

**HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN'S ROMANTIC IMAGINATION:  
Exploring eighteenth and nineteenth century romantic conceptualisations of the  
imagination in selected fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen.**

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## Abstract

There are certain influences from the eighteenth and nineteenth century English and German romantic *Zeitgeist* that can be discerned in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. The role of the imagination stands out as a particularly dominant notion of the romantic period as opposed to the emphasis on reason during the Enlightenment. It is this romantic influence that Andersen's tales especially exemplify. For him the imagination is transcendent – one can overcome the mystery and hardship of an earthly existence by recasting situations imaginatively and one can even be elevated to a higher, spiritual realm by its power. The transcendent power of the imagination is best understood by viewing it through the lens of negative capability, a concept put forward by romantic poet, John Keats. The concept implies an “imaginative openness” to what is, which allows one to tolerate life's uncertainties and the inexplicable suffering that forms part of one's earthly existence by using the imagination to open up new potential within trying circumstances. In selected fairy tales, Andersen's child protagonists transcend their circumstances by the power of their imagination. In other tales, nature is instrumental in this imaginative transcendence. The natural world conveys spiritual truths and has a moralising influence on the characters, bringing them closer to the Ultimate Creator. This follows the philosophy of German *Naturphilosophie*, as well as that of English romantics like Coleridge and Wordsworth, for whom nature functions as a portal to the spiritual world. The concept of the “sublime” underpins this philosophy. If nature is viewed through an imaginative, instead of an empirical lens, it becomes the means by which the temporal world can be transcended. It is a message of hope and as such is in keeping with Andersen's self-professed calling as visionary who uses his art to uplift mankind. In this he is the ultimate romantic hero or outsider who, while standing on the periphery of society, observes its shortcomings and feels called upon to show the way to a better world.

## Key Terms:

Hans Christian Andersen; fairy tales; imagination; English Romanticism; German Transcendentalism; negative capability; universal Soul; spiritualisation of nature; romantic outsider; social criticism.

## Samevatting

Sekere invloede van agtiende- en negentiende eeuse Engelse en Duitse romantisisme kan in Hans Christian Andersen se feëverhale bespeur word. Veral die rol van die verbeelding staan uit as 'n dominante invloed van romantisisme, in teenstelling met die laat sewentien- en vroeë agtiende eeuse fokus op rasionaliteit. Dit is hierdie romantiese invloed wat Andersen se verhale veral versinnebeeld. Vir hom is die verbeelding transendentiaal – 'n mens kan die misterie en swaarkry van jou aardse bestaan oorkom deur situasies deur die oog van die verbeelding te bejeën en kan selfs deur die mag van die verbeelding opgehef word na 'n hoër, meer spirituele vlak. Die transendentale mag van die verbeelding kan beter begryp word wanneer dit deur die lens van “negative capability” gesien word. Hierdie konsep is deur die romantiese digter, John Keats, voorgestel. Die konsep impliseer 'n verbeeldingryke openheid in die aangesig van aardse onsekerheid en swaarkry, wat die mens uiteindelik in staat stel om nuwe potensiaal in moeilike omstandighede raak te sien. In uitgekose feëverhale, oorkom Andersen se kinderprotagoniste hul moeilike omstandighede deur die mag van die verbeelding. In ander verhale is die natuur deurslaggewend in dié transendentale verbeeldingsreis. Nie net dra die natuur geestelike waarhede oor nie, maar dit het ook 'n moraliserende invloed op die karakters, wat hulle nader aan 'n Opperwese bring. Dit herinner aan die Duitse *Naturphilosophie*, asook die sienswyse van Engelse romantikusse soos Coleridge en Wordsworth, vir wie die natuur 'n deurgangstroete na die geestelike wêreld is. Die idee van die “sublime” is onderliggend aan hierdie filosofie. As die natuur deur middel van die verbeeldingslens, in plaas van deur 'n empiriese lens bejeën word, kan dit 'n manier word om die aardse te oorkom. Dit is dus 'n boodskap van hoop wat in lyn is met Andersen se selfopgelegde taak as profeet wat sy kuns gebruik om die mensdom op te hef. In hierdie opsig is hy die absolute romantiese held of buitestaander, wat, ofskoon hy aan die buitewyke van die samelewing staan, tóg tekortkominge raaksien en geroepe voel om die weg na 'n beter wêreld te wys.

## Sleuteltermes:

Hans Christian Andersen; Feëverhale; Verbeelding; Engelse Romantisisme; Duitse Transendentalisme; “Negative Capability”, Universele siel; Spiritualisering van die natuur; Romantiese buitestaander; Sosiale kritiek.

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## DECLARATION

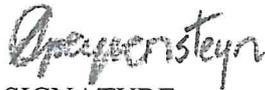
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I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



SIGNATURE



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## Introduction

Harold Bloom contends that the romantic influences on Andersen's work are pervasive; he writes that:

Andersen and Kierkegaard are as High Romantic as Goethe and Novalis, Victor Hugo and Dickens, Manzoni and Walt Whitman, or as Hegel himself. Where Andersen differs [however] is that instead of dreaming universal nightmares, like Edgar Allan Poe, he entertained universal daydreams, the immemorial human mode of imaginary wish-fulfilment. (2005:407)

For Bloom, Andersen's Romanticism can be discerned especially in his privileging of the imagination and his choice to write fairy tales. Both echo the romantics for whom a renewed appreciation of the imagination encouraged a revived interest in and love of fairy tales. Fairy tale elements and narrative strategies are woven through much of the writing of the European and English romantics; Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* and John Keats's *La Belle Dame sans Merci* are merely two examples of this. Fairy tales also constitute a singularly appropriate genre for the romantic writer, given that fairy tales themselves may be considered "acts of the imagination" (Warner, 2014: xix) in which magic abounds and "universal daydreams" might come true.

The starting point of my study is, therefore, that Hans Christian Andersen is such a romantic writer. Briefly, one might define or describe "romantic writing" or "a romantic" as an artist who favours emotion and the individual imagination above reason (Potter, 1987:1999). Romanticism is characterized by an idealistic world view that rejects convention and seeks to liberate society from oppressive structures and limiting thoughts. I would argue, then, that even a cursory consideration of Andersen's life, his beliefs, and his writing reflects a romantic mindset. In this thesis I demonstrate that this Romanticism is woven through a number of his fairy tales, in which he explores specifically romantic concepts.

Andersen published four collections of fairy tales: *Eventyr, fortalte for born* (*Fairy Tales, Told for Children*, 1835-1842), *Nye eventyr* (*New Fairy Tales*, 1844-1848), *Historier* (*Stories*, 1852-1855), and *Nye eventyr og historier* (*New Fairy Tales and Stories*, 1858-1872). Like Adam Oehlenschläger and Bernhard Ingemann, he collected mostly Danish folk tales. Andersen,

however, changed the original tales, making them more personal by addressing the listener directly and using colloquial language. Only the following tales were not original: “The Tinder Box”, “Little Claus and Big Claus”, “The Princess and the Pea”, “The Travelling Companion”, “The Swineherd” and “The Wild Swans” (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>). Andersen himself was a lover of fairy tales and expresses his appreciation of them as follows:

In the whole realm of poetry there is no domain as boundless as that of the fairy tale. It reaches from the blood-drenched graves of antiquity to the pious legends of a child’s picture book; it takes in the poetry of the people and the poetry of the artist. To me it represents all poetry, and he who masters it must be able to put it into tragedy, comedy, naive simplicity, and humour; at his service are the lyrical note, the childlike narrative and the language describing nature. (Andersen, 1979:9)

His love of fairy tales thus stems from the fact that they speak to adults and children, that their poetry appeals to both the artist and the layman, and also that one may express any number of issues through them – whether humorous or tragic. Fairy tales thus gave Andersen a literary space in which to explore his experiences of the world and the redemption that he felt was possible only when the imagination was called into play.

In this study I explore how Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales reflect the way the romantic thinkers of 1789 to 1832 conceived of and dealt with the imagination – specifically, the redemptive capabilities of the imagination as expressed in the ideas of negative capability, the spiritualisation of nature and the figure of the romantic outsider. Because I focus on the identification of romantic ideas in Andersen’s tales, my analysis of the tales is grounded in thematic close-reading. I discuss how each of the selected tales explores concepts first theorised by the romantics and then argue that the appearance of these in his tales reveals Andersen’s own Romanticism. In my close-reading of the tales, I do discuss images and symbols and what they represent and, as such, my analysis draws on general Jungian archetypal theory. Carl Jung theorised that a “collective unconscious” exists which houses mythological motifs or primordial images common to all mankind; an individual could access these via dream and the imagination. He called these mythological motifs and images “archetypes” and explained that archetypes are not inborn ideas, but “typical forms of behaviour which, once they become conscious, naturally

present themselves as ideas and images, like everything else that becomes a content of consciousness” (Jung, 1983:16). I draw on Jungian symbolic theory at times both because Jungian theory remains influential in fairy tale studies and also because, even though Andersen’s fairy tales are not all traditional, they do evoke the same archetypal quality of more traditional tales. Such an analysis is useful because it allows for the exploration of the psycho-spiritual function of the imagination that speaks through such symbols and archetypal stereotypes. My analysis of Andersen’s fairy tales thus focuses on the romantic and spiritual aspects of these tales – in short, the transcendent elements evoked by negative capability, the universal soul and the spiritualisation of nature (pantheism), as well as the figure of the outsider/ romantic hero.

In Chapter One I trace the development of Andersen’s Romanticism, looking at various socio-cultural factors that may have influenced him in this direction, for example the political and industrial climate in Denmark during Andersen’s lifetime. Andersen lived in a time of political change in which the nobility lost some of their privilege and political power in favour of a more egalitarian class system. This coincided with the advent of an Industrial Revolution that encouraged the peasant classes to believe that they could improve their circumstances through hard work and their own abilities and talents. Because of this, Andersen was convinced that ordinary people like him could gain control of their own destiny and improve their lives. However, although he accomplished this, achieving fame and fortune, he was never fully accepted by the social elite and this led to a deep and abiding disappointment in him.

Andersen’s socio-cultural context thus encouraged in him both the idealism and disillusionment associated with Romanticism. His romantic perspective might also, however, have been influenced by his peasant background. As a peasant, Andersen had grown up close to nature and was raised on imaginative folk tales which relied heavily on the supernatural. These aspects found their way into his writing and strengthen the romantic “flavour” of his work. One can also trace various theoretical, philosophical aspects of Romanticism in Andersen’s perspective. These include the importance of the freedom of the self, which values the artist as a free-thinking being; the foregrounding of imaginative perception as opposed to an emphasis on reason; a renewed appreciation of nature and the simple rural lifestyle; the valuing of feeling over thought; and a shift from the superficiality of daily existence to an appreciation of the eternal realm of the

soul. For Andersen the imagination was transcendent: it offered the means to overcome the trials of a painful earthly existence to which no logical, practical solutions could be found. And, for him as for the romantics, nature was instrumental to this imaginative transcendence of suffering.

Andersen's particular brand of Romanticism is influenced by English and German Romanticism, both of which conceptualise the imagination as the organ through which humanity might transcend earthly limitations. In this thesis, I focus specifically on how the imagination is dealt with in English and German Romanticism in order to show how Andersen's Romanticism reflects aspects of both. Briefly, English romantics such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge regarded the natural world as a spiritualising agent which had the ability to restore harmony to man's inner being (Peck & Coyle, 1984:5). The concept of the sublime is central here. German Romantics such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe were inspired by the transcendental aspects of *Naturphilosophie*, which promoted the idea of nature as a portal to the spiritual, offering the means by which man might transcend earthly concerns and achieve a "higher", spiritual mode of being. Immanuel Kant's German Idealism is at the basis of this stream of thought.

In my brief discussion of the theoretical strains of Romanticism that one might identify in Andersen's perspective, I also refer to the work of various theorists such as Jack Zipes, Harold Bloom, and Nancy Easterlin, all of whom argue that Andersen's artistic outlook is evocative of Romanticism. Once the broad theoretical foundation has been laid, I then move into an in-depth look at the three aspects of the imagination that I contend are foregrounded in selected fairy tales by Andersen: negative capability; pantheism, which includes the universal soul and the spiritualisation of nature; and the outsider/romantic hero.

In Chapter two, I examine how Andersen's tales "The Little Match-Girl", "The Red Shoes", "The Little Sea-maid" and "Little Ida's Flowers" (Andersen, 2002) explore or reflect the romantic concept of negative capability. Chapter Three traces the manner in which the romantic precept of the universal soul and the spiritualisation of nature can be identified in Andersen's "The Fir Tree", "The Butterfly", "The Happy Family", "The Snail and the Rose Tree", "The Gardener and the Squire", "Old Shut-eyes" and "The Swineherd", "The Bell", "The Angel",

“The Rose Elf”, “A Picture from the Ramparts”, “The Goblin and the Huckster”, “The Nightingale” and “The Story of a Mother”. In Chapter Four the sensibility of the romantic outsider is traced in the tales “The Drop of Water”, “There’s a Difference”, “It’s Absolutely True”, “She was No Good”, “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, “The Tin Soldier”, “The Ugly Duckling”, “The Tinder-Box”, “The Flying Trunk”, “The Teapot”, “Heartache”, “Auntie Toothache” and “Something to Write About”.

My study thus consists primarily of an analysis of selected fairy tales by Andersen, foregrounding the manner in which he employs specifically romantic conceptualisations of the imagination which lie at the heart of romantic thinking. As Keats aptly expresses it, “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart’s affections and the truth of the Imagination” (Keats’s Letter to Benjamin Bailey 22 Nov 1817 in Gittings, 2009).

## **Chapter 1**

### **Hans Christian Andersen and the Romantic Imagination**

#### Andersen's early life and the development of his romantic mindset

In order to trace the romantic influence in Andersen's fairy tales, it is necessary to outline the socio-historic context which shaped his romantic sensibilities. In her article, "Hans Christian Andersen's Fish out of Water" (2001) Nancy Easterlin highlights the fact that Andersen's socio-economic environment played a significant role in shaping his artistic outlook, which is essentially romantic. She writes that,

Careful consideration of Andersen's tale, [The Little Mermaid] reveals, in fact, that environmental conditions [such as] the development of industrialization and the ensuing movement out of rural communities, the collapse of the enlightenment and the consequent development of literary romanticism, combined with the similar trajectory of Andersen's own "fairytale" life. (Easterlin 2001:3, in Darrow 2009)

Andersen's Romanticism may thus have been encouraged by his socio-historic context. He was certainly influenced by the ideological changes that occurred as a result of the industrialisation of Europe – the shift from an agrarian system to industry, the appearance of a middle-class, a resulting idealization of peasants and the pastoral, and his personal experiences of being a "fish out of water" who belonged nowhere because he straddled two classes and two historical eras. He was an idealist who felt alienated, and he took refuge in his imagination and art.

From a historical perspective, nineteenth-century Denmark was suspended between two worlds – that of superstition, folklore and the traditional archaic power of the monarchy on the one hand and that of scientific advancement, rational thinking and a budding democracy on the other (Grønbech, 1980:94). There were scientific inventions such as Oersted's electromagnetism, yet many peasants were still living in a natural environment that they could not control and they continued to find answers to natural phenomena in the supernatural (Grønbech, 1980:94). Industries were being developed across Europe, leading to the appearance of a middle-class and yet many people still lived in abject poverty. And King Frederik was forced to implement a democratic system which undermined the privileges enjoyed by the nobility: he still held

monarchic power, but there were murmurings of dissatisfaction among the working classes who had discovered the power of the lower classes from the French revolution (Buch-Jepsen, 2001:2).

As a little boy growing up in Odense, Andersen found himself torn between these two worlds. On the one hand his imagination remained rooted in the superstitious peasant environment in which he grew up, thriving, as he had, on his grandmother's tales, and on the other hand, he was inspired by the growth of democracy and the belief that a "self-made man" could improve his circumstances through his rational mind and an overturning of the social status quo (Popova, 2013:6-10). The social constraints of the past were being questioned which meant that even a peasant like Andersen could improve his social position if he used his talents – in his case, his incredible imagination. These possibilities paralleled the ideology espoused by the romantics half a century earlier: anyone could improve his/her circumstances by questioning the norm, employing their imagination, rather than relying solely on reason and by taking on the task of the outsider, the visionary who enlightens society.

Although Andersen was a peasant, the son of a shoemaker and a washerwoman, his parents encouraged his dreams and imagination. He might have been expected to follow in the footsteps of his father and follow a trade, but his father, who owned books and read to him, encouraged him to develop his imagination. His mother, too, encouraged imaginative play, making him colourful costumes with strips of cloth so that he could act out plays he found on his father's bookshelf. Andersen would also escape to the spinning room in the mental asylum where his grandmother worked and spend time listening to her tell tales (Hersholt & Westergaard, 1949:X-XV). His family environment thus provided fertile ground for the development of his imagination and, ultimately, encouraged his romantic leanings.

Andersen also lived through the birth of democracy in Denmark, encouraged by the promise of new industries developing both there and across Europe (Grønbech 1980:94). Although he was inspired by the influx of liberal thought and ideological innovation that followed the French Revolution, however, Andersen's disillusionment with the unchanging conditions in Danish society urged him away from a rational approach to problems to the adoption of an imaginative one. He observed that while conditions did not change fundamentally for the Danish peasant

class, at least the imagination enabled people to think differently about circumstances and escape hardship in that manner. The imagination offered a liberating vision of a self-made man who could escape his class, relying on his inborn talents to achieve material and spiritual success. The fact that Andersen was an outsider also enabled him to see the flaws of society more clearly. He considered himself almost a romantic visionary, called to unmask these flaws and guide his fellow man to a more elevated understanding of being, to a spiritual dimension that could alleviate the suffering caused by the industrial revolution and its alienation of man from nature.

Like the romantics, Andersen used his imagination to overcome the restrictions of his social position and created tales that defied the literary and social conventions of the day. Maria Popova describes this as the creative power of “positive constructive daydreaming” (2013:10), a term that is better understood when read against the background of Bruno Bettelheim’s psychological theory on the imagination. Bettelheim asserts that the search for meaning remains central to human existence and one can best come to terms with the inexplicable, not through attempts at rational comprehension, but by “spinning out daydreams- [...] fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures” (2010:7). This is precisely the process that plays out in Andersen’s tales, a process that is intrinsically romantic.

### Andersen’s Romanticism

Limited research exists on the romantic influences in Andersen’s work. However, there are some scholars who have delved into this area. For example, Dinah Birch (2014:2) focuses on Andersen’s depiction of himself as an outsider or romantic hero. This is a singularly romantic trait. She is supported by Harold Bloom, who describes Andersen as “wholeheartedly romantic and anti-academic [and] eagerly concerned with folklore and the popular cause” (2004:132). In his work on Andersen, fairy tale scholar, Jack Zipes (2006:2), too, points out Andersen’s “imitation and unique appropriation of the German Romantics”, particularly in his spiritual treatment of nature. This “spiritualisation” of nature is characteristic of romantic writers like Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth (Jasper, 1985). Johan De Mylius (2006:1) points out that Andersen is generally regarded as “an outdated phenomenon of nineteenth-century Romanticism or Biedermeier” when compared to the literature of his day. He quotes Georg Brandes who, in 1869, already labelled Andersen a writer of the “childish” period in

literature called Romanticism (De Mylius 2006:1). And Julia Briggs argues that the imagination is a sustaining power in Andersen's life and remarks upon his "romantic roots", affirming the scholarly identification of Andersen's romantic leanings (2006:1).

My thesis both draws and builds on the previous scholarship in order to advance the exploration of Andersen's Romanticism. Briefly, I explore the romantic period as a literary phenomenon and touch on the key thinkers of the period, outlining the main ideas associated with them. For my purposes, the concepts that stand out as exemplary of Romanticism are the foregrounding of the imagination; a new appreciation of nature; the valuing of feeling over thought; the advocating of a return to a simple, rural lifestyle and the promulgation of an inner focus away from the transient, superficial aspects of the world, towards the intransient world of the soul (Potter, 1987:204-205). And although I acknowledge that one should be cautious of "labelling" eras, it is generally accepted that these characteristics reflect some of the overarching attitudes of Romanticism.

### Romanticism, and the Romantic Imagination

Seamus Perry suggests that Romanticism is difficult to define and points out that there has always been considerable debate as to which writers should be included in the movement and which should not (Wu, 1998:3). This may be because, as David Duff suggests, although literature reflects its historic context, Romanticism seeks to transcend empirical reality (Wu, 1998:23). Romantic writers express their inner experience with a focus on the spiritual and the imaginative rather than on the material aspects of their existence. They seek to represent ideas that are timeless rather than those limited to a specific historical context. Therefore, although a specific historical moment may have given rise to Romanticism, it is a movement that transcends the moment. This idea also appears in German Idealism, which was anti-empiricist and became the foundation of German Romanticism. Abercrombie describes this as "a tendency away from actuality" and "relying more on the things it finds within itself" (Wu, 1998:7).

However, although the romantic movement cannot be limited to its historic context, it is helpful to place it within a broader historical framework in order to understand what led to it. Romanticism (1789-1832) was preceded by the Augustan age, also referred to as the Age of

Reason. The artists and writers of the time were inspired by the values of classical Rome and Greece, such as simplicity and harmony and elegance. They rejected crudeness and excessive passion and saw the classical era as extolling balance and a spartan grace. Because religious and civil wars were rife, the artists and thinkers of the Augustan age sought to bring order to the chaos through logic and reason, a move encouraged by the impressive scientific discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton and others (Potter, 1987:185-189).

Given the restrictive parameters of the preceding Augustan age, the liberating influence of the French Revolution on the *Zeitgeist* cannot be overemphasised. It destabilised traditional power relations in Europe, doing away with the feudal system. The French monarchy was replaced with a budding democracy, resulting in an influx of liberal ideas and a resounding call to freedom for the working classes across Europe. For centuries, the lower classes had been kept in check by a discriminatory social order; the industrial and political revolutions introduced into European society a middle class that questioned this discrimination (Buch-Jepsen, 2009:1-3).

These socio-economic changes transformed countries like Denmark, England and Germany in the era during which the Romantics were most active so that the years from 1790 and 1830 saw a revolution in literature. In England, romantic poets such as John Keats and William Blake were inspired by the hope and promise of the era. England was enlarging its colonial territories which encouraged a sense of security among its people and prompted a revival of interest in the arts. And in the arts, there was a move away from Neo-Classicism to Folk Art and nature (Potter, 1987:200-220). Because they developed within the same broad historical context, the romantic outlook of various writers in Europe and England is similar in many respects. This reveals the fluidity of the romantic ideology which is largely unlimited by time and place. The ideas of Romanticism crossed boundaries and influenced the artistic outlooks of writers, artists, musicians and the common man in England and Europe. As a result, Andersen's Danish fairy tales reflect the influences of both German and English Romanticism.

Because both English and German Romanticism can be discerned in Andersen's fairy tales, it is necessary to discuss these two strands of Romanticism briefly. English Romanticism is usually conceived of as including the writings of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John

Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Alfred Lord Byron and William Blake. According to P.M.S Dawson it is customary to distinguish between an older and a younger generation of romantic poets (in Curran, 1993:48-50). Wordsworth (born 1770) and Coleridge (born 1772) constituted the older and Byron (1788), Shelley (1792) and Keats (1795), the younger. The latter group is also referred to as the “high romantics” due to their poetic fervour. Blake (1757) was part of an earlier generation and, as such, is an anomaly. According to David Simpson it is not helpful to classify romantics under the traditionally posited distinctions of early and late romantic, pre-and post-romantic, highly or anti-romantic, as these are seldom consistent and are used subjectively to justify a certain viewpoint (Simpson cited in Curran, 1993:1). The scope of this study therefore embraces both eighteenth and nineteenth century Romanticism (1798-1832) as one and recognises, too, that Romanticism is not necessarily restricted to an historic epoch.

As certain aspects of German and English Romanticism are foregrounded in Andersen’s fairy tales, it is thus important to discuss each of these concepts briefly here. In the first place the transcendent quality of the imagination is central to both English and German romantic thought. For both English and German romantics, the imagination enabled people to overcome the earthly limitations of daily existence, and this centrality of the imagination negated the previous emphasis on reason. Keats’ negative capability is an expression of this transcendent quality of the imagination. In the second place, both English and German Romanticism advocated a return to and the renewed appreciation of nature. For both, nature had the power to redeem humanity from the artificiality and superficiality imposed upon it by industrialisation. In nature people could become better versions of themselves and even reconnect with divinity. This formed part of the transcendent aspect of the imagination and is expressed in ideas such as the universal soul and the spiritualisation of nature. In the third place, for the romantics, the freedom of the self and the idea of the artist as a free-thinking being encouraged the notion of the artist as a romantic visionary. According to this, the artist had a calling to use his art to lead society to a higher state of being in which “ultimate truth” could be perceived. The romantic outsider was such a visionary. Andersen regarded himself as just such a visionary and employs all three of these concepts in selected tales, as is explored later.

Andersen's privileging of the imagination and according it spiritual truth echoes Coleridge who, in his *Biographia Literaria* (Roberts, 2014: cv), describes the imagination as "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." For Coleridge, the imagination thus propels man between reality and an almost god-like state of creativity and is the means by which mankind might transcend harsh reality and access the spiritual realm. J. Robert Barth affirms this link between Romanticism and spirituality by suggesting that for Coleridge and Wordsworth the imagination "of its very nature is divinely empowered and can put one in touch with the divine" (2003:1). He also stresses that only the symbolic language of the imagination can reflect spiritual truths, "resisting the human drive for simple clarity and determinateness" (2003:7).

As primary examples of German Romanticism, one might discuss Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. The main concepts championed by these writers are the freedom of the self and the artist as a free-thinking being, unencumbered by any specific ideology or preconceived thought patterns, for whom the internal world is more important than the external (Grabert, Mulot and Nürnberger, 1988:111). Their ideas are a natural evolution of those first introduced by the mystics and pietists, who were the precursors of the German romantics. Briefly, mysticism entails the awareness of things that are inaccessible to the intellect and which eventually lead to a union with the Deity (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>). This can only come about by means of self-surrender. Pietists were characterised by their devoutness to this union with the Deity. They argued that it could be achieved by means of *Empfindsamkeit* or "sentimentalism", which foregrounds feeling in religious experience (Von Wilpert, 1989:231). This is a subjective experience in which the study of ordinary objects while in a state of "melancholy reverie" facilitates a sense of spiritual union. English romantics called this higher form of existence or experiential perception the "subjective sublime", a phrase coined by Edmund Burke (Speech in the House of Commons [1757] 1997). A perception of the sublime is excited by something grand in nature that produces fear and awe in the spectator; what one perceives is thus far beyond the object of the senses and only the imagination enables the spectator to appreciate its full impact. According to Coleridge a "suspension of disbelief" is necessary to achieve this. Keats would call it "negative capability". Wordsworth likened the process to a cloud taking over the mind (Wu 1998:488). An experience of the sublime is thus a

“transcendent imagining”, an essentially mystical experience that can be traced back to the German Idealism of Immanuel Kant.

German Idealism is a philosophical movement that developed after the publication of Kant’s *Die Kritik der reinen Vernunft (The Criticism of Pure Reason)* in 1781. In it, Kant underlines the importance of the imagination as bridging the gap between the senses and ideas. For him, the mind was an active, creative agent, a concept that would greatly influence the idealism of German and English Romanticism. Kant advocated three types of Imagination: the Reproductive Imagination which relies on the association of ideas; the Productive Imagination which entails perception via the senses and discursive reasoning; and the Aesthetic Imagination which functions free of the laws of reasoning and operates through symbols (Kitson cited in Wu, 1998:38). Kant criticises the possibility of “pure reason” because reasoning, judging and speaking are objects of experience; as personal mental constructs, they are subjective. The crux of Kant’s argument is that we perceive things only because they exist as ideas in our minds: things do not possess any independent identity beyond what we perceive.

Idealism rejects rationalism and empiricism, as both of these schools of thought maintain that knowledge is a product of the senses. In opposition to this, German Idealists like Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schelling and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel believed the spiritual to be the means of discovering the truths of human existence: the material world had to be overcome (transcended) to achieve a higher state of being in which “truth” could be perceived. In practical terms, humane conduct towards others and the creation of art expressed humanity’s greatest achievements in this spiritual state (Von Wilpert, 1989:399). This idea would give rise to the notion of the romantic visionary, the artist who felt called to guide humanity to spiritual enlightenment through his art.

In terms of his being influenced by these German romantics, we know that Andersen spoke German as a second language and that he studied the work of the German romantic poets Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Heinrich Heine and E.T.A Hoffmann, whose ideals and techniques he incorporated into his work (Briggs, 2006:1). Andersen was also influenced by the writings of the Norwegian philosopher Henrik Steffens, who visited Denmark in 1802 and had studied in

Germany, himself assimilating the ideas of German Romanticism. During Steffen's time in Denmark he gave lectures in Copenhagen and is thought to have stimulated the development of Danish Romanticism in which the same focus on heightened emotion rather than rational thought can be identified (Grønbech, 1980).

In England, romantic poets like William Blake had also rejected the notion that man's perception is limited to the senses and proposed, rather, that man's perception was influenced by infinitely more. Blake's ideas were echoed by Wordsworth whose poems sometimes reflect the loss of innocence brought about by scientific knowledge. This appreciation of the imagination was one of the key components of eighteenth and nineteenth century Romanticism, so much so that Alex Potter refers to it as "the central feature of romantic thought" (1987:207). He describes the romantic writer as a visionary who draws close to the creative power of divinity by means of the power of the imagination in order to access "truth". This was not a truth that could be tested by Newtonian science, but one which lay dormant at the core of every human being, in the soul. The romantic writer seeks to transcend the world of suffering through the redemptive power of the imagination, not as a form of escapism, but recasting reality in order to reveal previously unseen possibilities. This could enable people to transcend the restrictions of daily life through the liberating visions of the imagination. For both English and German romantic thinkers, the imagination enabled a far wider perception of reality and, for both, nature was pivotal as was the artist. These are the key aspects in which English and German Romanticism overlap.

#### The Romantic Imagination: Negative Capability, the Spiritualisation of Nature and the Universal Soul, and the Romantic Hero/Outsider

In this study I focus on specific conceptualisations of the romantic imagination articulated by Coleridge and Keats between 1798 and 1832, specifically those articulated as negative capability, pantheism (which includes the universal soul and the spiritualisation of nature), and the outsider or romantic hero. In general, the imagination is explored by these writers as a mode through which earthly existence could be transcended in order to access a deeper truth. They encouraged seeing reality in an imaginative way, in order to open up new possibilities in trying circumstances and they encouraged seeing beauty and divine inspiration in ordinary things like nature.

## Negative Capability

In the preface to the text *Coleridge, Keats and the Imagination* (Barth & Mahoney, 1990:vii) David Perkins points out that the romantic imagination was the unifying theme of Romanticism in general, and central to the work of Keats and Coleridge in particular.

1990:vii). The two individuals met briefly in April 1819, when Keats was 23 and Coleridge was 46 and yet Coleridge had a profound influence on Keats' writing (Stillinger cited in Barth and Mahoney, 1990:7). Stillinger considers Coleridge's theory on the Primary and Secondary Imagination, as expounded in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), a primary source for Keats' theory of negative capability, which is the first romantic concept I discuss. In order to do it justice it is essential to understand that the term is embedded in the romantic move away from rational thought towards a focus on the mysteries of human existence. Jackson Bate's describes it thus:

In our life of uncertainties, where no one system or formula can explain everything [...] what is needed is an *imaginative openness of mind* and *heightened receptivity to reality* in its full and diverse concreteness. This, however, involves *negating one's own ego*. (Bate, 1963: 208; author's Italics)

According to Bate, the focus of negative capability is on the imagination and not the human intellect. Keats accords a spiritual importance to earthly trials and foregrounds the "soulful" imaginative process involved in overcoming them. He writes:

How then are souls made? How then are these sparks within which are God to have identity given them – so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each one's individual existence? How, but by the medium of a world like this? [...] Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school and Intelligence and make a Soul. (Keats cited in Wu 1998: 70)

When Keats first hypothesised the notion of negative capability, it was applicable specifically to the writing of poetry, in which the artist was advised to relinquish his own identity and preconceived ideas in order to become one with the suffering of another so as to depict its "essence". Keats's theory has since been applied to other contexts as diverse as, for example, law

and medicine. In these contexts, negative capability implies an attitude of being open to what is, instead of relying on one's rational faculties and jumping to foregone conclusions which depend on the ego and mar the free-flow of perception in an unfamiliar context. My understanding or definition of negative capability draws on the work of theorists who have applied the theory to other contexts, as well as an understanding of Keats's brief discussions of the concept.

For Keats, negative capability offers a way of dealing with the inexplicable complexities of human existence and he expresses or explores this in his poetry. He proposed the necessity of immersing oneself in all experience, surrendering to "going beyond the self". As Wu suggests, negative capability aims "not to overcome the negative or indeterminate, but to stay within it as long as necessary" (Wu, 1998:763). This implies a selflessness, a willingness to lose oneself in the essence of something or some-place else, even if this means suffering and trial. The study of people and phenomena beyond himself, and his ability to lose himself in the "essence" of other things and people, arguably enabled Keats to transcend his own ill health and emotional suffering to some small degree; Keats' ability to transcend his earthly existence is described by Richard Woodhouse in a letter to John Taylor (1818):

As a poet, and when the fit is upon him, this is true - And it is a fact that he does by the power of his imagination create ideal personages, substances and powers - that he lives for a time in their souls or Essences or ideas - and that occasionally so intensely as to lose consciousness of what is around him. (in Wu, 1998:456)

The heightened state of empathy implied by Keats's negative capability thus proposed a means of making peace with the overwhelming uncertainty and suffering people faced during their earthly lives. In 1817, Keats specifically describes negative capability as "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Letter to his brother George, 1817). It therefore advocates an imaginative openness in the face of adversity, rather than the rationalising of hardship or a giving in to self-pity; for Keats, the ego should be overcome so that individuals could embrace the sublime mystery of the moment.

In Chapter Two, I argue that Keats's negative capability is most apparent in Andersen's tales, "The Little Match-Girl", "The Red Shoes", "The Little Mermaid" and "Little Ida's Flowers"

(Andersen, 2002). I demonstrate that negative capability is reflected in various aspects of these tales. First, Andersen is preoccupied with spiritual suffering, a theme that is central to many of his tales which often lack happy endings. Andersen felt it his duty to use his artistic gift to bring relief to a suffering world and, like Keats, for him the solution was to transcend suffering by entering an imaginative world. This imaginary transcendence of the world evokes negative capability in the sense that the characters surrender to an imaginative vision without grasping after rational explanations or solutions. Secondly, there is a negation of logical reasoning/rationality by the protagonists who, faced with trying circumstances, use their imaginations to construct a different reality for themselves. Thirdly, they exhibit a self-abnegation in which they surrender their identities in order to be taken up into the essence or the mystery of something or some-place else. And, fourthly, the lack of egotism or self-pity displayed by the protagonists is a key aspect of negative capability. For Andersen, as for Keats, negative capability thus entails a lack of egotism and almost total selflessness.

It is also significant that, in some of Andersen's fairy tales, the imagination calls a child protagonist away from the world of strife and suffering and helps him or her release the need to question the human condition rationally and transcend it imaginatively. This pattern seems to reflect the core concepts of Keats's negative capability: life is a mystery and the only way to deal with the mystery and to overcome the suffering that accompanies it is to surrender to an imaginative vision. For Andersen, however, this imaginative vision is often coded Christian, the protagonists transcending their circumstances and entering into a heavenly realm.

#### The Spiritualisation of Nature

Another romantic concept that can be discerned in Andersen's work is a deep regard for nature. For the romantics, nature offered a pathway to "truth" and offered moral instruction. As such, they revered and respected it, as this extract from a poem by William Cowper suggests:

What wonder then that health and virtue, gifts  
That can alone make sweet the bitter draught  
That life holds out to all, should most abound  
And least be threatened in the fields and groves?  
(The Task, 1, l.750-753)

The romantic view of nature as offering a moral centre echoes that of the German Transcendentalists who believed that the contemplation of nature encouraged the transcendence of the earthly and fostered a connection to the divine. The romantic sublime, too, originates in this belief that nature encourages man to transcend the “phenomenal world and discover the divine power and freedom of the mind” (Modiano, 1985:101). These attitudes may have been influenced by the Pantheism that gained popularity during the romantic era. In pantheism, all material nature is considered a manifestation of divinity ([www.merriam webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)). Critics such as Alan Menhennet (1981:20) confirm the primacy of pantheistic thought in influencing the Romantic *Zeitgeist*. Raimondo Modiano notes that the “pantheistic” philosophy of nature or *Naturphilosophie*, as expressed by the German Transcendentalists, can be viewed “as one among many forms in which Romanticism manifested itself” (1981:141).

At the centre of *Naturphilosophie* is “the ideal spirituality of nature” (Schelling in Modiano, 1985:173). This already implies the transcendence of temporal reality in favour of an “ideal” spiritual realm. If nature is perceived through the imagination instead of empirical thought, it might thus enable man to overcome earthly restrictions and draw closer to divinity. This process constitutes the “spiritualisation of nature” that can be discerned in some of Andersen’s tales. Like other nature philosophers, Schelling also confirmed the link between man, nature and divinity “establishing the link among particular objects and the Absolute” (Schelling in Modiano, 1985:173). This idea finds expression in Andersen’s depiction of the universal soul in selected fairy tales.

According to L.J. Swingle, Pantheism as an ideology re-emerges during this era because of the “post-Enlightenment distrust of the capacity of human reason to ascertain the laws of nature” (1987:16). When thinkers of the time realised their limited capacity to grasp the immensity of the universe, they began to appreciate a sense of the “sublime” and, if the universe could not be defined by empirical study alone, the imagination had to bridge the divide between knowing and not knowing (Heath & Boreham, 1999:19). Instead of trying to explain the mysterious aspects of life empirically, the mysterious aspects of being were thus embraced imaginatively.

Coleridge, in particular, regarded nature a medium of divine revelation or the “other great Bible of God” (Modiano, 1985:81). For him, the revelatory character of nature disclosed the existence of a universal soul, which interconnects all life on earth and then connects this life to the divine, a concept that is at the centre of Pantheism. In *Aphorism IX*, Coleridge outlines the idea of a universal soul in the following manner: “Life is the one universal soul, which, by virtue of the enlivening Breath, and the informing Word, all organized bodies have in common, each after its kind” (in Burwick, 2009:245). Coleridge’s conception of the universal soul relies on a system of polarity, or rather the interaction of polar life forces on earth: humans, plants and animals are in constant interaction with one another and with the divine spirit. This destabilises the traditional hierarchy in which humans occupy a superior position to other life on earth. Andersen’s tales reflect precisely this symbiosis of earthly creatures and the divine: in Andersen’s writing, nature is afforded a voice and is depicted as important in its own right and not just as backdrop for human endeavour. And, often, his stories reflect the harm done by humans to the natural world and to themselves when they ignore this sacred symbiosis.

In his tales, Andersen often recasts nature imaginatively in order to foreground its sentience. In “The Toad” and “The Happy Family” animals are autonomous and express their independent truths, they are not perceived as using only a limited, human, naturalist lens. This aspect of pantheism profoundly influenced Andersen: he depicts nature’s reaction to mankind sympathetically and ascribes thoughts and sensitive feelings to animals and plants. The following outlines statement outlines Andersen’s affinity with nature:

nightingales, flowers, and daisies; even of slugs and cuttle-fish; and of what all sorts of animated creatures round about us, think, do, and might say if they could speak; that one’s consciousness as a human being almost becomes lost in the crowd. (Rossel, 1996:273)

Andersen’s sympathetic treatment of the natural world has been commended by critics, who praise “the fidelity and open-heartedness with which [he listens] to Nature” (Hersholt and Westergaard, 1949:5). In fact, his tales deal mostly with the natural world, as opposed to the world of humans, and he often shows how all life is interrelated by depicting the consequences of human actions on the natural world. Nature is endowed with thought and feeling, with what

Thomas Mc Farland calls an “imaginative intensification of the cognizance of external objects” (in Barth & Mahoney, 1990:32). This “imaginative intensification” of nature allows Andersen to elevate the natural world so that it is equal to the human realm: as nature voices its concerns and shows its pain and pleasure through Andersen’s talking animals and plants, he foregrounds the idea that all life is connected and constitutes a universal soul.

The concepts of a universal soul and the spiritualisation of nature are both aspects of Pantheism. But where the universal soul evokes a sense of the interconnectedness of all life, the spiritualisation of nature foregrounds nature’s role as a moral centre and, ultimately, as a guide to the divine. And, like the universal soul, the spiritualisation of nature is a key element of Romanticism, celebrating what Alan Menhennet calls the “primacy of spirit over sense” (1981:20). In Chapter 3 I explore the role of nature in the tales “The Fir Tree”, “The Butterfly”, “The Happy Family”, “The Snail and the Rose Tree”, “The Gardener and the Squire”, “Old Shut-eyes”, “The Swineherd”, “The Bell”, “The Angel”, “The Rose Elf”, “A Picture from the Ramparts”, “The Goblin and the Huckster”, “The Nightingale” and “The Story of a Mother”.

For the romantics, nature thus pulsed with divine energy. Because of this, they rejected a purely empirical, scientific study of nature and in favour of a more subjective approach that recognised the importance of feeling and imagination. This perspective enabled certain aspects of nature to be perceived as so awe-inspiring and beyond man’s sphere of influence that they practically revealed the existence of an entity far greater than man. This experience was, in turn, so apart from the everyday that it could not be perceived with the senses; the only way to access it and become part of the mystery was through the imagination. As a “portal to divinity”, nature was thus “spiritualised” by the romantics. A tree was no longer merely a natural “thing”, but a beautiful entity that encouraged spiritual visions that transcended earthly limitations. In drawing close to nature, the romantics could access a “truer inner” self, untarnished by the artificial constraints enforced by society. According to Coleridge, proximity to the natural world would enable man to harness the power of his imagination, encouraging him to develop his “sublime nature” which made him akin to God. Thus, “nature [was celebrated] as a medium of divine revelation” (Modiano, 1985:6-7). And, because one could supposedly escape societal expectation

and access a “pure” moral guidance in nature, ordinary peasants who made a living off the land were idealised and considered to be closer to their “true selves”.

The romantics rejected cold empiricism and advocated a move back to nature and feeling, hoping to foster a richer human experience. It is this aspect of Romanticism that Hans Christian Andersen’s tales exemplify: nature and the imagination are interwoven in his writing and often direct the reader to an experience of divinity. In order to make the mystery of the spiritual more accessible, Andersen connects the earthly and the ethereal, removing the divide between the two realms and it is the imagination that enables his characters to move effortlessly from an earthly to a heavenly realm.

#### The Outsider or Romantic Hero

The third Romantic concept that receives treatment in Andersen’s tales is that of the outsider or romantic hero. This concept is traced in the tales “The Drop of Water”, “There’s a Difference”, “It’s Absolutely True”, “She was No Good”, “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, “The Tin Soldier”, “The Ugly Duckling”, “The Tinder-Box”, “The Flying Trunk”, “The Teapot”, “Heartbreak”, “Auntie Toothache” and “Something to Write About”.

His focus on the spiritual realm already reflects Andersen’s awareness of the spiritual darkness and suffering that characterised his society. The hope that mankind would be enlightened by the influx of new ideas sparked by the French Revolution proved empty; not all of the lower classes could extricate themselves from the poverty that continued to plague a post-Industrialisation Europe. As an artist and visionary, Andersen wished to uplift and enlighten society through his art. This desire echoed the romantic belief that artists were called to use their art to improve the condition of humanity, a belief that reflected Romanticism’s renewed focus on humanitarian issues. (The era coincided with the publication of Thomas Paine’s “Rights of Man” and led to what Robert Southey termed as a “mania of man-mending” (Wu, 1998:25).)

Towards the end of his life, Andersen expressed his humanitarian quest as follows:

Whether I was vouchsafed many or long voyages, the longest would be the one conducted into the great unknown land, and then I would wish that with the flight of electromagnetism I might send down a beam of light and illumine much in the foggy chaos which has surrounded so many down here. (in Hersholt & Westergaard, 1949: xxxiii)

Almost the quintessential romantic hero, he wished to elevate his people by displaying a “nobility of spirit” that would lead Denmark into an era sharply distinguished from the ignorance of the past; his was “A quest for light and redemption” (De Mylius 2006:11). He wanted to uplift society by means of his art, particularly through what he felt was the transforming power of the imagination. For Andersen, not only could the ordinary be transformed into something of great beauty, but human trial and tribulation could be transcended. For him, the imagination transformed the world into a place in which individuals could surpass the limitations enforced by an industrial society and fulfil their utmost potential. His personal ideology thus reflected the idealism of the romantics. Many of Andersen’s fairy tales reflect this – in them he explores his understanding of the world and his belief that only poetry, the epitome of the imaginative soul, can free humanity from its suffering.

Andersen’s “quest” is that of the romantic hero or outsider, the person who remains on the periphery of society and who, unencumbered by the need to abide by societal restrictions and demands, can remain true to his inner vision. A heroic individualist, he was able to observe the human condition from a distance. This reflects precisely Paul De Man’s observation that the romantic writer is someone who exists in his own consciousness and separates himself from the claims of the external world (in Wu, 1998:7). The romantic is aware that society puts pressure on individuals to conform to norms of behaviour and to be productive in a utilitarian sense. This suppresses the individual’s potential to draw close to divinity through creativity; in order to make an artistic contribution, the artist therefore has to withdraw from society.

As Denmark’s most renowned author, Andersen socialized with royalty, and well-known figures such as Charles Dickens, Balzac and Victor Hugo. And yet he felt himself to be an outsider who had been measured and found wanting. He expresses these thoughts in his diary: “I had and still have a feeling as though I were a poor peasant lad over whom a royal mantle is thrown”

(Popova, 2013:20). According to Popova this feeling of being an outsider stemmed from the fact that Andersen came from peasant stock and never managed to discard the feeling of not being “good enough” for the high society into whose company his artistic genius brought him. He may have been introduced to the upper echelons of Danish society by his official guardian, Jonas Collin, but the family kept him at arm’s length, refusing his desire to marry the Collins’ daughter. They also insisted on the more formal “thee” instead of “you” as the method of address where Andersen was concerned, denying him intimacy with them. Because Andersen travelled a lot and did not have a permanent home, this, too, almost guaranteed an existence dominated by a feeling of “estrangement” (Prince, 1998:320).

Andersen might, therefore, have embraced the era of development into which he was born, with its hope and liberalism, but because he was an outsider he was detached enough to see the hope fail as a result of humanity’s weaknesses. His dissatisfaction with the social conditions he saw around him encouraged Andersen, who already came from a peasant background, to reject the arrogant, privileged, rational world of the Danish aristocracy and ruling classes and revert to the imaginative, symbolic and supernatural world of his background.

The feeling of being estranged from society was also aggravated by the wars of 1848-1850 and 1864 which caused Andersen to sink into depression and entrenched his opinion that no earthly solutions existed for the frailty of the human condition. But his religious views, which have been described as a mixture of “Lutheran Christianity, pagan superstition and humanistic idealism”, countered this cynicism somewhat, sustaining him throughout his life (Prince, 1998:345). Like Keats and other English romantics, Andersen had to make peace with the disillusionment he came to feel as an adult: all his dreams of eternal love and his hope that the world would become better for ordinary, hardworking people proved baseless – people still suffered misery and hardship. He had to find another outlet for his romantic yearnings for oneness with beauty, poetry and God and, for him, that proved to be the retreat into a spiritual and imaginative realm. This encouraged his deepening perception that man’s state could only be improved by a turning inward. In this he joined the ranks of other romantic writers and poets such as Shelley, Blake and Wordsworth.

Andersen saw himself as a romantic hero, an outsider who did not conform to society's norms and who was, in turn, rejected by society. He explores the idea of the outsider in fairy tales such as "The Half-Chick" and "The Ugly Duckling". He also explores the value of the outsider's perspective in a tale like "The Emperor's New Clothes". Because the outsider has a unique perspective on society, he or she is often witness to the worst of humanity and expresses this in critical social commentary. In "The Emperor's New Clothes", for example, the outsider is a child who exposes the ridiculousness of an adult authority figure, inverting the hierarchical norms that entrench the superiority of these figures (Birch, 2014:1-4). In this case, the acerbic criticism of the outsider destabilises the authority of the social hierarchy. It is social commentary such as this that leads Johan de Mylius to argue that Andersen's tales are not traditional fairy tales directed only at children, but critical texts directed at adults (2006:1-4). Andersen's fairy tales thus often contain the same note of social criticism that one finds in much romantic writing.

Andersen's political stance was complex: he was in favour of democracy, but did not trust ordinary people to govern themselves. He also harboured resentment towards the nobility and the wealthy, but needed their patronage to support his writing (Houe, 2006:55). His ambivalent, and critical, attitudes to the upper classes are clearly expressed in his writing in which he often chooses ordinary people for his protagonists and ridicules the nobility. For him, fairy tales were an extension of folk art, which he felt was an "authentic" medium that concentrated on the concerns of ordinary people and not those of the aristocracy. Like many other romantic writers, he expressed unpopular opinions and was side-lined by society. This, again, encouraged him to find solace and inspiration in nature rather than in human interaction so that he became, more and more, the quintessential romantic outsider.

### Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales

The fact that Andersen was born into the peasant class encouraged him to explore his imagination and may well have led to his writing of fairy tales (Grønbech 1980:94). Because he was of peasant stock, he was not limited to a perception of the world that privileged mechanical physics, a perception more common to the educated ruling classes who believed that the world was a rational, ordered, structured place. The world inhabited by Andersen and his parents, together with others of the lower or serving classes, was still considered uncontrollable and

chaotic. Nature was the force that dominated the material fortunes of their lives. Given the milieu into which he was born, it is no wonder that Andersen so easily ascribed spiritual aspects to nature and saw nature as an entity that stood independent of the machinations of humankind. For the uneducated peasant classes, the supernatural properties of things enabled them to make some sense of phenomena: weather patterns and natural disasters could be explained as the actions of trolls, ghosts and elves – supernatural beings who featured in the folk tales they told themselves.

Folk tales are often described as arising from an oral tradition ascribed to “old women of the village”, and as performing both a pedagogical function and relieving the boredom of repetitive household tasks (Warner, 1995). Andersen’s exposure to his grandmother’s story-telling profoundly influenced the development of his imagination and his own subsequent story-telling (Popova, 2013:5-6). His rural upbringing might also have laid the foundation for his imaginative rejection of the rational world of the privileged classes. Because Andersen felt that folk tales offered authentic glimpses into the human condition, he collected them, often revising the older tales and adding elements of his unique, imaginative vision to them. He particularly viewed folk tales as “true poetry” because they favoured the imagination over reason. In this he was influenced by German writers like Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Johann Gottfried Herder who foregrounded indigenous German folk art, focusing on ordinary people, rather than on the products of the learned and the aristocracy. E.T.A Hoffmann particularly influenced the work of Andersen, as he was one of the first writers to personify animals and plants in tales such as “The Daisy”, “The Fir Tree” and “Five Peas from One Pod” among others (*Oxford Dictionary*).

Because these stories abound with magical transformations and the imaginative depiction of nature, they influenced Andersen’s developing romantic view of the world. And because the fairy tale genre requires the reader to surrender a rational understanding of the world in exchange for a more imaginative vision, it seemed a natural choice through which Andersen might explore his romantic ideas. Andersen’s original tales all offer an imaginative recasting of reality, which means we may categorise them *Kunstmärchen* (art fairy tales). In these, the content is haphazard, incidents do not always make logical sense, characters are stereotypes and there is little description of the external context beyond the immediate space in which characters exist. The

wondrous, fanciful elements of his original tales echo the preference of the romantics for imagination over reason.

And perhaps, here, a brief discussion of the origins of the traditional fairy tale is necessary so as to contextualise Andersen's contribution to the genre. Fairy tales became popular in the seventeenth-century French court as upper-class adult entertainment, and were only later simplified and adapted for children. The development of the fairy tale in its modern form was also influenced by early Sanskrit fables and the Greek fables of Aesop, as well as the early writings of Jean de la Fontaine, the Russian poet Ivan Krylov, and the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann. Twentieth-century fantasist, J.R.R. Tolkien suggests that a fairy tale is a story that uses "Faerie", or magic (Popova, 2013:2). This implies that the chief element in a fairy tale is fantasy or "the mental power of image-making". In this space, the reader is free to create images in his or her mind regarding the characters, setting and other elements of the story. Reality fades and is replaced with a world in which greater creative freedom is possible.

According to Tolkien, fantasy is natural to the human mind and does not destroy reason but allows for an imaginative recasting of reality. This recasting is traceable in traditional fairy tales which are often characterised by the presence of the marvellous, such as shape-shifting and talking animals. The setting is usually remote and characters are more general than particular, making the content more universally applicable. Marina Warner (1995) concurs with Tolkien's identification of the primacy of "mental image-making" in fairy tales, referring to this as the "optative" mood of fairy tales in which what is possible is more important than what is. Often the plot of a fairy tale does not conclude logically so that the outcome is left to the imagination of the audience who infer meaning for themselves. Vanessa Joosen (2011) confirms that fairy tales almost always portray unusual or improbable events, defying logical reasoning. This move away from reason toward an imaginative recasting of reality places fairy tale writing clearly within the realm of Romanticism.

As far as the origin of the fairy tale is concerned, folk tales may thus be one possible source (Yolen, 2006:3). Another source may be myth, which is often considered to be the original source material for the fantastic elements that appear in fairy tales. As myths do, fairy tales

usually trace a journey, the phases of which might be likened to psychological trials. Where myths normally have positive endings in which the mythical hero transcends the earth and goes to “heaven”, the fairy tale hero remains on earth and lives happily ever after (Eliade, 1963:6). In this sense the only true fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen is “The Snow Queen” in which an arduous journey is undertaken and a happy ending follows. Andersen’s tales also do not conform to tradition in the sense that they very seldom end happily. More often, Andersen does not console the reader with an earthly solution to the dilemmas they are facing. He rather conveys the idea that hardship is part of the human condition and earthly resolution to the situation is not forthcoming. He explores the difficulties of life and his tales foreground the notion that the protagonist and the reader have to find within themselves the means of dealing with the human condition. However, many of his tales do promise spiritual reward after earthly trial: tales like “The Red Shoes” and “The Angel” (Andersen, 2002) offer a decidedly Christian vision of redemption. This pre-eminence of the spiritual is in keeping with Andersen’s romantic predisposition. According to Gavin Hopps there is a move to downplay the spiritual aspects of Romanticism, but he underlines the “pervasive religious culture of the romantic period”, extolling romantic writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge as visionaries of this renewed spirituality (Hopps & Stabler, 2006:13,36).

Andersen’s choice of the fairy tale genre as a vehicle for expressing his spiritual concerns thus makes sense in light of the fact that the genre has its origin in myth, and myth-making is, arguably, about exploring spirituality or spiritual truths. Mircea Eliade outlines the process of myth-making, stating that myths deal with Supernatural Beings and the origin of humankind. Myth-making is therefore an effort to explain things that exist in the world which are beyond rational human perception (1963:1-6). Because fairy tales deal in archetypal symbolism, they offer an appropriate vehicle through which to convey and explore spiritual truths. Vladimir Propp points out the distinct relationship between fairy tale and religion, observing that fairy tales predate Christianity and closely resemble ancient religions, with their focus on rituals (Matejka and Pomorska, 1971). My analysis of Andersen’s tales focuses on the specifically spiritual elements that abound in his writing, such as the pantheistic and Christian elements. This approach is relevant because it is here that his tales often depart fundamentally from traditional fairy tales, inviting a reading that reflects more adult concerns and expresses his romantic views.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Negative Capability in Andersen's tales**

#### **Introduction**

“I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds.” (Keats in a family letter, Oct 1818)

This statement by romantic poet, John Keats (1795-1826), attests to the high regard in which he held the transformative power of the imagination. From the onset his tragic material circumstances urged him towards an imaginative transcendence of reality. He lost both his parents at a young age and was, thereafter, at the mercy of an unscrupulous guardian. Later as a surgeon's apprentice, and faced with the grim conditions of a nineteenth century hospital, Keats came to recognise that suffering and loss was part of the human condition and he sought to overcome this by writing poetry in which he explored the beauty revealed by the imagination ([www.biography.com/people/john-keats](http://www.biography.com/people/john-keats)).

Keats' negative capability is the first romantic concept that I discuss in relation to Andersen's tales. The applicability of this Keatsian concept becomes clearer as one acknowledges firstly, Andersen's preoccupation with spiritual and physical suffering and, secondly, his constant description of the imaginative transcendence of said suffering. This theme is central to his tales. As I mentioned earlier, Andersen felt it his duty to use his artistic gift to bring relief to a suffering world (Hersholt & Westergaard, 1949) and, like Keats, for him the only solution was to transcend suffering by entering an imaginative world. This imaginary transcendence evokes Keats' negative capability in the sense that the characters surrender to an imaginative vision without grasping after rational explanations or solutions. Andersen's tales “Little Match-Girl”, “The Red Shoes”, “The Little Sea-Maid” and “Little Ida's Flowers” (Andersen, 2002) explore specific aspects of negative capability and it is on these aspects that my discussion of the tales focuses. They are: the negation of logical reasoning and rationality by the protagonists who face trying circumstances; their use of the imagination to construct a different reality; their self-abnegation in order to be taken up into the essence or the mystery of something else; and their lack of egotism or self-pity.

In the spirit of what Thomas Paine describes as the nineteenth century “mania of man-mending” (Wu, 1998:30), Keats felt himself called upon as an artist and a visionary to light the way for others through his poetry. His theory of negative capability amounted to such an attempt: it advocates a surrender to the mystery of life instead of a reliance on empirical reasoning to make sense of inexplicable situations. Joshua Hall’s description of the similarities between Keats’s theory of negative capability and Daoism is useful here because it enables one to comprehend the core of Keats’s philosophy (2012:225-237). Quoting Ivanhoe and Van Norden, he writes that

According to the *Laozi*, the *dao* is the source, sustenance, and ideal state of all things in the world. Because of their unbridled desires and their unique capacity to think, act intentionally, and alter their nature [...] humans tend to forsake their proper place and upset the natural harmony of the Way. The *Laozi* seeks to undo the consequences of such misguided human views and practices. (Ivanhoe & Van Norden in Hall 2012:225-237)

A person living according to this philosophy would therefore see himself as a cosmic nurse, healing the imbalance in nature by guiding mankind to a more spiritual path, away from the egotism brought about by a rationalist way of thinking. Ragussis (1978:67) refers to the “sublime tentativeness” displayed by Keats and posits that he is involved in a magical *nursing*. This he did by writing poetry that celebrates the beauty in ordinary objects and human experiences. He wanted to demonstrate that looking at life through an imaginative lens enables one to see the potential for hope in everyday life, something that could open up new avenues in seemingly hopeless circumstances. Keats’s practice of negative capability came to the fore more strongly as he approached death, suffering, as he did, from the end stages of pulmonary tuberculosis. The following statement reveals Keats’s commitment to selflessness in his dealings with others - an investment he referred to as his “posthumous existence” (Keats, 1820, cited in Gittings, 2009:398): “If I recover, I will do all in my power to correct the mistakes made during sickness: and if I should not, all my faults will be forgiven.” In essence, for him, then, negative capability negates the ego and promotes a selflessness in the face of adversity: on his deathbed, Keats is concerned with how his illness has inconvenienced others, rather than with his own suffering because he sees beyond it.

Half a century later, Hans Christian Andersen also experienced alienation from his external world. He grew up in abject poverty and was bullied at school. He lost his father early in his childhood and faced a bleak future in trade in the company of his stoic stepfather. (Grønbech, 1980:1-50) At the age of fourteen he left for Copenhagen to pursue a career in the arts, in which he would later explore the transcendent power of the imagination in his fairy tale writing. His fairy tales advocated the imaginative transcendence of a harsh reality, at times their visions specifically advocating a reaching towards spiritual truths because, for Andersen, the spiritual world was real. His peasant background, steeped in myth and superstition, as well as his deep-seated Christian beliefs encouraged in him the conviction that existence was not finite, that an infinite “beyond” existed and begged to be explored.

For Andersen, this spiritual dimension offered hope to a society in which life had become unending trial, especially for the working classes in post-industrialised Europe. As an idealist and a visionary, he felt himself called upon to use his art to light the way for others who were grappling with the mystery of life. He expresses this sentiment succinctly when he writes that “The history of my life will say to the world what it says to me – There is a loving God who directs all things for the best” (in Hersholt and Westergaard, 1949: xxxiii). Some of his fairy tales therefore specifically encourage the idea of heavenly reward after earthly trial, presenting his readers with an eternal hope to follow temporary suffering. Keats did not share Andersen’s Christian spiritual clarity. Despite in-depth conversations with theology student, Benjamin Bailey, Keats was sceptical on matters of religion. For him, the only way to overcome suffering was to surrender to an imaginative vision that brought one closer to Beauty and Truth, two concepts that, for him, were almost akin to spiritual truth (<http://englishhistory.net/keats/life.html>).

And yet, for both Andersen and Keats the imagination remained central to their art and provided the means of transcending reality, allowing a glimmer of spiritual hope to emerge in a dreary post-Industrialised world.

The imagination is thus the force at the centre of negative capability. This seems quite logical, given that the imagination is also a central part of the romantic aesthetic (Potter, 1987:204-205), which promulgates a move away from the transient, superficial aspects of the world towards the

intransient world of the soul. According to Immanuel Kant (*Die Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781) the imagination can modify constructs like space and time which are mere thought entities and possess no inherent meaning within themselves. Man can endow these constructs with meaning in whichever way he chooses. The romantics harnessed this ability to construct meaning imaginatively: for them, there was a deepening perception that man's state could be improved, not through the amelioration of his material circumstances, but by turning inward. The process of imaginative creation sometimes brought romantic writers to what they perceived to be the cusp of a mythical realm that stretched beyond their earthly existence. This encouraged romantic writers like Blake, Coleridge and Wordsworth to accept Plato's theorisation of an immortal soul, so that imaginative, spiritual transcendence took on aesthetic significance. Coleridge expresses the importance of this spiritual transcendence of earthly suffering in a letter to Charles Lamb, writing that "in storms like these, that shake the dwelling and make the heart tremble, there is no middle way between despair and the yielding up of the whole spirit unto the guidance of faith" (Wu, 1998:66).

His words evoke Keats's concept of negative capability because he does not promote a rational analysis of the human condition, but suggests that one should embrace the mystery of it and hold on to the faith offered by the spiritual dimension: "The life we seek after is a mystery; but so both in itself and in its origin is the life we have" (Wu, 1998:67). Andersen's privileging of the imagination, and according it spiritual truth, echoes this romantic spirit and artistic vision. He writes, "I [...] became sensible of the holiness there is in art [...] I learned that one must forget one's self in the service of the Supreme" (in Rossel, 1996:38). A multitude of influences thus converged to make Andersen a romantic thinker convinced of the truth of negative capability. I discuss his use of this concept in the following analyses of selected fairy tales.

#### "The Little Match-Girl" (1835)

In this fairy tale, the child protagonist is a young girl who is forced to bear responsibility beyond her years because she has to provide for her family financially. In order to avoid a beating, she wanders the icy streets on New Year's Eve, selling matches. To ease her physical discomfort, she strikes a match to warm her hands and this initiates her escape into an imaginative world. Each of the visions conjured by the match flames show her a world consisting of a home environment

where her physical needs for warmth and nourishment are met: in her vision, there is a cosy fire and a lavish spread of food. The wonders of her imagination create a far better world than that which she faces in harsh reality. And, finally, when she freezes to death, she ascends to heaven to be with her dead grandmother. The little match-girl finds her immediate reality unbearable and, when she surrenders to an imaginative vision of a better world, this reflects negative capability in action. As I have noted, for Keats and later for Andersen, earthly trials had spiritual importance and the imaginative transcendence of earthly suffering and uncertainty was the solution they proposed.

Like other romantic writers, Andersen was acutely aware of the suffering around him. Because of this, as Frank Hugus suggests, his writing was not only about transcendence, but a vehicle for social criticism:

[he] did not shrink from criticizing what he saw as egregious social flaws, many of which he had experienced personally [...] [He reveals that] it was not at all an easy matter to climb out of one's lower social environment. That so few of Andersen's figures survive this attempt is as much a criticism of society as it is a testament to the genius and perseverance of those individuals [who tried]. (2006:4).

The plight of children in a post-industrialised urban environment is one of the most constant themes in Andersen's tales. At the time, the exploitation of poor children for labour was rife and Andersen's sympathies always lay with the poor. During a nineteenth century Europe characterised by rapid urbanisation, cities were flooded with people seeking work. This resulted in city slums in which living conditions were often horrific and children were expected to contribute to the family's upkeep. Often this meant they were employed as factory workers and chimney sweeps (Potter, 1987:228-233).

In the UK, the Children's Employment Commission, established in 1840 and headed by the Earl of Shaftesbury, conducted interviews in order to monitor the issue of child labour and campaign for the reduction of working hours for women and children. When the findings came to light, they revealed that children as young as five were working in paper mills and iron foundries and girls and boys under 10 were working in coalmines. "Generally speaking, all the females

employed in these works are wretchedly clad," wrote sub-commissioner Frederick Roper and remarks on "their evident poverty, want of clothing, and in many cases, of sufficient food" (Barkham, 2007:1). According to researcher Ian Galbraith of the Origins Network (in Barkham, 2007), who worked through 900 interviews that had been conducted during this time, children did not necessarily complain about their fate because working was preferable to being at home, where abuse and deprivation were the order of the day.

This harsh reality is reflected in the setting of this fairy tale and the little match-girl's unforgiving circumstances encourage her yearning for imaginative escape. As a young child, she may be read as the archetypal representation of innocence and hope, the idealized promise and potential of the human soul stifled by abject poverty and suffering. The tale thus prompts the reader to question the values of a society in which children endure such suffering. In depicting her unhappy circumstances, Andersen points out that the 'liberation' promised by the post-French Revolution era failed to change the circumstances of the members of society who are arguably most vulnerable to poverty, children. Andersen's narrative style underpins this message as the narrator is subjectively involved and his sympathy for the girl is quite apparent. Jørgen Holmgaard describes the narrator as "sentimental with his compassion" (2009:4). The narrator draws the reader in, describing the plight of the child with the repetition of emotive words: her vulnerable position as a child in society is foregrounded with adjectives like "poor" and "little" which point out her powerlessness. The fact that she is "bareheaded" and "barefoot" in the freezing cold, too, reveals her vulnerability and stirs the reader to sympathy:

It was terribly cold; it snowed and was already almost dark, and evening came on, the last evening of the year. In the cold and gloom a poor little girl, bareheaded and barefoot, was walking through the streets.

So now the little girl went with her naked little feet, which were quite red and blue with the cold.

Shivering with cold and hunger she crept along, a picture of misery, poor little girl! (Andersen, 2002:360)

Andersen wants the reader to sympathise with the little match-girl in order to contrast her present with the imaginative transcendence of reality she achieves later. He specifically includes details that suggest circumstances are robbing her of her childhood, forcing her to grow up and "fill her

mother's shoes". However, she is not yet equipped for the demands of the adult world and, although she starts off wearing her mother's slippers, they prove too big for her and she loses them. It is not an option to return home, as her home environment is neither warm nor nurturing: she faces abuse if she does not sell any matches and the house is cold due to a leaking roof. Society turns a blind eye to her plight, "two carriages [rattle] by, terribly fast", scaring her and making her lose her slippers. A boy grabs one slipper and runs away with it, revealing that she is in competition with other children who are also bent on survival and with whom she must compete for resources, especially since "no one had given her a farthing" (Andersen, 2002:360). There is a painful contrast between the cold, hunger and gloom that she experiences and the bounty she beholds when looking in on the scene through the window of a rich merchant's house. Here, the family is celebrating New Year's Eve with roast goose and the room is beautifully lit, highlighting her deprivation.

In the opening tableau, Andersen therefore focuses on society's flaws. He does not, then, offer an earthly solution to the plight of the little match-girl, but instead advocates an imaginative transcendence of earthly trials. Her transcendence is initiated when, in an effort to ease her physical discomfort, she strikes a match to warm her hands and, in the flame, conjures a make-believe world of her own. The flame from the first match is likened to a candle, which in her mind soon becomes a great polished stove with brass feet. This represents the home comforts that are lacking in her life. The striking of a second match reveals a table laid with delicious food, in contrast to the deprivation she experiences daily. When she strikes a third match, a beautiful Christmas tree appears with Christmas candles burning on the branches. These float up to heaven and streak across the sky, signifying souls ascending to heaven. With the fourth match, her deceased grandmother, whom she loved with all her heart, appears to take her to heaven. The flames thus initiate her escape into an imaginative world which provides her with physical as well as emotional comfort. The meagre warmth of the matches replaces the absent "hearth" that the child yearns for. Her poverty encompasses a lack of love and family and her make-believe world makes up for this with a warm home environment where her needs for basic shelter and nourishment are met and her beloved grandmother returns from the dead. Clearly, for Andersen, the imagination enables one to transcend one's circumstances.

Lesley Stevenson defines the imagination as “the ability to think of something not presently perceived” (2003:238). This propositional imagination thus constitutes a belief-like state in which the constructs of the imagination are perceived as real (Currie and Ravenscroft, 2002). It also enables a retreat into an imaginative sphere in which the individual can control and manipulate the elements that constitute his or her world. This is the type of imagining that is at play when the match-stick girl enters a belief-like state in which she can no longer distinguish between the imaginative and the real world. Psychologist, Eli Somer might agree with this; he coins the term “defensive association” to describe this detachment from reality and suggests that it is an adaptive response during childhood trauma which involves the compartmentalisation of threatening mental materials and the subsequent estrangement from the suffering self (2002:159). He explores this phenomenon as maladaptive daydreaming, defined as follows: “extensive fantasy activity that replaces human interaction and interferes with [...] functioning” (2002:200). This extreme fantasizing is ascribed to loneliness or the need to escape from aversive environments. It is a “disconnection from the pain of living and a magical transformation of misfortune into desirable experiences” (2002:204). Thus, as the meagre warmth from the lit match warms the girl’s hands, her imagination transports her to a better time and place. She does not rationalise her circumstances or blame the situation on anyone. In short, she does not “grasp after fact or reason”, but experiences the moment with an imaginative openness that enables her to escape her reality. This suggests the application of negative capability: the wonders of her imagination enable her to transcend reality, and they allow her to envision a spiritual plain where she meets her deceased grandmother who leads her to heaven. Andersen’s tale clearly suggests that an imaginative transcendence of reality is preferable to the rational scrutiny of suffering as answers to earthly trial are not readily found. For him, the most effective solution to the challenges of the human condition is found on the spiritual plain.

The match-stick girl’s imaginative transcendence of her circumstances moves into the spiritual realm when her daydream creates a Christmas tree alight with thousands of candles – the lights of which eventually streak through the sky as stars. When one falls down to earth she recalls her grandmother’s saying that this is a sign of a soul ascending to God. She does not, however, realise that she herself is dying and seeing her own soul ascending to heaven. Her deceased grandmother appears and the little girl begs her to take her with her to the after-life and:

She took the little girl in her arms, and both flew in brightness and joy above the earth, very, very high, and up there was neither cold, nor hunger, nor care—they were with God!” “The New Year’s sun rose upon a little corpse! The child sat there, stiff and cold, with the matches of which one bundle was burnt.” “She wanted to warm herself,” the people said. No one imagined what a beautiful thing she had seen, and in what glory she had gone in with her grandmother to the New Year’s Day. (Andersen, 2002:361-362)

Andersen juxtaposes extremes of tragic suffering and transcendent joy in this image but, finally, it is not the poverty-stricken circumstances of his character, but the power she finds within herself to transcend her circumstances that he focuses on. Her imagination facilitates her spiritual liberation and allows her to move beyond her earthly constraints. He suggests that, in this world of suffering, the imagination is the only thing that can free her. And although her imaginative transcendence of reality is followed by her death, because death is coded as redemptive, it is hopeful.

#### “The Red Shoes” (1845)

The child protagonist in this tale is a girl named Karen who loses her nurturing home environment when her mother dies. She is poverty-stricken and has to fend for herself and the reader is told that “in summer she had to go barefoot, because she was poor, and in winter she wore thick wooden shoes, so that her little instep became quite red, altogether red” (Andersen, 2002:207). An old shoemaker’s wife takes pity on her and makes her shoes from red cloth which she wears on the day of her mother’s funeral, for lack of something more appropriate. In her childlike innocence she does not realise the inappropriateness of the shoes and, when an old lady in a passing carriage takes pity on her and adopts her, Karen thinks it is on account of her nice red shoes. Later, however, the old lady has the red shoes burnt because they are too vain and suggestive. Karen is clothed “neatly and properly”. For her Christian confirmation, Karen fools the near-sighted old lady into buying her a pair of red shoes made from patent leather which she wears to church. At the confirmation, the shoes cause a stir and, distracted by them, Karen cannot concentrate on the spiritual message of the priest. They are the only beautiful possessions she has ever owned and soon consume all her thoughts, leading her astray into a world of

superficial materialism. At the church door, Karen is intercepted by an old soldier who exclaims: “Look, what beautiful dancing-shoes!” (Andersen, 2002:211)

These words seem to be a curse because the shoes take over and she cannot stop dancing until they are pulled off her feet. Although her patroness forbids her to wear the shoes again, Karen gives in to temptation and wears them to a ball. Again, she loses control of her feet and cannot stop dancing. Finally, she dances up the church steps and she is halted by an angel, who proclaims:

“Thou shalt dance!” he said, - “dance on thy red shoes, till thou art pale and cold, and till thy skin shrivels to a skeleton. Thou shalt dance from door to door; and where proud, haughty children dwell, shalt thou knock, that they may hear thee, and be afraid of thee! Thou shalt dance, dance! (Andersen, 2002:211)

Karen recognises that her selfishness and vanity have led to this and, to end the torment of the dancing, she has her feet chopped off. She does not want her head taken off, “for if you do, I cannot repent of my sin” (Andersen, 2002:212). Her repentance seems to appease society to a certain measure, as the executioner replaces her severed feet with a pair of wooden feet with crutches.

However, Karen is still not entirely forgiven for the sins of vanity and pride - even after confessing her sin, the dancing red shoes prevent her entering a church. Humbled, she finds work as a servant at the parsonage. Here she seeks redemption by being “industrious and thoughtful”, denouncing “dress and splendour and beauty”. Forsaken by all, she reads her hymn book alone in her room. And what Andersen seems to suggest with this is that, for the individual who transgresses, it is almost impossible to escape society’s judgemental attitude. The individual is isolated and might as well be destroyed.

As a little girl, Karen craved motherly love and the material possessions that people around her seemed to have. When the old lady adopted her and provided the opportunity for her to select her own shoes, she did not realise that her choice of the red shoes would incur such harsh judgement by society. She tries to appease society, accepting its censorship, but when this is not enough her circumstances become too hard to bear and she finds solace in a world constituted by her

imagination. She envisions an angel who transports her away from her world of strife and suffering to a place of beauty and peace:

[He] carried a green branch covered with roses; and touched the ceiling, and it rose up high; and wherever he touched it, a golden star gleamed forth; and he touched the walls, and they spread widely, and she saw the organ which was pealing forth sound.

The clear sunshine streamed so warm through the window upon the chair, in which Karen sat; her heart became so filled with sunshine, peace, and joy, that it broke; her soul flew on the sunbeams to Heaven. (Andersen, 2002:213)

The green of the branch signifies life and rebirth and the golden star suggests spiritual reward after suffering. Her imagination conjures a world filled with sunshine, peace and joy. Karen's narrow room and dire circumstances are transformed into a heavenly realm through her imagination: she then becomes one with her imagined reality and transcends to heaven.

Her quest for an imaginative transcendence of reality stems from her alienation from society. She is a young girl entering puberty and exploring aspects of her emerging womanhood. For her, the world is a complicated web of societal rules and requirements that she must navigate without a mother who can guide her. She embarks on a haphazard developmental journey to selfhood, making the wrong decisions, offending society's moral code and being severely punished for it. The harsh rejection she faces, coupled with the physical torture of losing her feet, encourage her to transcend reality imaginatively, evoking Keats' negative capability. One might almost argue that Karen's developmental journey echoes that of a mythological hero, which is appropriate because the roots of fairy tale may originate in myth. According to Joseph Campbell, the hero undergoes a "schizophrenic journey". At first there is a "departure from the social order and a long, deep retreat inward into the psyche and backward in time, [with a] chaotic series of encounters there, then a harmonizing and rebirth to life" (1993:210). Karen travels through these phases, struggling to overcome flaws, achieve moral maturity and develop a sense of a worthwhile self. The phases of her journey are symbolised through her relationship to shoes and feet. The loss of her feet, thus, finally forces her withdrawal from reality and her escape into an imaginative, spiritual realm.

Feet and shoes most obviously suggest one's journey through life. At first Karen is barefoot – a carefree young girl – and then she is required to wear ill-fitting wooden work shoes and join the workforce after her mother's death. Her childhood is suddenly over and she is expected to take up adult responsibilities and fend for herself. The deprivation that she experiences is reflected by the redness of her little feet, constricted by the shoes just as she is caged by the rigid world of adult work. Later, there is societal pressure to fit into the mould of “acceptable” womanhood; here she is taught to read and sew and is clothed “neatly and properly” in order to be deemed “agreeable”. She is encouraged to wear sensible, black shoes, but yearns to celebrate her femininity and tells herself that “[you are] so much more than agreeable; you are beautiful! (Andersen, 2002:211)”

She models herself on the little Princess who makes a brief appearance at the window of the castle, wearing red shoes. The fact that the princess is allowed to wear red shoes, but society frowns upon Karen doing the same, might be suggestive of the social privilege enjoyed by the ruling classes. Red is also the colour of blood and might signify sexual awakening. As a young girl, Karen is on the brink of womanhood. Her blossoming womanhood is represented by the red shoes that she covets. According to psychologist and fairy tale scholar, Bruno Bettelheim (2010:173) the colour red represents violent emotions and the coming of age, perhaps signifying the appearance of menstrual blood. At first, Karen fights the temptation of her vain femininity and concedes when the old lady admonishes her for wearing the red shoes to church. However, she cannot deny the whimsy and seduction of her burgeoning womanhood, reflected in the fact that the shoes dance wherever they want to and she has no control over them. She dons the shoes, even though she is required to sacrifice her own pleasure and choose rather to nurse the sick old lady upon her deathbed. Because she succumbs to the worldly seduction of the red shoes rather than adhering to spiritual principles, Karen is cursed to dance non-stop, a deterrent to proud and haughty girls. The repetition of “obliged to dance” and “compelled to dance” (Andersen, 2002:210-211) signifies a destiny she cannot escape, dictated by society's expectations and the moral codes to which she must adhere. As punishment for breaking society's moral codes, she loses both her feet as well as the shoes. This indicates that Karen flounders and loses the means to move forward on her journey to self-actualization. Society takes away her freedom and she

loses her means of self-determination, gaining something of it back only once she appeases society.

On the one hand, Andersen criticises the judgemental attitude of the morally self-righteous who punish Karen, ostracizing her for her supposed sins of selfishness and feminine vanity. On the other hand, he comments on the superficiality of society that Karen cannot escape, the materialism that seduces her. Once she has chosen the red shoes, they own her. She manages some small escape when she is supplied with crutches and wooden feet. This suggests that society will let her progress, but only on its terms. The wooden feet are functional, not pretty. They allow a shuffling gait, not giddy dancing. A woman therefore has a patterned role in society and stepping out of this role unleashes punishing forces. The red shoes provoke feelings of guilt, preventing her from entering a church and it is only when she withdraws into herself and envisions an imaginative reality of her own making that her lot becomes bearable and escape, possible.

Karen's imaginative transcendence of her circumstances can be better understood when read in the light of Bettelheim's psychological theory regarding fairy tales. Bettelheim, himself, found the means within himself to survive a Jewish concentration camp as a child and subsequently made a study of the role of fantasy in a child's psychological development. He found that the effectiveness of children's logic is overshadowed by the power of fantasy and emotion. The child might fill gaps in his or her understanding using fantasy because he or she is not yet psychologically equipped to deal with the complexities of life rationally (Bettelheim, 2010:53). This makes children more susceptible to an imaginative, rather than a rational, view of the world and, I would argue, more open to Keats's negative capability which entails "being in mysteries and doubts without irritable grasping after fact or reason." Certainly, Andersen's tales focus on how the imaginations of young protagonists enable them to escape tragic realities.

According to Bettelheim, reading fairy tales may be beneficial to children because the adventures of fairy tale protagonists often echo children's developmental phases and mirror how to navigate the expectations of adults. If the fairy tale hero can overcome obstacles, so can the child reader. Fairy tales might thus encourage the child to develop certain coping mechanisms that enable him or her to deal with anxiety and frustration. According to Bettelheim (2010:45-52), during this

journey to selfhood the fairy tale encourages the child to feel hope that overcoming obstacles is possible, and that, even as the “good” hero is rewarded, so evil will be punished. This makes sense to the child reader who tends to polarise concepts to make sense of their chaotic inner world – people are good or evil, nothing in between. Bettelheim suggests that fairy tales might also guide children to overcome anti-social behaviours, such as those associated with Freudian Oedipal jealousy and selfishness; if a child learns to overcome these behaviours, he or she is more likely to be successfully socialised into society and to earn its protection, as opposed to being abandoned. Fairy tales teach that a better life is possible, just as the fairy tale hero’s actions enable him or her to achieve a happier state of existence. Often the feats that need to be performed are not too challenging, so that the child is encouraged to learn that small actions can lead to great results. In “The Red Shoes”, if Karen can navigate the challenges of growing up and entering adulthood and be successfully socialised into society, the child reader might believe that he or she can also overcome his/her childhood fears and frustrations. This provides the reader with hope.

Andersen’s tale, however, departs from the normal flow of the fairy tale in the sense that there is no happy ending after the heroine’s journey to confront difficulties and construct an identity in line with societal expectations. The typical fairy tale ends with an increase in rank and power, but for Karen her journey ends in death. She surrenders to her suffering, at which point she experiences an imaginative vision which allows her to transcend reality. Andersen’s “message” to his readers is therefore that there may be no rational solution to human suffering, that only the imagination allows transcendence of suffering. And, if imaginative transcendence of suffering is achieved, this vision can lead one to a spiritual realm in which suffering no longer exists. This, in essence, reflects Keats’s negative capability in which he advocates an embracing of mystery and rejection of empirical reasoning. Karen’s imaginative vision leads her to a spiritual experience in which she, at last, finds redemption.

This shift from the earthly to the spiritual should not prove beyond the child reader, given that children more readily entertain the possibility of a supernatural realm because of the animistic nature of their thinking (Bettelheim 2010:8-10). According to Tzvetan Todorov (1975:149) there are three kinds of fantasy: that which explained supernaturally as the result of divine

intervention; the scientific fantastic in which extraordinary events are explained rationally; and uncanny fantasy in which the fantastic remains unexplained. Supernatural fantasy plays a role when a child feels unsafe in his or her environment. Because of this, a child reader may approve of the superhuman help offered to the protagonist in the fairy tale even if it defies the logic of the “real world”. For Karen, “supernatural” help does not come from some “magical” external source; she discovers within her the means to transform her surroundings imaginatively, thereby accessing a redemptive spiritual experience. Usually in myth, the hero transcends the earthly and goes to heaven, while in fairy tales, the hero usually stays on earth and lives happily ever after. In this sense Andersen’s tale once again aligns itself with myth, which is concerned with the eternal and not the temporal.

Johan de Mylius (2006:1-9) observes that Andersen’s unhappy – but spiritually redemptive – endings are the primary aspect in which his work differs from the flow of the traditional fairy tale. The traditional fairy tale usually ends happily, on the hopeful note that the protagonist can extricate themselves from difficulties; this constitutes wishful thinking. Like many of Andersen’s other tales, “The Red Shoes”, however, advocates self-sacrifice and ends in death, followed by a rising from death and a transformation into a spiritual body. The fact that Andersen’s text departs from the pattern of the folktale in this way, suggests that his tales are more easily classified as experimental writing or art fairy tales (*Kunstmärchen*) – he transforms traditional subject matter so as to express his belief that there is no earthly resolution of human suffering.

Although his writing departs significantly from the pattern of the traditional fairy tale, “The Red Shoes” does contain some essential elements of the traditional fairy tale – Karen’s loss of her mother, for example. The absent mother is a fairy tale leitmotiv, resulting in an abandoned child protagonist who tries to find solace in other people or objects. The child might also feel guilty and responsible for the mother’s absence (Warner, 1995:210). As traditional fairy tales, which often explore the upsetting truths of a society such as the neglect and abuse of children, Andersen’s tale deals with the physical and mental suffering of an abandoned child - Karen. In traditional fairy tales good is rewarded and evil is punished. Because of this, there is hope for a better future. One can also expect magical elements to appear and help the hero to overcome whatever challenges arise (Warner, 1995:84). Andersen’s tale seeks to impart a lesson in

Christian morality, focusing on the punishment of selfishness and pride and the rewarding of humility and self-sacrifice in heaven. Karen's earthly trials encourage her to become spiritually mature. And while she cannot overcome her earthly suffering, her imaginative glimpse of heaven encourages her to surrender to death, which enables her to "achieve" heaven. Dying, she transcends the world. Karen does not question her circumstances rationally but allows her imagination to transport her into the mystery of a heavenly realm. This is a clear evocation of Keats's negative capability: life is suffering, and the only way to overcome suffering is to surrender to an imaginative vision. For Andersen, this vision is coded as Christian.

#### "The Little Sea-maid"

A possible source for Andersen's tale is Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine* (1811), a *Kunstmärchen* or art fairy tale containing fantastic elements. Danish authors like Johannes Ewald and B. S. Ingemann's *De underjordiske* [The Creatures from the Underworld] (1817) may also have influenced Andersen's exploration of the mermaid theme. Andersen's little mermaid comes from an idyllic underwater world, glowing with colour and alive with perpetual motion. Andersen describes a particularly picturesque setting:

Far out in the sea the water is as blue as the petals of the most beautiful cornflower, and as clear as the purest glass. But it is very deep; deeper than any cable will sound; many steeples must be placed one above the other to reach from the ground to the surface of the water. And down there live the sea-people [...] - the strangest plants and flowers grow there, so pliable in their stalks and leaves, that at the least motion of the water they move just as if they had life. All fishes, great and small, glide among the twigs, just as here the birds do in the trees. (Andersen, 2002:60-61)

Andersen uses the reader's familiar frame of reference for his depiction of the underwater world, referring to the depth of the water "as deep as three storeys". He compares the fish to birds in trees, and even the mermaids are referred to as sea-people. The little mermaid's world is also alive with colour: "[there was a] great garden with bright red and dark blue flowers; the fruit glowed like gold, and the flowers like flames of fire" (Andersen, 2002:61). But even though she lives in such a beautiful environment, the little mermaid (Andersen does not give her a name) is fascinated with human life on shore and as a result "there was no greater pleasure for her, than to

hear of the world of men above them". She holds on to her grandmother's promise that when she is fifteen, she may go up to the surface and see the world of men (2002:62) and she relishes the tales her five older sisters tell her about what they have seen and heard on their ventures out of the water.

The little mermaid's interest in the human world goes beyond the superficial, however. Not only does she want to exchange the underwater kingdom for a life on shore, she wants to marry a human being in order to gain an immortal soul. Although her mermaid lifespan is 300 years, she dreams of defying this limitation by acquiring an immortal soul; only if a human being falls in love with her, can she have one. On one of her trips to the surface, she rescues a prince from a sinking ship and falls in love with him. She kisses his forehead and leaves his unconscious body on the beach, to be found by a group of young girls from a nearby convent. When the prince regains consciousness, he gratefully acknowledges one of the girls his saviour because he does not know about the little mermaid.

She, however, has lost her heart to him and asks the sea witch for a spell to make her human so that she can be with her beloved. She sacrifices her mermaid tail for human legs and every step she takes is then like knives stabbing into her flesh. The sea witch also takes her tongue, which renders the little mermaid incapable of communicating her feelings to the prince. He finds her washed up on the beach, dresses her in beautiful garments and invites her to live at the castle as his "little foundling" (2002:74); he loves her like "a dear, good child". Her heart is broken, however, when she discovers that the prince will marry the daughter of a neighbouring king. Ironically, his heart yearns for the girl who found him on the beach and he knows that he cannot love another. For the little mermaid, this is a death sentence: she will turn into foam on the day of his wedding. During the wedding ceremony "her ears heard nothing of the festive music, her eye marked not the holy ceremony; she thought of the night of her death, and of all that she had lost in this world" (2002:78). Her sisters call to her from the side of the ship and present her with a knife with which to slay the prince. If the little mermaid slays the prince, the drops of his blood will return her tail and she can go back to the ocean.

The little mermaid refuses to harm him and, instead, sacrifices herself. She is rewarded for her selflessness: she is allowed to join the sisters of the air in their quest to gain immortal souls. The narrator tells the reader that:

the sun rose up out of the sea. The rays fell mild and warm upon the cold sea-foam, and the little sea-maid felt nothing of death. She saw the bright sun; and over her sailed hundreds of glorious ethereal beings – she could see them through the white sails of the ship and the red clouds of the sky – their speech was melody, but of such a spiritual kind that no human ear could hear it, just as no human eye could see them; without wings they floated through the air. (2002:79)

Her need for an imaginative transcendence of reality stems from the fact that the little mermaid undergoes endless physical and emotional suffering throughout the tale. She experiences knives stabbing into her newly-acquired human legs when she walks, the sea witch cuts out her tongue so that she is unable to express any thoughts or emotions and, finally, she loses the one she loves to someone else. This suffering spurs on her imaginative transcendence of reality and she dissociates from her immediate circumstances. She enters an imaginative state in which the clouds turn into a white ship that has ethereal beings floated round about it. The sky is filled with sweet music that no human ear can perceive. The natural world acts as a portal to the divine and she embraces the mysteries of this spiritual realm through the imaginative openness that negative capability allows. From the outset of the tale it is clear that the little mermaid is intrigued by the mystery of the unknown. She yearns for an unfamiliar life on shore and endangers her life to gain an immortal soul. She tells her grandmother that she “would gladly give all the hundreds of years (she has) to live, to be a human being only for one day, and to have a hope of partaking in the heavenly kingdom” (2002:70).

According to Finn Mortensen, (2008:437-454) “The Little Sea-maid” follows the structure of the *Bildungsroman*, in which the protagonist embarks on a journey to selfhood. The little mermaid’s focus slowly shifts from her childhood preoccupations to a focus on her family dynamics and, thereafter, to a discovery of the nuances of her adult identity. She questions her sisters’ resignation to their fate as mermaids who will eventually turn into sea foam and this spurs her to acknowledge what is most important to her: she yearns for a soul. In order to gain a soul, she

must experience romantic union with a human being. Her journey towards mature selfhood thus encompasses growth into a sexually mature young woman. Her childhood world is chaste: there are no married couples. Part of her discovery of the nuances of adulthood, is, thus, her sexual awakening. This is a process that Gwyneth Cravens describes as “metamorphosis in consciousness at the boundary between girlhood and womanhood”, emphasising the “solitary nature of the quest for a new sensibility” (2006:2). The little mermaid’s willingness to embrace the mysteries of human existence evokes negative capability: she embraces the unknowns of the journey to selfhood which encompasses the acquisition of reproductive agency rather than surrendering to the rational advice of her grandmother to be “happy with what she has” and not “to hanker after the unknown”. She uses her imagination to conjure up visions of life on shore and what it might be like to become one with the mystery of the ultimate unknown which exists in the sphere of a heavenly kingdom. She displays what Jackson Bate, in relation to negative capability, calls an “imaginative openness of mind” (1963:208). In order to become one with this mystery of an immortal soul, she is willing to risk everything and go into the domain of the witch. Like the polypes she encounters in the witch’s domain – half animals, half plants – she, too is stuck somewhere between being an animal and a human, a woman and a girl. She is struck mute, so that, symbolically, she cannot express her own selfhood and remains in search of herself.

In the end the little mermaid spills her own blood instead of that of the prince and his lover and this sacrifice enables her to win a chance to gain a soul. Usually the blood of the girl signifies her becoming a sexually mature woman but here the little mermaid offers her blood up in order to gain a soul - and temporarily turns into white foam, signifying purity. Being a Lutheran Christian himself, Andersen might have been influenced by the Lutheran belief that children did not automatically possess souls, but had to acquire them by righteous living. Therefore, the little mermaid and the daughters of the air have to work hard to obtain a soul, suggesting that the reader, too, has a say in the matter of their salvation and can speed up the sanctification process by “being good” (Prince, 1998).

As was previously stated the journey from girlhood to womanhood and, hopefully, self-actualisation and spiritual maturity forms part of the structure of the *Bildungsroman*. This

journey gains further significance when read in the light of Jung's archetypes. Nancy Easterlin (2001:16) traces the archetype of the mermaid from its origin as a fish-tailed god in Babylonian culture and water dragons in Eastern beliefs, to Poseidon and the Greek sirens who lure and seduce men. Jung asserts that water is the symbol of the unconscious mind, as opposed to rational mental consciousness. As such, water suggests the balancing of life between the rational and the irrational, the conscious and the unconscious. The mermaid thus represents a combination of the human and animal world, raw instinct and more cognitive, refined capabilities, the earthly and the striving after imaginative, spiritual transcendence, all of which need to be balanced. This is part of the journey towards self-actualisation.

Mary Ann Mattoon describes the Jungian archetypes as follows:

Every human psyche possesses the same archetypes and different archetypes may be prominent at different times. Jung hypothesized a psychic structure that corresponds to the different chromosomal makeup of men and women: a predominantly feminine conscious personality in a woman, masculine in a man, together with a predominantly masculine or feminine component, respectively, in the unconscious [...]. Each is needed to complement each other, and therefore, is insufficient alone [...]. For a man or woman to achieve wholeness, it is essential that each develop both the feminine and masculine sides of his or her personality. (1981:83-84)

According to Sabrina Soracco (1990:2) the balancing of the masculine and feminine is part of the individuation process, and only balance eventually leads to spiritual self-actualization. This forms part of the journey that the little mermaid undertakes as she leaves behind the asexual underwater world that her grandmother inhabits to become one with her masculine side, the prince. The sea, death and night are coded feminine in Jungian symbology, while the sun is a masculine symbol. The depiction of these elements in the fairy tale might constitute the efforts of a female to integrate her masculine side, represented by finding her place in the more patriarchal world that exists in daylight, "under the sun". In Andersen's tale, however, her journey to human selfhood proves too difficult to endure; instead, she surrenders to her suffering and experiences an imaginative vision.

Niels and Faith Ingwersen, (1990:412-415) attest to the fact that Andersen's tale again departs from the traditional fairy tale in which a happy ending follows earthly trial. They suggest that the ending of "The Little Mermaid" more closely resembles the undeserved deprivation and isolation of the hero in the ballad. Even after undertaking the journey, being tested (in order to achieve eventual self-actualization) and passing the moral tests that appear, the little mermaid is not guaranteed any reward. This foregrounds the unfairness of life and, in Andersen's case, the absence of earthly closure. Although the little mermaid does not kill the prince, the only reward she might get is a chance at securing an after-life: she does not achieve a soul or immortality itself. And yet, this suffices for her (Cravens, [1992]2006:80). Having said this, the power of her imagination is healing and redemptive and she is delivered from her earthly suffering to continue her existence as a spiritual being. This conclusion evokes Keats's negative capability. The little mermaid is willing to sacrifice herself. She does not pity herself, nor does she question the events rationally. There is no egotism, and she surrenders herself to the mystery of a spiritual existence beyond death. The reader is also asked to surrender to this imaginative world because of the interactive nature of Andersen's ending: if the reader is "good" the little mermaid's ascent to heaven is hastened. The reader is thus also asked to surrender to the mystery and not question the events rationally – effectively, the reader is asked to practise negative capability.

#### "Little Ida's flowers"

In this tale, a little girl mourns the "death" of her flowers and asks a visiting student to explain her loss. If the historical background to the tale is true, this takes on additional pathos because Ida had just experienced the death of her mother (Mortensen, 2005:2). The student in the tale possesses a lively imagination and ascribes the wilting of the flowers to a particularly exhausting ball they had attended the previous evening. Trying to assert a rational disposition, little Ida observes that flowers cannot dance but the student asserts that they do. The setting for these balls is the great castle outside the town-gate and the student describes scenes in which the roses sit on the throne and the violets are naval cadets that dance with hyacinths and crocuses. The flowers hide from detection when the old steward comes calling and they then glide through the air without being detected, because humans think they are butterflies. Drawn into his world of make-believe, Ida now accepts the flowers' anthropomorphism and her imagination transports her into a world of make-believe where flowers and toys gain a life of their own. When reality

reasserts itself the next morning and she realises that the flowers are actually quite wilted, her flight of fancy makes their loss bearable and she buries them, comforted by the belief that they will bloom again during the coming spring.

According to Finn Hauberg Mortensen, (2005:1-9) this fairy tale is biographically based on the history of Ida Holten Thiele (born in 1830) who lost her mother, Sophie Thiele, at the age of 5. Sophie was known to Andersen, who published an elegy “Sophie Thiele” in a Copenhagen newspaper. Three weeks after Sophie’s death, he published “Little Ida’s Flowers”. When her mother was alive, the real Ida and her sister had basked in their parents’ love, but when their mother died, their father withdrew from them, delegating their upbringing to their grandparents. He later remarried and raised a family apart from his two elder daughters. In a fictional form, this fairy tale thus confronts Ida’s sorrow at death and the very real abandonment that follows it.

In the tale, the recently bereft Ida is eager to be shown a world that has not been damaged by her sorrowful reality. She wholeheartedly opens herself to the romantic mystery presented by student’s imaginative world and asks: “is nobody there who hurts the flowers, for dancing in the king’s castle?” (Andersen, 2002:23-24) and when she is told that the old steward is there, but that he cannot see them, she exclaims: “That is famous!” The student also tells Ida about the “botanical Professor”, who lives nearby. He uses man-made, empirical science as the foundation for his studies of flowers and, because he leaves no room for the imagination, when the flowers do reveal themselves to him, the professor reacts badly, slapping a nettle which stings him in return (2002:25). The professor wants to assert “appropriate” behaviour for the plants as dictated by his years of empirical study: the natural world is supposed to behave as expected, as dictated by the laws of science, but his efforts are in vain when the flowers step out of their expected frame and are recast imaginatively.

Ida’s imagination allows her to project her own grief onto the flowers and she tells her doll, Sophie: “The poor flowers are ill, and they must lie in your bed; perhaps they will then get well again” (2002:25). She visualises the ball that the flowers attend in the king’s castle and even hears the tinkling of piano music. Even with no night lamp lit, “it seemed really to little Ida as if the long yellow flower looked like the young lady; and it had just her manners in playing”

(2002:26). The privy councillor, who often comes to visit at Ida's home, however, represents the rational world which is opposed to fantasy and he criticizes the student: "How can anyone put such notions into a child's head! Those are stupid fancies!" But the narrator reveals that "to little Ida, what the student told about her flowers seemed very droll; and she thought much about it" (2002:25). Believing the student's tales, Ida lays the flowers down to rest in the doll's bed with the expectation that they will rise in the night and dance. This expectation is fulfilled when she hears music and sees hyacinths and tulips dancing around gracefully by the rays of the moon. All the flower pots are empty and even the sick flowers are dancing. Toys become animated and join in the dancing, even her wax doll, Sophie. Little Ida is enthralled by this imaginary world and forgets her sadness. Eventually all return to bed, even Ida, who dreams about what she has seen.

Ida's imaginative transcendence of reality can be linked to what Marina Warner calls the "mythic imagination" (2002:20) by which natural laws are suspended. Fairy tales rely on this type of imagination so that the fairy tale world then functions according to the "laws of enchantment" (2002:21). She also refers to the process of transcending reality by means of the imagination as "mind-voyaging" (2014:98). This process is reflected in Ida's actions: instead of rationalising her sorrow at losing her mother and being deserted by her father, little Ida chooses to be transported into the student's world of make-believe. She does not give in to self-pity which negates the needs of the ego – as negative capability requires. She becomes one with the inexplicable, enjoys the dancing flowers and does not become anxious even though events defy logic. The imaginative student guides her in this, as opposed to the councillor with his logical reasoning. She is not yet ready for an adult understanding of her circumstances. She uses her imagination to come to terms with life's challenges. After all, as Naomi Wood observes, "dark and painful conflicts are not necessarily and definitely "adult" (2006:1) and children may be required to navigate the darkness as much as adults are.

According to Diana Crone Frank and Frank Jeffrey (2006:1) Andersen understood the concerns of children and created stories "uncorrupted by academic prescriptions" (2006:2), replacing the adult's more formal way of expression with expressions that a child would understand. He addresses his stories to children and writes them in spoken language to make them easily accessible to a young audience. He allows musical and lyrical elements to influence the

development of the storyline. The tales are meant to be read aloud and be entertaining, the recreation of sounds making them lively and direct speech reproducing different voices so as to reach his young audience. The childlike, for Andersen, was not a contrived style: it came directly from his personality. He was severely criticised for his colloquial language, his “sloppy punctuation” and “curious similes” and yet Andersen did not adjust his style. His message to his young audience was that there was hope in hardship. Through the lens of the imagination, events could be recast to provide the means to overcome them. Negative capability constitutes one of these means. The content of his tales is therefore serious and contains layers of meaning aimed at both the child and the adult reader alike, but the language through which the message is expressed makes it especially accessible to the child reader. In “Little Ida’s Flowers” he portrays a child losing her mother and grappling with the resultant grief in such a way that other children (and adults) can experience it vicariously, and find some measure of hope in their grief.

The discussion of these fairy tales by Andersen suggests that one can overcome grief and hardship by means of imaginative transcendence of one’s circumstances. For Andersen, hope is found in the world of the imagination, in accepting the mystery, without having to rationalise it: in short, in allowing for negative capability.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Romantic appreciation of Nature in Andersen's tales**

##### Introduction

There was a time when meadow, grove  
and stream  
The Earth, and every common sight  
To me did seem  
Apparelled in celestial light  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
(From "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of  
Early Childhood" by William Wordsworth (1804))

Not only do these lines reveal Wordsworth's appreciation of nature as a spiritual realm, but they also indicate that this close bond with nature has somehow been compromised. This view was shared by romantics in general. For them, nature was not something to be subdued and harnessed in order to improve the lot of humans, but a place and space that encouraged aesthetic appreciation, and could once again open one up to the experience of the spiritual. This chapter explores how the romantic appreciation of nature, expressed through the concepts of a universal soul and the spiritualisation of nature, appears in selected fairy tales by Andersen. The emergence of a universal soul is traced in the following tales: "The Fir Tree", "The Butterfly", "The Happy Family", "The Snail and the Rose Tree", "The Gardener and the Squire", "Old Shut-eyes" and "The Swineherd". The spiritualisation of nature is explored in "The Bell", "The Angel", "The Rose Elf", "A Picture from the Ramparts", "The Goblin and the Huckster", "The Nightingale" and "The Story of a Mother".

The natural world plays a central role in most of Andersen's fairy tales, so much so that many of his tales feature animals, insects and plants as main characters and protagonists. Even in those tales in which the main characters are human, nature offers a significant frame for the human activity. In his tales nature is described in meticulous detail so that natural phenomena appear true to their forms. Harold Bloom describes Andersen's love of nature thus:

One of [his] weirdest and greatest gifts is that his stories live in an animistic cosmos, in which there are no mere objects whatsoever. Every tree, bush, animal, artifact, item of clothing, lump of clay has an anxious soul, a voice, sexual desires, need for status, and a terror at the prospect of annihilation. (Bloom, 2005:403)

Andersen believed that nature was sentient, and he thus treats every aspect and manifestation of it with great respect. As Bloom suggests, in many of his tales he equips natural phenomena with voices so that each might express themselves, revealing depths of emotion and experience usually dismissed by a self-centred humanity. This acute empathy Andersen felt for nature and natural phenomena is one of his most obviously romantic traits.

Briefly, the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau were instrumental in formulating the nature-related ideologies of Romanticism, especially his *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (Brians, 1998:5) in which he described his meanderings through the countryside, appreciating its beauty and philosophising about the nature of life. For Rousseau, nature offered an alternative to the artificial world constructed by humans, the urban environment created by industrialisation which had generated so many social ills. This is echoed in the general romantic outlook which idealised the earlier, rural roots of human “civilisation” with sentimentality and sought to recapture the simplicity of a life close to nature and uncorrupted by nineteenth century industrialisation. This yearning within the romantic movement fostered the idea that an experience of “the natural world” would encourage human beings to better themselves. The romantics thus attributed a moralizing influence to nature (Brians, 1998:6). And if nature were able to return people to a moral ideal that existed before their corruption by an artificial society, that made nature an agent of spiritual truth.

Romantic ideology would ultimately also embrace the Kantian ideal of transcendence and the sublime. On extended walks in the countryside, Wordsworth and Coleridge discussed poetry and the concept of the sublime, which embraces nature as spiritual revelation and, in this way, recalls German *Naturphilosophie*. This philosophical idea can be defined as follows: “Nature excites and recalls [the belief in God] as by perpetual revelation. The sublime culminates in a feeling of unity with the universe and the Deity” (Roberts, 2014: xci). For Coleridge, the sublime implied

“unity of an indeterminate character” (Modiano, 1985:115) and evoked the qualities of “boundlessness and indefiniteness”. As these concepts escape rational qualification and quantification they hint at the “spiritual essence” of the sublime as an “experience of transcendence” (Modiano, 1985:116). In Wordsworth’s essay *The Sublime and the Beautiful* (1811) he identifies the sense of power brought about by the permanence of natural objects, such as mountains, as one of the chief characteristics of the sublime. This itself suggested a departure from the structured and thus limited temporality of industrialised human society. In the presence of the sublime, the mind surrenders to a power “at once awful and immeasurable” (Modiano, 1985:132) which evokes in the mind “transcendent sympathies” (1985:133).

In order for the beauty of nature to move humankind beyond their earthly concerns into a space of spiritual contemplation, however, each individual would have to open him or herself up to the beauty of nature as well as reaching within themselves to access the power of the imagination. Thus Kant, who believed in the principles of the Enlightenment and was a follower of Newtonian physics is also described as a “Lutheran pietist” (Curran, 2010:86): he believed in the natural laws of science as well as believing that a realm existed which could not be explained by science. He felt that it would be “morally absurd” to argue that the afterlife did not exist and he felt that the belief in a spiritual world beyond material existence could serve as a redeeming force, inspiring humanity to live morally righteous lives. Post-Kantian German Transcendentalists such as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel developed this idea further. Schelling, for example, explored the idea of a World Soul in which everything on earth, both man-made and natural, were products of the same “Creative Will” (Curran, 2010:87). English romantics such as Coleridge, De Quincey, Carlisle and Wordsworth were profoundly influenced by Kantian thought and the German romantic *Weltanschauung*, so much so that Wordsworth also circulated the idea of a World Soul. In addition to this he was convinced of the “caring ministry of nature” (2010:90) in which nature reveals the spiritual realm and is, thus, “spiritualised”. Both of these concepts, the universal soul and the spiritualisation of nature, are explored in greater detail in each of the sections that considers them in relation to Andersen’s tales and the manner in which he engages with nature as a portal to the spiritual realm.

### The Universal Soul in Andersen

Andersen's reverence for nature is clearly expressed in his meticulous and minute attention to descriptions of natural phenomena. In addition to this, he often personifies natural phenomena, ascribing thoughts and feelings to animals and plants. In this way he guides his reader to appreciate, respect and sympathise with nature. He asks his reader to recognise that the universe reverberates with cause and effect and that human activity has an impact on nature. The manner in which Andersen treats nature in his tales reveals that he considers nature to be an aspect of the universal soul, an expression of the creative genius of the Ultimate Creator and, as such, that it should be respected.

If one draws on Schelling and Wordsworth's definitions of the term, the universal soul is the interconnectedness between humans, animals, plants and the Ultimate Creator or deity. Interconnection implies unity, symbiosis and mutual respect. The romantics felt that the Age of Reason and the Industrial Revolution, with their scientific and technological advancement, had caused a rift between humanity and the natural world, encouraging people to harness and exploit nature rather than appreciate it. The emphasis on reason had also urged man to question his religious beliefs which belonged to the realm of the supernatural, and thus fell outside rational thought. In response to this rift, romantic writers sought to re-establish and celebrate the unity that the existence of a universal soul implied.

Although he was a Victorian, Andersen's affinity with nature connects him ideologically with Romanticism, particularly when one takes into account the spirituality that he ascribes to nature. Harold Bloom describes Andersen's beliefs as essentially Christian, but also as being deeply founded in ancient animism which encourages his depiction of a vitalistic universe. Various modes of "religious thought" would have influenced Andersen: he was brought up in a rural setting amid superstitious peasants; he was raised a Lutheran Christian; and as a Dane, Scandinavian folklore, such as that of the Norse mythological tree *Yggdrasil*, would have influenced his mythological framework. According to Scandinavian myth this tree had its roots in hell, the trunk stretched through the earth, and its branches reached across the sky, its leaves creating the clouds and its fruit, the stars. Yggdrasil thus connected everything in creation. Because the first Norseman *Ask* sprang from this tree, it is considered the origin of life and

bridges the earthly and supernatural spheres (Lehner, 2003:21). Andersen's mythical background and his Romanticism both recognise the primacy of interconnection, which is perhaps why the concept of a universal soul emerges so strongly in his writing.

Georg Brandes has also explored Andersen's affinity with nature and finds that Andersen is drawn to the weak and the helpless, which includes children, animals and plants. Andersen is able to immerse himself in the worlds of children, animals and plants using what Brandes terms his "child-like genius" (Brandes, 1923:4): his imagination is unrestrained by adult rationality and "the nerve and sinew of [Andersen's] art is the imagination of the child, which invests everything with a soul, and endows everything with a personality [...] causing one thing to live in another, thus animating all things" (1923:2). By its very nature, this approach recognises the interconnectivity between humans and nature as equal aspects of the universal soul, urging humanity to respect other living things and surrender its claim to superiority. This speaks directly to the romantic ideal of healing the rift between man and nature. As McKusick writes, "much romantic writing emerges from a desperate sense of alienation from the natural world and expresses an anxious endeavour to re-establish a vital, sustainable relationship between mankind and the fragile planet on which [we] dwell" (2000:123). Andersen's animal transformations and his personifications of plants can be interpreted as expressing precisely this desire to facilitate man's reconnection with nature, the desire to create an ideal whole in which human, plant and animal worlds are combined. Given this, Georg Brandes's description of Andersen's particular Romanticism, which foregrounds the unity of all things (in short, the existence of a universal soul) is apt. He writes: "After it has grasped the physiognomy of the inanimate, [Andersen's] fancy identifies itself with the formless all, sails with the moon across the sky, whistles and tells stories like the wind" (1923:4).

#### The Universal Soul in Andersen's Fairy Tales

Michael Ferber defines Romanticism as a movement which "privileged the imagination as a faculty higher and more inclusive than reason which sought solace in or reconciliation with the natural world" (in Bloom, 2004:10). This is one of the clearest themes in Andersen's fairy tales. Andersen's tales portray the violence inflicted upon nature by people in great detail and with an abundance of feeling (Brandes, 1923:4). He allows plants and animals to voice their thoughts and

feelings and, doing so, creates sympathy for their concerns and their suffering. His primary theme is that life is circular, not hierarchical and that all life is interdependent. For Andersen, all life forms have a role to play in the scheme of things, even those deemed by humans to be “lowly” or “insignificant”. They also form part of the great whole created by the Ultimate Creator and, as such, ought to be respected. Andersen thus evokes the Romantic Universal Soul, encouraging his readers to see nature, and individual aspects of nature, as ensouled and every aspect of living nature as interconnected. It is this aspect of his tales that I explore in the following analyses.

### “The Fir Tree”

According to Naomi Wood, one of the implications of Andersen’s personification of inanimate objects and his portrayal of animals and birds as sentient creatures is that it “multiplies exponentially the possibilities for pain in the universe” (Wood, 2006:196). This is certainly the case in “The Fir Tree”. In this tale, the tree, which is portrayed as a sentient entity that has thoughts, feelings and ambition, is perpetually dissatisfied with its circumstances. Andersen’s anthropomorphic portrayal of nature in the tree encourages the reader to identify with its experiences and to sympathise with it.

In the tale the little fir tree stands in the forest and wishes to grow tall and gracious, like the other trees. It cannot wait for the process to be completed and does not allow itself to enjoy the sunshine or the pink clouds overhead because it focuses only on its progress. And yet progress results in one thing: the little fir sees the taller firs and pines felled by woodcutters and transported out of the forest. The sight of the felled trees as they lie, spindly and naked on the ground, distresses the little fir; Andersen uses powerful images that evoke experiences of violation and murder to describe the felled trees. A passing stork tells the little fir that these trees sometimes end up as the masts on ships and, after this, it covets that grand destiny. The reader sees the irony in the little fir’s naivete – it seems not to understand that it needs to be cut down first before it can be made into a mast. Another destiny that may await the fir is that of being a Christmas tree, decorated and standing in the parlours in town. Again, it first needs to be chopped down but, to the little fir tree, this still seems a splendid future. The sparrows who tell the fir about Christmas trees do not, however, know what happens to the trees after Christmas.

The reader is again aware of the irony of the fir's coveting such a "grand destiny" because Christmas trees are discarded afterwards. The fir tree's innocence and naivete echoes that of human children who yearn to grow up without understanding the full implications of reality in the adult world. The fir tree does not heed the words of nature: "Rejoice in me," said the air and the sunlight;" rejoice in your lusty youth out here in the open' (1976:130). Instead, it yearns to be part of the human world, oblivious as it is to the cruelty humans inflict upon nature to create their artificial world.

At last, the tree reaches adulthood and woodcutters come to chop it down. The tree's experiences are described in painfully human terms:

The axe cut deep through pit and marrow, and the tree fell to the earth with a sigh, faint with pain, with no more thoughts of any happiness; it was so sad at parting from its home, from the place where it had grown up. For it knew that never again would it see those dear old friends, the little bushes and flowers that grew around. (Andersen, 1976:130)

The pain of the tree is acute and the reader feels its loss in this moment. The pain is the sacrifice necessary for the fir to achieve the destiny it had dreamed of: it becomes a Christmas tree. The reality, however, is not entirely what the tree expected. It is decorated with manmade ornaments, its appearance altered to fit human prescriptions of what constitutes beauty. As Christmas eve and Christmas night pass, the reader is led through the fir's experiences. At first, the tree focuses on physical sensitivity, smarting from the scorching of the lit candles attached to its branches. Then it begins to feel emotional sensitivity, sensing itself "plundered" by the children who tear cakes from its branches. And, finally, the tree achieves a philosophical maturity of sorts as it reflects on its enjoyment of Humpty-Dumpty, a story told to the children. The fir ponders the events of the last days and spends the night in "silent thought". It is only just starting to acclimatise to its new environment, however, when Christmas is over and it is stored in the attic. The tree finds itself lonely and terrified and thinks to itself, "If only it weren't so dark and so terribly lonely in here! [...] It was so jolly out in the wood, when the snow was lying and the hare went bounding past" (1976:132). Significantly, in its despair, it now yearns for the home-comforts of nature. The artificial human world is not home and it offers the fir tree no comfort.

The only company the tree has is a few mice whom it tells about the beauty of the forest and how happy it was there. The tree also tells them the story of Humpty-Dumpty but they fail to find it amusing and desert him; unlike the tree, the mice and rats have little use for the artifice of the human world.

The fir tree is disappointed with humanity, having finally experienced pain at its hands. And yet, it refuses to give up on the human world; it believes that, come Spring, it will be taken into the yard and keep growing. The tree does not understand that, in chopping its roots away, man has interfered in nature and removed the fir from the natural cycle. The fir tree will never experience the regenerating powers of spring. And, having lost its aesthetic value to human beings, the little tree is chopped into pieces for log fires. The narrator tells the reader that, as it burns, “the tree groaned so loudly that every groan was like a little shot going off” (1976:134). This reference to a “[gun] shot” implies violence and indicates the brutal physical pain that the tree suffers. Andersen foregrounds the sentience of the tree in these last moments of its life, each image and experience heavily laden with pathos. As the fir burns, flashes of precious memories pass through its consciousness and the reader is told that, “the tree thought of a summer’s day in the wood, or of a winter’s night out there when the stars were shining; it thought of Christmas Eve and of Humpty-Dumpty, the only fairy tale it had heard and was able to tell” (1976:134). Andersen’s sympathetic depiction of the fir tree’s suffering brings home the impact that mankind’s sometimes thoughtless actions have on the natural world and the reader responds to the fir tree precisely because it is so ‘human’, with its hopes and dreams and love of fairy tales. It is the connection between the tree and human beings, the similarities of the experiences that forces the reader to begin to understand the interconnection of all living things.

#### “The Butterfly”

Briggs asserts that “[Andersen’s] writing reflects a rare, almost Keatsian ability to identify with and re-create from within the thoughts and speech of individuals, but also of animals and even inanimate objects” (2006:145); “The Butterfly” is a perfect example of this. In this case, the “inanimate objects” are insects and flowers. As in “The Fir Tree”, Andersen’s ability to depict the thoughts and feelings of creatures in the natural world encourages the reader to identify with

the experiences of the creatures, evoking sympathy for them and foregrounding the interconnection of all living things.

In “The Butterfly”, Andersen personifies the flowers, comparing them to little debutantes that display “proper” behaviour as they “sat so quietly and modestly on [their] stalk[s]”. The daisy even reveals a certain feminine vanity, preferring to be called “Miss” instead of “Mrs” because the latter might make her seem old. The butterfly, too, is personified: it yearns for love and flits among the flowers to find its ideal mate. The fact that it wants to wed a flower is not so farfetched when one takes into account the natural role that butterflies play in pollinating flowers. Andersen offers a detailed description of each of the flowers, matching them with voices that best express their characters; the narrator tells the reader that the butterfly:

flew away to the anemones, but found them a trifle bitter in their outlook; the violets rather too romantic; the tulips too showy; the daffodils too suburban; the lime blossoms too small – and, besides, they had such a lot of relations. The apple blossoms looked like roses, but they were here today and gone tomorrow at the least breath of wind. (1976:362)

In this description, Andersen’s imaginative description of flowers reveals an intimate study of different varieties, how they look and smell as well as the associations that humans attach to them: anemones have bitter sap, lime blossoms bloom in profusion (had such a lot of relations) and apple blossoms resemble miniature roses and are so fragile that a gust of wind can blow them away. The description foregrounds the fact that nature is multi-faceted and worthy of study, and at least as complex as self-centred humans believe themselves to be.

Andersen taps into the folklore surrounding flowers, highlighting any amorous associations. For example, according to Roman mythology the daisy originates with the nymph Belides, one of the Dryads presiding over the forest, meadows and pastures. When the overlord of the orchard in which she lived fell in love with her, she transformed herself into a flower to be coy. According to Greek legend the crocus flower was named after a handsome young man from the plains who fell in love with a shepherdess of the hills. Due to his unrequited love, he pined away and died and the gods turned him into a flower. In later centuries the crocus was then used to adorn

marriage beds because it was thought to induce powerful love (Lehner, 2003:56). When Zeus loved the nymph Io, he changed her into a heifer to hide her from the jealous Hera and created the delicate sweet-smelling violet for her to feed on (Lehner, 2003:82). In each of these cases, divine intervention transforms humans or human-like spirits into flowers, and nature thus becomes ensouled. When Andersen alludes to flowers in mythology that have souls, he draws the concept of the universal soul to the fore of his vision of nature.

But even flowers are not immune to humanity's violence: lovers tear the petals off a daisy in order to determine whether or not someone loves them. Andersen thus depicts a humanity that cares only about its own fate, a humanity that does not see other living things as having fates, dreams and desires of their own. In contrast to the human lover's violence, the butterfly kisses the daisy's petals to determine whether the daisy herself has any feelings for him. The chief attraction of the flowers lies in their scent and the butterfly rejects the dahlias and the hollyhocks on the grounds that they lack an attractive scent. The butterfly's passionate pursuit of the flowers is bittersweet as it brings home the fact that time is of the essence in the plant and insect world. The lifespan of both is very short, especially as winter approaches. The butterfly finds temporary respite from his searching and the gathering cold in a parlour in which a fire is burning, the fire offering a temporary illusion of summer. This environment is artificial and although the butterfly is taken in by the illusion of "sunshine [and] freedom" (1976:363), this is soon shattered by humanity's cruelty and lack of respect for nature: the butterfly is taken as a "curio" and is promptly pinned on a cushion. Robbed of its freedom, the butterfly consoles itself with the thought that being pinned down is a little like being married with its accompanying constraints, but this is cold comfort. It rejects the sympathy expressed by the pot-plants who are fellow captives in the human world. They too have been taken from the wild and then domesticated and the butterfly dismisses them because they are no longer part of the wild natural realm. The butterfly thinks to itself: "Still, pot-plants aren't always to be trusted [...] They have too much to do with human beings" (1976:363). This reveals the rift that exists between the human and the natural world in the sense that insects, animals and plants lose their wild authenticity when they are domesticated. And, as natural phenomena are disconnected from their origins, the interconnection of the universal soul is also chipped away. Andersen thus draws attention to the

manner in which cruelty inflicted on the natural world causes a break in the unity of the universal soul.

### “The Happy Family”

In the tale “The Happy Family” two old snails are convinced that they are the centre of the universe. They believe themselves to be “the cream of creation” because they have “houses from birth” to keep out the rain. People, however, view them as food: the narrator tells us that these snails are “The big white snails that fine folk in the old days used to have stewed into a fricassee, muttering “Yum, yum, how delicious!” (1976:223). Even the burdocks in the forest in which the snails live were originally been planted as snail food to ensure that the snails could eventually be served for dinner at the manor house. Ironically the snails believe the process of being boiled is “delightful”, but the reader knows that this is a painful process that leads to death. For the people at the manor, the snails’ purpose is to be of service to them, a purpose even the snails accept as their final destiny.

Andersen’s anthropomorphic portrayal of the snails encourages the reader to identify with them. Like humans, they are conceited, believing themselves to be “the finest folk imaginable” (1976:224) and when they adopt a little garden snail, the two are described as “Mother Snail” and “Father Snail”, invoking the familial bonds of humankind. The anthropomorphism is expressed particularly through the vanities of the snails: the little snail may not choose a bride who does not possess her own house. The ants and the gnats help the snail find a worthy bride and, after the wedding, the youngsters are advised to live “honest upright lives and multiply, [because then] they and their children would one day go to the manor-house and be boiled black and laid on a silver dish” (1976:225). It is clear that the older snails accept that their destiny is to be served as human food, and advise the young to do the same. However, as time passes the old snails go to sleep and the young ones raise their family in the burdock forest without any human intervention. The snails become convinced that “everybody in the world had died out; and as no one contradicted them, it must have been true...and they were happy” (1976:226). One might think that the snails would be upset or “directionless” when their ‘destiny’ (to be human food) comes to naught but, as the narrator tells the reader, left to their own devices, the snails are happy. Andersen suggests that when humans stop interfering, the balance between man and

nature is corrected and nature flourishes. As nature is allowed to flourish, so the healthy interconnection of the universal soul is reasserted; man, nature and spirit exist independently of each other, and in harmony with each other.

#### “The Snail and the Rose Tree”

As in “The Happy Family”, in order to honour the unity that the universal soul implies, it is important that nature’s right to autonomy and an existence independent of people be respected. This is not the case wherever there is an imbalance and nature is exploited by humanity. In this tale the rose bush represents a nature that has been compromised as soon as it is harnessed by mankind and bred to be “useful” to humanity. In contrast, the snail represents nature as a liberated, independent entity, existing for its own sake and insisting on its right to live as an autonomous part of an interconnected creation.

Briefly, in this tale there is a garden in which a beautiful rose bush grows. Under the bush there lives a snail which is described as “self-contained, for he contained himself” (1976:326). Read in the context of the story, this detail is significant. The snail does not need to serve the utilitarian purposes of mankind to feel it has worth. While the rose is “putting out buds and blossoming roses” throughout the year in order to earn her keep, the snail suns itself. And when it is asked what contribution it intends to make to the world, the snail replies that it has no plans to produce nuts like the hazel trees or milk like the cows (1976:326). It is no instrument at man’s beck and call. When winter comes and the rose bush starts losing its leaves, the snail turns the interrogation around and asks the rose whether there is any point to what she does:

You’ve given the world all you had in you. How much that is worth is a matter I haven’t had time to consider. But it’s quite clear that you haven’t done a thing for your inner development, or you’d have had very different results to show.  
(1976:327)

The snail points out that because the rose has served people throughout the summer, she has spent no time contemplating the meaning of her own existence. She does not know why she flowers and she becomes agitated. The main function of domesticated species like fruit trees and cows, is to provide food for human beings. Humanity allows them no independence outside its

needs. Like them, the rose bush's only purpose is to be of service to humankind: one rose is put into the housewife's hymn-book; one is held close to a young girl's breast and one is kissed by the lips of a child. When the rose remembers these moments, she seems content with her role:

“I flowered in sheer joy, because I couldn't help it. The sun was so warm, the air so refreshing. I drank in the pure dew and the pouring rain; I breathed, I was alive. There came strength to me from the earth below, strength too from above; I felt happiness that was always new, always deep, and so I had to be always blossoming. That was my life; it was all I could do”. (1976:327)

In contrast to the domesticated rose, the snail is described as “one of those thoughtful, highly gifted creatures” (1976:327) which is independent of humanity and may thus explore its own experiences, coming to an understanding of itself and its spirit – of the universal soul – precisely because it is autonomous. The snail is self-aware, and wise, enough to dismiss the human world:

“What have I given – what shall I give? I spit at the world. What's the good of it? It means nothing to me. Go on, grow your roses – that's all you're good for. Let the hazels bear nuts, let the cows and the sheep give milk; they've each got their public, and I've got mine, inside me. I withdraw into myself, and there I stay.” (1976:328)

The snail is not willing to become a commodity, used for the benefit of humankind (the “public”). It exists for itself. Andersen's suggestion here is that nature does not have to be harnessed and utilised by humankind for it to have “purpose”. Natural creatures are autonomous and should be able to choose to close themselves off from man's scientific scrutiny or consumerist desires. Nature ought to be respected as equally important to the universal soul as mankind is.

#### “The Gardener and the Squire”

The setting of this tale, the orchard and vegetable garden of an old manor house, recalls Georg Brandes's comment that Andersen prefers the peace and harmony of the vegetable world in which there is “little disturbing action [and] growth takes place in calm increments and death is a mere wilting and returning to the soil” (1923:5). The last few tales have focused on the natural

world, but in this tale, Andersen explores people's attitude towards nature and the universal soul: here some of his human characters pointedly discount nature's right to autonomy and others display sympathy for nature.

At first Larson, the gardener, believes that nature is purely meant for the benefit of mankind. He is not yet convinced that nature has the right to exist for its own sake. He appreciates the beauty of nature, but even harnesses its beauty by picking flowers and presenting them to his landlord. Further developments in the tale makes him adjust his stance and he becomes more sympathetic to nature.

His garden is neat and ordered, a landscape under man's control and utilised for man's purposes. There is a large lawn and a greenhouse with rare flowers, as well as an orchard and a kitchen-garden, but the peacefulness is deceptive because it first required the destruction of natural, free wilderness. There are, however, two massive old trees further back in another part of the grounds; they are the last remnants from a time when wild nature ruled and,

from time out of mind, a swarm of screaming rooks and crows had built [their nests there]; it was an absolute colony of birds, and the birds were the masters, the landed proprietors, the oldest family on the estate, the real lords of the manor. (1976:461)

The wilds were ruled by birds and huge trees dominated the landscape, until people arrived. The tragedy of nature, for Andersen, lies in its a-temporal passivity: because things have been this way for "time out of mind", nature does not defend itself from the encroaching men. The birds and trees watch the men come into their spaces and the narrator tells the reader that "None of these people below meant anything to them, but they put up with these crawling creatures in spite of their sometimes banging away with their guns" (1976:461). Nature is more willing to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all life, "putting up with" man despite his violence and cruelty. Mankind, however, seldom offers nature the same in return.

Larson urges the squire to give him permission to cut down the great old trees and get rid of the birds. His insistence reflects humanity's need for expansion and its constant encroaching on nature's space. The squire, who expresses a more tolerant view of nature, refuses permission and

remarks that the trees are remnants of the olden days, that they belong to the birds and so should be kept. Of the two men, the squire may be more sympathetic to nature's rights than Larson, but he is not entirely innocent. In many ways, he and his wife are blind to the beauty of wild nature, believing that the quality of man-cultivated flowers and fruit must surpass those of the wilds.

When Larson presents his employers with the gift of a brilliant blue flower they do not recognise, they assume it must be an exotic Indian water lily and offer it as a gift to the princess. To their dismay, however, it turns out to be the blossom of an artichoke from the kitchen-garden and they immediately send an apology to the princess for the humbleness of the flower. Andersen's point, here, is that the human world imposes class distinctions even on natural phenomena, so that one plant is considered humble and another exotic or grand but this value system is alien to the natural world. In nature, everything is beautiful and equally important because the universal soul imposes just such equality.

The princess, who is described as "kind and sensible", is unmoved by society's false standards and recognises the beauty of natural things. She praises the gardener for "[showing] us beauty where we never dreamed of looking" (1976:465). She asks for an artichoke blossom to be sent up to her room while they are in flower. This gesture calls into question the value judgements of which the squire and his wife are guilty. The princess is a botanist and values what others discount as a lowly vegetable blossom from the kitchen-garden and her ability to see beauty everywhere suggests a sensitivity to the universal soul: she values and respects nature for its own sake, disregarding the popular attitude of humanity which is that nature is meant to serve.

The conclusion of the story suggests an attempt at balancing the rift between man and nature, an attempt to heal the division in the universal soul. When a gale topples the ancient trees in which the birds nest, the gardener tries to make amends by using "this fine sunny space" to plant "things that no other gardener had thought of putting in at all [...] he now planted in their proper soil and in the shade and sunshine required by each sort. He tended in love, and they grew into splendour" (1976:465). Gone are the days when nature was utilised only to produce goods to satisfy consumer-society and the gardener's ego. Now he plants common plants that are typically disregarded by society, such as the "despised burdock that when freshly picked is so beautiful

that it can look fine in a bunch of flowers” (1976:466). He also gives nature its proper due, feeding the birds in winter: “according to ancient custom a sheaf of oats was hung from this pole, so that the birds of the air might have something to eat at happy Christmas time” (1976:466). At the end of the tale, Andersen presents the reader with a world in which man and nature exist in harmony as a tribute to the universal soul.

### “Old Shut-eyes”

As in the previous tale, in “Old Shut-eyes” Andersen also focuses on the human experience and treatment of nature. In this tale, when children dream they are transported to a fantastic natural realm in which they become minute and enter tunnels with mice or climb into paintings and sail away on the ocean. These experiences enable the human children to become acquainted with the animal world because they can understand the language spoken by the animals and live in their world for a time. This encouraged the development of a sympathy for nature, drawing human beings closer to the unity with nature associated with the universal soul.

At bedtime, Old Shut-eyes appears and sprays milk into the children’s eyes so that they become sleepy and his stories influence their dreams. He touches objects in little Hjalmar’s room with his wooden wand and, doing so, animates the beautiful natural scenery in a landscape portrait:

There was a big picture in a gilt frame hanging over the chest of drawers; it was a landscape in which one saw tall, old trees, flowers growing in the grass and a great piece of water, with a river flowing from it round behind a wood, past many castles and away to the open sea.

Old Shut-eyes touched the picture with his wand, and the birds in it began to sing, the branches of the trees moved, and the clouds scudded along; you could see their shadows passing over the landscape. (1949:351)

Andersen’s romantic appreciation of nature is apparent in this wondrous description and it is significant that a one-dimensional replica of nature (a painting) becomes three-dimensional when animated: man might reduce nature to a manageable form that can be contained in a domestic environment, but romantic magic restores nature to its original awe-inspiring form.

Man becomes less and nature more dominant as Old Shut-eyes restores nature to its rightful place. Old Shut-eyes literally reduces man's stature when he makes Hialmar physically smaller, so that he can fit into a mouse hole and experience the world from an animal's perspective. Because of this, Old Shut-eyes' actions thus work towards correcting the imbalance that exists between man and nature, reforging the connections between the two and the universal soul. Significantly, little Hialmar does not question these events, but participates wholeheartedly. He finds the conversation with the mouse entertaining and his ability to experience life from the mouse's perspective recalls Bettelheim's assertion that children live in an animistic universe in which all things are sentient and animated (2010:46). The fact that animals and humans are on an equal footing in the world Old Shut-eyes creates speaks, once again, to Andersen's yearning for a world in which the rift between man, nature and the universal soul is healed.

Old Shut-eyes tends to grant children his beautiful dreams and restful sleep; adults are denied these gifts. The reason for this is that children, who are still innocent and malleable, may learn from his dreams. This characteristic comes to the fore when Old Shut-eyes tells Hialmar about his brother, Death. Death tells only two tales: one so beautiful that no one can imagine it and one so horrible that no one can describe it. When Little Hialmar is shown a picture of Death his response is: "But Death is beautiful Old Shut-eyes [...] I am not a bit afraid of him!" Upon which Old Shut-eyes replies: "Nor need you be [...] if only you take care to have a good character in your book" (1949:359). Andersen suggests here that one may receive a heavenly reward if one perseveres in being morally righteous, just as children who are innocent and imaginative are blessed with beautiful dreams at night. For Andersen, this state enables one to draw close to the natural world and sympathise with the experiences and trials of other creatures; this is the state in which the rift between man and the universal soul is healed. However, if one has a bad conscience, one is denied restful sleep and pleasant dreams on earth and, eventually, eternal peace in the afterlife. For Andersen, a bad conscience – signifying moral corruption – prevents one from entering the world of animals and plants in an imaginative manner, and as one exiles oneself from the natural world, so one exiles oneself from the universal soul. This aspect of the story introduces the romantic spiritualisation of nature because the moral treatment of nature secures spiritual reward.

### “The Swineherd”

In this tale, a poor prince is determined to marry the daughter of an emperor and tries to woo her by giving her his two most precious possessions. The first is a rose that grows on his father’s grave; its scent is magical and makes a person forget all his or her cares and sorrows. The second is a nightingale in whose throat dwells “every lovely melody in the world” (1949:360). These are gifts from nature and no monetary value is attached to them.

Early in the tale, however, the princess’s character is revealed in her chief occupation: she “play[s] at visiting” with her ladies-in-waiting, and has “nothing else to do (1949:360). It is significant that she only “plays at” visiting and is not interested in the real thing. She is removed from what is “genuine” and this includes nature. An artificiality pervades her life because she continually deems the man-made world superior to nature. When she is presented with the rose she is disappointed: “Fie, papa!” she said; “it is not made, it is a real one!” The princess does not respect nature, an attitude that, once again, reveals Andersen’s preoccupation with the rift between man and the universal soul. In contrast, her father, the emperor, is much moved by natural beauty. He admires the rose, and the songs of the nightingale move him to tears. Unlike his daughter, he is closer to experiencing unity with the universal soul.

At first the prince is taken in by the princess’s superficial charms and demeans himself, becoming a swineherd in the emperor’s service so as to be close to her. Because he knows that the way to her heart is through man-made treasures, he makes her pot from which wafts the scents of all the meals cooked in every household in town and a rattle that sounds all the beautiful waltzes and melodies played since the creation of the world. His ploy is successful and the princess is willing to reward him with kisses in return for the treasures. She is unaware of her alienation from nature and the universal soul. When the swineherd later reveals that he is a prince, she is pleasantly surprised. Unfortunately, however, at that stage the prince has lost interest in her. He tells her:

“I am come to despise thee,” he said. “Thou wouldst not have an honourable prince, thou couldst not prize the rose or the nightingale, but thou wouldst kiss the swineherd, for a trumpery musical box! As thou hast made thy bed, so must thou lie upon it!” (1949:364)

The prince rejects her because of her preference for the artificial and her disconnection from the universal soul. Unfortunately, he recognises that when she rejects his natural gifts, she rejects his sincere feelings. The rose and the nightingale are natural and, like the prince, guileless. They are also most dear to him, particularly because the rose grew on his father's grave and, as such, is an extension of the sincerest and most loving bond he knew (that between father and son). The prince's authenticity aligns him with the universal soul, but the princess prefers artefact over natural gifts.

Andersen implies that if one rejects that which is natural and genuine, and distances oneself from the universal soul, one might well lose out on joy. When the princess denigrates that which is honest, sincere and natural, she is herself degraded and loses the little standing she has in her world: when she is caught kissing a swineherd, she feels humiliated. The rain and mud splash onto her, reducing her to just another living creature, masking her identity and social standing with "filth". Because the princess cannot see the beauty in nature, she is irreparably separated from the universal soul.

Even a cursory reading of these last few tales thus reveals what, I argue, is Andersen's exploration of the universal soul. In each of the tales humanity is asked to recognise that nature is autonomous, and equal in beauty and importance to anything man might make. When characters refuse to acknowledge this, their actions are equated with moral corruption and they remain disconnected from the universal soul. In the next few tales, I discuss Andersen's exploration of the spiritualisation of nature. Where the notion of a universal soul explores the interconnectedness of humans, nature and God, the spiritualisation of nature focuses on how the natural world might act as a portal to the divine. This concept enabled the romantics to discuss and hypothesise the moral and spiritual effect nature might have on mankind, if man chose to enter into a closer relationship with it.

### The spiritualisation of nature in Andersen

What wonder then that health and virtue, gifts  
That can alone make sweet the bitter draught  
That life holds out to all, should most abound  
And least be threatened in the fields and groves?  
William Cowper (Task I, 750-753)

The redeeming effect of the natural world on man's sensibility is apparent in these lines by Cowper. I have already mentioned that the industrial age introduced hitherto unknown pressures and social ills into European society, instilling in the romantics a need for simplicity and a return to reflections upon nature. This led to the rise of the Cult of Nature and Childhood, in which both nature and children were thought to represent that which was simple and innocent, that which was unspoiled by industrial artifice. Nature was thus attributed a moralizing, redeeming influence and the logical progression of this was a recognition of the divine in nature. This meant that even natural objects like stones were considered divine objects. In this, the romantic spiritualisation of nature is very similar to Pantheism: both depict nature as a living, conscious soul that draws the poet closer to the divine/God (Danmarkslæringsportal: (<http://www.emu.dk/modul/romantic-spirit>)). In nature, romantic writers thus found not only solace from the pressures of society, but also artistic inspiration and spiritual redemption. For them, nature could encourage people to be 'better' because it revealed the divine to them: Nature made the spiritual more accessible.

Of course, for centuries the natural world had provided a rich setting for humanity's exploration of their spiritual beliefs and the ritualistic activities that accompanied it. As Ernst and Johanna Lehner (2003:12) write: "Plants and trees became so interwoven with man's daily life that they developed into symbols for his expressions and sentiments, his passions and affections, his beliefs and religions, his fears and superstitions." According to them, the influence of the natural world on humanity's spiritual development can be traced in Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Nordic mythology, as well as in Biblical and Oriental legends. In all of these, the aesthetic, medicinal and nutritious properties of plants were elevated to symbols and associated with various gods and deities. Primitive man witnessed the passing of seasons and, because plants seemed to make an

effortless transition from life to death and back to life again, it appeared that plants could transcend earthly limitations. It was thus logical that supernatural properties and powers would be attributed to plants.

Centuries later the romantics showed a renewed appreciation for the spiritual nuances of the natural world. Even as the industrial revolution was destroying large tracts of woods and field and creating an artificial environment, a renewed love of the wilderness arose and 19<sup>th</sup> century nature writing acquired a religious quality that had been absent in previous periods. In urban environments people realized more forcefully the contrast between their lives and those lived by the inhabitants of the wilds. The romantics felt that humanity had lost their unselfconscious connection to nature and they proposed an aesthetic appreciation of nature might reassert nature's ability to reconnect man with his "authentic" self.

Andersen's spiritualisation of nature takes multiple shapes in his fairy tales. In the first place, it involves nature acting as a moralising influence. In Andersen's view, nature encourages man to become a better version of himself when it criticises immoral behaviour. In the second place, he depicts aspects of the divine reflected in nature – plants seem to possess the divine gift of immortality, effortlessly crossing the boundary between heaven and earth. This link between nature and divinity is reflected in his tales by plants which symbolise spiritual things like souls. For Andersen, plants may also be redeemed in heaven, just as humans are because God uses nature as a tool with which to execute His will on earth. And sometimes, as in the following tale, nature gently calls mankind closer to it in order for humanity to experience its redeeming power. All of these are clear examples of Andersen's spiritualisation of nature.

### "The Bell"

This tale centres on the mystery of a tolling bell. When the tolling is heard in town, the sound is faint, but on the outskirts and at the edge of the forest the sound becomes clearer. There is much conjecture among the townsfolk as to the origin of the sound, and people camp out and have picnics while they search for the bell. (Some think it might be a very big owl in a hollow tree, beating its head against a trunk.) The mystery inspires poetry and even the Emperor takes an interest and offers a reward to whoever finds the origin of the bell. There are continuous attempts

to find rational solutions to the mystery and, in the absence of an explanation, a theoretical treatise is written on the subject. The implication of this is that the townspeople are uncomfortable with the mystery; they employ reason to solve it, unaware that the answer is spiritual. When one reads this tale from the perspective of Andersen's Romanticism, the tolling bell can be interpreted as nature's voice calling from the woods: it entreats man to draw closer in order to re-establish a relationship with nature. Brandes too, asserts that the tolling of the bell is symbolic of the "invisible alluring, and wondrous voices of nature" and even the "divine, universal soul of nature" (1923:8).

In the tale, the bell sounds loudly from the woods after a Christian confirmation ceremony and some of the recently confirmed young people set out to find it. They have just affirmed their relationship with the divine in church, and are now asked to establish a romantic unity with nature. Human society, however, interferes with this search – asserting the supremacy of the material over the spiritual/natural: one girl does not go because she has to try on her first ball-gown and a boy has to return the tail-coat and boots he borrowed his confirmation. The others who venture into the forest are, one by one, distracted and turn away from their quest. Andersen seems to suggest that most people are distracted by the human world and that few, then, reach spiritual maturity and unity with the universal soul (1949:346).

The king's son and a poorly-dressed little boy are the only two who persevere. It is clear that when it comes to connection with the universal soul, social class is not important. The little boy wears "wooden shoes" (1949:347) and, because wood is a natural element, he therefore seems to be naturally aligned with nature. Although the prince and the boy take separate routes, both are both astounded by the beauty of nature and united in their appreciation of it:

Round about were beautiful green meadows, where stags and hinds gambolled under the spreading oaks and beeches. Mosses and creepers grew in the fissures where the bark of the trees was broken away. There were also great glades with quiet lakes, where white swans swam about flapping their wings. (1949:347)

They ran towards each other, and clasped each other's hands in that great temple of Nature and Poetry, and above them sounded the invisible holy bell; happy spirits floated round it to the strains of a joyous Hallelujah. (1949:348)

This awe-inspiring sight is evocative of the romantic sublime, nature's beauty revealing the perfection of the divine. In the conclusion, the narrator tells the reader that "All Nature was like a vast holy temple, where trees and floating clouds were as pillars, flowers and grass the woven tapestry, and the heaven itself a great dome" (1949:348). In this setting, nature is holy and its spirituality reconciles man both with nature and the universal soul.

#### "A Picture from the Ramparts"

This tale foregrounds the redeeming influence of nature on mankind, focusing on how nature touches those people who have been excluded by society, in this case, a convict who has broken its moral code. As the narrator reveals:

Down below us we see some dark and gloomy buildings [...] that is where the worst convicts are confined. A ray from the setting sun falls into the bare room [...] The sun shines on good and bad alike. (1949:61)

Nature does not discriminate against people in the way that human society does; instead, in Andersen's tale, nature forgives the prisoner who has been locked away and pours the sun's rays down on him. The image of the sun's rays illuminating the cell is particularly evocative of divine intervention and forgiveness. Nature touches the prisoner a second time with its redeeming power in the scene in which a little bird flutters close to the prisoner's window grating. Andersen's romantic appreciation of nature is revealed in his detailed observation, his depiction of its movements revealing a careful study of birds; we are told that "It twitters softly for a little while, and remains perched, flutters its wings, picks a feather from its breast, and puffs its plumage up" (1949:61). And the convict, who has been branded by society as "the bad man in chains", looks at the bird and the sight uplifts him and appeals to his better nature. The narrator observes that

a milder expression steals over his hideous face. A thought which is not quite clear to himself steals into his heart; it is related to the sunshine coming through the grating, related to the scent of the violets, which in spring grow so thickly outside the window. (1949:61)

This thought is not logical, nor does the prisoner understand the impulse. Harking back to the romantic sublime, this process seems to be nature working in conjunction with the prisoner's imagination to reveal spiritual truths. As Kant proposes, these revelations of the divine in nature might help man transcend reality, accessing a spirituality in which hardship is transformed. For the romantics, the sublime was not an overt, material "thing", neither could it be grasped by reason, it was the divine mystery revealed by nature. This was nature "spiritualised".

The prisoner is being transformed by the sublime, spiritual power of nature. However, before nature can complete its redemption of him, society intrudes: "now is heard the huntsman's horn clear and lively [...] the bird flies away from the grating, the sunbeam disappears and all is dark again in the narrow cell, dark in the heart of the bad man" (1949:61). This moment represents mankind's persecution of man and nature – it seems to have derailed the salvation offered to the prisoner. And yet, while the huntsman's horn disrupts nature's spiritualising process, it does not entirely obliterate it because "the sun has shone into [the darkness of the prison cell], and the bird has sung its song": nature's redeeming influence on the prisoner lingers on a subconscious level, helping him rise above his circumstances and begin to become a better person.

#### "The Rose Elf"

As I pointed out previously, the romantics reacted to the social ills and pressures of the industrial age by looking to nature for simplicity, moral guidance and redemption. Nature represented something pure and unspoilt by artificiality and, because of this, nature was attributed a moralising, redeeming influence on mankind. In this tale, nature steps into the human world in the form of flower spirits or elves and exacts revenge on a man who murders someone. Doing so, nature warns man away from selfishness and the superficial, material concerns that encourage immoral behaviour and directs him towards morality and spirituality.

In the tale an elf inhabits the rose exchanged between a young man and his lady-love. The rose is a parting gift because the girl's brother, who disapproves of the relationship, has sent the young man on an errand from which he will not return alive. Apart from the elf who witnesses the murder of the young man at the hands of the brother, this is a silent crime that goes undetected and unpunished by the world. However, nature has witnessed the crime and is morally outraged: "the little elf sat trembling with fear and anger at the wicked deed" (1949:34).

In the form of the flower spirit, nature steps in to right the moral wrong and expose the murderer. The elf is carried back on a linden leaf under the hat of the murderer, crawls into the sleeping girl's ear and tells her of the evil deed. She quietly steals out to the woods that night and finds her lover's grave under the linden tree where her brother buried him. Unwilling to part with her lover's mortal remains she takes his severed head home with her and buries it in a flower pot under a sprig of jasmine. When her tears fall on the jasmine, it flowers profusely – the combination of his mortal remains and her tears produce the beautiful flowers of the jasmine. Because of this it is almost as though the young man, the girl and nature are united in an outpouring of love and grief.

The tale continues and, as the girl pines for her dead love, her life ebbs away. The rose elf comforts her on this journey to the after-life, creeping into her ear and reminding her of her beautiful memories in the arbour, the sweet scent of roses and the love of the elves. This brings to the fore the spiritualisation of nature, which takes place on various levels in this tale. First the elf, who is a flower spirit, represents an anthropomorphised, spiritualised nature. Secondly, the elf as nature is instrumental in helping the girl make the transition between the earthly and the spiritual dimension. And, lastly, the elves rectify the moral imbalance created by the murder, by exacting revenge on the brother for his evil deed:

But in the night, the first night after his sister's death, when the brother was asleep in his bed, close to the fragrant jasmine tree, every blossom opened its petals, and out of every flower stepped invisibly, but armed each with a tiny poisoned spear, the little spirits from the flower. First they took their places by his ear, and told him evil dreams; then they flew over his mouth and pierced his tongue with their poisoned darts. (1949:36)

In this tale the elves thus represent nature's redeeming influence on mankind, exhibiting a strict moral code and holding humans to it. Their task is thus both to support and comfort those who are gentle and to punish those who are cruel. This judgement allies them with the morality associated with religion and imbues nature with a moral authority that humanity should respect.

#### "The Angel"

As previously mentioned, one of the ways that the spiritualisation of nature is foregrounded in Andersen's tales is by having plants or flowers make an effortless transition between an earthly, or material, and a heavenly, or spiritual, realm. In this specific tale, flowers are taken into heaven with the soul of a child, transcending to a higher level of existence where they bloom more beautifully than they did on earth. As the narrator reveals,

Whenever a good child dies, an angel of God comes down to earth, takes the dead child in its arms, spreads out its great white wings, and flies away over all the places the child has loved. It gathers, too, a whole armful of flowers to be carried up to heaven, where they may bloom still more beautifully than on earth. The good God presses all flowers to his heart; but to the flower he loves best he gives a kiss, and then the flower gets a voice and can join in the glorious songs of praise. (1976:156)

The story itself is recounted by an angel as it carries a dead child up to heaven. It passes over gardens filled with beautiful flowers and asks the child which flowers should accompany him to heaven; the child chooses a slender rose tree whose stem was broken by a "wanton hand" (1976:156), whose "branches with all their half-opened buds, hung drooping and withered":

"Poor little tree!" said the child. "Take that, then it can bloom when we come up to God." So the angel took the rose tree and gave the child a kiss, and the little one opened his eyes. They picked some of the fine showy flowers, but they also took with them the despised marigold and the wild pansy. (1976:156)

It is significant that "good" children who have shown sympathy for natural things, are rewarded in heaven. Andersen therefore equates compassion for nature with Christian morality.

The child and the angel hover about a neglected part of the city where there were “plates lying in fragments, bits of plaster, old hats and rags – everything that was no longer fit to be seen” (1976:157). The angel points towards a flower-pot and lump of earth “held together by the roots of a large wildflower that was dead and done with” and had therefore been thrown out into the street. “We must take that with us,” said the angel. “I will tell you why, as we go along” (1976:157). The angel tells the boy that the wildflower belonged to a sick boy who lived in a dark cellar on a rundown street. The boy had to keep to his bed and was only able to move up and down the room on crutches once or twice a day. In summer, the sun would shine into the basement for half an hour a day and the boy would warm his hands in the rays falling through his window and imagine himself to be in the great beech forest outside his window. One day, he receives a wildflower with its root attached and plants it in a pot. The flower encourages his imagination to take flight:

It was a lovely garden to the boy and his greatest treasure on earth. He watered it and tended it [...] and the flower itself spread into his dreams; for him it blossomed, scattered its perfume, and gladdened the eye; to the flower he turned in death, when God called him. (1976:157)

Nature comforts the boy and offers him an alternative to the broken and barren world in which he lives, even easing his passage into the afterlife. In this tale, Andersen therefore aligns nature with a spiritual force that heals and redeems humanity.

It has been a year since the boy’s death and the wildflower has died and been thrown out. The angel rescues it because it has “given more happiness than the grandest bloom in the Queen’s garden” (1976:157). When the boy died, he became an angel and now that the flower has died, it too transcends to heaven to become a force for spiritual good. It is significant that Andersen proposes that the soul of a human boy and that of a flower have the same spiritual worth: like the romantics, he believed both were ensouled. The angel and child enter heaven and the child is pressed to God’s heart and given wings like the angel. The flowers, too, are pressed to God’s heart and the dead wildflower is given a voice so that it can sing with the other angels. The spiritualisation of nature is thus fairly overt in this tale, in which human and plant are treated the same by the creator who birthed both.

### “The Story of a Mother”

In this tale, as in the previous one, plants or flowers make a transition between earth and heaven. Here, however, the plants represent human souls in the spiritual realm because every person has a tree or a flower of life in Death’s hothouse.

In this tale Andersen confronts the bitter grief of a mother who has lost a child to death. She refuses to accept her child’s death and so pursues Death into the afterlife in the hope of reclaiming her child. Nature helps her throughout the tale, giving her directions. It is significant that this process requires the mother to negotiate with and make concessions to nature which, she realises, is the only agent that can reunite her with her child in the spiritual realm. The reason for this is that nature is a spiritual power, and so has authority in spiritual realms. This aspect of the tale clearly reflects Andersen’s romantic belief in the spirituality of nature.

Aspects of nature are anthropomorphised throughout the tale: night, for example, is portrayed as an old woman dressed in black, who insists on hearing the songs that the mother used to sing to her baby in return for information on the child’s whereabouts. A little thorn bush is also personified as it shivers with cold and the mother painfully presses the thorny bush to her breast to warm it and gain more information. When the mother reaches Death, Death asks who guided her and she replies “Our Lord has helped me” (1949:272). This directly aligns the natural with the spiritual: for the mother, the guidance she received from nature was like direct guidance from God.

Another aspect of Andersen’s spiritualisation of nature in this tale is the fact that plants represent human souls in the spiritual realm. As the old crone who takes care of Death’s hothouse explains: “You know that every human being has his or her tree of life, or flower, according as they are made; they look like other plants, but they have beating human hearts” (1949:272). When someone dies, his/her plant withers in Death’s hothouse. He fetches it and transplants its real heart in the place of the flower stand-in. The fact that the spirits of human beings are stored in Death’s hothouse as flowers or plants and that Death is described as God’s gardener also aligns the natural and the spiritual worlds, clearly reflecting the spiritualisation of nature on Andersen’s part.

The mother listens to every plant to find her child's heartbeat and recognises it in a little blue crocus that is hanging feebly off to one side. Because she wants to prevent Death from pulling it out of the ground and transplanting it in the Garden of Paradise, she threatens Death – saying that she will pull out all the other plants. However, she realises that this will force other mothers to lose their children and feel the pain she is feeling. This explicit link between the plants and human souls foregrounds the fundamentally spiritual character of nature in Andersen's imagination.

To conclude one can therefore suggest that Andersen weaves the concepts of the universal soul and the spiritualisation of nature through selected fairy tales. He suggests a universal soul exists by highlighting how much natural phenomena have in common with human beings, that they often share the same feelings, desires, fears and vanities. When nature is hurt by man, Andersen suggests that man himself loses something because of it, because they are connected to each other and to the universal soul. Andersen also foregrounds the spirituality of nature in tales in which natural phenomena have souls, and are very much engaged in morality. These motifs in Andersen's tales reflect his romantic yearning to overcome the separation that exists between man and nature. Andersen's tales thus promote a sense of the interconnectedness of man, nature and God in the universal soul and they present nature as facilitating spiritual awakening and awareness. Both of these themes may be interpreted as explorations of the romantic ideology in which the natural world encourages transcendence of earthly matters and a more spiritual perspective. As Peter Thorslev suggests,

We have become aware that there is indeed that in nature which transcends merely human purposes, an infinite order and creativity we perceive only dimly and ignore at our peril. The greatest works of High Romantic Idealism restore some sense of wonder, even of reverential awe, to such visions of transcendence and attempt also to find a place for man within them. (in Curran, 2010:101)

I would argue that Andersen's depiction of nature does precisely this, which enables one to consider him a romantic.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **The Romantic Hero / Outsider**

My life is a beautiful fairy-tale, so eventful has it been and wondrous happy. [As] if, when I was a boy and went forth into the world poor and friendless, a good fairy had met me and said, "Choose thy own course through life and the object for which thou wilt strive, and then, according to the development of thy mind, and as reason requires, I will guide and defend thee. (Andersen, 2005:1)

Clearly, Andersen idealised his life as being "wondrous happy" and yet an awareness of the "poor and friendless" boy he had been remained a part of him throughout his life. For various reasons, Andersen always felt himself an outsider. He was often despondent because he craved literary recognition but was, at first, rejected by theatre-goers and critics. He yearned to be accepted into the higher social classes but, although he moved in bourgeois and aristocratic circles, he never quite escaped his peasant background to be accepted into the aristocratic fold. As Niels Ingwersen suggests, "Andersen was the outsider who was allowed inside and who, in many ways, was warmly welcomed within the patrician parlor; thus, it would be wrong to see him as the odd man out; rather he was the odd man in" (2005:2). Andersen was thus relegated to the periphery of upper class social circles and often felt alienated because he did not share the interests or concerns of the upper classes. Andersen was also a particularly sensitive man, acutely aware of the extremes of beauty and suffering that he saw around him. All of these converged to make him an outsider and encouraged him to become critical of the "elite". One could argue, therefore, that Andersen himself embodies many characteristics of the romantic hero: a desire to maintain "authentic selfhood"; a willingness to defy social convention; and a need to express social criticism. His own position as an outsider or romantic hero is precisely what enables him to write this character into so many of his tales. In this chapter, I therefore hope to demonstrate that selected fairy tales by Andersen explore the concept of the romantic hero or outsider and argue that this serves as a further confirmation of his Romanticism.

#### Andersen as the Outsider

Andersen's background already marks him exceptional, and thus potentially an outsider: he was a peasant who distinguished himself by means of creative genius. Andersen left home at fourteen

to seek “fame and fortune” in Copenhagen, a goal he achieved in later years through his fairy tale writing. His skilful storytelling and magical imagination opened the royal courts of Europe to him and lifted him out of the lower classes into which he had been born. However, while this allowed him access to the higher classes, it did not necessarily guarantee his acceptance by these classes. Andersen often felt himself on the periphery – a feeling confirmed by Jenny Lind’s rejection of his advances (she was a famous opera singer) and the fact that Andersen’s courtship of Ms Collin, his guardian’s daughter, was prevented on the grounds of class. Although he would achieve fame in later years, Andersen felt a perpetual sense of insecurity and that he did not belong in the elevated social strata in which he finally found himself. Clearly, his outsider status was derived, on the one hand, from the fact that he did not “fit in” with the social elite into whose circles his artistic genius gained him entry. On the other hand, however, it was also derived from the fact that the Danish public and critics did not appreciate his art and subjected him to scathing criticism. He was especially disenchanted with his Danish audience, who did not recognise his artistic genius in the way that the German- and English-speaking public did.

Although his perspective as an outsider may have originated with a subjective feeling of rejection, it enabled Andersen to mature into an objective observer and evaluator of social problems and foibles. He maintained a healthy distance from the upper-classes who were blinded by their own desires and prejudices and was thus able to diagnose social ills from a more objective position. He also knew that he could raise awareness through his art, through the social criticism he expressed in his fairy tales. This attempt to make the world better stemmed from what Poul Houe calls an “incurable dualism [that] wedds his most optimistic sentiments to a nihilistic backlash” (2006:68). Andersen understood that human efforts were limited and believed that only art could bring about transcendent change. This perspective, in which an artist has a calling to point out societal flaws in order to bring about social upliftment and spiritual enlightenment, is central to romantic ideology and is particularly concentrated in the figure of the outsider or romantic hero. This figure is essentially an artistic genius, who is distinguished from birth and meant for great things, even though the world might not recognize him.

One of Andersen’s first stories, “The Tallow-Candle”, written while he was at school in Copenhagen, depicts Andersen’s encounters with the upper classes and their dismissal of his

“authentic self”. Like the candle, which carries the hidden gift of fire within itself, Andersen too had hidden talents and greatness. And just as the candle is scarred when handled by rough fingers, Andersen’s innocence and trusting nature were damaged by the artifice and callousness of a society that had no regard for his sensitive nature and imaginative genius, and which judged him purely on the grounds of his social background. Andersen yearned for society to accept and appreciate him, but he was disappointed. Even with the Lassøe family, who practically adopted him, he remained only a perpetual house guest, and was never completely accepted:

On many an evening, I could completely become as a child in their home. I became natural just because I did not feel shy and knew that my errors and spontaneous remarks would never be weighed without their letting the good tip the scale in my favour. While other people tried to turn me into a man of the world, they appreciated my curious, childlike character. (Jørgensen, 1999:5)

Even having achieved a certain fame through his writing, Andersen was denied acceptance: Danish society wanted him to conform to their notion of what a successful author ought to be while he wanted nothing more than to express his romantic vision. This lack of acceptance and understanding fed his feelings of alienation. These would last his lifetime and find expression in his defiance of social convention, which is precisely the attitude reflected by the romantic hero /outsider characters in Andersen’s tales.

Lord Byron, the English romantic, introduced the idea of the “romantic hero” and, significantly, Andersen shares many of his characteristics, both as a person and as an artist. Like Byron, Andersen was described as “self-reliant and alien” (Marin, 2008:85). Although Andersen frequently fell in love, he did not settle into a permanent relationship and remained a bachelor until his death. Even in his own family circle he was isolated, seldom visiting his mother and half-sister and not returning to see his mentor, Jonas Collin, on his deathbed. This certainly reflects the sentiments Andersen expresses in the opening of this chapter: “Choose thy own course through life and the object for which thou wilt strive” (Andersen, 2005:1) Marin observes that the romantic hero “in his isolation [is] absolutely self-reliant” (2008:55), a trait that is easily identified in Andersen’s life.

Andersen also refused to remain in the upper classes to which his writing had gained him entrance. Instead, he made an effort to share his stories with working class audiences in public readings of his tales. In these he made it clear that his sympathies lay with them, reinforcing what biographers describe as his egalitarian political stance (De Mylius, 2006:6). Any social bias irked him and his particular gripe was the prejudice and snobbery of the upper classes, although he could find the vulgarity of commoners distasteful as well (Houe, 2006:71). He detested materialism, which he felt came at the expense of the natural world. He also despised the inequality maintained by gender roles. All these constitute what Ingwersen refers to as “habitual thinking” (1993:2). In contrast to this, the Outsider is not subject to “habitual thinking”. The outsider stands on the periphery and does not let society prescribe his thought processes, but rather questions conditioned thinking. This resonates with Marin’s description of the romantic hero as “pursuing his own ends according to his generated moral code against any opposition, human or supernatural” (2008:55). Andersen remained true to his inner moral code, exposing society’s flaws through his storytelling. He strove, in his behaviour, to reflect the “nobility of spirit” that the romantic artist possesses, and through which the artist facilitates the enlightenment of society (De Mylius, 2006:6).

Christina Marin suggests that another trait of the romantic hero is his melancholic disposition (2008:83). From this perspective, Andersen’s “abnormal bent for depression and melancholy” becomes significant (Houe 2006:55), an attitude that might have stemmed from his profound sensitivity to the ills of his society. The subject matter of Andersen’s tales is often suffering which suggests that his natural melancholia was worsened by the hardships he witnessed in society, such as poverty, child labour and social oppression. As Jens Andersen observes, Andersen was “both spontaneously and deliberately [...] disposed for the child’s [...] purity in defiance of what he saw as a petrified adult hegemony and a mindless materialistic civilization all around him” (quoted in Houe, 2006:63). Perhaps, then, Andersen opted for the fairy tale genre because of its association with childhood innocence, and the fact that it allowed him to express his distaste at suffering and inequality and to heal that suffering in the imaginative manner that most appealed to his romantic nature.

Andersen was also a non-conformist in his writing. He challenged existing tradition by writing his fairy tales in colloquial language, even though this resulted in the severe criticism of the literary world. He was also innovative in the manner in which he expressed social criticism in his tales. Although fairy tales have traditionally dealt with social criticism, Ingwersen argues that his expression of social criticism went beyond the “naïve” relationship between storyteller and audience (Ingwersen, 2005:1) and De Mylius describes him as an experimental writer long before post-Romantic and expressionist writers ventured into similar experimentation. For De Mylius, Andersen was thus “a constant outsider in his sympathies” (2006:6).

In Andersen’s tales, the perspective of the outsider emerges both through the narrative techniques he employs and as a recurrent theme, embodied in various characters. For example, in some tales the sensibilities of the outsider are discernible in the narrative viewpoint because the narrator expresses social criticism; this is true for “The Drop of Water”, “There’s a Difference”, “It’s Absolutely True”, “She was No Good” and “The Emperor’s New Clothes”. At other times, the outsider is represented by one or more characters in the tale who are themselves outsiders; this occurs in “The Tin Soldier”, “The Ugly Duckling”, “The Tinder-Box”, “The Flying Trunk” and “The Teapot”. These tales often criticise the way society treats the outsider as well as foregrounding the outsider’s own sensibilities. This is especially discernible in “Heartbreak”. Interestingly, at times Andersen also focuses specifically on the writer/artist as outsider in tales such as “The Nightingale”, “Auntie Toothache” and “Something to Write About”. One could argue that all of these tales reflect, to some degree or another, Andersen’s own experience of being a romantic outsider.

#### “The Drop of Water”

In this tale an old magician studies a drop of pond water through a magnifying glass and sees “any number of strange-looking creatures that you would otherwise never see in the water” (Andersen, 1976:227). He is intrigued by the moving shapes and calls a friend to help him make sense of them. The magnifying glass is a scientifically advanced instrument not usually associated with the fairy tale genre and this oddness draws the reader in. The tale takes a humorous turn when the two old men liken the creatures in the water to the inhabitants of Copenhagen: outsiders on the periphery of society, the two old men are able to take an objective

view of interaction in society, and the microscope represents precisely their distanced, analytical, outsiders' perspective.

In this tale the outsider-protagonist is a magician called "Creepy-Crawly". His name reflects Andersen's interest in things that lie outside the immediate realm of human perception, such as insects and bacteria. As the tale progresses, Creepy-Crawly's interest in these hidden aspects of the world appears to echo the romantic outsider's perspective: distanced from society, the outsider has a more balanced view of what goes on in society and can then use his art to create awareness about various social ills. Andersen himself often rued the fact that most people were not blessed with this perception (Ingwersen, 2005:3), a perception he often gifts to his outsider characters. Watching them from a distance, Creepy Crawly, for example, finds the cannibalizing tendencies of the microscopic organisms disturbing, especially as they seem unconcerned about their destructive behaviour: "they are so ferocious that they tear off each other's arms and legs, buttocks and thighs – though, in spite of that, they are quite pleased and cheerful in their own way" (1976:227). He tries to put an end to it using magic, pouring a drop of witch's blood into the water. This colours the bacteria pink and the organisms now appear to be "a whole townful of savages" (1976:228) because their pink skin colour "identifies" them as Europeans in the magician's mind.

Another distinguished old magician concurs with Creepy Crawly's findings when he exclaims that: "It looked exactly like a whole town where everybody was running about without anything on." He describes the sight as "horrible", with people "pushing and elbowing each other, wrestling and wrangling, snapping and snarling" (1976:228). The alliteration of [w] and [s] reinforces the physicality of the barbaric behaviour, one's lips stumbling over the sounds even as the creatures push each other. Andersen uses the barbaric behaviour of the creatures to mimic human behaviour, highlighting the fact that a society singles out and victimises a person for being unique; the magician imagines the creatures thinking to be something like: "His leg is longer than mine. Pooh! Away with it! And here is a chap with a little pimple behind his ear... and they ate him for the sake of the little pimple" (1976:228). The magicians find themselves on the periphery of their society because they are engaged in an alternative mode of living, one that involves magic. If the microscope is taken as symbolic for the outsider's distanced view of

society, the magicians are outsiders. This is particularly true when the old magician finds a satirical humour in comparing the creatures' behaviour to society's goings-on; he compares the society of the creatures to that of Copenhagen or any big city, as they are all alike.

Andersen's disillusionment with city-life after the industrial revolution is clearly reflected in this tale. He suggests that people trample each other to secure their own livelihoods: the organisms' behaviour shows that as soon as someone appears to be competition, that person is broken down so that they are no longer a threat. Creepy-Crawly's sardonic closing remark that the drop of water under the microscope is "ditch-water" can also be applied to life in cities, which is like filthy ditch-water. For Andersen, the artist and romantic outsider, tasked with the role of opening the eyes of society to the degenerate practices that abound in a post-industrialised society, the prevailing conditions are unacceptable and this tale is an effort at fostering awareness and encouraging some sort of redress.

#### "There's a Difference"

As in the previous tale, in which the organisms who are different from their companions are victimised, the characters in this tale who do not conform to society's standards of beauty and status are cast aside as though they have no inherent worth or right to exist. One could argue that Andersen's own experience as a socially inept, physically awkward outsider, is most clearly voiced in this tale, as is his frustration with the superficial judgements of human society. In the tale, a little apple blossom bough is picked because it is pretty and, due to the recognition it gets on the basis of its exterior beauty, it becomes conceited and judgemental. Those who meet the reigning standards and enjoy society's approval, deem themselves superior to the outsider, who is left out in the cold without the affirmation of his peers and must fend for himself.

It is the beginning of spring and a young countess climbs out of her carriage to pick a bough off a little blossoming apple tree. It is arranged in the castle with some "bright-green sprays of beech" in a vase that "seemed to be carved out of new-fallen snow" and the effect is astoundingly beautiful. It becomes very pleased with itself, "just like a human being" (Andersen, 1976:299). Watching people coming and going through the elegant rooms "the apple bough comes to realize that there's as much difference between people as between plants as "[s]ome are for show and

some to provide food; there are also some that aren't wanted at all" (1976:299). Plants such as weeds are not wanted as they are "common" (1976:300). In Andersen's Denmark the social class system dictated that some members of society were worthier than others. A peasant, like Andersen himself, was "common" like the dandelion. However, it soon becomes clear that, apart from society's value judgements, the dandelion is important in its own way because children pick it and use it to make wishes:

they took the stalk with its fluffy composite seed-crown, that light airy wool-blossom which is a little masterpiece of its own, as if made of the most delicate feathers, snowflakes or swan's-down – they held this to their mouths so as to blow the whole thing away with one puff. The boy who could do that would get a new suit of clothes before the year was over – so Granny said. The despised flower was quite a prophet on this occasion. (1976:301)

However, the apple blossom, which represents high society, maintains that beauty is a better measurement of worth than the utilitarian use of the dandelion, until the countess carries in the fluffy seed-crown of the dandelion and puts it in the vase with the apple blossom. Surprisingly she wants to paint the dandelion for its beauty:

Just look how marvellously God has made it! [...] I want to paint it alongside the apple blossom. That of course, we all find so infinitely lovely, but this humble flower has also in another way received just as much from heaven; so different are they, and yet both children in the realm of beauty. (1976:301)

The belief system of the apple blossom is questioned when the sun kisses both it and the dandelion: superficial value judgements hold no sway in the face of the spiritual and the apple blossom is forced to recognise "God's boundless love for everything that lives and moves on earth". It regrets its judgmental attitude and its "petals appeared to blush" (1976:300,301). Andersen's analogy between the attitudes of humans and plants suggests that each living entity has a right to exist. Differences are no reason to criticise and judge any one thing, because God's love encompasses all. As a romantic outsider, Andersen sought to shift society's critical attitude towards those who do not meet its superficial requirements. In this tale, Andersen insists on every living thing's God-given right to exist.

### “It’s Absolutely True”

The title of this tale proves to be ironic as the plot follows the spread of malicious gossip through society. Andersen’s irony is the tongue-in-cheek humour of the romantic outsider: standing on the periphery of popular society, Andersen is more sensitised to its weaknesses and better equipped to point these out to his audience, and humour is often an effective tool through which to convey criticism without creating a mood of sombre judgement.

He criticises society’s gullibility, its willingness to believe sensational tales without asking for proof. In the tale, a hen who lives “in quite another part of town” (Andersen, 1976:203) spreads a rumour, asserting that “It’s absolutely true!” Even though she does not live in the vicinity of the events, she is all too willing to attest to their authenticity:

A respectable hen, flew up to her perch and preened herself with her beak. A little feather came loose and fluttered to the ground. “The more I preen, the lovelier I shall grow, no doubt!” she said in fun and went to sleep. Another hen overheard a part of what she said, and being sleepy she repeated this message: “Did you hear that? I give no names, but there is a hen who means to pluck out her feathers for the sake of her looks. If I were a cock, I’d simply despise her”. (1976:203)

Andersen explores society’s gossip-mongering, the sensationalism of the story escalating with each retelling: The owl overhears it being told and flies off to tell another owl and in the process the doves in the dovecot overhear them saying: “Have you heard? To-who! There’s a hen that’s plucked out all her feathers for the sake of the cock. She’ll freeze to death, if she isn’t dead already” (1976:204). The doves repeat this to the chickens in their hen-run, saying that two hens have already died, because they wanted to attract the attention of the cock by plucking out their feathers. The effect of all this exaggeration is that the hen’s good reputation is in danger, when the truth is that she lost only one feather. Her honour is eventually at stake due to society’s gossip-mongering. Andersen draws attention to the fact that the ill-considered spread of tales for their sensational value can cause profound damage to the personal lives of the subjects of these tales. In his view this forms part of the intolerant, uncaring nature of modern society.

The hen who lost the feather does not recognise her own story, which has by now escalated to five hens plucking out their feathers to show who is the thinnest so as to impress a cock, and then

pecking one another to death. Ironically, she vows to ensure that the story is put into the paper to serve as a warning to other chickens. The romantic outsider sees society's foibles and uses his art to draw attention to them; in this tale Andersen suggests society is too eager to spread malicious gossip without any regard for either the truth or consequences.

#### "She was no good"

This tale explores the suffering of the poor. Financial deprivation was of particular significance to Andersen, who recognised that it encouraged a specific kind of outsider-dom stemming from the loss of personal dignity in the face of material poverty. Having been a peasant, he was intimately acquainted with poverty and the social humiliation and oppression that accompanied it. In Andersen's world, class distinction was rife and the poverty-stricken outsider was more than likely to find himself out in cold, looking in through the parlour window at the warmth and plenty inside. Ursula le Guin suggests that readers who undergo suffering can identify with a dark tale such as this one which suggests that one should not recoil from suffering, which is a part of life but that one should give it a voice and listen to it so that it can change one (in Wood, 2006:195).

In the tale there is a character who is reminiscent of Andersen's own mother, a washerwoman who takes in laundry to support herself and her child. In order to wash the clothes, she stands in the millstream when the sluices are open and beats the dirty linen with a washing-bat. It is hard physical labour and she endures the cold for up to six hours a day. She sends her son to buy liquor for warmth and urges him to drink some too, because his clothes are too thin to keep him warm. Their lives are stained by deprivation and the mother describes her son as "[her] poor penniless child" (Andersen, 1976:247). The reader is sympathetic towards these indigent members of society and critical of the powerful because they do nothing to help the poor. Andersen encourages this through the ridiculous portrayal of the mayor, who appears at his window with a piece of newspaper stuck on his chin. (He cut himself shaving and does not remove the paper before waving to the washerwoman's son as he passes in the street.) Nevertheless, the boy takes off his cap respectfully; class distinction demands respect be paid to those in power, even if they do not deserve it. The boy shows deference to the mayor "as if to the King himself" (1976:246). The mother is determined to raise her son "respectably" (1976:247)

and, although they are shabby, his clothes are clean and neatly-mended. The mayor dismisses this, however, patronising the boy and saying that he will likely become a drunkard like his mother: “She’s had a drop too much; [the mother’s] no good”. (1976:248)

Ironically, sympathy for the mother and her son comes from someone who is even more under-privileged than they are - an old woman with a lame leg and a blind eye: Lame Maren, who is also called Honest Maren. Although her appearance marks her an outsider, Lame Maren tries to fit into society by hiding her blind eye with a lock of false hair; in a poignant reversal, this only makes the eye more noticeable. Andersen ascribes honourable traits to Maren, criticising the inequality that exists in society in which wealth, power and beauty count more than mercy and compassion. When the washerwoman falls ill, Maren takes care of her.

In a feverish daze, the washerwoman confides in Maren, telling her that she began her service in the mayor’s parents’ house; like the mayor, his father was a politician – a councillor. She tells Maren that she fell in love with the mayor’s brother. Disregarding social prohibitions in “chastity and honour”, they became lovers because there is “nothing wrong with a kiss between two that really love each other” (1976:249) and he seals their love with his golden ring. However, his mother, who represents the disapproval of society, admonishes the servant girl: “You haven’t had the education that he has; you won’t be equal in things of the mind...we must be careful to keep on the right track as we drive ahead, or else the carriage will upset” (1976:249). The “carriage” is the carefully constructed fabric of a society based on class distinction as well as the plans the parents have for their son. Their privileged world is jealously guarded from the working classes and the mother urges the girl to marry someone from her own class. Bowing to the pressure, the girl returns the brother’s ring and marries a glover. The mother’s meddling leaves a permanent scar because the mayor’s brother spends the rest of his life alone, returning home only for his mother’s funeral.

The servant girl and the glover are happy for a while and she bears a son. Soon, however, the trials of a working-class existence take their toll. They fall prey to a predatory financial system: the glover borrows money so as to improve their standard of living, loses everything when he falls ill and cannot work to pay off his debt. When he dies, his widow must fend for herself.

Having told Maren her life story, the washerwoman feels a little better and returns her washing. Because she is still weak, however, she falls into the freezing water and dies before help arrives. At the same time, the mayor receives news of his brother's death, and the fact that he has left 600 dollars to the washerwoman! He realises that their love endured despite their separation by time, space and social convention. And yet he still dismisses it as "some sort of foolish nonsense" (1976:251), and insists on keeping her son in the working classes, offering the boy only the small hope that "he may turn out a good workman" (1976:251).

It is significant that Andersen does not name either the mother or son. Because of this, they remain types, representative of the disadvantaged working classes and reinforcing the primacy of the social criticism of the tale. The mayor and his brother, too, are designated roles in society, rather than wholly realised characters. The mayor governs and is therefore committed to the maintenance of the power structures that support his social standing. His brother is a student whose education separates him from the working class which earns a living by means of physical labour. These roles and the privileges they convey exclude the poor outsider. Andersen's own experience of this prejudice enables him, the outsider, to present the experiences of other outsiders with sympathy. He also hoped that his artistic gift, which enabled him to depict the inequalities of society, might encourage social change.

#### "The Emperor's New Clothes"

In this tale Andersen ridicules figures in positions of authority, particularly if they are corrupt and not fit for the positions they occupy. He also criticises society's gullibility, lamenting the fact that people are unable or unwilling to perceive the truth about the world around them (Ingwersen 2005:4). Andersen's tone is satirical in this story, the satire itself constituting a rebellion against pompous, institutional authority.

The main character in this tale is a vain emperor who is more concerned with his wardrobe than matters of state, to the detriment of those he governs. The narrator tells the reader that the emperor "cared nothing about his soldiers [...] nor for the theatre, nor for driving in the woods except for the sake of showing off his clothes" (Andersen, 1949:218). This statement reveals that he has lost contact with everything authentic, which is what nature represents in Andersen's

symbolic system, as well as everything emotionally and artistically worthwhile, represented by the theatre. The emperor thus represents precisely the institutional superficiality and vanity against which the romantics railed. Because he prefers artifice and superficial appearance, two swindlers are able to take advantage of him. They pose as weavers and convince him that they weave the most beautiful outfits, magical clothes that will appear invisible only to fools who are unfit for positions at court. These clothes would thus enable the emperor to discern those who are worthy of their positions and those who are not (1949:218). The irony is, of course, that the emperor is a fool for believing the deception and that he himself is not worthy of his position. The overt nature of the deception is emphasised by Andersen's word choice: "They gave themselves out as weavers" (1949:218) and they "pretended to weave". The words "swindlers" and "imposters" (1949:220) are also used repeatedly. This suggests that the emperor, or his advisers, should have been able to see through the ruse of the weavers. However, because insincerity and deception dominate this society, in which pretence and truth are interchangeable, the swindlers are practically assured of success.

This commitment to pretence continues unchallenged in society both because of the people's gullibility on the one hand, and their petty one-upmanship on the other. The narrator tells the reader that everyone was eager to see the magical clothes because "Everybody in the town knew what wonderful power the stuff possessed, and everyone was anxious to see how stupid his neighbour was" (1949:219). People would rather adhere to the lie, pretending to see the wonderful clothes they have been told exist, than risk ridicule. Even the old minister who evaluates the weaving process, and is described as "faithful", lies to the Emperor rather than acknowledge that he cannot see the material on the loom: "Good heavens!" thought he, "is it possible that I am a fool? I have never thought so, and nobody must know it. Am I not fit for my post? It will never do to say that I cannot see the stuff" (1949:219). So, too, do the two "honest" officials that the emperor brings along for a view.

"It is magnificent!" said both the honest officials. "What a design! What colours!" And they pointed to the empty loom, for they thought no doubt the others could see the stuff. "What!" thought the Emperor; "I see nothing at all! This is terrible! Am I a fool? Am I not fit to be Emperor? Why, nothing worse could happen to me". (1949:220)

Each of these individuals fear the consequences of being foolish before society and thus perpetuate the illusion. Those who are entrusted with positions of power and authority are careful to preserve their status, leaving the status quo unquestioned. Where the fear of public ridicule binds these people to group-think, the outsider stands detached from the group and may observe its practices more objectively.

In his portrayal of the swindling weavers, Andersen also exposes the greed that manifests itself in a society in which materialism is rife. They take the fine silk and gold thread meant for the emperor for themselves and stitch “away with needles without any thread in them” (1949:221). What they are actually weaving is a web of lies and their efforts achieve nothing substantial because they do not mean to improve society in any way. This too reveals the superficiality that dominates the moral landscape of this society. Ironically, their dishonesty is rewarded, their work complimented with adjectives such as “magnificent!”, “excellent!” and “gorgeous” and they are considered “gentleman weavers” (1949:221). When the Emperor is stripped naked in order to fit the suit of clothes, this presents him with an opportunity to strip himself of the illusions and deceit that characterise his governance. He is confronted with his naked reflection, with himself, but cannot acknowledge that he is naked. Finally, he becomes a ludicrous figure, trying to preserve his power and dignity, while he stands naked in front of his subjects. Andersen pointedly ridicules those in authority who emphasise the importance of appearance – of clothing and accessories – rather than service to their communities.

At the climax of the tale a little child finally voices the truth: “But he has nothing on,” said a little child.’ The boy’s father responds, “‘Oh listen to the innocent,” said its father’ (1949:222). The mention of the child’s innocence indicates that he has not yet been corrupted by social convention. In this sense, the child is still an outsider; he may be in the process of being introduced to society’s conventions but has not yet been fully absorbed or corrupted by society’s expectations. He thus unmasks the deceit that the others have been habituated into believing and are too afraid to expose.

### “The Steadfast Tin Soldier”

In this tale, twenty-five tin soldiers are created from a tin spoon. They all look alike and wear smart red uniforms and shoulder their guns in the same manner. One soldier, however, differs from the rest because he was made last and the tin had run out. Because he has only one leg, he is marked an outsider. From the outset, the tale explores the pressures exerted on individuals to conform to society’s expectations and the difficulties faced by the outsider who does not fit in. At the start this is indicated by the fact that the tin soldiers are required to walk in a line by the little boy who sets them up on the table (Andersen, 1949:93): the line symbolises the predetermined roles an individual must adopt in society.

Andersen felt that this tale, in particular, struck various autobiographical notes, allowing him to explore his sense of himself as a confirmed outsider. Like the tin soldier, he was alienated from his peers but felt certain that he had a destiny – that, as the little soldier thinks to himself, the very thing that sets him apart will be the instrument of destiny: “he stood just as well on his one leg as the others on two, in fact he is the very one who is to become famous.” Andersen’s difficult path through life is also mirrored in the trials of the soldier, and its subsequent success; as Andersen himself observed: “First you go through an awful lot, and then you become famous”. In the tale, the tin soldier falls in love with a little dancer who has been cut out of paper. She is beautiful and wears a dress of gauze with a blue ribbon as a scarf, and she stands at the open door of the paper castle. The tin soldier realises that his circumstances are not fitting for her as she is “much too grand; she lives in a palace, while I only have a box” (1949:94). This, too, was Andersen’s experience: although he achieved much sought-after fame, he was not good enough to earn the affections of the famous soprano singer, Jenny Lindt, who had claimed his heart.

In the tale, the toys come to life, “fighting battles and giving balls”, but the tin soldier and the ballerina remain motionless. As outsiders, they stand on the periphery of the interactions and power struggles of the other toys. At midnight a goblin Jack-in-the-box admonishes the soldier for staring at the ballerina but the tin soldier ignores him: the outsider dismisses societal rules. In the morning, the children put the tin soldier on a window sill and a puff of wind blows him out into the world, issuing in his journey into the unknown. This reflects the fact that the outsider’s

questioning nature often compels him to explore the unfamiliar. A torrent of rain washes the soldier into a gutter and, in the sewers, he meets an officious water rat. The rat is one of society's officials, those whose task it is to regulate behaviour; the rat demands the soldier's pass documents and the fee for his passage. The rat represents the minute control of people by bureaucracy but the tin soldier ignores him, refusing to be governed and controlled. An outsider, he takes pride in his defiance and his courage: "no one should say of him that he even winced" (1949:96).

The soldier journeys on and is finally swallowed by a fish that is caught and prepared for the dinner table. The cook finds the little tin soldier in the fish and his bravery is recognised by all – he is paraded through the house and placed in the same parlour in which the ballerina still stands. Instead of the happy ending the reader expects, however, in an anti-climactic turn of events, the little boy throws the tin soldier into the fire. In a tragic moment so typical of Andersen, the outsider's acceptance is proven an illusion: his adventures beyond the boundaries of acceptable society and his challenging of social convention comes at a price. In the flame and his grief, the soldier is unrecognisably altered:

The tin soldier stood there, lighted up by the flame, and in the most horrible heat; but whether it was the heat of the real fire, or the warmth of his feelings, he did not know. He had lost all his gay colour; it might have been from his perilous journey, or it might have been from grief, who can tell? (1949:97)

Then the little dancer is blown into the fire. But she, unlike the tin soldier, is utterly consumed. Only the blackened remains of her spangle can be seen, whereas the tin soldier is reduced to a heart-shaped lump of tin. This is revealing: the trials reveal that his core is love; because of this, he is not utterly destroyed by the fire as the little ballerina is. She lacks depth and inner strength and so the fire burns her up. The tragic conclusion of this story suggests that sometimes the outsider is 'rehabilitated' and incorporated into society and, sometimes, he is not. In this case, as Le Guin suggests, "[the] uneasy outsider experiences the pain of a social world that will not or cannot accommodate him or her" (in Wood, 2006:199). This was much Andersen's experience.

### “The Ugly Duckling”

From an autobiographical perspective, this tale seems to echo moments of Andersen’s childhood – particularly his experiences as a physically awkward boy who was bullied at his village school. In true outsider fashion he felt different from his class mates: he did not fit in with them and knew that he had exemplary inner attributes, that he was destined for great things (Birch, 2009:1-4). The duckling in the tale does not fit into his circle either and the other ducks describe him as “monstrous” and “ugly” (1949:384-385). He is judged according to superficial standards of appearance and not according to inner gifts or talents that he might have. The tale explores the ugly duckling’s insecurity in the face of society’s criticism, until he finally escapes and is revealed to be a much-venerated swan rather than an ordinary duck.

Andersen’s sense of the picturesque draws the reader into the story (Davidsen, 1999:1). Like many of his other tales, his romantic love of nature comes to the fore in descriptions such as this one: “The country was lovely just then; it was summer. The wheat was golden and the oats still green; the hay was stacked in the rich low-lying meadows, where the stork was marching about on his long red legs” (1949:383). As I demonstrated in chapter two, Andersen encourages his readers to identify with the animals in this tale through the use of personification; foregrounding the animals’ emotions and sensibilities makes them “human” and their experiences accessible to the reader. From the very beginning, the reader expects the ugly duckling to be exceptional, an outsider with a destiny, because there is one egg that does not hatch with the others. When the egg does hatch, the duckling is also larger than the others who “are all exactly like their father” (1949:384). This sets the ugly duckling apart from the family, which means that he is soon treated with distrust and contempt. When it becomes clear that he does not conform to his society’s standards and expectations, they decide to force him to comply: “into the water he shall go, if I have to kick him in myself” (1949:384).

Andersen foregrounds the cruelty that characterises this kind of society, in which the ‘survival of the fittest’ ensures that only those who abide by society’s rules and norms are accepted. Each of the animals in the farmyard must be prepared to fight for what they want. The narrator describes a “fearful uproar going on, [as] two broods were fighting for the head of an eel” (1949:385) and reveals that the turkey-cock was “born with his spurs on” (1949:386). This is a society in which

survival depends on successful battle. The mother duck wants to train her ducklings in the ways of the world so that they can fit in and win general approval because she knows that this will ensure their survival. She tells them: “Quack now! Don’t turn your toes in, a well brought up duckling keeps his legs wide apart just like father and mother” (1949:385). The little ducklings heed her advice and conform rather than rebelling against these societal norms. In contrast to this, the ugly duckling is described as “ungainly and queer” and “not a good specimen”. If he wants to fit in, he will have to change and conform. His very right to existence is challenged when an old duck remarks: “it’s a pity you can’t make him over again” (1949:385) and suggests that it would be better “If only the cat would get hold of you, you hideous object.” The duckling is reduced to an object of ridicule. As a result of this, the duckling “did not know where to turn; he was in despair because he was so ugly” (1949:386). His melancholy is a trait particularly associated with the romantic outsider.

There is, however, some hint of potential greatness when the mother duck half-heartedly defends him, saying “he is not handsome, but he is a thorough good creature, and he swims beautifully. [...] I believe he will be very strong, and I don’t doubt but he will make his way in the world” (1949:386). Even this paltry hint at potential encourages him to challenge the boundaries set by the mother duck. She begins to tell her ducklings about the boundaries of their world, telling them that the world “stretches a long way on the other side of the garden, right into the parson’s field”. Of course, she herself has never been that far, and the reader knows that the world is infinitely greater. She tells her brood that no duck goes that far, betraying her limited experience of the world – something that the ugly duckling challenges when he flies over the hedge into the unknown.

He leaves the ducks and the farmyard animals because he no longer trusts them. Instead, he joins the wild ducks on the marshes, all the while expecting them to reject him too. His expectations are confirmed when they tell him he can stay “so long as you do not marry into our family” (1949:387). This incident recalls Andersen’s being forbidden to court the daughter of his guardian. Like Andersen, the ugly duckling is reminded that he does not fit in. Another downside to being an outsider is that the duckling does not learn how to negotiate the violent world in which he finds himself – because he does not belong to any group, he is not taught the lessons

that would serve to protect the group or ensure its survival. When the wild ducks and geese are shot at by hunters, he “twisted his head around to get it under his wing” (1949:387) rather than fleeing. He hides from the violence, pretending that he is not there; as a survival strategy, but this is severely limited. In another incident, he encounters an old woman who lives in a dilapidated cottage with a hen and her cat. The animals feel themselves very much the duckling’s superiors, believing that they “represented the half of the world, and that quite the better half” (1949:388). Their sense of superiority encourages them to treat the duckling cruelly, particularly because he can neither lay eggs nor purr. Once again, he must conform to the expectations of others if he wants to be accepted. He retreats within himself, as he did when the hunters shot the geese, and dreams about floating on the water: these images offer him peace and encourage the development of his romantic outsider’s self-reliance. His response is misconstrued, and the hen accuses him of being “mad”. One can almost hear Andersen’s own lamentation at the fact that his genius was neither understood nor valued by society, in the ugly duckling’s exasperated utterance: “You do not understand me” (1949:389).

As the duckling journeys onward trying to find where he belongs, he learns that he belongs nowhere and that the world is fraught with hardship. Finally, he freezes into the ice on a pond. A peasant rescues him but, because he is not used to kindness, he tries to escape when the children want to play with him; he expects abuse and does not trust the sincerity of people. He leaves the family, choosing rather to “go out into the wide world” and make his own way or “choose thy own course” as Andersen suggests in his autobiography (Andersen translated by W. Glyn Jones 1954:13). At long last, winter approaches and swans make their appearance at the duckling’s pond. They are described as “beautiful” and “dazzling” and “happy” (1949:390). In the truly introspective fashion of the outsider, the duckling is “overcome by a strange melancholy” (1949:391) when he approaches the swans. He expects to receive the rejection to which he has become accustomed. Bowing his head towards the water, however, he sees his reflection and realises that he, too, is a swan. At last he knows what he is and he is welcomed into the fold by the swans. This is one of the few tales in which Andersen’s outsider finds belonging.

### “The Tinder-Box”

This tale begins with a soldier returning from war. He has satisfied society’s expectations of him by serving his country, and expects to be rewarded for having completed his duty. As he journeys home, he is stopped by an old witch who offers him treasure in return for a favour. He accepts. The favour requires him to climb down a hollow tree into a cavern, outwit three dogs that have magical abilities and taking the money in the chests upon which the dogs are seated. The old witch says that she wants only the tinder-box her grandmother left at the bottom of the tree. When the soldier asks why the tinder-box is so special, the witch refuses to tell him and he chops off her head and claims the tinder-box for himself. With the money he has taken from the boxes in the cavern, the soldier sets himself up as a gentleman. Unfortunately, however, he spends his newly-acquired money very quickly. To his credit, he donates generously to the poor because he can still remember what it is like to endure financial hardship. However, as a result of his spendthrift ways he is soon down to his last penny and in need of a candle. He finds a stub of candle in the tinder-box and, when he lights it, discovers that this enables him to summon the magical dogs to do his bidding.

The most significant detail here is Andersen’s endowment of a pedestrian, working class utensil such as a tinder-box with magic. This, combined with the marvellous turn-around in the soldier’s fortunes, indicates that working-class people possess the abilities necessary to break free from the future prescribed for them by society. Andersen himself was, of course, an example of this – he used ‘magic’, his artistic talent, to propel him out of a working-class existence.

The soldier harnesses the tinder-box’s magic to improve his financial position. Then, because he is curious, he asks the dogs to show him the king’s beautiful daughter, who is kept hidden in the castle. This suggests that, having improved his financial standing, he wants to belong to the nobility, to the upper classes into which his wealth has jettisoned him. Like all of Andersen’s working-class characters, however, the soldier cannot escape his class, regardless of his wealth. The king hides his daughter away to prevent her from marrying a “mere” soldier but the soldier overcomes this obstacle, using one of his magical dogs to ferry her to him while she sleeps. He admires her and then commands the dog to return her to the palace. In the morning, the princess recalls the events as a dream, but her lady-in-waiting sees everything and marks the house into

which the princess was carried (the dog marks all the houses in the street to thwart the lady-in-waiting). The lady-in-waiting's actions signify the determination of those who perpetuate class distinction to maintain and safeguard their world of privilege. Even though the soldier has proved his worth, fighting in a war and risking his life for his king, he is still regarded as a "mere" soldier and not fit to associate with royalty.

On the next night, the queen fastens a leaky bag of flour to the princesses' dress; the trail of flour leads them directly to the soldier who is thrown into prison to be executed in the morning. The punishment for questioning social conventions is severe: not only is the soldier imprisoned, he may lose his life. Through the iron bars, the soldier asks a young cobbler to fetch his tinder-box so that he can summon the dogs to help him. Help therefore comes from a member of the working class. Like the utilitarian tinder-box, the only help a soldier needs is within his grasp. Like the magical potential within the tinder box, the working classes can upset the existing social order if they so wish. This is exactly what happens when the dogs throw the judges, the councillors, the king and queen into the air. The soldiers and commoners are frightened by this and realise that those who had previously made and enforced the rules by which society was governed, have been overthrown. A new order is established: the soldier is crowned king and the princess becomes his queen.

The dogs get pride-of-place at the royal table and roll their great eyes. The focus on their eyes in the last moments of the tale is noteworthy because it signifies the outsider's ability to see society's flaws so as to expose negative practices and bring about enlightenment. In this tale the dogs are instrumental in bringing about social change, overthrowing existing power relations and assisting the soldier to overcome the social prejudice that prevents him from being upwardly mobile.

Even though a soldier seems an unlikely romantic outsider based on his conformism to societal dictates, this particular soldier rejects convention as soon as the war is over and he has fulfilled his expected role. Instead of earning his keep by legitimate means and finding honest employment, he agrees to help an old witch and gain riches by unorthodox means. Once he has secured his treasure, he totally discards society's taboos by committing murder. This sets the

tone for further defiance of convention. Instead of trying to fit in as a member of the establishment he uses magic to add to his riches by summoning the magical dogs. Instead of respecting the social class system, he challenges conformity by falling in love with and planning to marry a princess. It is clear that this romantic outsider challenges the norm and upsets the social order.

### “The Flying Trunk”

This tale also explores Andersen’s preoccupation with the social issues of materialism, class distinction and the ostracization of outsiders. The story begins with the death of a greedy merchant who leaves all his wealth to his son. The son, however, has very little regard for money; the narrator tells the reader that he “made paper kites from banknotes and played ducks and drakes on the lake with gold pieces instead of pebbles” (Andersen, 1976:73). Soon he has only a few pennies left and walks around in an old dressing-gown and slippers. This image presents a stark contrast to the world of business that his father once inhabited. In this world, one is judged by one’s appearance which either presents one as successful or not. The son shows a blatant disregard for this world and, as such, he is very much an outsider.

A friend sends him an old trunk in which to pack his remaining things so that he can leave and start a new life. The son, however, has nothing to pack and so climbs into the trunk himself, upon which he discovers that it is a magic trunk and, as soon as he presses the lock, it takes off and flies away. The trunk touches down in the land of the Turks and the son takes up residence in a local wood and sets about learning their ways. He discovers that there is a castle with very high windows, in which the king’s daughter lives, hidden away from the public eye and jealously guarded by the king and queen; her parents are protecting her from a fortune-teller’s prediction that she would have a very unhappy love affair. Read from the perspective of Andersen’s criticism of class distinctions, these details indicate the separatist tendencies of the nobility. This is again foregrounded in the fact that the princess is not allowed outside the castle walls.

An outsider who disregards convention, the merchant's son disobeys the royal decree and uses the flying trunk to get to the castle roof. He peeks into the room and is astonished by the princess's beauty. He presents himself as a Turkish God and she accepts his fake identity, knowing that no one could gain access to the castle by anything other than supernatural means. The fact that a member of the working classes, a merchant's son, can gain entry into the privileged world of the aristocracy only through magic and deceit is indicative of the rigorous way in which social prejudice is maintained in society. In order to prove his worth, the merchant's son uses his imagination to woo the princess, telling her stories. He also compliments her, comparing her eyes to beautiful lakes in which her thoughts are swimming like mermaids. The son's novel approach pays off and the princess falls in love with him; Andersen suggests that the imagination enables the lower classes to overcome the strictures of social convention. However, in order to convince her parents that they should grant him her hand in marriage, he must tell them stories too.

This proves challenging because the king and queen display what Andersen felt was high society's tendency to shy away from serious content and prefer the superficial: the queen likes "goody-goody" and "correct" (1976:74) stories and the king likes stories that make him laugh. This indicates their preference for tales that affirm the social order rather than those that challenge it. Andersen, however, is a master at masking social criticism with humour and endows his literary protagonist with the same ability. The merchant's son tells a tale about household objects who quarrel about their social standing as they while away their time in the kitchen. The matches are "tremendously proud of their high birth" (1976:74) given that they originate from a great fir tree in the forest. They believe they are superior because the dew drops they once enjoyed were "diamond tea" and they pride themselves in the fact that, while other trees lose their leaves in winter, the fir does not "go naked". Eventually the great tree trunk is used for the main mast of a "splendid ship", but the rest of the wood has to be content with "lighting up for the common herd" (1976:75). The cooking-pot also vies for the spot of 'most important utensil in the house'. Andersen paints a scene in which the household utensils represent society's concern with social standing. As a result of their social preoccupation with class, the utensils label each other, referring to some as "riff-raff" and others as "stuck-up" as is the case with the quill pen (1976:76). Because they spend all their time indoors and have limited

experience of the world, they view those with a wider frame of reference with suspicion. The market-basket, for example, ventures outside the domestic sphere and concerns himself with broader issues such as politics – he “goes in for a lot of wild talk about the government and the people” and is described as an “out-and-out radical” (1976:75). This description applies to the outsider in general, because he is blessed with a deeper level of perception and ventures outside the restrictive, conventional thinking dictated by society.

Impressed by the imaginative tale and seemingly unaware of the social criticism it expresses, the king and queen give their permission for the “Turkish God” to marry the princess. When the outsider is taken into the fold, they refer to him as “thou” “because, you see, he was to be one of the family” (1976:76). This detail is significant because Andersen was prohibited from using the more familiar “thou” when addressing Edvard Collin, the son of his guardian, Jonas. Unlike the merchant’s son, Andersen remained perpetually an outsider, a rejection that left a lifelong mark on him. The merchant’s son’s acceptance is, however, flimsy because it relies on his maintaining a false identity – that of a Turkish God. In order to maintain this illusion, the merchant’s son shoots off fireworks from the trunk during the wedding celebrations. A spark ignites the trunk which burns. Because of this, the son can no longer reach the high windows of the castle or marry the princess: the outsider is, once again, on the periphery.

From the outset it is clear that the merchant’s son questions the materialism into which he is born. Instead of learning how to make money and become like his father, he shows no regard for finances and uses banknotes as playthings. He does not dress like other successful men of business and walks around in his pajamas. This shows a disregard for convention – for what a materialistic society deems acceptable. He also rejects the social class system by endeavouring to marry someone way above his social position – a princess! Instead of using the conventional financial means to woo her, he makes use of his imagination and wins her heart by telling her stories. This aligns him to the romantic outsider, who disregards convention and remains true to his own inner convictions.

### “The Teapot”

This tale deals with society’s expectations of the individual and how the outsider often fails to conform to these standards and is subsequently ousted. We are introduced to the protagonist, a teapot, who is proud of who it is, even though it is flawed: “it was proud of its porcelain, proud of its long spout, proud of its broad handle [but] the lid had a defect, and we don’t care to talk about our defects – others will see to that” (1976:387). This statement recognises that society takes every opportunity to point out the flaws in individuals. The teapot, however, views its imperfections in a positive light, thinking that they build character rather than overshadowing its other attributes: “I know my own defects well enough and admit them. That’s where my humility, my modesty, come in. We all have our failings, though we also have gifts, don’t we?” (1976:387)

And then the teapot suffers a devastating blow: it is dropped and its spout, handle and lid all break: “The teapot lay fainting on the floor with the boiling water running out of it. It was a hard blow that it got, and yet the hardest blow was the way they laughed; they laughed at the teapot, and not at the clumsy hand” (1976:387). The physical pain it experiences is nothing compared to the emotional scars caused by the public humiliation. “The clumsy hand” might represent society’s callous attempt to control individuals, forcing everyone into the narrow confines of social convention with no interest in individuality or individual agency. Having been so badly damaged, the teapot now falls even shorter of society’s exacting standards, so much so that it is no longer considered to be of any use to society. It is banished from the social niceties of the tea parlour and is given to an old beggar woman, indicating its fall from social grace.

When the old woman plants a flower bulb in the damaged teapot, she shows that things can be re-appropriated, that “First, you’re one thing, and then you become something quite different” (1976:387). This offers the teapot hope because there are alternatives if one falls short of society’s expectations. The teapot realises this:

The bulb lay in me and became my heart, my living heart, such as I’d never had before. There was life in me, there was strength and energy. My pulse beat, the bulb sprouted till it almost burst with thoughts and feelings; it broke out into flower [and] I forgot myself in its loveliness. (1976:388)

Andersen might be describing his own struggle which was fraught with personal hardship and alienation, but which eventually culminated in a depth and understanding expressed in his artistic creations. And yet, the bulb is finally transplanted from the broken teapot into a better pot and the old lady breaks the teapot to extricate the bulb. Once again, the teapot is discarded. It is thrown out and has only its memories to sustain it; it remains perpetually the outsider, much like Andersen.

### “Heartbreak”

Dinah Birch suggests that Andersen’s tales appeal especially to the misunderstood and those who struggle to fit in, those who are outsiders themselves ((2014:1) This tale paints a particularly heart-wrenching picture of outsider-dom, as well as exploring “the outsider” perspective from various angles. For example, the narrator opens the tale with a discussion of the technical aspects of story-telling. This is an interesting narrative strategy because it reminds the reader that the narrator is himself an outsider looking into the tale, and it links outsider-hood with art. The narrator reveals that: “The story we are bringing in here is really a story in two parts. The first part might just as well be left out; the only thing is, it makes a good foundation – and that’s such a help” (Andersen, 1976:236). This focus on the structure of a story asks the reader to acknowledge that everyone has a tale, and that one can only really understand someone if one knows the whole story – every piece of the story is painstakingly created in order to enmesh the reader in the unfolding events and to explain how a character becomes what he or she does.

The events in this tale follow the visitors to a country manor house. The first of these is an old lady who comes by to sell shares in her tannery in town. She carries her little pug-dog with her and describes his quirks to the children thus:

“He won’t bite,” said his mistress, “he has no teeth. He’s just like one of the family, very faithful and very grumpy – though he has been teased into *that* by my grandchildren, who play at ‘weddings’ and insist on his being a bridesmaid; poor old chap, he finds that so exhausting.” (1976:236)

It is significant that the pug is “person-ified”, given the central role that it plays in the latter part of the tale. It is also something of an outsider as it is an unwilling participant in the children’s games, just like the romantic outsider who prefers to stand aloof of society’s machinations. A week after this event, and its death sets off a significant series of events.

After the funeral service, the widow’s grandchildren decorate the pug’s grave with broken bits of pottery and sand. They find a ghoulish delight in its death and dance around the grave. The eldest grandchild, a boy of seven, suggests making the grave an attraction and charging a button entry fee, because all the children have access to that type of currency. The children file in to see the grave, thinking that it was worth paying a button to see it even though some are afraid of going home with only one brace fastened. The spectacle is a tongue-in-cheek criticism of how some people enjoy the sensation in misfortune.

There is a ragged little girl who stands outside the gate, separate from the horde of grave-visitors. Although she is depicted favourably as “standing gracefully” and having the “prettiest curls” and “delightfully clear blue eyes” (1976:237), her outsider status is very pronounced. The narrator reveals that

she didn’t say a word, and she didn’t cry, but every time the gate opened she looked as far in as she could. She hadn’t a button – she knew that – and so she was left standing sadly outside, standing there till the others had all had their look at the grave and had gone away. (1976:237)

Because she keeps her feelings to herself, she remains self-reliant and self-contained in true outsider-fashion (Marin, 2008:81-82). It is only when she is alone that she expresses her feelings and realises the full extent of her social exclusion: “Then at last she sat down, held her little brown hands before her face and burst into tears; she alone had not seen the dog’s grave. That was heartbreak, as bitter for her as it may sometimes be for one who is grown up” (1976:238).

In this tale Andersen explores the pain caused by society’s unwillingness to acknowledge the agency of the outsider: the little pug is forced to engage in activities that are foreign to his nature – he is a dog but, for the children’s entertainment, he is dressed up as a bridesmaid and has to play at ‘weddings’. It is significant that a week later he dies – almost as though he cannot stand

to be a part of the masquerade any longer. Andersen also explores the emotional suffering caused by society's exclusion of the outsider on the basis of her financial constraints. Post-industrialised society was essentially materialistic and the poor were often excluded from the privileges enjoyed by the upper classes. Because she does not have a button, the little girl may not participate in the children's entertainment and she is embittered by her exclusion.

#### "The Nightingale"

In this tale Andersen contrasts the real and the artificial through the singing of a mechanical bird and that of a nightingale, the real bird's voice symbolising "art with life-giving power" (Ingwersen, 2005:3). This dovetails with Andersen's evaluation of the folk tradition, in which he wrote, as "real" art and the aesthetic sensibility of the upper classes as sophisticated and, therefore as producing "artificial" art.

In the Chinese emperor's garden, a note of artificiality is discernible from the outset. In the garden, rare flowers have little silver bells attached to them to draw attention to them and everything is "most carefully thought out" (Andersen, 1976:95); the influence of humanity is apparent in the contrived landscape. Beyond the garden, however, in a stretch of wood, lives a nightingale that sings most sweetly. The narrator reveals that travellers to the palace might admire the beautiful palace architecture, the surrounding city and the landscaped gardens, but they are most impressed by the beautiful songs of the nightingale. It inspires writers to mention it in their books so that even the emperor comes to hear about it. It is revealing that the emperor is unaware of the natural talent that exists in his kingdom but is very conscious and proud of the world-renowned, man-made artefacts conjured by his artisans. In this sense, the nightingale could be a symbol of the artist whose talent is not appreciated by those who wield power and dictate convention in society, making him an outsider.

Andersen portrays those in power as self-important and removed from nature. The emperor is a figure of authority who threatens violence if his command is not obeyed – there is no sensitivity or compassion in him. Andersen also criticises the artificial pomposity and self-aggrandisement that a social hierarchy encourages: the narrator describes the gentleman-in-waiting as "so grand that, whenever anyone of lower rank than himself ventured to speak to him... he only answered "P!" – and that means nothing at all" (1976:96). It is thus hardly ironic that the little kitchen

maid, who does menial labour and forms part of the lower ranks of the court structure, is the only one who knows where the nightingale can be found. This ties in with Andersen's general social motif which suggests that the lower classes are not "spoiled" by materialism and thus both recognise and have a regard for "true" art. In direct contrast to this, the gentleman-in-waiting repeatedly mistakes a cow's mooing and frogs croaking for the song of the nightingale and praises them highly, confirming his lack of artistic sensitivity. When he finally sees the bird, he judges it for its appearance instead of its talent, saying: "How ordinary she looks! I expect she's off colour through having so many distinguished visitors" (1976:97). His preference for superficial beauty has been encouraged by a "high" society mesmerised by outward show rather than subtle artistry.

Once the nightingale is taken to the palace, she is expected to "give a command performance" (1976:97) and, despite the authoritarian way in which she is approached, she sings beautifully and moves the emperor to tears. He wants to reward her materially, offering her his golden slipper, but she refuses because his tears are reward enough. Her reward is an emotional one, which connects her with the figure of the outsider as artist and visionary, someone entrusted with the sacred gift of bringing enlightenment to society. The emperor keeps her imprisoned in a cage and exploits her talent with no regard for her agency and individuality – the fact that, as a bird, she needs to roam freely. She is allowed outside but remains captive because her leg is bound to a palace servant with a silk ribbon. This signifies society's attempts to control the artist, making of him or her a commodity and commanding his or her creative output. This is reminiscent of Andersen's own experience as an artist misunderstood by society. Andersen's experience of society's artifice and callousness thus enables him to write about the romantic outsider with authentic insight.

Eventually the emperor grows bored with the nightingale and his next project is to have an artificial bird created which resembles the real one and reproduces its songs. This bird is everything a materialistic society desires: it is covered with jewels and plays the same songs repeatedly, and on command. Inherent in this is Andersen's critique of a society in which art is commercialised and mass production is valued over originality. Artificiality replaces authenticity, and the artificial bird is given pride-of-place on a satin cushion next to the

emperor's throne. While the court is distracted with the artificial bird, the real nightingale escapes into the woods. The disenchanted emperor later officially banishes her from the realm.

Finally, however, the emperor discovers that artifice cannot replace authenticity because the artificial, mechanical bird breaks down. He falls ill and feels Death sitting on his chest. In a feverish haze, he sees his good and bad deeds personified as people around his bed and begs for music to drown out their voices, but his subjects have all deserted him and there is no one to wind up the artificial bird. And then the emperor hears the sweet song of the true nightingale in the tree outside his room. She saves him from Death, trading her beautiful songs for the emperor's life: Death departs and the nightingale agrees to visit the emperor often, but only if she may maintain her freedom because she needs to sing for the peasant and the fisherman too. Andersen's implies that true art surpasses class distinctions and can be a redemptive force, but only if the artist maintains control over his art and retain his outsider-status.

#### "Auntie Toothache"

Houe remarks on the fact that Andersen's tales sometimes lack purpose and do not express what he calls "bourgeois sentiment" (2006:78). This was in opposition to the "orderly moral world of the Danish golden age" in which Andersen found himself. The Danish golden age was a period of creative production in Denmark which was an extension of Biedermeier, a movement that originated in central Europe (1815-1848) and which then extended into Scandinavia. In response to the chaos and bloodshed of the Napoleonic wars, the focus of the Biedermeier period was on maintaining peace and stability. Middle class sensibilities were promoted and there was a turning away from political concerns towards a preoccupation with the domestic sphere. It encouraged a pious view of the world and, in art, there was a shying away from topics that could be potentially upsetting to the audience (Ingwersen, 2005:6). In stark contrast to this complacent view of the world, Andersen delves into controversial areas and expresses social criticism through his art. This makes him almost the ultimate outsider, who, in rejecting convention, follows his own moral compass.

In the opening paragraphs of this tale, Andersen foregrounds society's preference for the practical and pedestrian over the profound: the discarded pages of a story are used as wrappers

for butter and cheese in a grocery store. The grocer's son questions this practice, saying that "Things go into the tub that oughtn't to go into the tub" (Andersen, 1976:401). He rescues the pages and starts reading them. He finds that the tale was written by a student who has since passed away. It relates a budding author's struggles to write in a restrictive social context. The student regards himself a poet, someone special who sees the world in a different way. His view dovetails with Andersen's romantic concept of the poet/artist as a visionary. Like Andersen, the student also remarks on the fact that people perceive only the surface meaning of phenomena, while "profess[ing] to know everything about 'God, the world and immortality'" (1976:402). The student's critical, and unconventional, world view indicates that he is an outsider.

His alternative view of the world originates in a healthy imagination, through which he perceives the neighbouring houses as bookshelves, each with a story to tell – if one listens closely enough. His imagination is encouraged by his aunt Millie who believes that poets should not write about reality. The fact that she overindulges the children with sweet things might, in fact, indicate a Biedermeier mentality, sugar-coating reality and discouraging the revelation of harsh truths through literature. She is nicknamed "Auntie Toothache" owing to her love of sweet things; when her teeth fall out she replaces them with beautiful false white teeth, revealing both the artificiality of this approach to reality and the consequences it might have. The student, who was raised in this environment, also suffers from severe bouts of toothache. In his dreams the pain takes on a physical shape in the form of Madame Toothache, who issues him with a challenge:

"Will you admit, then, that I'm more powerful than poetry, philosophy, mathematics and all music?" she asked. "I have been around longer. [...] If you will give up being a poet, never write down a single verse on paper, slate or any kind of writing material, then I'll leave you. But I shall come back, if you start writing". (1976:409)

The message here is clear: society prefers "sweet" art, and the student is not strong enough to withstand the preference. He cannot produce the art he wants to – art that teases out and understands controversial societal concerns – and if he surrenders to the production of "sweet" art, he will live with perpetual toothache. The outsider artist is bombarded by society's restrictions on his art, not only in the form of his aunt, but also in the form of Madame

Toothache who is the personification of society's preferences. Eventually, he yields under this pressure and downplays his artistic calling: "Please let me be little," [he] begged. "Don't let me be anything! I'm no poet, I only have fits of writing, like fits of toothache. Do go away!" (1976:408). Having vowed never to write again, he wakes from a deep, restful sleep. This might indicate a temporary truce between the outsider and his social context, but the bleakness that permeates the atmosphere at the end of the tale suggests that compromise is no real solution to the artist. The artist must express himself, and the world – which thinks otherwise – is actually better for the outsider's well intentioned reflection.

#### "Something to Write About"

The process of artistic creation is the central theme of this tale. Because Andersen sees the artist as a visionary who has been tasked by God to enlighten the masses (Birch, 2014:3), his very nature sets the artist apart and frames him an outsider. For Andersen, writing is a sacred calling not to be taken lightly. It should therefore not be pursued in the hope of egocentric reward or financial gain.

In the tale, a young man plans to become a writer by Easter, so that he can earn a living and get married. He therefore takes a course and studies writing. Having done this, however, an appropriate topic eludes him. Andersen suggests that writing is not merely a technical, sterile process, to be engaged in only for the financial benefits. The young man becomes ill in his quest for a topic and pities himself because all the good ideas have been dealt with. Finally, he seeks out a wise woman who lives in a "cottage by the gate that leads into the fields" (Andersen, 1976:438). This description already promises freedom of a kind, because the gate opens onto fields which are unbound and thus represent freedom of thought. Again, Andersen links a return to nature with the imagination and artistic inspiration: perhaps the escape from convention frees the creative process.

When he meets the old woman, the man voices his concern that there is nothing left to write about and pines for the olden, "better" days in which there was more to say. She admonishes him, reminding him that:

“In the old days the wise women were burnt and the poets went about with empty stomachs [...] you don’t look at things in the right way. You haven’t sharpened your hearing, and I don’t suppose you ever say your prayers at night. There’s plenty these days of every kind to write poems or tales about [...] have a try with my glasses, put my ear-trumpet to your ear, then pray to God and stop thinking about yourself”. (1976:439)

The implication here is that if a writer looks through the eyes and listens with the ears of wisdom, remaining on a spiritual path and surrendering egocentrism, he may find plenty to write about.

The cottage has a potato patch and a beehive, as well as a dike covered with blackthorn berries. When the man stops to listen, the potatoes tell him the story of their heritage, as do the bees in the hive and, when he gets up on the dike, he is astounded at the many stories he hears from passers-by. However, when the old lady takes away her glasses and her earpiece, the young man loses the ability to enter the other worlds that exist around him and, again, cannot think of a single thing to write about. Andersen clearly suggests that most people lack an artist’s perception; an artist is special and separate because of his ability to hear imaginative stories in the mundane world. The old woman advises the young man to give up on writing and suggests that he rather become a critic. If he does that, he will never have to write anything original and can spend his time criticizing what others have written. Instead of being affronted at the clear insult, the frivolous young man is elated: “Something to have a cut at! Cried the young man; and then he knocked every other poet out of the barrel, since he couldn’t become a poet himself” (1976:440). This emphasises the fact that, for Andersen, genuine artistic creation is a sacred calling; it sets the writer apart from the masses and identifies him as a romantic outsider. And, Andersen, who suffered greatly at the hands of literary critics, pointedly suggests that they have nothing of any original worth to contribute to the world.

In summary all of the tales dealt with in this chapter explore Andersen’s preoccupation with those who find themselves on the periphery of society – the outsiders. He gives them each a voice in his tales and allows them to describe, explain and criticise the worlds in which they find themselves. This particular class of character is one with which Andersen himself had much in common; he, too, was an outsider who was rejected by society and who rejected societal norms

in turn. As Paul Houe suggests: “Andersen’s childlike lability, to which his journeys were mostly brought to adjust, was driven by adventurous desires for liberation, for escaping the familiar and narrow in favour of an always larger and “other” world. As he resisted socialisation according to norm” (2006:65). Nils Ingwersen, too, remarks on the fact that tales such as “The Swineherd” have such strongly autobiographical aspects. Ingwersen writes that Andersen explores his experiences as an outsider overtly through such tales, in which the princess’s rejection of the swineherd, who is actually a prince, stands for Andersen’s rejection by a society that did not recognise his artistic gifts:

That pattern was one that the young Andersen knew well, he performed with high expectations and his audience gave him cool - if not worse - receptions. It is a pattern that haunted the successful older man and thus he mercilessly and repeatedly replayed it in his tales (2005:1).

Nancy Easterlin suggests the same, writing that “The Little Mermaid”, too, particularly explores Andersen’s sense of himself as an outsider. She writes that

Andersen’s identification with Byron and other English, Danish, and German Romantic authors and his emulation of their themes, including the romantic fascination with folk culture and the supernatural, provided additional impetus for his adoption of the mermaid as outsider, connected profoundly to several realms but nevertheless belonging to none. (2001:9)

Clearly, Andersen’s experiences of alienation spurred him to criticise a society that he found flawed. He depicted financial hardship and the suffering that results from the oppression of the poor and weak by those in power. He explores the suffering caused by harsh words and cruelty on the more sensitive members of society. All of this, he felt, was in keeping with his calling as an artist to foster social upliftment through his art, a calling that aligned him with romantic ideology. He incorporated the “romantic conceptual structure” into his work, weaving tales that show how all forms of life strive towards a higher consciousness. For Andersen, human beings carry within them the seeds of divinity and an artist’s duty is to bring this seed to fruition. Only the artist is superbly conscious of the divine power that flows through nature and humanity and to him, therefore, falls the redemption of humanity (Jørgensen, 1999:4).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

In this thesis I have argued that one may discern the influence of the eighteenth and nineteenth century English and German romantic *Zeitgeist* as well aspects of their aesthetic in selected fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen. The role of the imagination stands out as a particularly dominant feature.

For Andersen the imagination was transcendent. It enabled a person to overcome the mysteries and hardships of an earthly existence through the imaginative recasting of situations and it could foster the engagement with a higher, spiritual reality. I contend that, in Andersen's tales, the romantic imagination is dealt with through the evocation of Keats's negative capability, through an exploration of nature as a spiritual and moral compass, and through the sensibility and perspective of the romantic outsider. As a romantic visionary, these concepts enabled Andersen's to attempt enlightening his society, showing his readers the way to a better world.

The first romantic element, Keats's negative capability, can be discerned in tales such as "The Little Match-Girl" and "The Red Shoes" in which Andersen's child protagonists use the power of their imagination to envisage a better existence that is removed from their present earthly suffering. The concept implies an "imaginative openness" to the mystery of existence that defies logical explanation. By tapping into the power of the imagination, earthly suffering can be transcended, thus providing hope in seemingly hopeless circumstances.

The second romantic element that Andersen explores in his tales is the notion that engaging with nature fosters connection with the universal soul, that interaction with nature is the means through which to connect to the spiritual. And it is only when viewed through an imaginative instead of an empirical lens, that nature thus enables man to transcend the earthly realm and its implicit hardship. Generally, in Romanticism nature is considered a moralizing power. Because of this, the romantics felt that a closeness to nature would encourage people to reconnect with their "authentic selves" which had been spoilt by the artificiality of an industrial society. The culmination of this process, of course, would be a reconnection with deity. Central to this is the existence of a universal soul and the ability of nature to act as a "spiritualising" agent – concepts

explored by Romantic writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge. It also echoes German romantic thought which was influenced by ideas stemming from *Naturphilosophie* and German Transcendentalism. For example, Immanuel Kant explored the idea that earthly concerns could be transcended by harnessing the power of the imagination and that nature could aid in this process. Andersen's tales clearly reflect these sentiments, showing how nature conveys spiritual truths and acts as a mediator between the earthly and the spiritual realms in tales like "The Story of a Mother" and "The Angel". Andersen's tales also advocate respect for nature specifically as an element of the universal soul in "The Butterfly" and "The Fir Tree".

The third romantic element that may be identified in Andersen's tales involves the portrayal of sensibilities of the romantic outsider. Instead of being trapped by societal conventions, the outsider in Andersen's tales employs the Imagination to take a fresh view of society and realises its shortfalls. Andersen himself was encouraged to occupy this position because of the historical moment in which he lived: poor living conditions brought about by the Industrial Revolution, as well as a prejudiced class system, had resulted in hardship for the less-fortunate, more vulnerable members of society. Andersen's criticism of the social ills that result from petty prejudices is voiced in tales like "The Ugly Duckling" and "The Tin Soldier" and very much expresses his mission as a romantic visionary to elevate society.

Given the findings evident in this brief thesis, it is obvious that further research could be conducted on other romantic aspects that might emerge in Andersen's fairy tales. Even the concepts discussed in this thesis could be explored further. For example, Andersen's treatment of nature could provide the impetus for a study using ecocriticism as theoretical framework. Cheryl Glotfelty defines ecocriticism broadly as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996: xviii). It is an earth-centred approach which, according to William Rueckert involves "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (In Glotfelty and Fromm (ed), 1996:107). Andersen's fairy tales are open to this kind of ecocritical analysis, as they promote respect for the natural world and give it a voice. There is, at heart, a profound likeness between the Romantic appreciation of Nature and ecocritical thought. Bate's work *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) is one of the first texts to draw the link between Romanticism and ecocritical

theory. Since then it has been recognized by theorists such as Gary Harrison who suggests that the origins of our current ecological thinking can be traced back to European Romanticism. He is supported in this by Worster who argues that “at the very core of the romantic view of nature was what later generations would come to call an ecological perspective: that is, a search for holistic or integrated perception, an emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature, and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth” (1996:82). These statements point to the integral link between Romanticism and ecocriticism. Andersen’s celebration of nature in his fairy tales provide adequate scope for a study in the ecocritical vein.

Another avenue of possible research could entail a foray into the more practical applications of Andersen’s tales in a field such as fairy tale therapy. Andersen’s original fairy tales seldom, if ever, offer any comforting earthly alternative to, or resolution of the cruelty and pain experienced by his child protagonists. Instead, he seems to suggest that the child holds the power within himself or herself to overcome suffering through the power of the imagination. Their escape into an imaginary world brings some form of comfort to the protagonists. Instead of grasping for solutions intellectually or practically, Andersen advocates an imaginative transcendence of suffering.

As part of the treatment of trauma, the exposure to this aspect of his tales could prove therapeutic when applied within the appropriate context and under the right professional guidance. Verena Kast summarises the therapeutic effect of fairy tales as follows:

Many things happen in a folktale that are marvellous, twists of fate that we would never in our wildest imagination expect in our actual lives [...]. At times - if secretly - we would be glad if reality would loosen its wrenching grip on us a bit; we would love to let ourselves be carried along by a belief in “marvellous” solutions, a faith in answers that we never dreamed of, a hope that creative solutions will dawn on us just when we’re giving up. (Kast, 1995: x)

The approach Kast suggests involves beginning with a problem and then brainstorming imaginative solutions that fall outside the boundary of conventional thought. This allows the mind to tap into a freer, unlimited imaginary potential that is unrestricted by habitual thought

patterns. This aspect of her research seems to have something in common with Keats's notion of negative capability, in which the imagination enables one to overcome suffering. It is a given that trauma often results in a feeling that one has lost control of one's destiny. To an extent this may be alleviated through an escape into fantasy, which might enable a trauma patient to regain some sense of agency and control: the patient imaginatively redirects the course of events by thinking about them differently.

Fairy tale therapy can also be used in the treatment of patients who suffer from psychosomatic illnesses and those who suffer from an impoverishment of expression and lack of curiosity, liveliness and spontaneity. Psychiatrists refer to "potential space", an area between reality and fantasy, a metaphoric zone of psychological experience which is synonymous with a capacity to tolerate illusion (Smith, 1990). Some individuals experience this space as frightening and do not venture there. Fairy tales may help patients enter that "potential space", taking them back to a time when they could access the imagination more freely, without the fear that accompanies ventures into fantasy. This kind of therapeutic approach would be in keeping with Andersen's quest to elevate the world through his art.

Given the broad approaches that one might apply to his tales, one could argue that Andersen's efforts to uplift society and fulfil his destiny as romantic visionary were successful. Certainly, the depth and sensitivity of his vision extends his imaginative legacy far beyond the reaches of "children's author". De Mylius refers to this as Andersen's "quest for light and redemption", a journey "from darkness to light." (2006:1) And the gravity of this task belies Brandes's and other critics' description of Andersen as "a person of childish nature who wrote in a childish genre and belonged to a childish period in literature – namely, Romanticism" (2006:1). The exploration of Andersen's fairy tales is thus a vast and fascinating subject, which deserves a fuller treatment than I could offer it in this dissertation. Like Dinah Birch and Paul Binding, I would argue that Andersen is "a figure of major intellectual substance" (2014:1) whose imaginary visions continue to offer a broken world redemption.

Please note:

*When quoting German terms such as “Zeitgeist” and “Naturphilosophie”, I have used the German writing convention that dictates that nouns always take the uppercase.*

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