

# Dolls and Toy Soldiers in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Nussknacker und Mausekönig*: the Secret Life Unseen

## Puppen und Spielzeugsoldaten in E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Nussknacker und Mausekönig*: Das unsichtbare geheime Leben

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### *ABSTRACT (English)*

This article explores the importance of Marie's dolls and toys (most importantly the nutcracker) to her transition from child to mature adolescent. The nutcracker serves as a catalyst by which she accesses her own agency and transforms from young girl to an adolescent. In order to contextualize my discussion, I draw upon the work of Susan Stewart, who analyzes the importance of the miniature, including dolls and dollhouses, and argues that they can "reveal a secret life" otherwise unseen.<sup>1</sup> In this case, the "secret life" is Marie's maturation and her negotiation of the emotional crisis brought on by the arrival of the nutcracker – a development that occurs largely without the assistance of the adults in her life. Additionally, I consider how the representation of toys in this text reflect and shape debates on the role of toys and play in the socialization and education of children.

**Keywords:** E. T. A. Hoffmann, imagination, socialization, maturation, emotion, play, miniatures

### *ABSTRACT (Deutsch)*

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Bedeutung von Maries Puppen und Spielzeugen (vor allem des Nussknackers) für ihre Wandlung vom Kind zur Jugendlichen. Der Nussknacker fungiert als Auslöser, durch den sie ihre eigene Handlungsfähigkeit erlangt und sich vom jungen Mädchen zur jugendlichen Person wandelt. Um meine Diskussion zu kontextualisieren, berufe ich mich auf die Arbeit von Susan Stewart, die die Bedeutung der Miniatur, einschließlich Puppen und Puppenhäuser, analysiert und argumentiert, dass sie „a secret life“ (ein geheimes Leben) offenbaren können, das sonst unsichtbar bleibt.<sup>1</sup> Das „geheime Leben“ ist Maries Reifung und die Überwindung ihrer emotionalen Krise, die von der Ankunft des Nussknackers verursacht wurde – eine Entwicklung, die weitgehend ohne Hilfe von den Erwachsenen in ihrem Leben abläuft. Zusätzlich betrachte ich, wie die Darstellung von Spielzeugen in diesem Text die Debatten über die Rolle von Spiel und Spielzeug in der Sozialisierung und Erziehung von Kindern widerspiegeln und prägen.

**Schlüsselwörter:** E. T. A. Hoffmann, Einbildungskraft, Sozialisation, Reifungsprozess, Gefühle, Spiel, Miniaturen

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart (1984, 47)

## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Nussknacker und Mausekönig* (1816) begins with the Stahlbaum family gathering on Christmas Eve. After waiting around all day, the Stahlbaum children, Marie and Fritz, are ushered into the living room to see what presents have been left for them. Marie marvels over her new dolls and a dress. Fritz is excited to see toy soldiers awaiting him on their white horses. After Pate Droßelmeier comes with his mechanical castle and the excitement of the evening ebbs, Marie discovers "ein sehr vortrefflicher kleiner Mann" still hiding under the tree (Hoffmann 1958, 257). She is instantly taken with the nutcracker and his rather peculiar appearance, and assumes the role of his caretaker despite the fact that he belongs to all three Stahlbaum children. The arrival of the nutcracker throws Marie's world into turmoil. She is suddenly confronted with feelings toward the nutcracker she is unable to articulate that hint at potential maturation and an emerging sense of sexuality. Her normally safe home turns to chaos as the mouse king and his army emerge from the structure of the house itself to attack Marie, her toys, and her understanding of her reality. At the same time, the nutcracker sparks Marie's imagination and frees her to do things and go places she previously thought impossible. She circumvents the limitations and conventions of her bourgeois life with the nutcracker at her side, defying the nature of reality to visit the land of the dolls and save the nutcracker from his curse. Her miniature play world merges with and overtakes her real life, and this disruption in scale between her real and play worlds is the catalyst for Marie's sudden and hurried transition into adolescence, as she is a "großes Mädchen" by the end of the narrative (Hoffmann 1958, 316). Even if one reads the fantastic elements of the text as only existing within Marie's fantasy, her relationship to the nutcracker and the adventure it brings reveal at least an attempt in Marie's mind to imagine this transition from child to adolescent to adult. This transition is fraught with uncertainty and she undergoes it perhaps a bit prematurely.

This article explores the importance of Marie's dolls and miniature play world to her apparent (if fantastic) transition from child to mature adolescent. The nutcracker

serves as a catalyst by which Marie accesses her own agency and transforms from young girl to an adolescent of marriageable age. She remains unafraid of his grotesque countenance and disproportionate body; in fact, his strange nature seems to be part of what draws her to him in the first place – an indication of her fascination with feelings she does not yet fully comprehend. In order to contextualize my discussion, I draw upon the work of Susan Stewart, who analyzes the importance of the miniature (including dolls and dollhouses) and argues that they can "reveal a secret life" otherwise unseen (Stewart 1984, 47). In this case, the "secret life" is Marie's maturation and her negotiation of the emotional crisis brought on by the arrival of the nutcracker – a development that occurs largely without the assistance of the adults in her life. In many ways, Hoffmann's Marie escapes those constraints through her play with the nutcracker.

### ***Toys, Play, and Pedagogy***

In order to understand Marie's play with the nutcracker and the disruption in scale between her real and fantasy worlds, I refer to Susan Stewart's work, *On Longing*. Toys, as Stewart underlines, are important examples of the miniature. She writes:

*The toy is the physical embodiment of the fiction: it is a device for fantasy, a point of beginning for narrative. The toy opens an interior world, lending itself to fantasy and privacy in a way that the abstract space, the playground, of social play does not. To toy with something is to manipulate it, to try it out within sets of contexts, none of which is determinative (Stewart 1984, 56).*

Marie uses her toys, initially at least, to act out scenarios and behaviors she has learned are what they deem proper adult behavior. But when the boundary between the miniature toy world and the real world becomes unclear, the resulting emotional confusion and crisis spark Marie's imaginative play – the "point of beginning" for Marie's hastened evolution. The fairy land she discovers, also "torn by strife," leads her to overcome her confusion and fear and successfully transition into adulthood (Daemmrich 1973, 56). In other words, in order to become a functional, productive adult that can operate within society's given parameters, Marie must first circumvent her bourgeois social constraints. This paradox is only made possible through Marie's play and imagination. Stewart would see these moments of disruption between the real and miniature worlds as examples of the

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<sup>2</sup> This article began as part of a chapter from my dissertation, so I would like first to thank Lynne Tatlock, my advisor, as well as Jennifer Kapczynski and Erin McGlothlin for their insights and feedback during that stage of writing. I would also like to thank Brooke Kreitingner and Kelsey Lecky for their careful reading of and comments on this article.

grotesque because the miniature is no longer true to its original scale, but more important than the presence of the grotesque is how Marie navigates this disruption through her interaction with the nutcracker (Stewart 1984, 46).

Hoffmann's text highlights the question of the role of toys and play in the socialization process through Marie's conflict – both with her play world and her parents. In this way, the text reflects its historical moment. (Gerhard Neumann even refers to the text as a "Sozialisationsmärchen," though he interprets Marie's experience as a dream [Neumann 1997, 4]). Toys became objects of contention for pedagogues, concerned parents, and other authority figures throughout the nineteenth century in Germany on account of their perceived benefits and hindrances in contributing to the socially acceptable education of children into responsible adults. According to Ganaway, "...Germany was the original home of modern toys and the marketing of youth culture" (Ganaway 2009, 2). The industry itself was responsible – especially toward the end of the century – for "promoting the notion of the educational benefits of toys," but this discussion about the role of toys in the home and in the education of children began earlier (Hamlin 2007, 144). *Nussknacker und Mausekönig* certainly reflects those concerns as well as contributes to the discussion via its representation of Marie's play and her parents' involvement (and lack thereof).

While the use of toys for the socialization of children in some social classes appears as early as the Renaissance, according to Kuznets, the connection between toys and education and their potential didactic uses begins to be explored further at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. This debate was part of the growing interest in two competing educational movements that gained prominence during the period (Kuznets 1994, 12p.). On the one hand, the work of John Locke and Enlightenment ideals suggested that toys could be used to teach reason and responsibility. On the other hand, proponents of Romanticism argued that play helped engender creativity and the formation of subjectivity (Hamlin 2007, 127pp.). Friedrich Fröbel, for example, outlines the importance of play that is also imaginative in nature; he is, however, more specifically concerned with the play of boys and therefore focuses on play and the public sphere, not the domestic (Fröbel 1926, 386pp.).

By the end of the nineteenth century in Germany, however, it was largely considered to be a fact that children were learning while playing and that toys should in some fashion be able to prepare them for their future gender-specific social roles (Weber-Kellermann 1976, 97, 100; Weber-Kellermann 1974, 201; Hamlin 2007, 140; Bowersox 2013, 20p.). This development was the result of a trend beginning

at the start of the century, when the single-family home became more and more the norm for the middle-class family. The place of play gradually migrated from outside the home to the newly anointed *Kinderstube*, or at least to a room of the home under the parents' (most specifically the mother's) careful supervision (Weber-Kellermann 1976, 99; Ganaway 2009, 28, 42, 47; Hamlin 2007, 24p.). Kuznets even suggests "...that adults, rather than finding toys trivial, are involved in a sometimes buried, sometimes obvious, struggle with children to keep control over them" (Kuznets 1994, 10p.). This underlying anxiety about play and adolescence, as well as the shift toward indoor play are certainly at work in Hoffmann's text. The family living room and glass cabinet are the stage for the beginning of Marie's adventure, and only through her imaginative play and the resulting conflict does she escape the domestic sphere. She then struggles to articulate her experiences to her parents, who do not wish to hear of her fantastic adventures and in fact cannot see how her experiences have initiated her emotional, mental, and sexual development.

### ***Toys and Play Out of Scale – A Closer Look at Nussknacker und Mausekönig***

In *Nussknacker und Mausekönig*, originally published in 1816 before appearing as part of *Die Serapionsbrüder* in 1819, Hoffmann provides the reader with an example of the miniature toy world par excellence in the mechanized toy castle that Droßelmeier brings to Fritz and Marie on Christmas Eve. The children first express excitement at Droßelmeier's latest creation; Fritz is so enchanted that he wishes to enter the castle. Droßelmeier explains to him that he is obviously too big for that; when Fritz prompts him to make the animated figures do something else, Droßelmeier explains that the mechanisms controlling the figures cannot be changed. Disappointed, Fritz expresses his preference for his toy soldiers and their unrestricted movement under his control, and even Marie quietly turns her attentions elsewhere so as not to hurt Droßelmeier's feelings further with her own lack of interest. Frustrated by their reactions, Droßelmeier insists his work is not "für unverständige Kinder" and begins to pack his things (Hoffmann 1958, 256).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, the relationship between human and machine is something that was a contemporary question and one that Hoffmann takes on in other texts as well, most famously with Nathanael's fascination with Olympia in *Der Sandmann*. For more information as to how this debate emerges in this text, see (Heintz 1974) and, for a more general assessment, (Gendolla 1992).

The castle, in all of its mechanical complexity, fails to stoke the imagination of the children perhaps precisely because it is too complete a model. Fixed as it is in the movements of the figures inside, there is no way for them to engage and manipulate them, to experiment or reconfigure them or the space within which they reside. Stewart describes the miniature as a “world of arrested time,” and the castle and its inhabitants certainly fit that description with their repetitive mechanical movements (Stewart 1984, 67). The castle may also serve as a model for society’s predetermined appropriate, non-deviant behavior. In that way, the castle is an allusion to the expectations of the larger bourgeois social world that exists beyond the confines of the Stahlbaum household. Marie manages to circumvent these expectations – to a certain extent, at least – within her familiar domestic world. By rejecting this representation of an idealized existence in miniature form, Marie resists the social norms that would otherwise trap her in circumscribed behavior patterns – a trait that fully emerges with the appearance of the Mouse King.<sup>4</sup> In comparison to the castle, Marie’s shelf in the glass cabinet provides a much livelier play space. She has decorated her shelf to resemble a room in a typical bourgeois household. The narrator describes her little room as “gut möbliert” and goes on to describe the “kleines schöngeblühtes Sofa, mehrere allerliebste Stühlchen, einen niedlichen Teetisch,” as well as its fashionably papered walls, and concludes, “dass in *diesem* Zimmer die neue Puppe, welche, wie Marie noch denselben Abend erfuhr, Mamsell Klärchen hieß, sich sehr wohl befinden musste” (Hoffmann 1958, 261). Indeed, Marie has taken her shelf in the cabinet and turned it into a dollhouse, a miniature version of her own surroundings, or “verkleinerte Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Gesellschaft,” as Kümmerling-Meibauer puts it, that becomes the epicenter of her nighttime adventures (Kümmerling-Meibauer 2014, 149). It is also important that Marie’s shelf is a doll house of her own design. As opposed to Droßelmeier’s castle, Marie has designed the shelf herself, exerting control over the appearance of and action that takes place within. While her presentation of this doll house may appear to be rather domestic, Marie’s decisions about the nutcracker and the action taken by the dolls that inhabit the shelf are not so typical.

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4 Yoko Tawada has identified the importance of toys and play in both “Nussknacker und Mausekönig” and “das fremde Kind.” Her interests however, lie in offering a Freudian reading of the texts. See (Tawada 2000). James McGlathery also offers a rather limited interpretation of this text that is based on Freudian theory (see McGlathery 1981, 95pp.).

As part of her study on miniatures, Stewart focuses specifically on the dollhouse:

*Occupying a space within an enclosed space, the dollhouse’s aptest analogy is the locket or the secret recesses of the heart: center within center, within within within. The dollhouse is a materialized secret; what we look for is the dollhouse within the dollhouse and its promise of an infinitely profound interiority (Stewart 1984, 61).*

The dollhouse operates as a sort of *mise-en-abyme*, reflecting a representation of the real world in miniaturized form. One can see this aspect of secrecy and interiority in Marie’s case with her care of the nutcracker.<sup>5</sup> Eschewing the more logical notion of leaving him with Fritz’s soldiers, she instead asks her doll’s forgiveness for placing him on her shelf so that he might better recover from his injuries resulting from Fritz’s overzealous use of him earlier. Alone at the cabinet, Marie further reveals her affection toward him, unsure why she feels the need to hide her deeds from her mother. That she succeeds in doing so is already a break from social norms, considering the “emphasis on maternal surveillance” of play popular in the early nineteenth century (Gonzalez 2011, 36).

One might attribute Marie’s feeling to the fact that Marie’s shelf in the cabinet is a “box” in which she places all that she holds dear. Gaston Bachelard, in his seminal work, *The Poetics of Space*, offers a phenomenological approach to understanding the importance of certain kinds of spaces and objects within the home. He describes the box as a “[witness] of the *need for secrecy*” [his emphasis] (Bachelard 1994, 81). In other words, the cabinet itself can also be seen as a type of secret box that might engender this feeling of its own accord. There, her secrets are safe, for the moment.

While one can see Marie’s dollhouse shelf on the one hand functioning as the “Sozialisationsagent” that one might expect to see from a girl of her age, practicing to be an adult, her need to conceal it from her mother and the fact that she does so under the cover of darkness suggest that there is more to Marie’s play than merely fulfilling pedagogical expectations (Fooker u. Mikota 2014, 15). Her caring for the nutcracker, this (male) stranger, may be understood as a first encounter with her own sexuality. Kremer refers to the nutcracker as the “Medium ihrer sexuellen

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5 Stewart refers to a “Nutcracker theme” in her study, making this text ideal for this discussion. However, based on her other comments on balance and the grotesque, I imagine she must be thinking more of the ballet and not of Hoffmann’s original story (Stewart 1984, 55).

Initiation” (Kremer 1999, 89). This instance is the first time Marie is “alone” with a male figure, and her unarticulated desire for her activities to remain secret might indicate that she is dealing with feelings she fears are inappropriate. His disproportionate physical appearance suggests that there is something odd or perhaps even threatening about his presence in her world, though Marie seems largely unafraid of his grotesque countenance. His uncanny appearance may in fact be one of the aspects that draws her to him in the first place. Her behavior toward the nutcracker from the start suggests she feels a special sort of affection for him beyond the excitement of having a new toy – an affection she cannot yet fully articulate. Marie’s nighttime encounter suggests that Marie may be experiencing her first instance of privacy that is normally limited to adults – another signal that she stands on the cusp of adolescence.

In addition to his preternatural appearance, the hybrid nature of the nutcracker, which bridges the toy-gender gap, may also be appealing to Marie. According to Kuznets: “The toy soldier and the doll symbolize most clearly the division society makes between girls and boys at play – as well as the gender separation assigned to nurturing and aggressive instincts. Toys thus become ideal tools for societal gender modeling” (Kuznets 1994, 16). In Hoffmann’s story, the nutcracker serves as both doll (as the object of Marie’s concern and care) and soldier (as the hero of Marie’s fantastic adventure who vanquishes the Mouse King and whisks her away to a happy ending). In this sense, he is able to circumvent gender norms because he embodies aspects of both. His form allows him to fit into Marie’s familiar domestic world, yet he also offers a greater range of play opportunities than her other dolls do. His presence seems to inspire her own acts of bravery in the text (such as throwing her shoe at the mice, sacrificing her books and toys to the mouse king, and securing a sword for the nutcracker), and he seems to serve as the entity that unlocks certain spaces that Marie has not had access to or has not possessed the bravery to access previously.

The nutcracker is not the only object that is disproportionate and unusual in the text. This quality is seen in the house itself and the fantastic spaces Marie inhabits. Stewart claims that the dollhouse can freeze time and “present the illusion of a perfectly complete and hermetic world” (Stewart 1984, 62). But Hoffmann’s text shows how these kinds of spaces within spaces and the miniatures that inhabit them can actually represent a world in flux, incomplete and disproportionate, both in time and space (ibid). This capacity becomes clear for the first time when

Marie is alone that night and the mice attack. Whether or not the attack happens merely in her head or not is not as important as what the passage tells us about Marie’s surroundings. The chapters containing the battle between the toys and the mice suggest that what ought to be a safe, known space for Marie contains darker elements secretly eating away at the home from the inside – that the normally innocuous bourgeois living room is rife with its own peril – whether literal or metaphorical vermin.

In the passages leading up to the battle between the toys and mice, the narrator describes how the mice are revealed in all the nooks and crannies of the room as well as within the walls and underneath the floorboards. As Marie tucks the nutcracker and her other toys into her shelf, the room begins to come to life with other, more threatening noises: “Sie verschloss den Schrank und wollte ins Schlafzimmer, da — horcht auf, Kinder! — Da fing es an leise — leise zu wispern und zu flüstern und zu rascheln ringsherum, hinter dem Ofen, hinter den Stühlen, hinter den Schränken” (Hoffmann 1958, 263). After Marie sees a tiny version of Droßelmeier perched on a clock in the room (yet another moment where scale appears to be off kilter) and finds her pleas for his help unanswered, the mice reveal themselves<sup>6</sup>:

*Aber da ging ein tolles Kichern und Gepfeife los rund umher, und bald frottierte und liefes hinter den Wänden wie mit tausend kleinen Füßchen und tausend kleine Lichterchen blickten aus den Ritzen der Dielen. Aber nicht Lichterchen waren es, nein! kleine funkelnde Augen, und Marie wurde gewahr, dass überall Mäuse hervorguckten und sich hervorarbeiteten (Hoffmann 1958, 264).*

The very structure of the house and its foundation come under attack as the mice attempt to break into the living room to reach the nutcracker. In addition, the sheer number of mice emerging from the house also represent a dissonance of scale; so many mice could not exist in the walls of the house, at least not without having drawn the attention of adults.

The Mouse King’s arrival is also rendered as a physical blow to the house; he appears literally to tear the floor apart and rise up out of the unknown

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<sup>6</sup> While I am not able to address this relationship in detail here, much research has been done on the uncanny figure of Droßelmeier and his relationship to Marie. These interpretations are sometimes connected to Freud, his definition of the uncanny, and sexuality. For more information, see, for example, the previously mentioned (McGlathery 1981) and Tawada (2000), as well as Blackford (2012) and Kremer (1999).

depths below the house: “Vor ihren Füßen sprühte es, wie von unterirdischer Gewalt getrieben, Sand und Kalk und zerbröckelte Mauersteine hervor, und sieben Mäuseköpfe mit sieben hellfunkelnden Kronen erhoben sich, recht grässlich zischend und pfeifend, aus dem Boden” (Hoffmann 1958, 265). The reader never learns how it comes to be that the mice exist within the walls or how long they have been there. The scene makes clear, however, that something strange and horrible is living just beneath the surface of this otherwise normal, happy home. Indeed, what lies within may be just as dangerous if not more so than the threats that might lie beyond its walls, which turns the idea of the home as a “safe” play space on its head. This is especially true for Marie. Her experiences with the battle and her quest to rescue the nutcracker after the fact appear to be largely tied up with her own maturation and subconscious attempts at negotiating between family expectations and her own desires and experiences that may not align with the social norms of the time.

The passage depicts this uncanniness in the very representation of a miniaturized toy battle happening in the living room. What was once confined to the glass cabinet and Marie’s impromptu dollhouse takes over the space reserved for Marie and her family and “real” life; it is perhaps the product of Marie’s imagination run amok. Whatever the case, the fact that the toys leave their enclosed miniature space is indicative of Marie’s emotional conflict and suggests that her distress reaches beyond the confines of her contained play world’s ability to lead her to a solution. In other words, emotional upheaval leads to a spatial upheaval as well, rendering scale (and eventually time as well) out of normal proportion and balance.

The influence of the toys in the glass cabinet and Marie’s imagination – most specifically the nutcracker – appear, by the end of the text, to permeate the entire household. After vanquishing the Mouse King with a sword borrowed from one of Fritz’s toy soldiers, the nutcracker enters Marie’s bedroom and offers to take Marie to the land of the dolls. Scale again comes into question here, as Marie appears suddenly to be the same size as the nutcracker, a miniature in her own right, as he leads her to a different cabinet in the house:

*Er schritt voran, Marie ihm nach, bis er vor dem alten, mächtigen Kleiderschrank auf dem Hausflur stehen blieb. Marie wurde zu ihrem Erstaunen gewahr, dass die Türen dieses sonst wohl verschlossenen Schrankes offen standen, so dass sie*

*deutlich des Vaters Reisefuchspelz erblickte, der ganz vorne hing. Nuscknacker kletterte sehr geschickt an den Leisten und Verzierungen herauf, dass er die große Troddel, die, an einer dicken Schnur befestigt, auf dem Rückteile jenes Pelzes hing, erfassen konnte. Sowie Nuscknacker diese Troddel stark anzog, ließ sich schnell eine sehr zierliche Treppe von Zedernholz durch den Pelzärmel herab. ‘Steigen Sie nur gefälligst aufwärts, teuerste Demoiselle’, rief Nuscknacker. Marie tat es, aber kaum war sie durch den Ärmel gestiegen, kaum sah sie zum Kragen heraus, als ein blendendes Licht ihr entgegenstrahlte und sie mit einem Mal auf einer herrlich duftenden Wiese stand, von der Millionen Funken wie blinkende Edelsteine emporstrahlten (Hoffmann 1958, 302).*

Not only does Marie now become the proper size to climb up the staircase hidden in the sleeve of her father’s traveling coat, but she appears to need the nutcracker in order to access areas she is normally not allowed to see and perhaps knows little about. This necessity may be due to his hybrid nature as both doll and soldier. He serves as the “chaperone” for Marie’s adventure because he embodies both the domestic, private sphere as well as the public sphere and can bridge the gap that might otherwise seem insurmountable or inappropriate. Her father’s traveling coat, normally concealed within the cabinet, is an item from a public life to which, as a mere girl, Marie may not have much access. But with the nutcracker as her guide, this coat contains the passage through which she, too, can have her own adventure and travel beyond the boundaries of the home. The nutcracker’s presence might suggest that she feels the need for his guidance (in her mind) or that the nutcracker possesses special powers that allow him to gain access to the house in ways she could not by herself. Either way, she finds in the transformation of the everyday object an extraordinary way to escape her domestic confines.<sup>7</sup> According to Bachelard, “Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed, without these ‘objects’ and a few others in equally high favor, our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy.... A wardrobe’s inner space is also *intimate space*, space that is not open to just anybody” (Bachelard 1994, 78). As he further clarifies, “In the wardrobe there exists a center of order that protects the entire house against uncurbed disorder” (Bachelard 1994, 79). Bachelard’s

<sup>7</sup> Detlef Kremer has identified Hoffmann’s preoccupation with the “Konstruktion eines imaginären Raumes” and its connection to time and space being out of order (Kremer 2001, 173).

observations seem especially fitting with respect to this passage from *Nussknacker und Mausekönig*, as they explain the importance of Marie's entering the wardrobe. She gains access to her father's coat, an object that represents travel and movement and links the world of the domestic interior to the outside world, offering her a way out of her *Kinderstube*. In this case, however, the center of order is perhaps not a center of order at all – at least not in the way Bachelard means. While as an object belonging to the head of the household, a traveling coat may suggest stability, the nutcracker manipulates the coat and reveals it to have connections that, while not chaotic per se, do not reinforce an order related to the family's everyday reality. It instead allows the nutcracker to show Marie his home whose prince is now saved from the Mouse King.

This lack of order may also be tied to a general absence of Marie's father in the text. He appears at the beginning of the story on Christmas Eve when the nutcracker is presented to the children and he designates Marie as his primary caretaker, and he comes in at the end of the text when Marie recounts her visit to the land of the dolls. Otherwise, Marie's father is largely absent from the text, leaving Marie to navigate her newfound responsibilities by herself. The general absence of her parents – though the mother seems to have more to say about Marie's accounts of her nighttime – allows Marie to have her adventures away from the prying eyes of adults. The lack of parental supervision means that she and the nutcracker are free to explore places where she at least would otherwise never have the opportunity to go. That she and the nutcracker arrive at the land of the dolls via the traveling coat suggests that there are different rules for places where bourgeois social norms are out of order and that they understand these rules in a way that the parents cannot.

The dramatic shift in scale in this passage leads Marie to a place that is tethered to the Stahlbaum household via the strange connection to the coat but exists in some other space and time (and perhaps only in her mind). The land of the dolls is an entirely separate miniature world whose appearance is quite fantastic but whose norms are not entirely different from reality. There, Marie mistakes herself for the Princess Pirlipat while taking in the sights of a world that Droßelmeier “niemals zustande bringen [konnte]” (Hoffmann 1958, 306). When the nutcracker explains her error, she feels shame at her misperception – an emotion linked most closely to an emerging sexuality she does not yet fully understand. After she meets everyone in the land of the dolls, the nutcracker returns her to her bed

at home, but she returns inexplicably older than before – a “großes Mädchen”, according to her mother, ready to marry the nephew she rescued and live as a queen (Hoffmann 1958, 316). Not only has she aged by the end of the story, but also seems to have achieved an unaccountable jump in social class, if only as ruler of her own fantasy world.

### **Conclusion**

Within the privacy of her dollhouse shelf, Marie toys with notions of adulthood and her own emerging sexuality through her play with her dolls and the nutcracker. Evading the constrictions of parental supervision, she experiences a fantastic world in which the dangers of growing up are real, but she has the means to overcome them with the nutcracker's help. For Marie, her miniature play world is not the “world of arrested time” that Stewart claims, but instead a world of accelerated time. Her play with the nutcracker and her other dolls both causes her terrifying ordeal and helps her to triumph over it. These toys and the places of play (such as the shelf in the cabinet) become transitional objects through the blending of her imagined and real worlds, inciting her internal emotional crisis via the battle between the nutcracker and the Mouse King. This crisis is resolved through her inexplicably fast growth and maturation via her interactions with the nutcracker, a figure who is both grotesque and strange to her and the key to putting her (un)familiar domestic space back into order. In allowing for this emotional development in Marie to happen, her play with the nutcracker and her other dolls reveals a “secret life” otherwise unseen.

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