

# Denmark, My Native Land! Hans Christian Andersen as a Happiness Object with Killjoy Potential

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**Abstract** Hans Christian Andersen is staged as a national icon in contemporary Danish political and cultural contexts, where certain affective perceptions of the Danish community are attached to him and his authorship. In this article, we discuss the content and function of some of these constructions by use of cultural studies scholar Sara Ahmed's term *killjoy* (*The Promise of Happiness*). It is our main argument that while Andersen's oeuvre represents a complexity of meanings, this complexity is sometimes lost when certain interpretations are extracted from his texts. Our analytical focus is on such polarized receptions and readings of Andersen and his authorship, and it is our aim to accentuate the complexity of the intermediate layer where different values are negotiated. Thus, we argue that Andersen's own texts contain a killjoy-potential that can be brought to the fore through analysis of his texts and different stagings of him.

**Key words** Hans Christian Andersen; nationalism; killjoy; canonization; romanticism

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reading of the authorship of Hans Christian Andersen arguing that his ambivalent descriptions of nature, the aesthetic use of things in the so-called object tails, the interest in natural science and the meta-poetic considerations found in Andersen's texts can be analyzed with perspectives from current theories of ecocriticism, new materialism and posthumanism to illuminate an anti-universalist aspect of his oeuvre; **Anne Klara Bom**, PhD, is Associate Professor at the Hans Christian Andersen Centre, affiliated with the Department for the Study of Culture at the University of Southern Denmark. Her research field is cultural studies. In her PhD dissertation she presented Hans Christian Andersen as an analytical object for cultural analysis and since then, she has published extensively on Andersen as a cultural icon, including how he can be approached analytically and methodologically, and how he is staged and perceived in contexts of cultural tourism and (inter-)national value systems.

## Introduction

Hans Christian Andersen is a canonized author in Denmark. Thus, it has been decided that his work is a significant element in Danish literary heritage, and that he has contemporary potential as an icon through which we can continue to tell stories about Denmark, Danish values and Danishness. The authorship of Andersen is multi-faceted. It contains highly complex narratives, and covers a great variety of themes. Many of the themes that continue to spark debates across borders, genders and ages are profoundly ambivalent. The texts are often constructed as open-ended deliberations on ethical and existential themes, and therefore they rarely present a moral with a clear and fixed understanding of the world. In spite of this inherent ambivalence, or perhaps because of the lack of clear moral stances, it is possible to extract phrases, sections and arguments from the texts and put them to use in reductive ways that correspond with current hegemonic interpretations of Andersen and his work. A Danish example of this is the nationalistic perception of Andersen as a national romantic. In this article, we want to focus on this particular understanding of his work. In the first part of the article, we want to show examples of how this framing can be said to work as what cultural studies scholar Sara Ahmed has termed a *happiness object* (*The Promise of Happiness*) in contemporary Danish discourses, but also how there is something in the texts that can somehow be said to resist this hegemonic understanding: There is a killjoy-potential in Andersen's texts ("The Politics of Bad Feeling") — a complexity that cannot be silenced and which, when brought to the forefront, has the potential to undermine the more reductive interpretations of them.

In her extensive work on how affects work in cultural politics, Ahmed argues that “politics works in complex ways to align individuals with and against others, a process of alignment that shapes the very surface of collectives” (“The Politics of Bad Feeling” 73). In line with this, we focus on specific uses of Andersen that illustrate how he is sometimes attached to nationalistic discourses, and how he is framed as a *happiness object* that contains and sustains a Golden Age national narrative about Denmark as a small, idyllic, monocultural and homogenous fairy tale nation: a narrative about national pride. This particular “frozen” version of Hans Christian Andersen is but one of many. It has therefore been an ambition for recent contributions to Hans Christian Andersen research to complicate “frozen” readings of the texts, for example by questioning biographical and moralistic readings of the work. Arguments have been made to see Andersen as a cosmopolitan and internationally oriented writer rather than a Biedermeier author (de Mylius et al., 1993, Binding, 2014). Similarly, several efforts have been made to consider Andersen a modern author, both in Danish and international contexts (Bom et al., 2014; Segala et al., 2010).

The question of nationalism and Andersen has, however, not been critically addressed by researchers. Several researchers agree that Andersen’s texts are more internationally minded than national, but the question of how national romanticism works in the oeuvre and how this has been used by his posterity has not been the object of discussion.

Consequently, the second part of the article uses Ahmed’s further argument that nationalistic narratives must be questioned and disarmed by *killjoys* as a point of departure. Here, we turn to examples from Andersen’s own writings and argue that he himself works as a killjoy. Literary scholar Aleida Assmann sees processes of canonization as highly active exceptions from the normality of personal and cultural life which is to forget: The canon is the actively circulated cultural memory that keeps the past present: In order to remember, something must be forgotten (Assmann 97-98). The *killjoy* examples from Andersen’s work are currently placed in what Assmann would call the *archive*: the “storehouse for cultural relicts” that does not have an immediate space in the active cultural memory and canon. These elements, however, always hold the potential to be opened up in new contexts and interpretations, argues Assmann (99). In conclusion, therefore, we suggest that critical research that combines literary and cultural studies can perform a useful critique of the cultural-political use of Andersen and his texts. We believe that it can be fruitful to regard his work as complex questions rather than unequivocal answers, and that such a framing of Andersen can open critical perspectives on contemporary issues

such as nation, migration and identity.

### Andersen as a Romantic Object of Happiness

There are several examples of how it can be easy to see Hans Christian Andersen as a representative of romanticism in a universalist and nationalist sense. Among the prominent examples are isolated readings of the fairy tale “The Bell” (1845) and of the poems “Denmark, my Native Land” (1850) and “Jutland” (1859)<sup>1</sup>.



1920's postcard, unknown painter<sup>2</sup>

This postcard from the 1920's presents a nationalistic framing of “Denmark, my Native Land.” The text on the postcard is the first verse of the poem, and the picture shows a dolmen stone reminiscent of the Danish Viking era, which is a powerful

1 Niels Kofoed's characterization of Andersen as “wholeheartedly romantic and anti-academic eagerly concerned with folklore and the popular cause.” (215) supports this view on his authorship.

2 The English version of the first verse of the poem reads:

“In Denmark I was born, 'tis there my home is,  
From there my roots, and there my world extend.  
You Danish tongue, as soft as Mother's voice is,  
With you my heartbeats O so sweetly blend.  
You windswept Danish strand,  
Where ancient chieftain's barrow  
Strands close to apple orchard, hop and mallow,  
'Tis you I love - Denmark, my native land!”  
 (“Denmark, My Native Land”)

symbol for nationalist affects, not only in Denmark but also in Scandinavia more broadly. There is also a little windmill on top of the hill, which is closely associated with the idea of the Danish nation state: In 1864, Denmark lost a war against Otto von Bismarck's Prussian forces in a very bloody battle at Dybbøl Mølle in Southern Jutland in the Southwest of Denmark. This was a devastating blow to the nationalism and militarism that had been increasing in Denmark during the previous decade, the 1850's, ever since the Danes had been victorious in a three year-long war against the Prussians from 1848-1850. This nationalism was fueled by national romanticism in the arts. With reference to Hans Christian Andersen's poem "Jutland," landscape geographer Kenneth Olwig writes:

Andersen's interpretation of the Jutland landscape is very much the product of the national romantic era, when Denmark was in the process of redefining itself as a homogeneous nation-state with a homogeneous national landscape. National romanticism was a cultural movement identified with the arts and that paralleled the development of political nationalism more generally. (22)

Together with "Jutland" we often find "Denmark, my Native Land" highlighted as an exemplary illustration of this national romanticism. The poem was written during the three-year war out of a nationalist passion that, as Olwig mentions, intensified at this point in time, and that motivated a return in the arts to Danish history, Nordic mythology and a reverence for the Danish landscape. Thus, romanticism in Denmark developed into what became known as the Golden Age. Golden Age nationalism produced powerful artistic and literary idealizations of Danish history, nature, pagan mythology, the Danish countryside, as the postcard from the 1920's suggests, this very Golden Age imagery might be invoked at times of peaking nationalism in Denmark. 1920 was the year Denmark was given back the substantial part of Southern Jutland that was taken by the Germans in 1864. This is known as the "Reunion" in Denmark and it is still celebrated today.

A nationalist use of Andersen's poem also appeared in 2011. The right wing, Danish People's Party used a line from "Denmark, my Native Land," the line "from here, my world extends" ("herfra min verden går") as its campaign slogan (Dansk Folkeparti). The party used the slogan in speeches, on posters and even made a song with the line as its title and central part of its chorus. In the music video, prominent party members are lined up in a setting that mimics the well-known charity songs of the 1990's such as "Heal the World." The video is sprinkled with cutaways showing a version of Denmark, which emphasizes the pastoral, rural and natural landscape in

a way that is drawing on the aesthetics of the Golden Age, and like the 1920 postcard closely identifies Andersen with this aesthetic.

These cases are examples of polarized framings of Andersen: He is staged as an icon and as what Ahmed defines as an object supposed to cause happiness, a sense of belonging:

To be affected in a good way by objects that are already evaluated as good is a way of belonging to an affective community. We align ourselves with others by investing in the same objects as the cause of happiness. (*The Promise of Happiness* 38)

These happiness objects can take the form of social norms: education, parenthood, heteronormative relationships and family structures or similar institutions that are supposed to be self-evidently desirable and, if reached, will produce happiness. However, the objects can also function on a political, national level when cultural icons are attached to affects of belonging to a national community that is presented as static and closed. In Denmark, we argue that the Golden Age has been a workshop for the production of such nation-defining objects of happiness. As Ahmed puts it:

Happiness is imagined as a social glue, as being what sticks people together. The mission to put glue back into communities not only suggests that communities lack such glue but also that they once had it. The program offers as its idea of happiness an image of a world in which people are less physically and socially mobile [...]. This nostalgic vision of a world of 'staying put' involves nostalgia for whiteness, for a community of white people happily living with other white people. The nostalgic vision of whiteness is at once an image of racial likeness or sameness. In mourning the loss of such a world, migration enters the narrative as an unhappiness cause, as what forces people who are 'unlike' to live together. (*The Promise of Happiness* 121-122)

Following these thoughts, we argue that the invocation of 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics and the staging of Andersen as a national romantic is an attempt to put a social glue back into a community that is perceived to lack in cohesion. The trouble is of course that the production of these objects of happiness relies on exclusion. Some groups of people are left out or disqualified from attaining proximity to the iconic phenomena or institutions, either because they are denied access or because they pursue a life

that is deemed to be the cause of unhappiness by some kind of majority. But sometimes the icon or object of happiness itself might resist its own interpretation. As we shall see, pigeon-holding Andersen like that is not easy. Thus, Andersen's status as a cultural icon is not always used in these kinds of nationalist, propagandistic ways. Actually, it can also be used as a vehicle for critique. To show that, we will turn to an example of a much debated and ambiguous part of Andersen's legacy, namely *The Little Mermaid*, which is Danish cultural heritage in more than one sense. Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale from 1837 is a part of the Danish cultural canon, which means that the Danish government has elected this fairy tale as essential to Danish cultural heritage. And the statue of *The Little Mermaid* on Langelinie in Copenhagen Harbor is one of the most visited tourist attractions in the capital city. The statue is considered a national icon and it is frequently used as a visual brand of Denmark.

Following geographer and anthropologist David Harvey, we conceptualize heritage as a cultural process, which means that heritage is never static, but always dynamically in motion. In this sense, heritage is always about power, and thus, it is of interest how people engage with heritage — how they re-work it, adjust it and contest it (Harvey 2001). This focus will enable us to see how identity, power and authority is produced throughout society. As a monument that contains a great deal of affect, the mermaid does not stand alone. Throughout history, monuments have been significant elements through which identities are negotiated. When monuments work as unifying symbols in these ways, they are objects of affective meaning-making: People tell stories through monuments. This is also the case with the statue of *The Little Mermaid*. The statue represents a particular interpretation of the story by Andersen, and in a broader context it is symptomatic of the understanding of him and his authorship as gentle and effeminate. With the statue's solemnity, self-complacency and fairy tale-like qualities, it also tells a certain narrative about Denmark as a peaceful fairy tale country. In this version, the mermaid is framed as a cause of happiness, but that framing has repeatedly been contested and debated through different kinds of damage of the statue: It has been dismembered, splattered with paint, dressed in a burka and a gasmask, and decapitated several times. These actions have frequently been explained as activism or artistic performances rather than just vandalism, and they have often involved some comment or stance on a current political situation (*BBC*: "Little Mermaid").

All applications of *The Little Mermaid* are examples of how Hans Christian Andersen's legacy is put to use. In Denmark, there are several tendencies towards what sociologist Nikolas Rose calls a community's "harnessing" of a common good



(176): Andersen can work within this harnessing as something that is privately owned — a common, but mostly for the Danes. But sometimes, the outside world also wagers in with a use of Andersen that works as a contrast to this framing.



Dave Brown's illustration to the article by Lizzie Dearden: "Denmark approves controversial refugee bill allowing police to seize asylum seekers' cash and valuables," *The Independent*

In 2016, cartoonist Dave Brown made a satirical illustration for an article in the British newspaper *The Independent*. The occasion was that the Danish government had passed a refugee bill that instructed the police to search all refugees at the border for valuable objects and cash, because everything that was estimated to have a value of more than 10.000 Danish kroner (approx. 1300 euro) was to be confiscated (Agerholm).

On his illustration, Brown uses The Little Mermaid as the personification of Denmark. The dolmen stone setting and the surroundings on Langelinie are upheld, and the same goes for the mermaid's position and tail. But then the similarities appear to stop. The mermaid's harmless and friendly appearance is replaced with a grumpy and vigilant facial expression. The girly body with fine lines is now more masculine, and the hands that were passive before now firmly grasp a wallet with cash and a pair of pliers that have just removed a gold tooth. Put together, the drawing of the mermaid still conveys a national narrative about Denmark, but this time, the narrative is told by the outside world, and the framing of a harmless fairy tale



country is overwritten with the story of a xenophobic right-wing community. The intangible heritage processes the statue is center to here are dynamic and powerful. Furthermore, this alternative national narrative about Denmark is elegantly related to the outside world through the poem on the inscription in front of the mermaid. It is a re-articulation of Emma Lazarus' famous sonnet "The New Colossus." Lazarus wrote the poem in 1883 as a contribution to an auction that had as its aim to fund money for a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. On Brown's drawing, the closing lines of the sonnet are quoted accurately, except for the very last one where Lazarus' welcoming "I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" is replaced with the mocking "I'll lift their wallets, jewels, gold teeth and more!" Thus, aside from communicating an alternative national narrative about Denmark, Brown's illustration establishes a connection to another national monument, The Statue of Liberty. By this he reminds us that heritage monuments in general hold the potential both to convey values to the outside world and to be used in political contexts that reflect the present more than the past. Monuments such as The Statue of Liberty and The Little Mermaid are both elements that can be placed in the canon, in Assmann's sense of the word, a canon that is "defined by a notorious shortage of space," and "built on a small number of normative and formative texts, places, persons, artifacts, and myths which are meant to be actively circulated in ever-new presentations and performances" (100). In line with this, Brown's illustration of the statue is an example of how elements from the canon are staged and exposed simultaneously: If there are stories to tell through The Little Mermaid about what Danes value and how Denmark is valued, the statue indicates that such stories can be far more complex and nuanced than the unequivocal narrative about a cozy, harmless and liberated Denmark. Brown's caricature shows the power of interpretation and signals that the processes through which cultural phenomena are interpreted never stops. In itself, the statue of The Little Mermaid represents an idyllic interpretation both of the work of Hans Christian Andersen and, to a larger extent, Denmark in general. But as the contesting actions towards and framings of the statue shows, adding more layers of interpretation to such seemingly unambiguous icons, can have the potential to destabilize the hegemonic interpretations and make them deeply ambiguous. This destabilization does not, however, necessarily have to be imposed on the icon from an external perspective. In the case of Hans Christian Andersen, the ambiguity seems to be weaved into the very fabric of his texts.

### **Andersen as an Anti-nationalist Killjoy**

I thus offer an alternative history of happiness not simply by offering different

readings of its intellectual history but by considering those who are banished from it, or who enter this history only as troublemakers, dissenters, killers of joy. (*The Promise of Happiness* 17)

Following Ahmed, Brown's satirical drawing can be seen as an example of a killjoy that comes from the outside, enters the scene and points to those who are excluded from the affective community attached to one central happiness object: Hans Christian Andersen. What is interesting here is that this killjoy is formed by a queering of the original object of happiness that constructs and deconstructs national hegemony simultaneously. Like a puzzle picture it presents a statement alongside that statement's refutation.

This can be seen as symptomatic for the double role that Andersen sometimes plays in discursive constructions of Danishness. In an article in the popular Danish travel magazine *Ud og Se*, the Danish writer Dorthe Nors was interviewed about Danes and Danishness. She started out by delivering a scorching critique of the much-praised Danish concept "hygge" (roughly translatable as "coziness"), which is a very powerful cultural concept and object of happiness in Denmark. Everyone should strive after "at hygge sig" ("being cozy"). In the interview, Nors performs a killjoy move by pointing directly to the people left out of the community created by this object, stating that:

'Hygge' is a consensus seeking suppression of feelings in a community consisting of primarily white Danes who have soft blankets and fire in the fireplace.<sup>1</sup> (Hjortshøj 68, our translation)

One could add that given the fact that this concept of hygge is increasingly associated with food items such as different kinds of traditional servings of pork and alcohol, the kind of hygge linked to food works as a powerfully exclusionary tool and object of political conflict in the public discourse in Denmark. This concept of "hygge" is by Nors however connected to a sort of duty-based reverence for certain cultural icons, including Hans Christian Andersen:

We Danes have grown up with the fact that if guests come to our country, we will talk nicely about everything: Grundtvig, H.C. Andersen, the bike lanes and

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1 "‘Hygge’ er en konsensusøgende undertrykkelse af følelser i et fællesskab bestående af først og fremmest hvide danskere, der har bløde tæpper og ild i pejsen" (Hjortshøj 68).

Olsen Banden<sup>1</sup> That's all well enough, I do it myself. But there are also less good things.<sup>2</sup> (Hjortshøj 66-68, our translation)

Here, Nors presents Hans Christian Andersen alongside other cultural icons and phenomena that are already evaluated as good, and as something we as Danes are expected to invest in, in order to belong to the Danish affective community. However, when she debuted as a writer, Nors in her own words refused to participate in this culture of consensus, which she believes also permeates the literary circles. In her concluding words, she states:

From the beginning, I told myself that, as an author, I wanted to be known for what I did — not who I drank beer with or was petting publicly or liked on Facebook. There were several who said to me that 'that's not how it works, Dorte'. But it has worked for me. I came in like *fucking* Clumsy-Hans.<sup>3</sup> (Hjortshøj 68, our translation)

After the positioning of Andersen as a representative and part of a consensus seeking culture of *hygge*, Nors concludes the interview by comparing herself to a character from one of Andersen's fairytales. Clumsy-Hans, the disruptor who throws mud in the face of the decadent court culture, is used as an allegory on the disturbance of consensus. As in the example with *The Little Mermaid*, interpretations of Andersen is used to construct both the happiness object of the affective community *and* the killjoy undermining this community, which points to an interesting ambivalence when it comes to Andersen as a cultural icon. Ahmed also touches upon the concept of ambivalence, when it comes to reading happiness:

Cultural and psychoanalytic approaches can explore how ordinary attachments to the very idea of the good life are also sites of ambivalence, involving the confusion rather than separation of good and bad feelings. Reading happiness

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1 A 70's series of comedic movies, ed..

2 "Vi danskere er opvokset med, at hvis der kommer gæster til vores land, skal vi tale pænt om det hele: Grundtvig, H.C. Andersen, cykelstierne og Olsen Banden. Det er også fint nok, jeg gør det selv. Men der er også mindre gode ting" (Hjortshøj 66-68).

3 "Fra starten sagde jeg til mig selv, at jeg som forfatter ville kendes på, hvad jeg kunne - ikke hvem jeg drak øl med, pattede offentligt med eller likede på Facebook. Der var flere, der sagde til mig, at 'sådan fungerer det jo ikke, Dorte'. Men det har det altså gjort for mig. Jeg kom ind som *fucking* Klods-Hans" (Hjortshøj 68).

would then become a matter of reading the grammar of this ambivalence. (*The Promise of Happiness* 6)

We believe that this productive confusion concerning the attachment to happiness objects is particularly relevant with regard to the works and function of Hans Christian Andersen in Danish culture. Though he might be presented as unambiguous, he holds a potential to be framed as a site of ambivalence. We have seen this in the ways he is staged and used in contemporary culture, which can be accentuated by use of perspectives from cultural studies, but the ambivalence can also be strengthened by the use of literary analysis and a closer attention to his own writings. They too are permeated with ambivalence.

### Reading the Grammar of Ambivalence

Rather than being exemplary of Andersen's overall oeuvre, it would be more accurate to consider nationalistic texts such as "Denmark, my Native Land" and "Jutland" as outliers in a body of work that for the most part is inquisitive, critical even, of the tendency of Golden Age nationalist aesthetics to turn into universalistic clichés and produce fantasies of national hegemony. This critique can be traced even in those works of Andersen that seem to adhere to the ideals of universal romanticism.<sup>1</sup>

In Denmark, as we have mentioned, romanticism was closely connected to nation building, but Andersen cannot be pigeonholed as a nationalist. Throughout his life, he remained what can be termed a cosmopolitan humanist, by which we mean that his works contain a humanitarianism that transcends classes and borders. And he was particularly critical towards what he saw as a specifically Danish tendency to self-complacency, to wall oneself in, cut oneself from the world and think too highly of oneself. Sometimes this resulted in decidedly anti-nationalist texts from Andersen's hand.

Of particular interest in this regard is his use of female Jewish characters in the novels *"To Be Or Not to Be"* (*"At være eller ikke være"*) from 1857 and *Only a Fiddler* (*Kun en Spillemand*) from 1837. In these two novels, Esther and Naomi, respectively, offer cultural side-glances on Denmark and they often have some very critical remarks when it comes to the Danish community and national identity. Here it is a passage from *Only a Fiddler*, where Naomi speaks particularly bluntly with

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1 For a further discussion of this aesthetic of ambivalence of Andersen's and its links to the concept of romantic irony, see Thomsen, *Skyggepunkter*, 2017 and Thomsen, "Funen Means Fine," 2019. The two literary examples that follow are also part of the argument in Thomsen, "Funen Means Fine," 2019 with a more literary-historical focus.

reference to Golden Age national romanticism:

Yes, the climate was the aiding topic in the recurring conversational quarrels in the Count's home. Let poets and patriots sing and say as much as they like about the loveliness of Denmark, Naomi however declared that we live in a miserable climate. "If the Heavens had considered," she said, "that our admiration of nature should've risen to this degree, we would surely, like the snail, have been created with houses on our backs. Then we would have been relieved of this constant looking out for capes, cloaks and umbrellas that form such an integral part of our person as it is now. [...] I'm no poet who sings in order to become knighted!" Naomi said, "I'm no patriotic speaker, who wants to be accepted in the great grade-book of the Danes, the "Statskalender": I appreciate what is beautiful, and if other people didn't do that to such an excessive extent, perhaps I would be excited too!" It was true. Perhaps she admired more than others the green, fragrant forest, the boldly shaped clouds, the sea and the burial mounds with the blooming blackberry vines. But she also knew that there are greater wonders in God's great creation and that our climate is terrible. (Andersen 5, 194, our translation<sup>1</sup>)

As mentioned, we argue that the Danish Golden Age can be perceived as an aesthetic workshop that produced a lot of the objects of happiness that Danes still navigate in accordance with. With this historical perspective in mind, Naomi's harsh condemnation of a culture of consensus bears several similarities to Nors' critique from 2018.

From a narratological perspective, the choice of words in the little sentence "It was true" stands out. The narrator pops up out of nowhere to sympathize with these anti-nationalist sentiments thus placing him firmly on the side of his killjoy, Naomi. So, when Andersen is classified as a sentimental romantic and his works are used in nationalistic ways, it seems appropriate to counter this narrative by pointing out that focusing solely on the idealizing texts in his oeuvre involves ignoring the significant part of his texts that are skeptical towards this very idealization. Thus, in Assmann's terms, examples from the archive can be reactivated to question the reigning canon and canonization more generally.

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1 Since no officially recognized, standardized translations of the novels exist, We have taken the liberty of translating our examples in this article ourselves. The existing translations are highly uneven in quality, exist in a lot of versions and are often re-written versions that have been stylistically embellished or otherwise altered.

An even more poignant example of this — which also relates to the question of migration touched upon in this context — is found in the latter part of *Only a Fiddler*. In the third part of the novel, the reader is introduced to a short side story about the Romani people living on the heath of Jutland, the mainland of Denmark famed for its harsh weather and climate conditions. The narrator begins by describing India, where the Romani people were thought to stem from, in terms that showcase the orientalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. India is believed to be like the Garden of Eden and the narrator informs us that ever since Adam and Eve were expelled from this place, all human beings might in some sense be considered migrants living in a kind of diaspora. Thus, it is implied that all kinds of nationalistic claims that some groups of people are entitled to clearly demarcated geographical parts of the world are in fact arbitrary and unmerited. The narrator goes on to describe the Jutland heath as a rough and unforgiving environment in ways that correspond with a romantic fascination of wilderness. Then a social indignation takes over:

Even to the north, to the barren heaths of Jutland, the youngest generation of the Pariahs migrates. We call them gypsies, scoundrels. The field of grain is their summer tent, the deep ditch their winter chamber. The children of the Pariahs don't have like the fox its cave, like the bird its nest. They walk in sludge and storm over the rough heath. There, like beasts, they give birth to their kin. The place of birth is the place of custody, so the farmer always seeks to move the pregnant women over to the neighbor's district. Thus, she is often taken from place to place on the miserable, uncomfortable wagon, without straws to lie upon, and gives birth there to her child, which is doomed to wretchedness. (Andersen 5, 218-219, our translation)

In compassionate terms, the narrator describes the conditions of the Romani people. He is not content to present the landscape as sublime in its harshness. The reader is also reminded that this harshness has real consequences for real people. The social indignation is clear, as is the criticism of the blame-worthy farmer who chases the pregnant woman away from his premises. Furthermore, the wretched conditions of the people are described in detail in ways that make them tangible to the reader. Finally, Andersen focuses specifically on the pregnant woman and the child: He tells us about the fate of the most vulnerable and encourages us to have compassion with them. This is a literary break with the conventions of universal romanticism, and it is launched from a position of social indignation and sympathy for the poor. As such, it performs the work of a killjoy. The break creates space: "To kill joy [...], is



to open a life, to make room for life, to make room for possibility, for chance” (*The Promise of Happiness* 20). The ultimate goal for making this room, creating this space, would not necessarily be to create different kinds of communities, but raising an awareness of the excluding mechanisms involved in community making in general, and point to a solidarity around the feeling of estrangement from objects of happiness.

There is solidarity in recognizing our alienation from happiness, even if we do not inhabit the same place (as we do not). There can even be joy in killing joy. And kill joy, we must and we do. (*The Promise of Happiness* 87)

It is this kind of solidarity that can emerge when we begin attending to Hans Christian Andersen as a site of ambivalence when it comes to affects of happiness and community.

### **Concluding Perspectives**

As Assmann elegantly puts it, total recall is only possible in the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie (105). We cannot remember everything, and in the context of cultural memory, this has as a result that certain heritage elements are selected and charged with the highest meaning and value (100). In a Danish context, this is the case with Hans Christian Andersen, who has been selected as a part of the canon and still works as both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Our aim with this article has been to illustrate some challenges and potentials that reveal themselves around Andersen’s status as a canonized cultural icon in Denmark. By use of Ahmed’s concepts we have argued that while Andersen is currently framed as a happiness object in specific uses of him, his own writings hold the potential for him to work as a killjoy that questions and dismantles the Danish discourse that stems from Golden Age nationalistic aesthetics. This is in line with new research on Hans Christian Andersen that challenges the unequivocal reception of him as a national romantic figure.<sup>1</sup>

Our analyses point to several levels of “happiness objects” and “killjoys” when it comes to Andersen. Literary analysis allows us to identify a coinciding construction and questioning of national romantic themes in Andersen’s texts, and perspectives from cultural studies makes it possible to see a similar duality when it comes to the way he is staged in contemporary culture. As a cultural icon, Andersen occu-

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Thomsen, *Skyggepunkter*, 2017, Bøggild 2012, Bøggild 2014 and Bom et al. 2014.

pies the role of the happiness object and the killjoy simultaneously, and the potential of these powerful framings reside in his texts, in hegemonic perceptions of him both as a historical person and as a representative of Danish culture and Danishness, and in tangible framings of both him and his work. Through his profound contribution to Danish culture, he represents an exertion of cultural power that can be open to political exploitation, but the queering of his legacy and the texts themselves might resist this use. There is a deep ambiguity in his writings. We argue that it is precisely because of the fundamental ambivalence in the authorship that any unambiguous interpretation of it can and often will be met by its contradiction. Andersen can never be completely harnessed: he will never stay frozen for long.

Viewed from one perspective, Andersen represents a cultural powerhouse that has had great impact on Danish culture, branding and self-understanding. From another perspective, however, he appears as the disrupter, the Clumsy-Hans, the child from “The Emperor’s New Clothes” who unmask the constructions of cultural hegemonies and, like a killjoy, undermines this very self-understanding from within. The challenge, it seems, is to keep our eyes open to both aspects and not allow his writings to stagnate in one extreme or the other.

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