

Hans Christian Andersen in communities

an introduction

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In December 2017, The Hans Christian Andersen Centre hosted the international conference *Hans Christian Andersen and Community*. For the first time in more than a decade, leading Andersen scholars from all over the world gathered to share new knowledge on what is at stake when the cultural icon Hans Christian Andersen continuously travels across borders and is located in culturally specific contexts. Every time Andersen's works are found valuable enough to be passed on to future generations, they prove themselves as temporally and spatially sustainable. Over time, Andersen's works have been selected and interpreted in different ways depending on shifting concerns, considerations and convictions. These processes of reinterpretation and canonization where Andersen is adjusted and re-worked confirm his status as an enduring reflector for human needs, desires and anxieties. The complexities and nuances in such heritage processes are of course expressed differently in different parts of the world: the use and perception of Andersen depends on the gaze, and this gaze is – among other things – culturally rooted and geographically varied. The Asian Hans Christian Andersen differs from the European version, and national, regional, local and personal scales reveal more clearly the complexity and potential of the icon that is Hans Christian Andersen.

This special issue of *Aktualitet – Litteratur, Kultur og Medier* contains 17 contributions from the conference.¹ When presented together, as in the case of this collection, they may be read as 17 pins in the global Hans Christian Andersen map. The content of each individual 'pin' reflects the authors' particular analytical and cultural perspective, which is again structured by geographical, historical and ideological markers relevant to the diverse locations. Thus, none of the contributions can be perceived as permanent or immovable 'pins'. They are reflections of our constantly changing present - thereby contributing to a more global narrative of how Hans Christian Andersen has always been and continues to be supplied with new meanings and values, as when scholars read and re-read his works and ask: What do we find valuable now and why? This question can be answered in multiple ways and with multiple approaches, and each attempt has the potential to reveal Andersen's potential for current and future, alternative uses.

It is pivotal that the pins in the Andersen-map do not serve to pin him down and that the meaning and influence bestowed on him and his works is allowed to change over time. We as scholars must never be tempted to state that we have ‘mapped’ Andersen. On the contrary, it is our ethical responsibility to be apprehensive about such universalist claims. Any ‘mapping’ indicates that the process of appreciation can be brought to an end – that one day, the global meaning, value and significance of Hans Christian Andersen’s works will be fully completed. Such a perception of Andersen would freeze him in static positions blocking access to his works for future generations and ultimately resulting in the crumbling of his status as literary world heritage. It is, therefore, our responsibility as Andersen scholars to keep the door open to new interpretations of and analytical approaches to Andersen and his works, because we thereby contribute to sustaining his work’s status as cultural commons that should be equally accessible to everyone across borders, times, ages and genders.

This special issue is opened with Head of the Hans Christian Andersen Centre, Johs. Nørregaard Frandsen’s introductory lecture held at the *Hans Christian Andersen and Community* conference.ⁱⁱ The lecture is followed by the first section that contains geographically demarcated contributions to knowledge about Hans Christian Andersen’s current status as a writer and a cultural icon in different countries. Sven Hakon Rossel, Nadezhda Mihaylova, Sara Pascoal and Kristina Junge Jørgensen all approach Andersen through his own descriptions of the countries they represent; Austria, Bulgaria, Portugal and France, respectively. Thus, Andersen’s gaze on these countries is put to use as suggestive guides for their contemporary potential and re-evaluation. Elena Krasnova & Elena Gurova access Andersen through translation. They illustrate how changing perceptions of Andersen over time are expressed in translations and re-translations of his fairy tales in Poland and Russia. Clara Juncker completes this section with a very current example of how Hans Christian Andersen has been found relevant in the American political landscape in the era of President Trump.

Hans Christian Andersen’s sustainability as a cultural icon is, however, rooted in more than geographical markers. Scholars in different countries keep finding new perspectives and complexities in Andersen’s writings, and thus, the works are continuously re-framed and reinvented when they are transformed into analytical objects in literary and cultural analyses. In the second section of this issue, we present pertinent examples of such new approaches to Andersen. Poul Houe and Henrik Lassen have chosen different thematic perspectives on the family and the fireside, respectively, while Cyrille Francois integrates Andersen’s own historical context, all of them with the purpose of re-reading passages from Andersen’s work through their selected themes. Liang Chen illustrates how elements

from the theoretical framework of spatial theory can be applied in a reading of “The Little Mermaid.” Angelica Garcia Manso, Mogens Davidsen and Julia Shore, in a similar vein, seek to demonstrate how one concept, metanoia, presence and anthropomorphism, respectively, can be used to open Andersen’s fairy tales in new ways.

As Hans Christian Andersen travels as a cultural icon, he is sometimes placed in new contexts and categories that have new suggestions for how he can be perceived and used. The third section holds articles that contain three examples of such suggestions. In her article, Zhang Shengzhen presents the argument that Andersen’s work has great potential if it is approached through the lens of Ethical Literary Criticism. Herdis Toft situates Andersen in a context of children’s play as she argues that his fairy tales can work as particularly useful components in what she terms FairyPlay. Finally, Kwok-kan Tam argues that Japanese and Chinese technological adaptations and uses of Andersen’s fairy tales convey new and diverse East-Asian conceptions of selfhood.

It is our hope that the articles in this special issue may be read as illustrating and exemplifying both the current complexity and the future potential of Hans Christian Andersen’s works, and that they must encourage you as readers to create new pins on the Andersen-map: After all, the sustainability and magnetic effect of Hans Christian Andersen will always depend on how his works are received, perceived and valued by new generations.

ⁱ The collection contains both peer reviewed and not peer reviewed articles. If the article is not peer reviewed, it is stated in an endnote.

ⁱⁱ If nothing else is mentioned in the articles, all translations of fairy tales in this book are Jean Hersholt’s that can be found on the Hans Christian Andersen Centre’s homepage.