

0. Nutcracker: The Original Story - Story Preface

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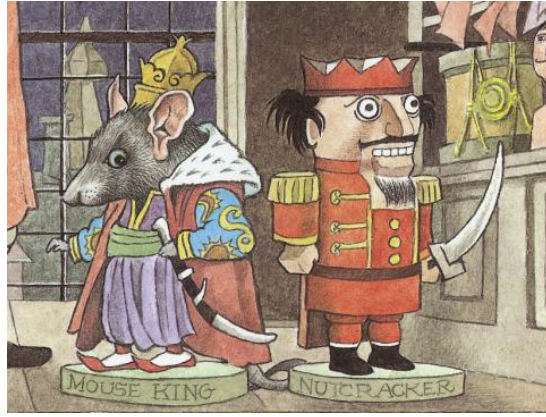


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*We believed in another world,
but we admitted the febleness of our senses.
Then came "enlightenment,"
and made everything so very clear and enlightened,
that we can see nothing for excess of light,
and go banging our noses against the first tree
we come to in the wood. We insist,
now-a-days, on grasping the other world
with stretched-out arms of flesh and bone.*

E.T.A. Hoffmann, author of *Nutcracker and the Mouse King*,
in *The Serapion Brethren*, Vol. I, Section II,
"A Fragment of the Lives of Three Friends"

E.T.A. Hoffman was a man who believed in "other worlds." Not just the imaginary worlds that live in our minds but also the world of art (such as music, among other artistic expressions).

After all, Hoffman was a man who could review music just by reading—not hearing—a score. That's how he reviewed Beethoven's 5th Symphony, which he did not hear, soon after its first performance in 1810.

Describing that still-famous symphony, and its four-note main theme, Hoffman observes that it:

...reveals an unknown kingdom to mankind: a world that has nothing in common with the outward, material world that surrounds it, and in which we leave behind all predetermined conceptual feelings in order to give ourselves up to the inexpressible. (See *The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions by His German Contemporaries*, Vol 11, at page 96.)

Giving "ourselves up to the inexpressible" was important to Hoffman. It's part of what makes us human. And it was his way of reacting, not entirely favorably, to "the enlightenment" era where scientific inquiries—instead of running-wild imaginations—held the upper hand.

Hoffman—himself a musician, painter and writer—let his own imagination run wild in many of his stories. Those stories were so important, in the 19th century, that other composers set them to music. One famous example is *The Tales of Hoffman* (by Jacques Offenbach).

One of Hoffman's best-loved tales, which he published in 1816, is about a young German girl, living in a straightlaced family, whose godfather—Herr Drosselmeier (a name which, loosely translated, means someone who shakes things up)—creates a special Christmas present for Marie's family. That special present is a nutcracker (which happens to have special powers).

Hereafter is our abridged version of Hoffman's original story.

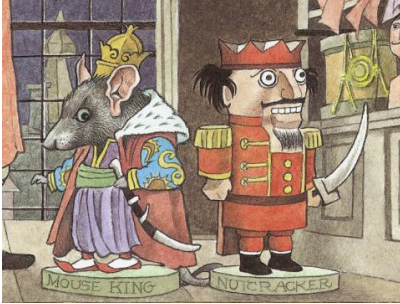
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Media Stream



Nutcracker and Mouse King

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