has mentored me not only spiritually, but also artistically and academically.

Through my research, I have discovered connections between my life and the lives of other *Nutcracker* creators and performers. As a child, piano and ballet lessons sparked my desire to express music through movement to tell a story, just as they did for Balanchine and Morris. Seeing *The Nutcracker* motivated me to become part of the ballet, just as it did for Stephanie and Stell. When I began auditioning, my mother gave me *A Very Young Dancer*. Once I started dancing with the Joffrey, I treated it as my Bible. Before every show, I read through Stephanie’s story to get myself into a performance mindset. Although I never played the female protagonist as she did, I participated in her climactic shoe-throwing scene through other roles.

Like many children, I began my *Nutcracker* career as an angel. As the youngest and shortest, I led my fellow angels onto the snow-covered stage after Clara’s defeat of the Mouse King. Although my steps consisted of basic *bouffées*, my presence felt significant. As the first sign of life after the battle, I opened the scene signaling Clara’s new identity. Tiny paper snowflakes fell from the ceiling and white clouds of smoke rolled gently from the wings. As I glided through them, I floated into my own fantasy

world within Clara's. Carrying a glowing candle, I lighted her way toward the Nutcracker's kingdom. Like Farrell in her *Nutcracker* debut, I felt as if I were in heaven.

Four years later, I witnessed Clara's triumph and transformation from a different perspective. As a more mature dancer, I depicted the darker side of *The Nutcracker* as a mouse. Just as I appeared first in the snow scene, I appeared first in the battle scene. In a puff of smoke, I scurried out of the Stahlbaums' fireplace and into their living room. Although the smoke came from the same machine as during the snow scene, the lighting gave it a more sinister effect before the battle. With my human form concealed beneath an enormous mouse head, I introduced evil into Clara's Christmas. Instead of celebrating her victory over the Mouse King, I tried to prevent it. Along with seven other mice, I charged the Nutcracker's army to protect my leader. Clara's dolls hurled giant gum drops at us and toy soldiers fired cannons in our direction. To my dismay, Clara thwarted us with a single ballet shoe. While audiences grasped the magnitude of this moment from their seats, I experienced it onstage from opposite ends and acquired a special appreciation for Clara's bravery.

Adopting a menacing mouse role after a virtuous angel one taught me the challenges and rewards of playing two very different characters. Throughout my *Nutcracker* career, assuming unconventional identities both frustrated and energized me. During my second year, I earned a role in the party scene and instantly pictured myself waltzing next to Clara in an elegant, Victorian gown. Because a professional dancer plays Clara in the Joffrey production, I considered being one of her guests the closest thing to being the star. When I learned that I was to play a boy rather than a girl, my excitement evaporated. As a girl without brothers who lived at a female-dominated dance studio, I had no idea how to portray a male character.

I tackled my daunting task determined not to let my director down. To play my new character realistically, I wrote his biography. I determined his name, age, hobbies, Christmas wish-list and relationship to the Stahlbaums. The more details I dreamed up about his life, the more convincingly I conveyed his personality in rehearsal. By the time opening night arrived, I had become a mischievous little boy. To my surprise, I enjoyed getting into antics with Fritz instead of dancing to lullabies with

Clara. Above all, the best part was being the first person onstage, not just for the snow or battle scenes, but for the entire performance. In the Joffrey production, party guests on their way to the Stahlbaums' appear in front of the curtain before it rises. As the smallest boy, I skipped out from the wings first. The same notes of Tchaikovsky's overture that thrilled me as a three-year-old accompanied my entrance, making it a particularly moving moment.

The following year I played a girl in the party scene, and although I enjoyed the role, it seemed simpler and less satisfying. My lavender skirt swayed like Clara's, just as I had imagined, but I felt stifled in my female part. Instead of German child-rearing practices, gender roles constrained children in Joffrey's *Nutcracker*, set in mid nineteenth-century America. As a boy I had been allowed to blast my toy trumpet and gallop about on a wooden horse. As a girl, I was instructed to sit beneath the grandfather clock, cradling my doll.

My contrasting roles surrounding Clara's triumph and her Christmas party helped me understand aspects of the *Nutcracker* less noticeable from the audience. From relationships within the party scene to the complexity of the battle scene, I saw how elements of reality play into a fantastical ballet. My various roles also made me feel powerful and free, just as Hefferon's interviewees described. As the first angel, mouse and party guest onstage, I became a leader for my peers. Disguised in a little boy's suit and a giant mouse's body, I got to be mischievous and evil, unlike in daily life. Like a dancer in *The Hard Nut*, I could become anyone onstage. Immersed in music and movement, I entered a state of flow where I lost my sense of time and self-consciousness.

Although Louis Sullivan's Auditorium Theater seats four thousand people, performing there did not intimidate me. During *Nutcracker* season, I found the theater environment liberating and enlightening. Dancing alongside Joffrey members gave me a glimpse into the demanding yet gratifying lives of professional artists. I developed particularly close ties to the couple that played my stage parents in the party scene. Like Stephanie, I regarded them as family members that I could turn to for advice. I also treasured the signed pointe shoes they gave me as parting gifts. Eight years after my last performance with the Joffrey, I still have their shoes as well as the ones I wore in every role. Even

though I have an impressive collection of autographed *Nutcracker* memorabilia, I consider my snow-white angel slippers and my shiny black mouse ones my favorite souvenirs. Although I never got to throw them at the Mouse King, they still serve as symbols of the insights and empowerment I gained through *The Nutcracker*.

Conclusion

The Nutcracker's rise from discordant fairy tale to widespread ballet tradition mirrors Marie's rise from incipient to empowered woman, making the story's success especially compelling. In *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, Wiley wrote that "the popularity of *The Nutcracker* today is so removed from the negative response to its first production that we do not suspect, let alone are we concerned about, the work's long road to respectability" (*The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov* 132). While many people know nothing of *The Nutcracker's* unstable premiere, its origins should not remain a mystery. Hoffmann's original techniques and messages played key roles in helping his story overcome obstacles in the past and will continue attracting artists and audiences in the future.

For its durability and adaptability, "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" deserves special recognition. Although it began as a literary tale considered inappropriate for children and developed into a ballet deemed unappealing to adults, it has become a cultural icon for audiences of all ages. One hundred forty-four years after Sir Walter Scott's harsh review, Harvey Hewett-Thayer published a biography of Hoffmann highlighting "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" as "one of his most delightful works, showing his skill in weaving a tale equally fascinating to children and grownups" (Hewett-Thayer 98). Modern versions of the story prove that its fan base extends far beyond children or nineteenth-century German readers. In the process of transcending time periods and socio-cultural boundaries, Balanchine, Morris, Sendak, Byrd and Mao have drawn unprecedented audiences to *The Nutcracker*. They cater to individuals of different ages, ethnicities and dance backgrounds and provide myriad definitions of what it means to be "American." Together, they demonstrate how a single story can captivate millions of people.

With a challenging yet successful journey as the overarching theme, *Nutcrackers* unite different populations across the United States. Their characters, creators and performers embark on similar adventures when they engage with the story. No matter what name she goes by, the female protagonist travels from the confines of her family's living room to a freer world, typically the Land of Sweets. Similarly, Balanchine and Mao traveled from war-torn St. Petersburg and Shanghai to create *Nutcrackers*

in New York, the “Land of Opportunity.” Today, dancers travel from the studio to the stage to perform in their ballets.

On a deeper level, *Nutcracker* participants journey to a new identity. “Of all narrative ballets currently performed, the *Nutcracker* is probably the most intensely focused upon the projection of identity through the body,” Cohen contends. “The action of the ballet, as many commentators have observed, comprises more a display of types than a focused drama, and the parallel between bodily performances in the social realm and those of ballet are neatly laid out in the contrasting staging of the two acts” (“Performing Identity” 488). Like their protagonist who transforms from a slighted child into a self-assured woman, Morris and Sendak developed from spurned children into outspoken artists and famed *Nutcracker* creators. Additionally, *The Nutcracker* serves as a sign of advancement for children’s cast members. They progress from amateur students to fairy tale characters or to professional dancers with the courage and talent to perform before hundreds of people.

On their journeys, *Nutcracker* participants bravely pave new paths like Marie. Their adventures are never easy, as they contain challenges ranging from seven-headed mice to seven-hour rehearsals. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the empowering consequences of integrating reality and fantasy. Just as the imagination serves as Marie’s source of insight, Hoffmann’s fantastical tale serves as a foundation for the personal and professional lives of Balanchine, Morris, Sendak, Byrd and Mao. No matter when or where their stories take place, they assert that anyone who believes can succeed. By representing a rise from “rags to riches” on multiple levels, *The Nutcracker* acts as a reassuring symbol of American values. More than any other ballet, it provides audiences with a sense of belonging in the United States.

The Nutcracker’s literary and ballet formats enhance its unifying journey theme. By addressing pressing social problems, Hoffmann’s “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” and Sendak’s *Nutcracker* picture book acknowledge the challenges of childhood through words and illustrations. Consequently, Zipes classifies them as “wonder tales” that motivate readers to persevere:

We want to be given opportunities to change. Ultimately, we want to be told that we can become kings and queens, or lords of our own destinies. We remember wonder tales and fairy tales to keep our sense of

wonderment alive and to nurture our hope that we can seize possibilities and opportunities to transform ourselves and our worlds. (Zipes 7)

As a child who literally becomes a queen in Hoffmann's story, Marie serves as the ultimate source of wonderment. As a child who stars in *Nutcracker* ballets, she serves as a role model for aspiring dancers. Balanchine defines ballet as "a democratic art, open to all who are willing to work and to learn" (Balanchine 508). In its ballet form, *The Nutcracker* engages audiences through more than prose and pictures. As it draws them in with music, movement, costumes, scenery and lighting, it inspires them to participate not only as observers, but also as dancers.

Thanks to individual artists propelled by parallel childhood experiences, "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" thrives in many media among multiple populations. They have carried it from European literary and dance circles into mainstream America. Balanchine has taken Hoffmann's story from St. Petersburg to New York, and Morris has taken it from the ballet world to the modern dance movement. Sendak has presented the story to children and adults simultaneously, and Byrd and Mao have given it to African and Asian Americans.

In December 2008, their versions appeared side by side in the "Battle of the Nutcrackers," a television special presented by Ovation, a cable channel dedicated to the arts. Ovation aired six *Nutcrackers* throughout the month and gave viewers twenty days to vote for their favorite. Morris's *The Hard Nut* came in first with forty-two percent of the vote, followed by Sendak and Stowell's *Nutcracker*. Balanchine's production came in last with only two percent support (La Rocco 2). The results underscore the fact that as America evolves, so do its *Nutcrackers*. While Balanchine's ballet remains a gold standard for traditional *Nutcracker* enthusiasts, Morris's counterculture-era version attracts more modern viewers. With *The Hard Nut*, "there is a particular, sharper sort of comfort in seeing something close to your reality reflected onstage—or for this competition's purposes, on the television or computer screen," notes *New York Times* reporter Claudia La Rocco (La Rocco 1).

Just as the *Nutcracker* ballet did not replace its literary form, its screen presence will not obscure its stage presence. Starting in December 2010, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the former home of

Byrd's *Harlem Nutcracker*, will become the new home of American Ballet Theater's *Nutcracker* (Wakin C1). Alexei Ratmansky, former artistic director of Russia's Bolshoi Ballet, will choreograph this latest addition to the *Nutcracker* phenomenon. Richard Hudson of Broadway's "The Lion King" will design the sets and costumes. Like the New York City Ballet's production, American Ballet Theater's will involve students from its private school.

December 2010 will epitomize the intertwining nature of *Nutcrackers* in the United States. The Mark Morris Dance Group will celebrate its thirtieth anniversary by running *The Hard Nut* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The show will close just three days before American Ballet Theater's *Nutcracker* opens. For the remainder of the holiday season, this new version will run head-to-head with Balanchine's 1950s classic. While some have expressed concerns about competing New York *Nutcrackers*, Peter Martins, ballet master in chief at the New York City Ballet, sees no future problems: "The more the merrier. If they're able to do a 'Nutcracker' at BAM and attract more people to the ballet, I think it's better for all of us" (Wakin C5).

Thirty years ago, Barnes proclaimed that "America has *Nutcrackers* like a squirrel has nuts" (Anderson 130). Today, the "Battle of the Nutcrackers" and American Ballet Theater's new venture prove that although the country has an abundance of Hoffmann-inspired ballets, the public craves more. *The Nutcracker* provides audiences with far more than frivolous entertainment. It speaks to their individual experiences, reaffirms cultural values and offers them a role in an American tradition. This annual, holiday affair operates on both nationwide and family levels. "We repeat *The Nutcracker* not just because one of your kids is in it, but because in this chaotic world that we live in, *The Nutcracker* is one of the few things that *does* repeat itself year to year," writes Fisher. "It represents what a debt we owe to our history and our ancestors and it brings friends and family back together" (Fisher 47).

In *A Very Young Dancer*, Stephanie cites seeing *The Nutcracker* with her family as an inspirational part of her youth. In her acknowledgements, Kremetz describes how the same experience affected her not only as a child, but also as an adult. "One of my most moving experiences while I was working on *A Very Young Dancer* was taking my mother to *The Nutcracker*, for it was she who many

years ago first took me to see this magical ballet. I remember two things: my astonishment as the tree began to grow, and my wonder at how all those children got to be up on that splendid stage” (Krementz). Stell, who *was* one of those fortunate children, plans to make *The Nutcracker* a family tradition as well. “This season, we are slated to take Celia,” he said, referring to his four-year-old daughter and budding ballerina. He looks forward to fueling her dance aspirations and “bragging to her that I did Fritz as a little boy on a not-so-small stage in a not-so small town. How many dads get to tell their daughters that?” he asked proudly (Stell).

For Stephanie, Krementz and I, seeing *The Nutcracker* has been a family tradition. For Stephanie, Stell and I, performing in the ballet has been an individual ritual. Between rehearsals and performances, I have seen over one hundred run-throughs of *The Nutcracker*, but I still attend at least one production every year. Although my grandmother no longer takes me to the ballet, I go with my mother and younger sister. When I have children, I will take them with the hope that the story, music and dancing will captivate them as they did me at age three. Along with Balanchine, Morris, Sendak, Byrd and Mao, I have read Hoffmann’s fairy tale through the lens of my own life and entwined it with my identity. By placing this nineteenth-century story in the context of our own childhoods, we have shaped its evolution and proliferation. Together, as writers, illustrators, set-designers and dancers, we have transformed “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” into one of the most durable yet malleable masterpieces in the worlds of literature and dance.

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