13. E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Nutcracker and Mouse King*

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Hoffmann’s *Nußknacker und Mausekönig* is an extraordinarily innovative and unusual piece of writing for children, way ahead of its time in its complete abandonment of didacticism and moral instruction. Almost fifty years before Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* it incorporates its original audience as characters within the story, but whereas *Alice* blends fantasy with parody and comedy the *Nutcracker* displays a less whimsical, perhaps more subtle sense of humour. It is a more realistic kind of fantasy in that the nocturnal events actually unfold in the same place that the children themselves inhabit. Like many of Hoffmann’s other tales the boundaries between fantasy and reality are blurred. Not only Marie, the chief protagonist of the story, but also the reader may have difficulty in distinguishing the two.

The German original was first published in 1816 in a volume entitled *Kinder-Märchen* (Children’s Stories), which included tales by Carl Wilhelm Contessa, Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué and Hoffmann himself. The story was later republished in the first volume of Hoffmann’s own collection, *Die Serapionsbrüder* (The Serapion Brethren) (1819-20), where its suitability for children is debated. This is a question that is often raised, but the title of the 1816 volume clearly indicates Hoffmann’s intention. The question is raised as much as anything because the story operates on more than one level. There are aspects of the story that children would not be expected to grasp (literary allusions, asides, narrative tricks), but most of it is perfectly comprehensible to intelligent children such as those of Hoffmann’s friend Julius Eduard Hitzig, for whom the story was written. What is so wonderful about the *Nutcracker* is the fact that it appeals to child and adult alike and
that Hoffmann did not ‘write down’ for his intended child readers. In point of style, themes and narrative technique it is as superbly crafted as any of Hoffmann’s other tales. The only difference lies in the fact that the story primarily focuses on children rather than adults. The Kinder-Märchen also includes another children’s tale by Hoffmann – ‘Das fremde Kind’ (The Strange Child) – but this has never enjoyed the same popularity as the Nutcracker.

Nutcracker and Mouse King is a Christmas story, and its central character is Marie, the seven year old daughter of Medizinalrat (medical councillor) Stahlbaum and his wife. Marie has a slightly younger brother, Fritz, and a sister, Luise, who is older. Luise plays only a marginal role in the story, but Fritz provides a boy’s viewpoint on the events narrated. In some ways he is more down-to-earth, thus contrasting with Marie’s absorption in fantasy and make-believe. Father and mother Stahlbaum represent rather starkly the realm of reason. Mother dismisses Marie’s account of the battle between the Nutcracker’s soldiers and the mice as foolish and berates her for causing her parents anxiety. They are no more understanding at the end of the story. Father accuses Marie of lying and tells her very seriously to cease all her fantasies, otherwise he will throw all her toys, including the nutcracker, through the window. Allied to the medical councillor and his wife is the surgeon Wendelstern, who appears only briefly to deal with the medical consequences of Marie’s nocturnal injury.

The most important adult role in the story, indeed the key figure to the whole work, is Pate (Godfather) Drosselmeier, whose Christmas gift of a marvellous toy palace with mechanical figures produces tension between himself and the children because he thinks they do not properly appreciate it. Drosselmeier is an ambivalent figure in the story, a focus of both delight and hostility, mysterious and a little sinister. Not only is he the narrator of the embedded fairytale of Princess Pirlipat, but he is as it were the regisseur of the dramatic production that the entire work embodies. As a skilled man who even knows about clocks, he is the mechanical genius behind everything who directs and interprets events. The scenario is his, and Marie projects on to him all her anxieties and aspirations.

Hoffmann is ingenious in his narrative, since the audience he imagines consists of the very participants in the story he is narrating. However, it is not until the second chapter, ‘The Gifts’, that he begins to use this device, playfully addressing his ‘attentive listener Marie’ and pointing out that the heroine of his story, the little Stahlbaum girl, is also called Marie. Later in
this same chapter he addresses ‘honoured reader Fritz’ and only a few lines further on exclaims ‘listen now, children!’ In this way – and it is frequently repeated – Hoffmann engages the separate and combined attentions of his audience, which by implication includes the parents.

The next chapter, ‘The Battle’, appropriately contains a calculatedly flattering appeal to ‘my militarily expert listener Fritz’, assuming his acquaintance with the rules of battle. The next address to the audience comes in the tenth chapter, ‘Uncle and Nephew’, where the narrator is concerned with the painful effects of Marie’s having cut herself on the glass of the toy cabinet and invites his audience to sympathize with her. There are many other similar appeals, and each is designed to highlight a particular event or turning-point. The result of such an accumulation of appeals to the audience is rather like a set of Chinese boxes, one inside the other, or of artfully placed mirrors reflecting each other. The child audience, however, has a further dimension that links it with extra-literary reality, in that Hoffmann wrote the story to entertain the Hitzig children, whom he was very fond of visiting. The younger children, Fritz and Marie, aged five and seven respectively, had the same names as in Hoffmann’s story, while the older daughter, aged nine, was actually called Eugenie (Luise in the story). The text of the story is ambiguous on Fritz’s age, since in the first chapter Hoffmann has him speaking to ‘his younger sister’, where it is unclear whether this means Marie is younger than Fritz or that she is the younger of the two sisters, in the latter case corresponding to the true ages of the Hitzig children. In the opening sentence of ‘The Gifts’ Fritz is appealed to by name – ‘I turn to you yourself, my dear reader or listener Fritz – Theodor – Ernst – or whatever else you may be called’ – but the additional names are in fact Hoffmann’s own first two names, and so he includes himself in *propria persona* as part of the audience of the story.

These biographical aspects of the story’s composition may be amplified further, although readers outside Hoffmann’s intimate circle cannot have been expected to know anything about them. Pate Drosselmeier, the ‘wizard’ within the story and the narrator of the ‘Fairytale of the Hard Nut’, occupies the kind of role in this fiction that Hoffmann himself had with the parents and children of the Hitzig family. Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822) – he replaced his third name, Wilhelm, with Amadeus in homage to Mozart – was a lawyer, theatre director and composer as well as a writer and had just returned to Berlin, where the Hitzigs lived, in 1816. Pate Drosselmeier is a highly placed lawyer, as
Hoffmann also was. But he is described in terms that transmute him into an ambiguous, grotesque figure. For the children he is the year-by-year giver of extraordinary gifts, which are usually taken away from them, but he is also unreliable, surprising in what he says and does, puzzling and even a little sinister:

Justice Drosselmeier was not a good-looking (hübsch) man, but short and skinny with lots of wrinkles in his face. He had a big black patch over his right eye and no hair, for which reason he wore a very beautiful white wig, which was made of glass and very skilfully made. Godfather Drosselmeier was altogether a very skilful man himself and even knew about clocks and had made some himself.

The link between Hoffmann and Drosselmeier belongs to literary history or biography, but that between Drosselmeier and the Nutcracker is at the centre of the story’s meaning. Cleverly, Hoffmann does not make the links too explicit. Like Drosselmeier himself, the Nutcracker is shrouded in mystery. He is the last of the Christmas gifts that the children discover, and it is nowhere stated who has given him to the children. He is seen through Marie’s eyes, and when she has looked carefully at him her question is not where he has come from, but who he belongs to. Marie compares him in her mind with Pate Drosselmeier because of their odd-looking coats and comes to the conclusion that even if Drosselmeier carried himself as daintily as this little man, he still wouldn’t be as good-looking (hübsch). This comparison is taken up again at the end of the chapter, after Fritz and Marie have fallen out on account of the Nutcracker and Marie has taken him under her wing. She cannot bear the fact that Drosselmeier is laughing at her actions and gives voice to her thoughts:

‘Who knows, dear Godfather, whether you would be as good-looking as he is, if you were to brush yourself up like my dear Nutcracker and had such beautiful little shiny boots on!’ This causes Marie’s parents to laugh and produces some discomfiture in Drosselmeier that she doesn’t understand. This little touch possibly reflects some actual occurrence in Hoffmann’s visits to the Hitzig family.

Drosselmeier, in conformity with his ambiguous role in the story, is linked at other points with different figures and seen in different ways. During the first nocturnal battle Marie sees him sitting on top of the clock where the owl should have been, and when Drosselmeier visits her after
her accident she scolds him, asks why he didn’t help the Nutcracker and accuses him of causing her to be ill and in bed. When he responds with a rhyming account of the battle, Marie thinks he looks much uglier than usual and is waving his right arm about like a marionette. Fritz tells him he is too ridiculous and acting like his Hampelmann (jumping jack), which he threw behind the stove a long time ago. The two children’s differing reactions show how Drosselmeier plays changing roles in the story and can thus be seen as a trickster figure.

This role and his name recall the figure of König Drosselbart (King Thrushbeard) in the Grimms’ fairytale of that name. Both Drosselbart and Drosselmeier are strange in appearance, Drosselbart having a crooked chin that causes the princess to compare it with a thrush’s beak, while Drosselmeier, as we know, is bald, wears a wig and has a black patch over his right eye. He thus can see only with his left eye, and there are several more things in the story that link up with this: in the first battle the mouse cavalry attack the left wing of the Nutcracker’s army, Marie throws her left shoe at the mice and their king, and Marie’s injury is to her left arm. One critic has suggestively interpreted the symbolism of left and right in Jungian terms with the left being associated with the unconscious and the right with the conscious and reason. In the Grimms’ tale König Drosselbart adopts a variety of disguises to carry out the tests or humiliations that the haughty princess undergoes, and we can readily see Pate Drosselmeier in this role as controller or organizer of the events in the Nutcracker, though they are not designed to punish or teach Marie a lesson. After the series of trials that she undergoes, she does end up with a similar splendid marriage to that of the princess, Pate Drosselmeier being replaced by Nephew Drosselmeier in his guise as the Nutcracker. Hoffmann thus makes use of the fairytale parallel, but adapts it skilfully to his own ends.

Like many of Hoffmann’s other tales, the Nutcracker moves rapidly and unexpectedly between the everyday and the world of fantasy. What connects the two here is the world of toys and children’s imagination. Hoffmann’s descriptions of a well-to-do family’s Christmas festivities and the children’s attitude towards their new and old toys locate the story firmly in the social and cultural reality of the early nineteenth century in Germany. Hoffmann himself was fascinated by movable toys and automata, and the figure of Olimpia, the life-size mechanical doll with which Nathanael in Der

Sandmann (The Sand-man) falls disastrously in love, is his most enduring creation in this respect. Pate Drosselmeier’s marvellous toy palace with its multitude of walking and dancing figures is the apogee of his mechanical genius, but it has been preceded by earlier gifts to the children of a funny little man whose eyes turn and who can bow, and a box from which a little bird hops out. This range of mechanical toys, stretching from the very simple to the very complicated and ingenious, reflects the achievements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, building on traditions of clock- and toy-making that go back to the late Middle Ages. The more complex devices, involving perhaps years of skilled work, were made for kings and princes and were presented by them as gifts to other rulers. It is this kind of thing, on a smaller scale, that is reflected in Drosselmeier’s palace. It would have been comparable to, say, the performing circus engineered by the Tyrolean Christian Tschuggmall (1785-1844), who toured with it as far afield as Poland and Russia. An eighteenth-century wooden clockwork man with moving eyes and mouth, now in the Abeler Museum, Wuppertal, provides a counterpart to Drosselmeier’s early gift to the Stahlbaum children. The box with the little bird was probably a by-product of the development of the animated cuckoo in the Black Forest clock-making industry, which is credited to Franz-Anton Schoemwald around 1730. Marie’s description of swans swimming on a lake, with golden ribbons round their necks, and singing lovely songs bears strange similarity to the appearance of a life-size silver swan made by the English watchmaker James Cox as part of a larger tableau. It is a nice touch on Hoffmann’s part, when Marie recounts that Drosselmeier had told her a little girl feeds swans with marzipan, that he has Fritz interrupt brutally, saying that swans don’t eat marzipan. Fritz doesn’t doubt the mechanical wonder, but swans eating marzipan is just too ridiculous.

These are the more extraordinary elements in the children’s life, but most of what is described in the Stahlbaums’ Christmas festivities is typical of middle-class celebrations of the period. Both Marie and Fritz have expectations related to their old toys. Marie’s big doll (Mamsell Trutchen) is getting clumsier than ever before and always falling on the floor and damaging her face, so she gets a new one called Mamsell Klärchen. Fritz,

82 Ibid., fig. 21, p. 28.
83 Ibid., p. 25.
84 Ibid., p. 58, also plate V.
ever preoccupied with his soldiers, knows that his father is well aware that he doesn’t have a chestnut horse and is entirely lacking cavalry, but even when Luise rather prissily reminds them that it is Christ who gives them presents through the hands of their parents, Fritz still murmurs to himself that he’d really like a chestnut horse and some hussars. His wish is fully granted.

The Christmas tree is the focus of the occasion, decorated with gold and silver apples, sugared almonds and sweets and a hundred little lights. The two girls have new frocks. The fir-tree was a particularly German manifestation of Christmas and was only adopted in Britain after Prince Albert introduced it to the Royal Family. The parents’ decoration of the tree on Christmas Eve in the absence of the children, who are then admitted into the bright splendour from the darkness in which they have been waiting on tenterhooks, seems to be a custom stretching way back in time. Germany, of course, has far more forests than England, and conifers are much more familiar than is the case here. Among the Christmas goodies there are also gingerbread men and women from Thorn, now the Polish city of Torun, but then part of the Prussian dominions. They are a reminder of Hoffmann’s own background, since he was born and studied in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) and worked in Posen (Poznan), Plotzk (Plock) and Warsaw.

The last of the Christmas gifts to be discovered is the Nutcracker, which Father tells Marie is for all the children, for Luise and Fritz as well as herself. Nonetheless, he entrusts the Nutcracker especially to Marie to look after and protect, and the remainder of the story focusses on their relationship. When Fritz is tired of playing with his soldiers, he wants to use the Nutcracker too to crack nuts, and because he gives the Nutcracker the biggest and hardest nuts, three of his teeth drop out and his lower jaw becomes loose. Marie is upset, all the more so as Drosselmeier takes Fritz’s side. However, Father comes to her aid and scolds Fritz for wanting to use the Nutcracker again after he has been broken, and reproaches him with transgressing proper military procedures. Although it is nowhere indicated who produced the Nutcracker as a Christmas gift, it is Drosselmeier who mends his jaw while Marie is ill in bed. He replaces the teeth and resets the jaw.

Among the children’s other playthings picture books are mentioned a number of times. In the glass-fronted cupboard, in which Pate Drosselmeier’s ingenious gifts occupy the uppermost shelf, the picture books come next, with Fritz’s soldiers and Marie’s dolls on the lower two shelves. That is some measure of their preciousness. Such books had been produced in
Germany since the middle of the eighteenth century, the period in which children were first separately targeted as readers in a more concerted way. They dealt with all kinds of subjects, but quite near in time to Hoffmann’s book we have J. A. C. Löhr’s Der Weihnachtsabend in der Familie Thalberg (Christmas Eve in the Thalberg Family) (Leipzig, 1805), which is similarly slanted to the Christmas theme. Picture books, especially hand-coloured ones, would have been expensive, but certainly within the purchasing power of a medical councillor or lawyer.

The Nutcracker is divided into fourteen chapters, perhaps so that it could be read in instalments between Christmas Eve and Epiphany. The central part, chapters 7, 8 and 9, consists of the ‘Fairytale of the Hard Nut’, which Pate Drosselmeier tells Marie over three evenings while she is recovering from her Christmas injury. She has not been able to play and hasn’t had enough concentration to read for herself, so Mother has read to her and told her stories. She has just completed the story of Prince Facardin. This story is one that Hoffmann frequently refers to. It was written by Count Antoine Hamilton (1646-1720), a French writer of Scottish descent, and bears the title Les quatre Facardins. It was published posthumously in 1730. The tale is included in two German editions of Hamilton’s fairytales that Hoffmann probably encountered in his childhood or youth – Drei hübsche kurzweilige Mährlein (Three Pretty, Amusing Stories), translated by Görg Bider (i.e. W. C. S. Mylius) (Halle: Hendel, 1777) and Feenmährchen des Grafen Hamilton (Fairytales of Count Hamilton) (Gotha, 1790) in volume 2 of Friedrich Justin Bertuch’s Blaue Bibliothek aller Nationen (Blue Library of all the Nations). It is a lengthy and very complicated literary fairytale, written in the wake of Antoine Galland’s Mille et une nuits (1704-17), the first translation of the Arabian Nights into a European language, and has a similar oriental narrative context. Full of the most bizarre adventures located as far apart as Mount Atlas, the Red Sea and Trebizond, it purports to tell the history of four heroes, each of whom bears the extraordinary name of Facardin. However, after some 150 pages the story breaks off with the statement: ‘Mais je crois qu’il est bon de remettre le reste du récit que fairoit le prince de Trébizonde, à la seconde partie de ces mémoires’. Then follow the words ‘FIN DES QUATRE FACARDINS’. By this time Hamilton has introduced his readers to only three of the Facardins and given little hint as to how the threads of the story might satisfactorily be tied together. One editor has suggested that the tale was intended as a satire on the absurdities of the French literary fairytale, much as Cervantes mocked the customs of chivalry
in *Don Quixote*; but it does not have the flair and humour of Cervantes. Hamilton’s tale was certainly not written for children as young as the seven year old Marie. Not only would its complicated plot be difficult for a child of that age to follow, but it also contains a number of primly erotic episodes that would baffle a child. Moreover, its exaggerations of traditional fairytale motifs and amazing long-windedness seem calculatedly artificial rather than organic.

What, then, are the aspects of Hamilton’s fairytale that we might see as appealing to Hoffmann and relevant to its being mentioned in the *Nutcracker*. Perhaps the first thing to note is the fact that both authors make play with characters bearing the same name. Hamilton has his four Facardins, Hoffmann his uncle and nephew Drosselmeier and the Nutcracker that is mysteriously aligned with each of them, but in different ways. Then there is the fact that Fritz and Marie Stahlbaum have their counterparts in the Fritz and Marie that the narrator constantly appeals to in his telling of the story. Even more oddly, we have in the embedded ‘Fairytale of the Hard Nut’ a court clockmaker and alchemist called Christian Elias Drosselmeier, the same name as that of Drosselmeier in the framework tale. Hamilton’s tale can be seen as providing a literary model for Hoffmann’s exploration of the theme of identity. The structure of the *Nutcracker* suggests a sense of multiple identities. The children in their playing with dolls and soldiers adopt identities relevant to their play, as well as having well-defined family and social relationships with their parents and godfather. Marie adds a further dimension to this through the extended nocturnal dream world, which constitutes a greater reality to her than the events within the family. But these worlds are not separate from each other: their personnel, concerns and emotions overlap and intersect.

*Les quatre Facardins* is also notable for containing an embedded story, when Facardin the Prince of Trebizond meets the second Facardin and listens to an account of his adventures. When this is done the two stories become intertwined. In Hoffmann’s tale too the theme and characters of the ‘Fairytale of the Hard Nut’ are taken into the continuation of the battle between the mice and the toys. It is significant also that the ‘Hard Nut’, like *Les quatre Facardins*, comes to a halt before the story can be said to have concluded. There is no traditional happy ending; the astronomer simply sees a solution in the stars. The remainder of Hoffmann’s story is aimed at achieving that solution through Marie and the Nutcracker. A further link between Hamilton’s and Hoffmann’s tales comes from the commentary
that each author has his story audience make on the embedded tale that they have just heard. With Hamilton this centres on the sultan and female storyteller that he envisages as the listeners to the story of the four Facardins, patterning himself on the *Arabian Nights*. With Hoffmann it is the more closely involved Stahlbaum family.

The reference to *Les quatre Facardins* is not, I would argue, just a casual allusion to a popular literary fairytale. Despite the many differences between Hamilton and Hoffmann in terms of length, artifice and, above all, tone, Hoffmann was obviously stimulated by the French author and adapted some of his ideas and techniques to suit his own purposes.

The main focus of the *Nutcracker* is on the hostilities between the toys and the mice, with the Nutcracker and the mouse King as their respective leaders. Although Marie is explicitly stated not to have a natural aversion to mice, her initial reaction to them as ridiculous rapidly turns into fear and dread. Hoffmann cleverly draws his audience into the emotions he is evoking by suggesting that Fritz, whom he addresses by name, would have run away, jumped into bed and pulled the bedclothes over his head. The Mouse King, emerging from sand, mortar and crumbling brick or stone, is as though driven by a subterranean power. With his seven heads with their seven sparkling crowns, he recalls not only the dragon in one of the most widely diffused folktale-types, ‘The Dragon-Slayer’, but behind him the dragon representing evil incarnate in the Book of Revelations (12: 3). In the folktale the protagonist is wounded in the battle with the dragon and a false hero attempts to claim the reward, but ultimately the true dragon-slayer is reinstated and marries the princess who was to have been the dragon’s victim. In Hoffmann’s tale not only is the Nutcracker wounded, but Marie suffers the same fate and faints. A delightful humorous touch occurs just before this when the Nutcracker in desperation echoes King Richard III’s dying cry: ‘A horse – a horse – my kingdom for a horse!’ August Wilhelm Schlegel’s translation into German had appeared in 1810, so Hoffmann was pretty topical.

The ‘Fairytale of the Hard Nut’ contains several elements that link up with Marie’s dream, the most obvious being the menacing figure of Frau Mauserinks, the mother of the Mouse King. Here, as in other instances, Hoffmann has made a gender change in the fairytale figure, though the role in the story remains the same. This metamorphosis applies also to Princess Pirlipat, the heroine of the fairytale, who, in a trait that immediately associates her with the Nutcracker, is born with two rows
of pearly teeth. The preparation of the royal sausage feast that opens the fairytale parallels the Christmas preparations with which the *Nutcracker* begins. Pate Drosselmeier has promised Marie’s mother that his tale will be funny, and indeed it is, at least to begin with. However, the Queen’s attempt to propitiate Frau Mauserinks with a little of the bacon used to make the sausage results in the whole mouse tribe appearing and consuming a vast amount of the bacon before they can be shooed away by the chief lady-in-waiting. Consequently the King’s enjoyment of the feast is progressively diminished by the lack of bacon in the sausage. When he learns what has happened he vows vengeance on Frau Mauserinks and her seven sons. The job is entrusted to the court clockmaker and arcanist, Christian Elias Drosselmeier, Pate Drosselmeier’s namesake. He makes traps in which all Frau Mauserinks’ sons and many of her relatives are caught and then killed. Frau Mauserinks warns the Queen to be on her guard with the princess, when for a second time she ruins the King’s dinner. At this point Pate Drosselmeier breaks off his narrative, promising to take it up the next evening. Marie asks him whether he really is the inventor of mousetraps. For her the world of the fairytale and that of everyday reality are not separate.

The second section of the fairytale sees Frau Mauserinks’ threat carried out. The big ugly mouse is scared away too late from Pirlipat’s midnight pillow, for the princess’s face and body have already been transformed into a grotesque ugliness. All the blame for this is placed on Drosselmeier (just as Marie has accused her godfather of failing to look after the Nutcracker and of causing her own injury and illness), and the King demands that he shall find a cure for Pirlipat within four weeks or face execution. On the Wednesday of the fourth week Drosselmeier realizes that Pirlipat, with all the sharp teeth she has, is fond of eating nuts. He has the court astronomer cast Pirlipat’s horoscope and discovers that she will be cured by eating the kernel of the Krakatuk nut. This nut has to be bitten open by a man who has never shaved or worn boots and then given to the princess with closed eyes, after which he must retreat seven steps and then open them. This cure is announced to the court on Saturday lunchtime, but the nut has still to be found. Drosselmeier and the astronomer are charged with finding it, and advertisements are placed in all the newspapers, including the foreign ones, looking for the man to bite the nut. Again at a critical point in the narrative Pate Drosselmeier breaks off.

The final section has the two searchers coming back to Nuremberg
Telling Tales

after a fruitless search lasting fifteen years. Going to Drosselmeier’s cousin, Christian Zacharias Drosselmeier, who is a toymaker (Nuremberg was famous for its toys), they find he actually has the nut in his possession, having bought it from a stranger seven years previously. When the astronomer peels off its gold exterior, he finds the name ‘Krakatuk’ engraved on it in Chinese characters. Furthermore, the astronomer discovers that Drosselmeier’s cousin’s son is the person destined to bite open the nut. The son shows signs of having previously been a *Hampelmann*, a feature that reminds us of Fritz’s earlier comparison of Pate Drosselmeier to a *Hampelmann*. But he now only requires a robust wooden pigtail connected to his lower jaw to become the proper Nutcracker to bite the nut for the princess. In fulfilling this task, he restores Pirlipat to her former beauty. However, in stepping back the prescribed seven steps, he treads on Frau Mauserinks, who has just appeared on the scene, and kills her, though not before she has turned him into an ugly misshapen creature and vowed revenge through her seven-headed son. Pirlipat is so shocked at the Nutcracker’s changed appearance that she has him driven away, as also happens to the clockmaker and astronomer. The latter now sees in the stars that the Nutcracker will only be transformed if he can kill Frau Mauserinks’ son, the Mouse King, and gain the love of a lady. At this point the embedded fairytale ends.

As with *Les quatre Facardins*, the narrative ends without a proper conclusion. Marie thinks Pirlipat ungrateful, while Fritz is sure that the Nutcracker can deal with the Mouse King and regain his former shape. The ‘Hard Nut’ finds its conclusion in the dream-world of Marie after she has recovered from her injury. In this way a link is made between the inner and outer stories. They are not separate, but intertwined. Two themes weave particularly strong threads through them – physical appearances and food. Is anything just what it seems? Pate Drosselmeier is both grotesque and kind, acting in ways that sometimes seem cruel or unfeeling, sometimes helpful and amusing. He too belongs to both the inner and the outer stories. Similarly, the Nutcracker is both victim and saviour, derided as completely ugly by Drosselmeier, but fallen in love with at first sight by Marie.

After Pate Drosselmeier has finished telling ‘The Hard Nut’ and Marie has internalized it as part of her dream fantasy of the struggle between the Nutcracker and the Mouse King, Drosselmeier tells her that she, like Pirlipat, is a born princess, that she alone can rescue him and must be steadfast and loyal. Fritz has listened seriously to Marie’s account to her parents of what has happened in the night, but he distances himself from
E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Nutcracker and Mouse King*  

... it on the grounds that his red hussars would not have behaved like that. None of it is true, he says, but it is not reason that tells him this: it is a different angle on the fantasy.

The remainder of the story focusses on Marie’s endeavours to save the Nutcracker, convinced as she now is that he is Pate Drosselmeier’s nephew. The ‘Fairytale of the Hard Nut’ is transposed into Marie’s nocturnal anxieties, as the Mouse King reappears and demands the sacrifice of sugar plums, marzipan and tragacanth dolls. The next day the family see how they have been nibbled at by mice. Fritz recommends the baker’s cat to deal with the problem, but because Luise can’t stand cats Pate Drosselmeier brings a mouse-trap baited with bacon, reminding the reader of his action in the first section of ‘The Hard Nut’. On the following night the Mouse King demands further sacrifices – picture books and frock – and in the morning Marie sees a spot of blood on the Nutcracker’s neck. He tells her that all he needs is a sword. Fritz, shocked that his hussars acquitted themselves so badly in the fight, gives them a dressing-down and takes a sabre from a pensioned-off colonel. This provides the means for the Nutcracker, in the next night’s fight, to kill the Mouse King, whose seven golden crowns he gives to Marie. Playing on Marie’s surname Stahlbaum (literally ‘steel tree’), he chivalrously declares that she alone is the lady who steeled him with knightly courage and gave his arm strength to vanquish the arrogant creature who dared to show her scorn.

The chapters entitled ‘The Realm of Dolls’ and ‘The Capital City’ are conceived extremely theatrically, as Marie follows the Nutcracker up a staircase through the sleeve of Father’s fur coat into a kind of Land of Cockayne with a Candy Meadow, an Orange Brook, a Lemonade River, a Lake of Almond Milk, villages called Gingerbread Town and Sweets Houses, and a Honey River. When they come to the Lake of Roses, Marie is delighted at the silver-white swans and the lake that she was expecting Pate Drosselmeier to make for her, but the Nutcracker tells her in an unusual fit of scorn: ‘That is something that your uncle can never bring about; much rather yourself, dear Miss Stahlbaum, but let’s not bother our heads about it, but take the boat across the Lake of Roses to the capital’. This, then, is in two senses Marie’s story: it is a story about her, but it is also the story that she creates in imagination for herself.

Marie is entranced at the reflections she sees in the lake, and once more the Nutcracker has to explain things to her and say that it is not Princess Pirlipat, but always only herself that she sees. The city that they reach is
Konfektburg, the Town of Sweets, where there are handsomely dressed ladies and gentlemen, Armenians and Greeks, Jews and Tyroleans, officers, soldiers, clergymen, shepherds and clowns and every kind of people in the world. Marie may have known them in toy form, but in specifically naming the Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Tyroleans Hoffmann is advertting to contemporary troubles. Both the Armenians and the Greeks were attempting to establish their independence of the Ottoman Empire, while the Tyrolese, under the leadership of Andreas Hofer, had lost their struggle for independence with Hofer’s death in 1810. But Marie is dreaming of a peaceable kingdom that exists only in fairytales or the realms of utopian desire. Behind the tumultuous diversity Marie sees is the Konditor, the confectioner who is the founder of everything – ‘an unknown, but quite uncanny power that people believe can make what it wants out of humankind’.

Although Marie’s accounts of what she has experienced are ridiculed by the rest of her family, the images of fairyland still surround her and make her a dreamy child. The end of the story is a wish-fulfilment, but linked as before with a loss of consciousness. This time Marie simply faints while Pate Drosselmeier is mending a clock. When she regains consciousness it is to encounter Drosselmeier’s nephew, the Nutcracker, who is to be her bridegroom and who fetches her after the space of a year to be his queen.

It is a common device in tales of otherworldly encounters or visits that they are validated by some physical object that remains when the dream-events are over. In Marie’s case this is the Mouse King’s seven crowns, which are accounted for by Pate Drosselmeier claiming that he gave them to Marie years before for her birthday. What is odd in the Nutcracker is the ending, in which the fantasy replaces everyday reality. Ronald J. Elardo’s Jungian interpretation of the story seems stark and inappropriate when he declares: ‘In the end, Marie fails to integrate the real and the fantastical. . . For Marie, the hero myth has ended in her loss of consciousness. Her descent into the land of the Confectioner is an end, not a beginning. She has regressed to the level of ego anxiety’. 85 This might be a ‘tragedy’ if Marie were an adolescent or young adult, but she is a seven year old child! It is not surprising that she is still deep in a world of fantasy. We have to remember that, while there are undoubtedly elements in the Nutcracker that make a call on adult sensibilities, the story is suffused with playfulness and was explicitly designed for children.

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85 Elard, p. 7.
The Nutcracker has had a curious history in English versions. Although there are several translations of other works by Hoffmann from the mid 1820s onwards, its character as a children’s book seems to have set it apart and caused translators to avoid it. And, as we have seen, as a children’s book it was very much in advance of its time. The first glimpse that we have of it in English was not the whole story, but simply the ‘Fairytale of the Hard Nut’, which was given the title ‘The History of Krakatuk’. It was presented as a separate, complete tale, omitting the narrative context with Marie and Pate Drosselmeier entirely, and thus as a single uninterrupted entity. The translator was the youthful William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63), and his work has all the charm, liveliness and humour that one could wish for. The translation was published in the National Standard during 1833, but it does not seem to have been republished in Thackeray’s collected works. It is not listed in Lewis Melville’s bibliography to his life of Thackeray, although Melville rescued it for posterity in the collection of Great German Short Stories that he compiled with Reginald Hargreaves in 1929.

Thackeray had gone to Germany in 1830-31 and spent six months in Weimar, where he met the aged Goethe. His time in Germany enabled him to get a good grasp of the language, and it provided him with the stimulus for some later writing – A Legend of the Rhine (1845) and The Kickleburys on the Rhine (1850, under his pseudonym M. A. Titmarsh). A passage in The Rose and the Ring (1855), in which the porter Gruffanuff is transformed into a doorknocker and only disenchanted at the end of the story, is reminiscent of a similar incident in Hoffmann’s Der goldne Topf (The Golden Pot). When Anselmus first goes to archivist Lindhorst’s house the doorknocker turns into the grimacing face of the apple woman that he is running away from, and the bell-pull becomes a monstrous snake. Thackeray’s use of the idea is comic rather than eerie, not opening up visions of the dark side of the human psyche as in Hoffmann.

Thackeray’s understanding of German was not absolutely perfect, but his grasp of sentence-structure and above all the tone of Hoffmann’s writing in excellent. Just occasionally he mistranslates a word or phrase or omits something that he does not understand. Thus, he translates ‘auf weißen Zeltern’ (on white palfreys) as ‘under white canopies’, gives ‘Magenwasser’ (stomach salts) as ‘cherry brandy’ and equates Peterwardein with Petersburg rather than what is now Petrovaradin in Yugoslavia. These are trivial faults in what is otherwise an engagingly readable conversion of Hoffmann into English. It is a pity that Thackeray did not translate the
whole of the *Nutcracker* when this first attempt was so successful. It is even more of a pity that the translation fell quickly into oblivion, since the newspaper in which it was published collapsed in 1834.

Some twelve years later a complete version of the *Nutcracker* made an appearance in England, but it was not a translation direct from Hofmann. It came through an intermediary, Alexandre Dumas the elder’s *Histoire d’un casse-noisette* (1845). This was an adaptation, rather than a translation, of Hofmann, and it was illustrated by the French artist Bertall (pseudonym of Albert d’Arnoux). *The History of a Nutcracker* appeared in two parts and was published by Chapman & Hall in 1847. Bertall’s illustrations were taken over and adorn virtually every page, sometimes two to a page. The name of the English translator is nowhere indicated. A later edition was issued by George Routledge and Sons in a volume entitled *A Picture Story Book* (c. 1875).

To judge from this English version, Dumas seems to have closely followed the plot of Hofmann’s story. The English text, however, contains a fair number of allusions to contemporary England, for example, to toy-stalls in Soho Bazaar, the Pantheon and Lowther Arcade, and to the march of the British Grenadiers, which are presumably additions to Dumas. It was the custom in England, as also in France, to give presents on New Year’s Day rather than on Christmas Eve, and this difference is noted at the beginning of the English version.86

The Dumas version is set from the beginning in Nuremberg. Hofmann does not name the location, though we may infer it to be Berlin, since that was where the Hitzigs and Hofmann were living at the time. Dumas presumably took his cue from Drosselmeier being described as having Nuremberg as his home-town. He changed the name of the Stahlbaum family to Silberhaus and made the father a judge rather than a medical councillor. The number of children was reduced from three to two: Luise disappears completely, Fritz we are now told is nine (Hofmann does not specify his age), while Mary in the English version is seven and a half (as opposed to seven in Hofmann). The indications of character that Hofmann allows to emerge from his narrative are developed in the English version into rather obtrusive moralistic differences.

86 William Hone, *The Every-day Book and Table Book* (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1838), vol. 1, cols. 6-16.
for he thought that everything in the world had been made for his
amusement, or to suit his fancy. In this humour he would remain until
the judge, annoyed by his screams, or by his stamping, came out of his
study, and, raising his fore-finger, said with a frown, ‘Master Fritz!’
Those two words were quite sufficient to make Master Fritz wish that
the earth would open and swallow him up.
As for his mother, it was no matter how much or how often she raised
her fore-finger; for Fritz did not mind her at all.

Hoffmann would not have liked this attack on Fritz’s character. By
contrast Mary is grossly sentimentalized: ‘She was sweet, amiable,
bashful, and kind to all who were in sorrow, even to her dolls: she was
very obedient to her mamma, and never contradicted her governess, Miss
Trudchen; so that Mary was beloved by every one’. There is no governess
in Hoffmann’s text. The name of Marie’s doll Trutchen has been taken over
for her. Pate Drosselmeier (now spelt Drosselmayer) has also undergone
a transformation, for from being small and dark in appearance he is now
about six foot tall, though he stoops, and from being a lawyer he has
been changed into ‘a great physician and doctor of medicine’. He and the
children’s father have exchanged professions.

There are a variety of other minor differences between Hoffmann and
Dumas in English, some of which may well be due to misunderstanding.
It is odd that Princess Pirlipata can only be saved by ‘a young man who
had never been shaved, and who had always worn boots’ when Hoffmann
specifies that he should never have worn boots. The wearing of boots
presumably marks the ritual transition from boyhood to manhood. Dumas
has the son of Christian Zacharias Drosselmayer sent to the University
of Tübingen at the age of ten, ‘where he remained till he was eighteen,
without contracting any of the bad habits of his companions, such as
drinking, swearing, and fighting’. He is eventually named as Nathaniel,
though Hoffmann had left him nameless. Probably the name was lifted
from Der Sandmann.

Hoffmann made little of the religious associations of his story. He had
the elder daughter, Luise, tell the younger children that the Christmas
presents came from Christ through the hands of their parents, while the
Dumas English version ascribes them to the ‘guardian angel who sends and
blesses all those fine toys which are given to you’. However, the associations
that Hoffmann evoked with the name Konditor in the Land of Dolls are
reduced in the English version, which translates it, reasonably enough,
as ‘Confectioner’, keeping the main meaning, but losing the religious
undertone. The English version introduces the idea of the transmigration of souls through the process of baking by the Confectioner, whereas Hoffmann’s text simply talks about his power of being able to make what he wants of humankind.

The Dumas version of Hoffmann’s tale has proved much more influential in Britain than the original. It also formed the basis of Tchaikovsky’s ballet, first performed at the Maryinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg, on 18 December 1892 with choreography by Marius Petipa. The ballet excludes the ‘Fairytale of the Hard Nut’, renames the heroine Clara and provides a large number of individual dances for the various toys. Probably most people's knowledge of the Nutcracker nowadays stems from this colourful, gloriously entertaining ballet rather than from a book. Performances have become a standard part of Christmas entertainment. Most twentieth-century retellings of the Nutcracker in English derive ultimately from Dumas, usually considerably simplified and, as in Walt Disney’s Fantasia, diverging a great deal from what Hoffmann wrote. Indeed, although Hoffmann’s name may be mentioned as the ultimate originator, his literary subtlety of composition is lost sight of.

The first complete translation of the Nutcracker directly from the German was made by Major Alex. Ewing as part of The Serapion Brethren (London: George Bell & Sons, 1886). This collection of Hoffmann’s tales was clearly not designed for children, running as it does to two thick volumes of over 1000 pages and containing no illustrations whatsoever. Major Ewing was the widower of the children’s writer Juliana Horatia Ewing (1841-85), author among many other things of The Brownies, and Other Tales (1870) and Old-fashioned Fairy Tales (1876). Several of Mrs Ewing’s books had been published by Bell. Major Ewing’s translation was reissued in 1908, and his version of the Nutcracker was used as the base for Roberto Innocenti’s sumptuously illustrated version (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997). Ewing’s translation sticks close to the German and is very readable. It is particularly good at conveying different registers of language, especially colloquial speech. There are a few mistakes or perhaps deliberate alterations made from the German. In the original Fritz says his toy stable is lacking a chestnut horse (Fuchs), but Ewing takes this literally as ‘a good fox was lacking to his small zoological collection’. He also changes the marzipan that is fed to swans in Marie’s fantasy garden into ‘shortbread and cake’. Other similar slips do not materially affect one’s appreciation of the tale.

Ironically, it was only in the same year that Tchaikovsky’s ballet appeared
that the first complete translation of *Nutcracker and Mouse King* for children was made from Hoffmann’s original. This was by Ascott R. Hope and was published by T. Fisher Unwin in 1892 in his ‘Children’s Library’ series. The book also contained a separate short section entitled ‘The Educated Cat’, adapted from Hoffmann’s novel *Kater Murr*. It took over a small selection of Bertall’s illustrations from the Dumas editions. Unwin’s ‘Children’s Library’ was a notable, attractively produced collection of both old and new stories for children. It was an international collection, including *Tales from the Mabinogion* and *Irish Fairy Tales* as well as the first English edition of *Pinocchio* (now a rare and costly book) and Wilhelm Hauff’s *The Little Glass Man and Other Stories*, so Hoffmann was in very good company. Ascott R. Hope was the name under which Ascott Robert Hope-Moncrief (1846-1927) wrote a variety of children’s books ranging from variations on traditional children’s tales, stories for the *Boys’ Own Paper* and tales about Red Indians and the heroes of Young America.

Hope’s translation of the *Nutcracker* keeps close to the original and is a careful rendering. However, like the majority of translators in his position, his aim is to produce a story that English children will read easily. He does not attempt to explain features of German life that may seem strange to his readers, but instead eliminates them or gives English equivalents. He assimilates Hoffmann’s story to English circumstances rather than trying to give his readers a glimpse of Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The children’s names are changed to Fred and Mary, while the surgeon loses his surname Wendelstern. Frau Mauserinks becomes Mouseykins (altogether too cosy a name for so terrifying a creature), and Prince Facardin is transmuted into the conventional Prince Charming of Perrault, Madame d’Aulnoy and the English pantomime.

Hope does not credit his readers with any acquaintance with the outside world (outside Britain, that is), for the troops in the first battle against the mice undergo a considerable change. In the English contingents we find ‘Gardeners, Highlanders, Japanese, Barbers, Harlequins, Cupids, Lions, Tigers, Baboons, and Apes’. In the German text we have Tyrolese for Highlanders and Tungusians for Japanese. In a later passage the people in Konfektburg include Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Tyrolese, which appear in English as ‘Arabs and Greeks, Highlanders and Indians’. Why should Hope have eliminated the Armenians and the Jews?

In Hoffmann’s original Marie twice hurts her left arm, and we have noted the significance of ‘left’. Hope has her hurt the right arm. This may
have come about through a hasty reading of the German, which reads: ‘Sie fühlte wohl in dem Augenblick einen recht stechenden Schmerz am linken Arm’ (At that moment she felt a quite stabbing pain in her left arm). Hope seems to have picked on ‘recht’ as meaning ‘right’ rather than ‘very’ or ‘quite’ and transferred it to the arm. This, of course, destroys the symbolic significance. The change is accidental, but it illustrates what can so easily happen with translators who are more concerned with the broad outline of the plot than with the patterning of details. Despite these minor changes we have to be grateful to Hope for returning British readers to Hoffmann’s original, though sadly most later English versions have reverted to Dumas. The major exception is the Manheim/Sendak edition, in which Hoffmann comes into his own with a splendid translation by Ralph Manheim, the most brilliant of translators from German, and marvellous pictures by Maurice Sendak (New York: Crown Publishers, 1984), but that is way outside our period.

In conclusion, it is worth another step into the twentieth century to see what happened to Hoffmann in the immediate aftermath of the First World War in a new adaptation, again called Nutcracker and Mouse-King, with illustrations by Florence Anderson (London: George G. Harrap & Company, 1919). As was the case with other German books at this time, every trace of its German origin was removed. The title-page makes no reference to Hoffmann, only to the adapter E. Gordon Browne. The two children have been thoroughly anglicized as Dick and Molly (the older sister is not mentioned at all), while Pate Drosselmeier has become an Uncle Christopher. No surnames are used anywhere, no locations are geographically specified. Even marzipan is changed into ‘sweet biscuits’. Molly’s old doll is called Gertrude, and her favourite doll Charlotte, corresponding to Hoffmann’s Trutchen and Klärchen. Since the Dumas version calls them Rose and Clara and gives the name Trudchen to a newly invented governess, this adaptation was almost certainly done from Hoffmann. The fact that the Mouse Queen is called Mouseyrink rather than Lady Mouseykins (Ascott R. Hope) or Dame Mousey (Dumas) confirms this. Uncle Christopher’s nephew, furthermore, has never (rather than always) worn boots.

The story is resolutely simplified and brought up to date linguistically. The nut Crickcrack, for example, is hard enough for a steamroller to go over without cracking it, while the original speaks of a forty-eight pound cannon. Florence Anderson’s four colour plates show an early twentieth-
century little girl in dreamy mood and the softest of shades, predominantly pink and pale yellow. While Bertall’s engravings capture the angularities and grotesque aspects of Hoffmann’s tale, Anderson’s drawings as well as watercolour paintings dwell on the pretty side. Yet her line-drawing of Mouseyrink on Princess Pirlipat’s pillow conveys the dreadfulness of the episode through the exaggerated size of the Mouse Queen.

The number of English versions of the Nutcracker is not as extensive as those of Fouqué’s Undine and Sintram, Chamisso’s Peter Schlemihl and Hauff’s fairytales. One can only speculate on the reasons for this. Although many German children’s books were translated into English at an early date, they were exclusively works with a strong educational or moral tendency. Nußknacker und Mausekönig did not fit into this category, and it escaped being translated as a work of adult fiction (which was what happened with Fouqué and Chamisso) probably because so many other examples of Hoffmann’s work were more obvious candidates. Der goldne Topf was translated by Thomas Carlyle in 1827, while Der Sandmann appeared in a translation by Lord Albert Conyngham in The Keepsake for 1834. Neither of these stories were readily adaptable for children, though Der Sandmann reached a much larger and enduring audience through its adaptation into the ballet Coppélia (1870) with music by Delibes. The reception of Hoffmann’s Nutcracker has suffered through contamination with Dumas and Tchaikovsky’s ballet, and abridgements of the story for children at the end of the twentieth century still show the marks. Ascott Hope’s 1892 translation probably came about through the increased interest in the 1890s in Germany and German books that saw so many new editions of Undine, Sintram, Schlemihl and the Grimms’ and Hauff’s fairytales. Yet it was a one-off affair and did not stimulate further newly illustrated editions in the Edwardian era.