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The Nutcracker: Traditional or Evolving Gender Roles

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THE NUTCRACKER: TRADITIONAL OR EVOLVING GENDER ROLES

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Abstract

This paper explores how traditional gender roles in American society have infiltrated ballet variations, specifically in *The Nutcracker* variations I begin by looking into early performances of ballet within the court of King Louis XIV how his political atmosphere helped shaped ballet and its movement, and the dominance of men in these early productions. I then consider the Romantic Period when women became more prominent in ballet but were also faced with the paradox of being sensual yet still retain their chastity. I then look at twentieth century ballet in the U.S focusing particularly on George Balanchine. Balanchine has kept these gendered norms in his ballets and exhibited traditional stereotypes within his work and movements. One of his most famous pieces, *The Nutcracker* conveys ballet's tendency to allow gender roles to infiltrate its choreography. Looking into characters such as The Prince, Clara, Sugar Plum, and various others; I examine how these ballets depict females as gentle and delicate, while men are all strength and powerful; implicitly depicting women as inferior.

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Introduction

Every year without fail during the holiday season posters promoting *The Nutcracker* ballet appear around cities throughout the U.S, promoting a tradition that has captured the attention of many dance enthusiasts (including myself) since at least the mid-twentieth century. From the rowdy Party Children, to the flamboyant Russian Candy Canes and to the gentle Sugar Plum Fairy this ballet has become family tradition for many due to its family-friendly plot line and its association with a so-called “holiday spirit”. Balanchine’s version has been a part of my life since I was a child and has mesmerized me since the beginning. Balanchine’s take of *The Nutcracker* was the first ever performance I saw, and also the first I preformed and so carries some sentimental value for me, as it likely does for many other young ballerinas. However as I grew older and became aware of gendered and racialized stereotypes, it became apparent that Balanchine’s piece; which once seemed a beautiful fantasy to me was also an exhibition of social gender expectations. The once friendly and playful characters I cherished became illusions of gender roles that are often placed on men and women.

Euro-American gender roles, while evolving constantly, often fall back on archaic ideologies that borrow, heavily from religious and aristocratic European thought while placing uneven expectations and norms on the sexes. This difference in the sexes is apparent in ballet; for dancers continue to fall in line with social expectations, thus influencing aesthetics on dancers based on their sex, embodying women as ethereal, delicate, and light (emphasizing their “femininity”), while men are portrayed as strong and leading protagonists (highlighting the expectation of authority from men). Social views slyly enforce these aesthetics onto characters specifically in variations of *The*

Nutcracker, establishing perceptions about each gender thus creating a concrete ideal of what is feminine as well as masculine.

The ballet originally adapted from the short story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* by E.T.A Hoffmann was first adapted by choreographer Marius Petipa and later Lev Ivanov (who stepped in to finish the production). The ballet's initial struggle is often traced to the production's second choreographer Lev Ivanov that was described as "distracted" in terms of directing (Fisher 36). Although its initial reception was not what the directors hoped for, once the ballet traveled from Russia to Europe to North America it found a place where its story line was appreciated. During its travel across nations, *The Nutcracker* was influenced in bits and pieces; however in all its border crossings, gender roles continued to portray Euro-American ideology.

One influential figure that reinforced these gender roles was George Balanchine who is seen to have revolutionized the look of classical ballet by stripping the pantomime of the 19th century movement. This essay examines the development of these gender roles and with a particular focus on Balanchine's influence on American ballet in the twentieth century because his choreography became the definitive production most widely known in the U.S. I begin by exploring ballet's past and the cultural system in which it evolved, which separated the sexes resulting in how women were viewed as delicate and helpless creatures in need of help from strong men. By studying the contemporary performance of Balanchine's influential choreography *The Nutcracker* and exploring its aesthetics, I argue the performance continues to perpetuate ideas of gender expectations of a woman's femininity being seen as delicate and as a male's masculinity viewed through perceptions of strength.

Methodology

To put together this research I've used secondary sources discussing the history of ballet and its social constructs while also providing choreographic analysis of Balanchine's *Nutcracker* to support my interpretation of the performance of gender in this ballet. Through my secondary sources (mainly articles emerging from the field of dance studies), I discovered information that assisted in my examination of gender expectations of femininity and masculinity of Balanchine's variation of *The Nutcracker*. Using videos of Balanchine's work I analyzed the movement, costumes, and storyline used to express gender roles within the characters. I am constructing my argument through a dance studies viewpoint focusing on aesthetics and dance movement itself and its connection to cultural meanings connected with gender as represented in the major characters in this work.

Ballet and Social Constructs in the Renaissance and Baroque Periods

Ballet emerges in the 1400's in Italy in the Renaissance era, where it was first used as a form of entertainment for aristocrats, and then nobles themselves performed the social dance. At this time ballet which was then considered court dance consisted of performers who danced to court steps in formal gowns and followed certain patterns on the dance floor that were predetermined by dance masters. The court of Louis XIV in France (r. 1638-1715) specifically allowed court dance to develop, for Louis XIV placed an importance on the arts; he was a patron and founded L'Académie de la Danse and L'Académie de la musique (Cohen 18). King Louis used the Court Ballet as a method to convey a distinction of power such that he desired to emphasize the hierarchy of his court with him being displayed as most powerful (MacGowan 43). He did this through patterns

of movement in which he his ballet master choreograph specific placement, which signified his authoritative status in the court. Ballet when first established in the Court of Ballet conveyed the social context of political power between the king and his nobles. Its origins reflected the social customs of the elites especially in King Louis XIV court, where the dance was viewed as a spectacle, for “dance should represent the actions, manners, and passions of characters in a wordless drama” (Cohen, 13). This spectacle was elaborate and involved specific themes and patterns which organized nobles and the king in an obvious manner which portrayed social rankings, thus by using “movement that is voluntary, ordered and preformed” the political standings of the king and his nobles signified the hierarchy of men (Cohen 14). In this way the king would be positioned in a precise place in order to emphasize his power over all and his nobles would be placed accordingly. This was used as a political strategy to assert his divine right to rule and influence over the elites. For example a role Louis often played was that of the Sun God Apollo and would be placed in the center during performances to symbolize his reign as one of divine power (Cohen 11).

Men were featured most prominently in ballets during this time, establishing a gendered hierarchy as well. This exhibition of power highlighted the separation of and the difference in authority between men and women. For majority of the time men participated in the court of ballet to demonstrate their ranking based on the favor of the king. The head courtiers were often male to convey their masculinity and superiority through dance and conveyed their status through their participation of the king’s spectacles. Males established their authority and demonstrated strength through the patterned choreography therefore displaying the intentional movement was used to

portray the masculine aesthetic while in the court. In Louis XIV's Court Ballet women while sometimes depicted in the performances, they did not have the same prominence as men.

Early Gender Norms in the Romantic Era

As ballet developed away from the courts and into the realm of the professional stage, the inclusion of women in ballet began to progress as well. Due to an importance of a mystical image in ballet in the Romantic period (circa 1827-1870), more women began to take part in the genre due to the belief that women were able to highlight the intimacy of the technical movement and since ballet no longer focused on power exhibition, men began to take a lesser role within ballet. By the nineteenth century, a new emphasis on physical movement still exhibited an "illusion of aristocratic accomplishment" but reshaped ballet and its union of body and art (MacGowan 37). New outfits such as shorter gowns transformed the look and actions of movements, for now the performers would be able to use their limbs in new ways, therefore focusing on the physical action. The new technique used at this time established a new style of dancing "suited to bring fantasies to life" and women at the time were thought of as the perfect instrument to embody the fantasy aspect (Jowitt 204). In this way society began to desire mystical performance versus the significance of power play of nobles in court. Women enchanted the audience through technique, where the style of movement changed such as "the turnout of the hips [increased] since the eightieth century"; demonstrating that ballet evolved its movement to incorporate more corporeal movement within the aesthetic and women were believed to be able to use their femininity while executing the technique, thus attracting the public's attention to ballet performances (Jowitt 207).

Developments in costuming made influenced women's success in the art of ballet. Costumes emphasized a women's sensuality, which became a popular aspect of ballet, for it promoted the image of women being soft and delicate creatures. The change in fashion contributed to the new movement for soft slippers and light, loose fitted dresses, which enabled a large range of motion, as well as created a sensual image of the women body, which played a significant role in the increase of interest in ballet, for the new exotic portrayal of the body gave the female corporeal body a new significance. These performances highlighted a woman's body and used their femininity to gather audience interest by highlighting female sensuality but also retaining the image of chastity in order to maintain Christian morals, reinforcing cultural perceptions that believed the female body should be virtuous. A double standard was established, for an audience expected women dancers to be exotic and sensual, yet retain the illusion of chastity which women were assumed to need. While the new shift in ballet aesthetics generated an opening where women gained a small foothold in achieving some power through a career as a ballet dancer, very few were able to make a living out of a life of a ballet dancer. Curiously, just as women were given roles that represent chastity, the stereotype of women being mother figures was still represented figuratively through the dancers bodies. The mother figure image was connected to the female body so significantly during this time that "Ballerinas often danced well into their pregnancies" suggesting that ballerinas were still seen as mothers (but as ballerinas, they were also working women which complicated this role) (Jowitt 46). Ballerina's were also frequently judged on how well they fulfilled gendered expectations of women; if a woman did not fit the criteria of the ideal "mother" they were often criticized, such as ballerina Louis Fitzjames

who was denounced due to her thinness, which was not seen as an optimal body type for child bearing, hence not representing the typical image of a caring mother (Jowitt 47). Thus social conventions enforce the image of patriarchal ideal that women are first and foremost for childbearing purposes and belong as caregivers in homes rather than career oriented individuals, due to their delicate and caring image that social conventions placed on them, making them the perfect sex to act as a mother. As a consequence of the mother like social image, the perception of the “submissiveness (of women) ...who would submit to a man” conveyed belief of a woman being delicate and helpless, therefore needing the support of male, for they were often seen as strong leaders (Jowitt 58). Women ballerinas hence, had to embody a working professional as well as a mistress resulting in a paradox since they had to fit two contrasting impressions at once. Juxtaposing aesthetics are forced upon the dancers since they must embody the perception of being passive; however still demonstrating strength in being independent workers on the stage.

Due to a desire to gain interest from the public, ballet performances often placed women in roles that sexualized or highlighted a women’s femininity. In most cases the “heroine was expected to gratify men’s appetites” which mirrored aristocratic views of the female holding the image of caring figures (Jowitt 60).

These traditional roles continue to inform ballet performances today, whether in the reconstructed works of the Romantic period, or in the more modern choreography of Balanchine. For example, in Balanchine’s *The Nutcracker*, as is the case in other versions of this ballet, Clara is often perceived as nurturing for she attempts to heal the Prince when he gets injured. Her movement of rocking the nutcracker in order to soothe it,

depicts the stereotype that women, even from a young age, inherently have a caring persona. By conveying this ideal in performances, choreographers give audiences a familiar cod of femininity and represent women as kind and delicate caregivers.

While women in the Romantic period were depicted as mother like, the fantasy aspect of the performances also touched heavily on the sexuality of women and its effect on men. The emphasis on sexuality influenced, the characters the women played, for the roles had to have an equal balance of being a “virtuous maiden of worthy respect and as a voluptuous chattel”, giving women contradictory standards for they must never be too chaste or too sensual but just the right amount (Jowitt 61). This oxymoron of being virtuous and sinful conveys the superiority men had back then, that they were able to institute impossible, contradictory ideals upon how women should act. These perceptions make it impossible for women to be the ideal image that they are often portrayed as, for they face the challenge of finding a balance between their sensuality and chastity, their “seductive and “nurturing” natures. Through ballet, men in society thus began to find it suitable to sexualize women because they felt the institution created boundaries that hindered women from being too provocative, for their characters applied the image of chastity within its performances while still sensualizing the corporeal body.

George Balanchine and his Influence

Balanchine revolutionized classical ballet by using classicism to quicken and expand the ballet movement (Jack 5). His contemporary take on ballet “permits a greater range of movement than the strict body lines” which used classical technique and pointe work which Balanchine believed women executed beautifully (New World Encyclopedia n.p). The ballerinas used the technique to portray femininity, which was often expected

from their performances. Due to this new found concept of lines, visuals became important, enough that some critics“ remarked that the sex appeal of ballet came from [the dancers] long slender legs seductive torso” representing a ballet performance habit to sexualize its women dancers (Hanna 5). Through new technique dancers began to manipulate their bodies to either challenge or reify social or cultural ideas of gender that society has placed upon them. This new aesthetic of movement was innovated through 20th century technique such as floor work and turned-in visuals of the legs, which Balanchine initiated by interweaving flexed hands turned out legs, and non-classical steps to his style of work. Balanchine favored women in his works for he believed that a woman’s feminine aesthetic fit the demands of the technique. His works often placed feminine and masculine aesthetics on characters according to their sex, which highlighted the juxtaposing gender expectations of strong male leads versus delicate females.

Balanchine’s ideal women who danced and played characters from his repertoire often reflect soft, gentle roles, which contrasted other masculine characters that embodied strength in appearance and movement. Balanchine viewed women as “naturally inferior in matters... and a woman obligingly accepts her lowly place. A woman was seen as an object of beauty, desire, and first in ballet by default, because she is more beautiful than the opposite gender...she’s an American icon” resulting in placed gender role aesthetics to highlight the feminine “beauty” he believed women had (Daly 8). His views were consistent with social perceptions of the inferiority of women for Balanchine’s choreographic style was controlling to the point that one of his dancers named Suki Schorer described him as, manipulating (Daly 9).

His overpowering demeanor reflects that of traditional gender roles in that men control women and women must submit to an inferior status; thus conveying the gender expectations. In this way women were again perceived as helpless and in need of a leader figure which men were deemed to have due to perceived strength. Through these dances, women were unable to find their voices and face difficulty in finding freedom as well since people like Balanchine carried conventional views on gender. The partnering work in his choreography emphasizes the controlling nature of men and stands as a metaphor “of the girl being an instrument...and a boy controlling her” for women are helpless and need the guidance of a strong male lead can offer (Daly 9). Through his choreography the manipulation of the feminine body demonstrated social views in which women fulfill the role of a helpless and delicate being, thus needing the support of the assumed strength that accompanies masculinity. While there is no direct proof that he ever forced a woman into any character roles, he continued to implement sexist views in his work through movement of the female and male body. Instead of playing a dominant role, the ballerina figuratively becomes submissive in the eyes of the audience through body actions and characters.

Balanchine expressed his masculine point of view in his work, reflecting women as a passive feminine subject and an image of fragility. To make a woman seem passive he made sure that partner work conveyed the masculine manipulation, where the feminine body depended on the male partner to sustain her or execute her movement. Scholars have suggests that Balanchine loved such gender stereotype for he “glorified woman because beauty pleased him, pleased the cavalier, and pleased the spectator’s male gaze” conveying that male audiences found interest in roles which portrayed women

as fragile and delicate figures, for these perceptions are the social constructs that encourage male audiences to watch (Daly 17). Male audiences that found interest in women stereotypes, then influenced Balanchine's roles, thus portraying the ideal that women came second and it was up to them to fulfill those male audience expectations. Much like the cultural perceptions of the Romantic period, Balanchine's work expresses a desire for women to follow a man's will and need before their own. Women became objects in his work who used their femininity in roles and operated as the manipulated counterpart of the male character who were established to be strong partner roles.

Influence of *The Nutcracker*

One of Balanchine's most famous works, and one that highlights the division of gender roles discussed here, is *The Nutcracker*—a ballet teeming with holiday cheer and customarily seen during the Christmas season. *The Nutcracker* tells the tale of Clara and the Nutcracker Prince, and their adventure to the Land of Sweets. With merry nuances of family values and an intertwined coming of age story, *The Nutcracker* stole the hearts of societies across nations. Over time, gender aesthetics such as the delicate femininity of a woman and the strength of men continue to be emphasized in the ballet through the portrayal of *The Nutcracker's* female and male characters. With the help of Balanchine's influence *The Nutcracker* became a household holiday phenomenon, being advertised to the American public for everything from its enticing characters to its festive music score.

However, this popular ballet relies heavily on gendered social conventions to make the ballet more marketable to conservative audiences and often imposes gender stereotypes onto the younger generation. Numerous children take part in *the Nutcracker*, whether as dancers in the performance or as engaging audience members signifying that

the ballet is an outlet, which promotes gender role expectations onto easily swayed children. In turn the younger generation then go on to indirectly learn about old-fashioned conventions about gender roles and expectations. Is it possible to teach the public to unlearn these cultural constructs on gender roles of femininity and masculinity, when they have already been established at a young age?

One possibility to deconstruct the already applied gender expectations is to provide outlets in which the public can view different versions of performances that tend to be seen as parodies. For example in Mark Morris's *The Hard Nu* (1991), his dance group acts out a satire version of *The Nutcracker*, making fun of the gender roles portrayed in the ballets performance. In the parody the dancers who play Clara and her Mother exaggerate soft feminine gestures, which convey the absurdity in placing specific aesthetics onto a single gender. The Mother role is played by a man in this version and with the overdramatic gentle gestures portraying the delicate nuances often accompanied with female expectations, it conveys that men can and should be able to practice these aesthetics, just as women can exercise masculine perceptions such as strength. In contrast a duet portion often executed by a female and male lead, is purposely neglected and instead two male leads perform partnering work. This rejects the ideal that women are helpless and need support of men, but conveys the notion that men can be manipulated as well. The partner work shows lifts and quick turns all initiated by one partner portraying the refusal to acknowledge the perception that any one gender is seen as helpless. Instead both leads guide each other by switching off and taking turns balancing one another demonstrating not one person has all the power but instead they are equals sharing the responsibility of the movement. Perhaps by giving the public a chance to experience new

interpretations of performances, cultural perceptions of gender roles can be deconstructed and instead just like in the partnering piece and equal attitude can be identified between both genders. The ballet institution although powerful in conveying gender expectations, these ideals aren't unmovable and change can happen as seen through development in new attitudes of ballet performances.

Character Stereotypes

The Nutcracker is named after one of the many lead characters in the performance. The Nutcracker Prince himself is often portrayed to be a manly toy that when brought to life is a “stalwart soldier” emphasizing the strength that is perceived to be associated with masculinity (Fisher 156). No surprise, the male lead is made to seem strong and dependable as men are usually deemed in traditional social gender roles (implicitly conveying the distinction of passive female bodies versus ever-active male bodies). The Nutcracker soldier epitomizes the description of a “man” through his “clean cut and patriotic” ensemble that highlights his authority (Fisher 156). Through his appearance, he can be described as neat and structured emphasizing the perception that he should epitomize a visual of strength and power. The strength of the prince can be attributed to the influence of times of war when men were seen as strong warriors who are meant to defend. As was the case in the court of King Louis XIV, the prince needs to convey the hierarchy of the character, thus the male gender expectations portray the power of the masculine body in order to express the connection between him and his authority. His consistent leaps and jumps through his variation juxtaposed Clara's fluid movement, revealing the masculinity the leaps held since they demonstrate the strength of the character. The Prince's charisma and sharp aggressive movements demonstrate the

masculine perception of strength and the ideal that men are protectors therefore they need to be strong. For example, many interpretations of Nutcracker toys manufactured in the last few decades featured a “Gulf War...and September 11th” themed aesthetic which often looked patriotic and masculine influencing its customized ballet character to appear just as strong and masculine (Fisher 157). Throughout the time, soldiers were considered men and those that partook in battle were considered strong. Thus the perception of the masculine power of a battle is conveyed through the fight between the Nutcracker and Mouse King.

Throughout the battle scene between the Nutcracker and Mouse King, the struggle for power is evident through the staccato movement of the other dancers. Even the Prince’s little army poses the persona of dignified warriors; it conveys in each young boy’s face the idea of bravery and power. Throughout the scene the Nutcracker’s quick stabbing motions and pointing demonstrates his leadership position and responsibility to protect defenseless Clara. In this way, society’s perception of male leadership and the ideal protector is represented by the Nutcracker’s desire to guard Clara from the dangerous mice that repeatedly harass her. Due to the inability of Clara to save her, the Prince is designed to become the protector following the gender rules that society has placed on men. In most traditional gender perceptions the males tend to be leaders and are appointed to take action due to the strength they are assumed to have. Thus, the ballet stresses the need for the prince to be seen as superior; in the Mouse King’s final moments, Clara distracts him but the Nutcracker delivers the final blow, thus staking claim to the principle that men are invincible and protectors.

It is also interesting to consider how this role changes whether the antagonist is a Mouse King or if the villain is instead played as the Mouse Queen. In the 1993 New York City Ballet production of Balanchine's *The Nutcracker*, the Mouse King, who ultimately loses to the Nutcracker Prince, still demonstrates a sense of masculinity throughout the performance. The Mouse King directly is presented to be the villain and his first movement includes those of running and charging forward with aggressive intention toward Clara and the Prince. In this way his assertiveness demonstrates the masculine perception of strength and power for ultimately he takes charge of his mice army and has visible intention of starting a battle. On the other hand many existing versions of the performance take a differing gender route in which a Mouse Queen is used versus a King. For example, the Sunrise Ballet company's version of *The Nutcracker*, a Mouse Queen becomes the villain and instead of conveying power through strength, it is her sensuality that is threatening. The Mouse Queen represents a seductress trying to capture the Prince's attention, reinforcing the idea that females use their body as sensual in order to capture male interest. Instead of the masculine aesthetic of strength during battle, her movements remain fluid and erotic emphasizing the construct that to be feminine once must incorporate sensuality in movement. This contrasting image of the male and female body reflect differing social ideologies that juxtapose aesthetics of feminine and masculine movement in ballet performances.

Whereas modern day society is evolving its perception of gender roles, traditional views continue to linger as conveyed through the outlooks of *The Nutcracker* characters. While the Nutcracker Prince fulfills social expectations imposed upon men, the Sugar Plum Fairy represents the ideal for how society views women. The Sugar Plum Fairy is

often described as a “fairy-tale princess” due to her appearance and her position as a “mild mannered sovereign,” all characteristics typically used to describe traditional gender roles (Fisher 161, 169). Women regularly are regarded to be delicate creatures that radiate their femininity fitting Euro-American social expectations with roots in both Court and Romantic ballet. The Sugar Plum Fairy represents this ideal for “ she can be sweet and caring” conveying the stereotype of females holding a motherly personality, thus implying “that the Sugar Plum Fairy was Clara's idealized vision of the beautiful adult woman she would like to grow up to be" (Fisher 165). Due to public influence, the Sugar Plum Fairy can be viewed to be a model for what is deemed a feminine personality. The Sugar Plum’s movement expresses delicacy and throughout her variation (as seen in New York City Ballet’s 1993 production), her footwork is quick when doing turns and small jumps. However no matter how much strength is shown through her technique she never fails to make the movement look light and soft. The Sugar Plum Fairy’s long extending limbs and controlled kicks remain soft and delicate conveying the gender expectation of females being tender. Her gentle nuances represent her feminine personality and how as a woman she should not be seen as serious as the Nutcracker thus creating a clear contrast of what is deemed feminine and what is masculine. While male ballet partners are often only used for support in duets, throughout the pas de deux, the Sugar Plum Fairy is manipulated during her movement due to her act of following in the Cavaliers lead (Fisher 174). During the variation she is being supported and guided by a male, which represents the ideal of an age that considered women being seen as subordinate is viewed as appropriate behavior. Through her gliding movements that make her seem as if she was soaring across the floor; “the need for the Cavalier's support

becomes apparent: she would fall over if he were not helping her”, portraying a social norm that women are dependent on men since they are the ones deemed to have strength (Kodat, 10). Although she does chose powerful and difficult movements in the duet, the Sugar Plum Fairy is viewed as unable to support herself due to the constant dependence of her male partner and his constant guidance which enable her to move throughout the space.

A male character that also partners throughout the first act is Clara’s godfather Drosselmeier. Not at all portrayed like Sugar Plum, he is often displayed with a persona of being the head of the household. He is often made to look older and sophisticated accentuating the perception of being the wise chief of the party. In some cases, the “role has beefed him up to be the orchestrator of events” signifying the deep-rooted principle that the dominant male can steer the direction of certain actions and can decide for others (Fisher 158). For example, he’s able to guide Clara into her dream due to his close connection to the toy soldier. In the NYC Ballet’s production of 1993, they show a close up of his face and the injured Nutcracker right before Clara goes to bed, in order to indicate that he is controlling the dream sequence that Clara experiences in the performance. His character represents the assumption that men are the heads of households and know what is best, thus labeling them as leaders and manipulators for they guide females that are perceived as helpless, such as Clara. By having Drosselmeier discretely decide what events should occur, it makes men seem all knowing versus women who need help deciding for themselves. His own movements reveal him to be a self-confident person, for he strides in the party scene and with his pantomime movement tells the parents and children what to do adding to his commanding presence. In this

regard it's implied that he can act like this because no one will challenge him, thus he establishes his authority in Act I. As a man it is socially acceptable for him to engage with his peers with as much superiority as he wishes, because, as is often the case for male heads of household in a patriarchal society, he is seen as dominant without need to justify that authority.

Although Clara appears to have the leading role in the ballet, she too falls into strict gender patterns. In most interpretations of the ballet Clara is dressed as a young pre-teen girl standing alongside other children celebrating their presents during the holiday. During the mouse-fighting scene, she scurries because she feels unable to protect herself and vulnerable against the unknown. Her dancing combines long lines using arms and legs, causing them to extend in fluid motions conveying her desire to reach an older age where she would be able to defend herself from the creatures. The dancers movements lengthens her limbs to make it seem that she desires to protect herself, however her character later crouches and ends up pulling her arms near her body, conveying a helpless aesthetic that females tend to be labeled as. The contrasting movement reflects Clara's inability to protect herself since she's conveying a delicate female she doesn't have the strength that comes with masculinity to defend herself from the villains. Likewise, the Nutcracker as a male role is deemed as the protector and comes in to save her, depicting the gender role of women being damsels in distress and the necessity of having a man to protect them. After the Nutcracker Prince introduces himself, the ballet renders Clara as a "love struck girl," indicating that ideal that women tend to follow their emotions versus their logic (Fisher 163). Clara being conveyed as reckless enforces the public image that women need to be guided toward what is customary. While Clara may be appointed as a

main character, her identity is formulated by social expectation conventionally placed on women, namely that portray them as delicate and helpless in need of a protectors.

Another female role, which exhibited gender construct as well as Orientalist fantasy, was the Arabian soloist that represented the exoticism and sensuality that was expected from non-European (or non-Euro-American) female figures. Her appearance highlights the female body by dressing her with an open midriff and a sultry skirt showcasing her legs; specifically reflect the exotic perception of the female body. Females although seen as delicate, face the double standard of needing to be fluid and gentle while still retaining sensuality, in order to capture a male audience's attention. The use of her body stems from the aesthetics of females using their bodies to please male spectators; such was Balanchine's goal with the choreography. Her movement retains a slinky quality showcasing her flexibility through leg extensions and back elasticity that expose a sensual quality and charisma. However although, the Arabian soloist exposes a sensual quality of her femininity, she doesn't become consumed by the aesthetic and still retains a level of gentleness and righteous through her light jumps and footwork that imply a gentle quality that cultural gender roles often place on women. The variations exotic characteristic also implies a foreignness of the movement for the dance is a replication of what is believed to be exotic. Orientalism is at play during this variation for Balanchine's choreography interprets what is believed to be foreign without specifically introducing's precise cultural knowledge of the Arabic world he depicts. Instead the choreography reflect what Balanchine believes the public would like to see which is the double standard of women using their sensuality, yet still keeping a level of virtuousness. While I have focused predominantly on the role of gender stereotypes in this production,

these stereotypes also intersect with stereotypes about race and ethnicity as is clear from the figure of the Arabian dancer.

Conclusion

Although modern society is slowly revising gender expectations, traditional perceptions still continue especially in ballet. Ballet's political history demonstrates the unfair gender expectations placed on the sexes. Balanchine's choreography reflects themes in which he highlights these gender roles and places them upon his characters in his work. In *The Nutcracker* ballet, the characters each represent archetypes of how a male or female should look or act. For example the "male character is to remain in control" as the Nutcracker Prince and Drosselmeir held when interacting with their partners (Foster 5). Due to the public's conceptions on gender roles men's have been decided to be superior and leaders, while women are delicate and passive. Clara and the Sugar Plum Fairy while both play leading roles in ballet, face the implicit social assumption that even women of great importance are to be guided by their male counterparts. They are portrayed as gentle females that need assistance though the entire performance. Examining Balanchine's ballet technique stereotypical gender roles are prominent due to the appearance and movement in which his characters portray. These gender expectation place women in a position to preform roles which highlight the images of being delicate, mother-like, and soft, while men are portrayed as strong, serious, and protectors. These gender expectations while evolving continue to be reflected in ballet performances where past aristocratic notions still place unequal perceptions on the sexes.

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