

# Puppetry of the Mind

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder & Nathanael in E.T.A Hoffmann's *The Sandman*

Arts and Humanities

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Der Sandmann, Federzeichnung von E.T.A. Hoffmann

- I explored the connections between Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (abbreviated PTSD) and the main character Nathanael in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*.
- *The Sandman* is a story that begins in letter form. The first letter is from an older Nathanael to his cousin Lothar; it tells a tale of a mysterious human called "The Sandman" and how every night he visited little Nathanael's father. When Nathanael asked his nurse who the Sandman was, he was told a gruesome story. He then slipped inside his father's study to see who the mysterious being was.
- He was none other than the obnoxious lawyer Coppelius who regularly referred to Nathanael and his siblings as "little beasts."
- Nathanael gave away his hiding place by screaming when Coppelius said "Bring the eyes! Bring the eyes!" Coppelius heard this, tried to take Nathanael's eyes out with a piece of burning coal. His father begged Coppelius not to, and so Coppelius instead dislocated Nathanael's hands and feet and put them back again. He lost consciousness but woke up later. When Nathanael was older he had angry outbursts and almost killed his fiancée and Lothar's sister Clara, and later himself after seeing Coppelius in a crowd.
- In regards to PTSD, Nathanael fit the 3 categories of symptoms: re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal. Nathanael had flashbacks during which he tuned everyone out and relived the experience, a probably faulty memory of the event, and angry outbursts. Also, suicide is a symptom, and Nathanael did just that by flinging himself over a parapet onto the pavement, which shattered his skull. While he is still alive, the reader of Nathanael's story is left in somewhat of an in-between situation; the story is not completely real, nor is it completely fabricated.
- Coppelius used Nathanael's mind to control him, hence the title of this project; "Puppetry of the Mind." It seems that Nathanael was a puppet to Coppelius, almost as much as the automaton Coppelius created, Olympia, was. Nathanael probably would never have thought to murder someone if he were well.
- All in all, I concluded that Nathanael is most likely suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I concluded this through research on PTSD and analyzed how it connects to *The Sandman*.

## Project Description

My project is based on my own research paper, in which I examine the impact of probable PTSD on Nathanael and his relationships in E.T.A. Hoffmann's German story *The Sandman*. The name of the project comes from the idea that the antagonist Coppelius used Nathanael's traumatic event and PTSD to toy with and control him.

My project meets the 5 judging criteria in these ways: I am not a psychology major nor am I in the health field at all. This not only shows risk-taking, but also creativity and exploration across disciplines. It gives facts and analyzes parts of the story. The impact my work has on society is also how it advances our knowledge; since Nathanael had problems with what seems to be PTSD and relationships, we could examine our own relationships and signs of dating violence in those with PTSD.

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President E. Thomas Sullivan  
Presidential Installation Ceremony  
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