

# Hans Christian Andersen on the Move

## Introduction

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Traditional scholarship once held the fairy tale to be a remarkably stable form: predictable in its parts, universal in its aspect, and easily transported between places with no cause for substantive alterations along the way. As genres go, the fairy tale was considered something of an immovable object – even as its popularity brought it everywhere. Folklorists and literary scholars have since endeavored to dismantle these ideas alongside any notion of *the* fairy tale, pointing out its myriad forms and influences and arguing that the genre’s truer constant is in fact change. Nevertheless, the old view tends to hold in popular thinking, even for decidedly nontraditional fairy tales such as those composed by Hans Christian Andersen.

As one of the world’s most widely translated authors, Andersen has been in constant circulation for almost two centuries. But it is not enough to commend his stories’ remarkable endurance for getting around: they shapeshift; they maneuver; they become caught up in movements; they are strategically situated. Everywhere they go, Andersen’s fairy tales interact with, transform, and are transformed by their environments, a testament to their adaptive and enduring ability to move readers of all kinds.

This special issue explores new ground in how Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales move and are moved, whether across borders, between languages, through adaptations, or even while staying in place. The first half of the issue presents a series of traditional articles while the second half consists of conference proceedings and essays, all of which nudge our understanding of Andersen beyond where it once lay.

**Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen** opens the issue in Britain by revisiting widely held criticisms of Mary Howitt’s early English-language translations of Andersen. Examining Howitt’s letter exchange with the author as well as the Victorian periodicals by which these translations entered new markets and transnational conversations, Stougaard-Nielsen offers a revisionist critique of the idea that Howitt’s efforts relegated Andersen to the “nursery.” Both the correspondence and the periodicals themselves partake in an ongoing negotiation

of Andersen's image as a serious author of foreign works, recalling how Goethe situates internationalism, contemporaneity, and print infrastructure at the emergent heart of world literature. By looking at fast-paced publishing instead of just books, Stougaard-Nielsen's research moves our longstanding image of Howitt's Andersen from the childish toward the modern and the cosmopolitan.

**Henk van der Liet** draws our attention to mobility within Andersen's texts themselves, treating Andersen as a vagabond-writer to better track his authorial interest in movement as a both ontological and epistemological phenomenon. The article follows Andersen's maneuverings between the contemporary scientific discourse on perpetual change in the natural world and the broader Romantic interest in travel as an exploratory human activity. For Andersen, the nexus of the scientific and social, human and nonhuman, and knowable and unknowable generates conceptual *terrae incognitae* which go so far as to metaphysically bridge our world to the spiritual realm of death and afterlife. Van der Liet thus proposes a topos of life as *perpetuum mobile* wherein Andersen's narrative nomadism may anticipate the twentieth-century *Zeitgeist*.

**Mushtaq Bilal** shifts our focus to Bengali translations of Andersen in nineteenth-century colonial India, contrasting them with Urdu translations in twentieth-century Pakistan to show how two different processes of domestication unfold according to Lawrence Venuti's hermeneutic model of translation. Bringing popular Western works like Andersen's into Bengal was a colonial pedagogical strategy designed to undercut local interest in lowbrow publications. These translations were explicitly conceived of as adaptations meant to overcome cultural differences, dispensing with fidelity to consciously move toward the target culture. While these "conforming" effects, per Bilal, betray overtly colonial interests, the postcolonial Urdu translations domesticated Andersen's fairy tales with the objective of conforming them to a Muslim readership. In either case, the study demonstrates how Andersen travels around the globe only to be further deployed in service of local needs.

**Inga Kapustian** moves us to Ukraine in the nineteenth-century under the rule of the Russian Empire, where Andersen is again strategically instrumentalized in translation – only this time, as an act of native resistance to Russian influence which parallels efforts by the Ukrainophile movement. Under the nose of Russian imperial censorship, translations of Andersen's fairytales became the unlikely site of language conflict wherein Ukrainian neologisms, folk traditions, and cultural references were mobilized in the name of native expression. Bringing Ukraine into dialogue with the broader European canon not only

preserved local identity through assertions of local specificity but also served to elevate Ukrainian literature through interaction with major works. This integration of national motifs asserts local identities within the fairy tales, resituating Andersen firmly on Ukrainian soil.

**Elisabeth Oxfeldt** brings us to contemporary Norway through Øyvind Rimbereid's 2023 *Hvorfor hjerte nummer to* (Why Heart Number Two), an ekphrastic and paraphrastic poem which adapts Andersen's millman papercut. Using Linda Hutcheon's work on adaptation, the article moves back and forth between Norway and Denmark as entangled literary cultures, the poem's two main characters as asymmetrical halves at the heart of the narrative, and poetry and papercutting as acts with shared aesthetic philosophies of presence, absence, caesura, and an open invitation to fill in the gaps. Oxfeldt then turns to Andersen's lesser-known "The Windmill" with these maneuvers in mind, rereading it to consider how Andersen conceptually inhabits Rimbereid today – and the role art can play in bringing humans into dialogues that constitute ongoing, moving relationships.

**Torsten Bøgh Thomsen** opens the second half of the issue with an exploration of how Andersen's playful superfluosity becomes a cross-culturally imaginative vehicle, resisting what Lawrence Venuti would identify as instrumentalism in translation. Because culturally sticky details demand to be outright transformed into new contexts, they spark iterations and proliferations whose very abundance goes against the tidy linearity of the so-called universal. Combining Rabindranath Tagore's idea of *bajey khoroch*, or the aesthetic principle of "thrifless excess," with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's argument that such excess is ethically significant precisely because it is non-utilitarian, the article concludes that Andersen's too-muchness is an act of literary generosity that moves us to open new intersubjective and imaginative spaces.

**Anne Klara Bom** centers us in Denmark by exploring how Andersen is taken up as a heritage figure and Danish cultural icon. Because icons share a likeness with that which they represent, some affinity between Andersen and the notion of Danishness becomes a logical necessity, thus demanding a metareflective investigation into how Andersen is deployed as a cultural representative. Using Laurajane Smith's concept of Authorized Heritage Discourse, the essay examines how Andersen's conceptual binding to a past Golden Age reinforces institutions and hegemonic ideals in the present, as demonstrated by pedagogic, biographic, and bureaucratic examples. Accordingly, this discursive knot presents an ethical imperative: by counter-archiving and anarchiving, scholars must diversify representations of Andersen

and reexamine the underlying cultural processes that shape and uphold his function as a Danish identity figure today.

**Sarah Bruun Jørgensen** brings us to the United States by tracing how the 1959 Broadway adaptation of “The Princess and the Pea,” *Once Upon a Mattress*, established Barthesian cultural myths that persist and evolve through North America to this day. Starring Carol Burnett, the campy musical strongly emphasized the nonconformity of its fiery redheaded lead, invoking a cultural renegotiation of social and gender roles at the time. The show’s success in turn generated an enduring myth structure: the strong-willed, red-haired princess who can be found in various iterations for decades to follow. And yet, changes to this figure and its cultural signifiers demonstrate how even cultural forms which seem persistent or invariant always adapt to the needs of the present. The case study thus marks how it is not fidelity but in fact reinvention which typifies Andersen’s ongoing cultural mobility.

**Sarah Bruun Jørgensen** then shifts to a more recent and controversial redheaded princess in the 2023 Disney adaptation *The Little Mermaid* starring black actress Halle Bailey. By following social media surrounding the film’s casting, the essay shows what political, cultural, and ideological stakes reveal themselves once the mermaid’s body, itself the contested subject of the original tale, is so visibly reimaged. From the perspective of cultural and heritage studies, the online discourse proves Ariel to be the site of a struggle wherein racialization, representation, and belonging come to the fore. Arguments in favor of the story’s supposed invariance – namely, the presumptive white identity of the Danish mermaid – betray an unsettling of whiteness and normative centrality for certain viewers, whereas for others, the casting at long last puts Ariel within reach of a reimaged “we.” These strong reactions make legible the fact that Andersen’s continuous cultural circulation is always a renegotiation.

**Alexia Panagiotidis** brings this issue to a close with a comparative reading of Sid Sharp’s 2024 graphic novel *Bog Myrtle* and its inspiration, Andersen’s “The Girl Who Trod on a Loaf of Bread.” Folding in an intermedial approach that conceptually tethers the two works through papercutting, the essay emphasizes the textual-material aspects of each story and proposes the term ‘psaligraphy’ to link the concepts of cutting and writing. An Andersen papercut of a spider and its accompanying poem supply a further dialogue with Sharp through the play between crab walking and the rhythmic patterns of the verse. Particularly in the case of Sharp, the tactile emphasis on textile acts like writing, spinning, and weaving

underscores an ecocritical aspect – with broader implications for such entanglements in other media. The inspiration Sharp draws from Andersen metareflectively models how reworking Andersen’s fairy tales can urge in more creative and ethically conscious literary directions moving forward.