

Hans Christian Andersen for Children, with Children and by Children

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Abstract This special issue on children's literature and fairy tales has its focus on Hans Christian Andersen: his unique way of telling and his influence on modern Danish children's literature, as well as the way his fairy tales are used pedagogically by teachers and by the children themselves in their play culture. Thus the articles will show a range of different perspectives on Andersen's fairy tales. The contemporary challenge of research in children's literature is to combine a literary perspective with other angles: children's literature as media, as pedagogical artefact, and as raw material for children's play. You need theoretical framing from different areas of science: in addition to literary theory you need book history, media theory, pedagogical and didactical theory, and cultural theory. This fact is mirrored in the selection of scholars and views in this volume.

Key words culture for children; culture with children; children's culture

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This special issue on children's literature and fairy tales with Danish contributors

has its focus on Hans Christian Andersen. It is treating his unique way of telling and his influence on modern Danish children's literature, as well as the way his fairy tales are used pedagogically by teachers and by the children themselves in their play culture. We find it an obvious choice in H.C. Andersen's native country to investigate his influence in children's literature, in school, and in children's culture.

The articles will show a range of different perspectives on Andersen's fairy tales. The Danish scholar in children's culture, Flemming Mouritsen (1942-2015) has introduced a definition of children's culture and made the field more precise by distinguishing three main types of child culture¹: culture *for* children, culture *with* children and *children's culture*. Culture *for* children contains artefacts produced by adults, e.g. classic media like literature, drama and music as well as modern media like film, TV, video and computer games. But toys, sweets and advertisements belongs to this category too.² Culture *with* children is about activities where adults and children do something together. It can be formalized in institutions, but also informal projects in free time where adults and children play or work together can be categorized as culture *with* children. *Children's culture* is also called *play culture* and consists of a wide range of forms and genres, rhyme, gags, songs, jokes and play, all aesthetically organized forms of expressions that can be regarded as children's most important mode of expressing themselves in special arenas³. This volume contains treatments of all these special branches of children's culture. The articles written by Jacob Bøggild and Anna Karlskov Skyggebjerg treat literature, e.g. culture *for* children. Nina Christensen writes about children's literature as well, but her perspective contains culture *with* children too. Nikolaj Elf writes about the use of Andersen's fairy tales in school, which can be regarded as culture *with* children, but he has some interesting findings concerning how young people make the material their own, so you can talk about *children's culture*. At last, Andersen's fairy tales transformed into *children's culture* is the main perspective in Herdis Toft's article.

Hans Christian Andersen is an international icon and with no doubt the most well-known Danish writer. He has been translated into languages all over the world, and many of his fairy tales have been transformed into other media. He was born 1805 under poor circumstances in Odense, a small city in the middle of Denmark, and the story about how his dreams came through is interpreted as a fairy tale by

1 In his book about playculture, Mouritsen, Flemming (1996): *Legekultur*. Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag.

2 See Mouritsen, Flemming and Jens Qvortrup, ed. (2002): *Childhood and Children's Culture*. Odense. University Press of Southern Denmark.

3 *Ibid.*: 17

himself in his autobiography, *The Fairy Tale of my Life (Mit livs eventyr)* (1855). As a young boy of 14 he went to Copenhagen to be an actor; he sought the bourgeoisie and they supported him so that he got some education. He soon had to give up his dreams of being an actor, instead he wanted to write plays to the Royal theatre. In 1834 he went to Rome by means from his benefactors, and the impressions from this journey resulted in the novel *The Improvisatore (Improvisatoren)* 1835). This novel gave him his literary breakthrough.

At the same time, he published his first fairy tales, *Tales, Told for Children (Eventyr fortalte for børn)* (1835). The collection was published in two booklets. The first booklet contained “The Tinder Box” (“Fyrtøiet”), “Little Claus and Big Claus” (“Lille Claus og store Claus”), “The Princess on the Pea” (“Prindsessen på Ærten”) and “Little Ida’s Flowers” (“Den lille Idas Blomster”). The fairy tales in this second booklets were “Thumbelina” (“Tommelise”), “The Naughty Boy” (“Den uartige Dreng”) and “The Travelling Companion” (“Reisekammeraten”). A third booklet with “The Little Mermaid” (“Den lille Havfrue”) and “The Emperor’s New Clothes” (“Kejserens nye Klæder”) was published 1837. Several collections followed during the years. From 1844 Andersen skipped the subtitle “Told for Children.” In 1852 came a collection of *Stories*, and from 1858 he used *Fairy tales and Stories* as the title. Several of the early fairy tales mentioned above are in focus in the articles in this issue – with different perspectives, as sketched above.

About the first collection of fairy tales he writes in a letter dated 10th to B.S. Ingemann, a colleague and friend:

I have included a couple of those fairy-tales which I myself enjoyed so much as a child, and which I believe are not well known; I have simply written them the way I would tell them to a child. ¹

Researchers have pointed out the *dual address*, *double articulation* or *double narrative* of the fairy tales of H.C. Andersen: he addresses the fairy tales to the

1 See http://andersen.sdu.dk/liv/tidstavle/vis_e.html?aar=1835

children, but the adults are invited to listen to them too ¹. In 1863 he writes in his “Remarks” to the tales (in the edition illustrated by Vilh. Pedersen, volume 2):

The style should be such that one hears the narrator. Therefore, the language had to be similar to the spoken word; the stories are for children, but adults too should be able to listen in. The first three fairy-tales are ones I heard during childhood, in the spinning room and during the harvesting of the hops; “Little Ida’s Flowers” on the other hand, came into being one day while visiting the poet Thiele, when I was telling his daughter Ida about the flowers at the botanical gardens; I kept and adapted a few of the child’s remarks when I later wrote the fairy-tale down².

Keywords are “tell” and “hear” (Mortensen 2005:17). He is inspired by the oral tradition and rewrites some traditional fairy tales. But he also invents new stories of his own. For both types of fairy tales, he is creating an arena where the reader — the child or the adult reader — is incorporated because the narrator opens the story to the audience by making a clear signal of the fact that this is a story that is told. Jacob Bøggild and Nina Christensen unfold aspects of this in their articles.

Is Andersen in his fairy tales a writer of children’s literature or are they so complex and of such an aesthetic value that their audience rather should be adults? That is a question that scholars have been concerned with. And what does the difference between fairy tales and stories mean? These questions raise several other questions. Is literature for grown-ups of higher value than children’s literature? Are children not capable of understanding the complexity of Andersen’s text? What is the connection between the oral tradition of fairy tales and Andersen’s special interpretation of this tradition? The different perspectives in the articles of this issue will show the complexity of these questions. The articles are looking at Andersen’s texts in a context of different media, they are regarding them as dynamic texts that are used by teachers and children, and they are looking at what happens with

1 See Mortensen, Klaus P. (2005). “Indledning. H.C. Andersens Eventyr og Historier.” *H.C. Andersens samlede værker. Eventyr og Historier I 1830-1850*. København. Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab. Gyldendal, Mylius, Johan de (2005). *Forvandlingens pris. H.C. Andersen og hans eventyr*. København. Høes 6 Søn, and Hansen, Per Krogh & Marianne Wolff Lundholt, ed. (2005.) *When we Get to the End... Towards a Narratology of the Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Andersen*. Odense. Writings from the Center for Narratological Studies 1. University of Southern Denmark.

2 http://andersen.sdu.dk/liv/tidstavle/vis_e.html?aar=1835

Andersen's poetic style and aesthetic language in translation.

As Jacob Bøggild points out in his article "Lost in translation" the notion that H.C. Andersen first and foremost is a writer of children's literature results in a neglecting of his aesthetic style in English translation. It is important to stress that the artistic value of Andersen's fairy tales is not *despite of* his writing from the children's point of view, but *because of it*. He is writing in the period of romanticism where the child is regarded as a being with extraordinary gifts, like the poet, and that explains his choice of the child's perspective: naïve, innocent, and open to miracles. But it is not the whole explanation to understand the genius of Andersen and his extraordinary poetic technique. He is revitalizing the narrative in the oral tradition, and exactly the choice of the child's perspective is the narrative element that makes his fairy tales and stories so unique. He makes room for a dialogue between narrator and reader, and the children's perspective makes it possible to make important and ground-breaking aesthetic experiments. Thus, he has influenced later Danish poets and writers, not only writers of children's literature. In fact, you can talk about a before and after H.C. Andersen¹. According to Mouritsen, elements of his style can be recognized in several works of Danish canonized writers and poets.

He has only to a limited extent been treated in children's literature research, though², and his influence on Danish children's literature does not really come true until 1967, a year that can be characterized as a magical year in the history of Danish children's literature. Until then one can say that he stands alone in Danish children's literature, which is dominated by teachers with pedagogical and didactic goals — with some exceptions of course. But in 1967 some important Danish books for children are published. It concerns the following books: Halfdan Rasmussen *Halfdans ABC*, Benny Andersen *Snøvsen og Eigil og Katten i sækken*, Cecil Bødker *Silas og den sorte hoppe*, Ole Lund Kirkegaard *Lille Virgil* og Flemming Quist Møller *Cykelmyggen Egon*. All these books have, like Andersen's fairy tales, a children's perspective and are interacting with the reader by making a common platform for expressing and understanding the children's experience of their lives. They are breaking with the traditional closing structure in children's literature by giving the reader an opportunity to confront reality. They are connecting fantasy and reality, by pointing at utopias, other ways of living together, and they turn around

1 See interview with Flemming Mouritsen in Knudsen, Karin Esmann, red. (2012). *Hvad gør vi med børnelitteraturen?* Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag.

2 See Høyrup, Helene. "Kiddie lit eller litteratur? Om læsninger af H.C. Andersens eventyr mellem tekst og kanon." *På opdagelse i børnelitteraturen*. Nina Christensen & Anna Karlskov Skyggebjerg, ed. (København: Høst & Søn, 2006).

reality in a wild carnivalism. Furthermore, they are full of aesthetic experiments, making connections between concreteness and complexity, using improvisations from children's own cultural expressions, rhyme, gags, and play as an aesthetic expression.

And Andersen's dual address — incorporating both the child and the adult as a reader — corresponds with new influences in the research of children's literature. Associate professor in children's literature at MIT, Marah Gubar, for instance points at the term *agency*¹. She says that considering child, childhood and children's literature you traditionally have been operating with two modes of the child – and each of them considers the child from outside. She identifies them as the deficit model (the child compared with the adult) and the difference model (the child having special talents). She proposes a third model, the kinship model, which offers a discourse of the child that focuses on affinities between children and adults. Both are human beings with agency.

The contemporary challenge of research in children's literature is to combine a literary perspective with other angles: children's literature as media, as pedagogical artefact, and as raw material for children's play. As consequence, you need theoretical framing from different areas of science: in addition to literary theory you need book history, media theory, pedagogical and didactical theory, and cultural theory. This fact is mirrored in the selection of scholars and views in this volume.

The starting point of this issue is H.C. Andersen's poetic style. In the article "Lost in Translation" Jacob Bøggild, professor at Center of Hans Christian Andersen, University of Southern Denmark, takes his starting point in the narrative strategy of dual address. He shows the consequences of the misbelief of the translator that the task is to write to an audience of children who are not capable of understanding the more eloquent elements in Andersen's aesthetic language. The translators have largely ironed out the anomalies of his style: peculiar syntax, the number of modal words, excessive use of exclamation, images and violent scenes and motifs of a sexual character. That means that the reader of Andersen's fairy tales outside Denmark do not meet the "impish and astonishing gifted writer of fairy tales and stories."

Nina Christensen, associate professor and leader of Centre for Children's Literature and Media, Aarhus University, focuses on the connection between literature and the book as a medium and argues that children's literature from a very early phase was a trans- and intermedial phenomenon. She shows how Andersen

¹ See *Passage. Tidsskrift for litteratur og kritik* 75. *Børnelitteratur nu!* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2016).

was aware of the new market of children and their parents, discussing fiction for children in one of his first fairy tales for children, “Little Ida’s Flowers.” According to book historian Johan Bryant she finds the term ‘fluid text’ relevant to characterize the interaction between this fairy tale and the rhyme “Dance, Dance, Doll of Mine” that first is published in a magazine for children and later becomes part of a print collection. She shows how Andersen’s work is dynamic and in dialogue and shaped by a specific social context, and how the readers can be perceived as co-authors.

The notion of Andersen’s fairy tales being dynamic is the focus in Herdis Toft’s article “FairyPlay,” although with another perspective. Herdis Toft is associate professor in Children’s culture at University of Southern Denmark, and she points out how fairytales are raw materials, called trash for production of play. Children muddle, mingle, remix elements from the fairy tales and use them when they play. In the framing of critical ethnography, the fairy tales are investigated not as autonomous literature or art, but as this recycling of trash in children’s play culture of today, called fairyplay. Toft shows how Andersen himself can be called a homo ludens, a trash-sculptor, and as such he represents a neo-avantgarde of his time, creating his fairy tales by combining trash and treasure, the oral and the literary language, and this is carried on by the children when they play.

Nikolaj Elf, associate professor in Education, University of Southern Denmark, explores how and why Andersen’s fairy tales could be taught at school in new multimodal ways. The starting point is that nowadays Andersen’s work exists both in the medium of paper and at the same time has been reproduced and redistributed into a lot of other media. The mode of the written language has been supplied with illustration, animation, film, computer-games etc. Elf has investigated how students in the classroom when taught mother tongue language (Danish) are developing semiocy (an expanded semiotic understanding of literacy) when they are asked to design pre-productions for a new animated Andersen fairy tale. His empirical study has important findings where the students’ ability to analyze, reflect and productively actualize some of the issues of Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales is obvious. This way of working with Andersen’s fairy tales open for a understanding that makes his work free of a narrow nationalistic way of reading it.

The last article in this volume goes back to the fairy tales as literature. Anna Karlskov Skyggebjerg, associate professor at Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, is exploring the influence of H.C. Andersen on contemporary Danish children’s literature, especially Louis Jensen whose inspiration from Andersen is very clear. The article describes some genre patterns and key features in Jensen’s works, and it treats both the novel *Krystalmanden* (*The Crystal Man*) from 1986

and Jensen's main work, the 1001 square stories (1992-2016), in ten volumes with each 100 stories, and a volume no.11 with one story. Jensen is influenced by both Andersen, Hoffmann and Carroll, and like those writers he does not use genres as fixed categories, but play with the fairy-tale as a flexible form. The square story can be said to fit with a (post)modern idea of openness and creativity in the processes of both writing and reading.

Together the articles are meant to give an impression of the importance of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. Not only are they representing a complete innovative poetic style that inspires and influences Danish literature, for adults and for children, that comes after Andersen, they also show Andersen's awareness of literature as a medium, and they offer matrixes as for instance "The Little Mermaid" and "The Ugly Duckling" that can be transformed into media and used creatively by children and young people in school and in their play culture.

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