Venturing into Parts Unknown

Hans Christian Andersen on Life, Travel and Beyond

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> Der Tod verbirgt kein Geheimnis. Er öffnet keine Tür. Er ist das Ende eines Menschen. Was von ihm überlebt, ist das, was er anderen gegeben hat, was in ihrer Erinnerung bleibt.
> Norbert Elias, *Über die Einsamkeit der Sterbenden* (1982)

This article seeks to pay attention to one particular – often neglected – aspect of Scandinavian literary romantism, i.e. the role of vagrancy and vagrants. In the following this objective is thoroughly narrowed down to a single, in my opinion exemplary, oeuvre, the works of the Danish traveller-cum-storyteller Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875). Much of Andersen's work is permeated with individual and social mobility, dealing with travel in a concrete sense and as a token of societal advancement and/or decline. Today, vagrancy, vagabondism, and nomadism have lost prestige as individual and collective mobile practises, not least because of the rise of Scandinavian cultural self-imagery as homogeneous, well-organized modern welfare societies. Roughly since the end of World War II, vagrancy is rarely understood as an intrinsic aspect of Scandinavian cultural heritage and identity.[1] In Andersen's time though, being on the move was a completely different affair than today, and I consider Andersen to be a significant author whose spatial and social mobility, as well as his versatile literary production, justify labelling him as a vagrant-writer or a literary nomad. This claim is supported by Klaus P. Mortensen, the main editor of Andersen's collected works, published between 2003 and 2007, who appropriately characterizes Andersen as "fortællernomaden" (the narrative nomad).[2]

[1] Maybe the only traditional Scandinavian exceptions pertain to the often-celebrated lifestyle of the Vikings and, more recently, the emancipation of the nomadic indigenous peoples of Scandinavia, notably the Sámi.

[2] All Danish references, unless indicated otherwise, are to the latest edition of Andersen's collected works: H. C. Andersen, *ANDERSEN. H.C. Andersens samlede værker* (K. P. Mortensen, Ed., Vols. 1–18), Gyldendal / Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, digitized by D. H. Andreasen & H. Berg (2024), https://hcandersen.dk/. This lengthy title is in the following abbreviated as: HCA, SV, in this case: HCA, SV 1, p. 24.

Terms like 'nomad', 'vagabond', and 'vagrant' will in the following be used in the same vein as Mortensen does, often under the collective term 'travel', because they all entail mobility, not merely semantically or metaphorically, but also in practical terms.[3] Mobility performed by migrants, nomads, and vagabonds implies travel and therefore this perspective may be helpful to come to a better understanding of the meaning of Andersen's well-known existential motto: "To travel is to live!" as he famously phrased it in his autobiography *The Fairy Tale of my Life*.[4] In the following, the emphasis will be on the overarching notions 'travel', 'mobility', and 'life', whereas words like 'nomadism', 'vagrancy', and 'vagabondism' merely play a role as practical references in the background of my argumentation.

What does the phrase "To travel is to live!" mean in Andersen's 19th century literary and cultural context, how do the words 'travel' and 'life' relate to each other, and what do they tell us about Andersen's ontology and epistemology? And how did he envisage the nexus between the mobility of travel and life, considering the temporality of the latter? In other words, how did he not only deal with 'life' but also with the notion of 'the afterlife', and in what sense did this impact his work?

A Universal Principle

The relevance of these research questions is obvious when we take a look at Andersen's first major travelogue of a journey abroad: *Shadow Pictures from a Journey to the Harz Mountains, Saxon Switzerland, etc. etc., in the Summer of 1831*.[5] In this book – at the beginning of his career – Andersen clearly demonstrates, that travelling in his view was synonymous with the notion of change, which for him was the quintessential precondition of everything alive. Andersen's romantic world view and frame of reference implied that for him the activities, 'travelling' and 'living', truly were equivalent and pertained to all forms of life – human as well as non-human. A crucial aspect of Andersen's universal understanding of life was therefore that life not only is fundamentally governed by motion and mobility, but also that this dynamic universal principle never stops and even includes the dead, whom – so to speak – have moved on to another phase, into 'the land unknown'. The dead have, in this metaphysical argumentation, not left the world but merely migrated, switched 'habitat' and 'substance',

[3] I prefer to employ 'mobility' as the overarching word for personal physical and symbolic movement, while 'vagrant' and 'vagrancy' are used to refer to various forms of unregulated mobility, including nomadic practises.
[4] "At reise er at leve!" (HCA, SV 17, p. 276). From H. C. Andersen, *Mit Livs Eventyr* (1855).
[5] H. C. Andersen, *Skyggebilleder af en Reise til Harzen, det sachsiske Schweiz etc. etc.* (1831), HCA, SV 14, pp. 65–185.

entering the spiritual realm of 'the afterlife'.[6] Consequently, this article is not so much about the conceptual inseparability of travel and life for Andersen, but – more importantly – about Andersen's understanding of mobility as *a priori* ingredient in life, as well as a way to probe into what lies in waiting in the hereafter.

In *Shadow Pictures*, Andersen summarizes his comprehensive perception of this universal mobility-principle in the following way:

> To be a traveller is surely the happiest lot, which is why we all travel. Everything in the whole universe travels! Even the poorest man possesses the winged horse of thoughts. If it turns old and feeble, Death will take him on the journey, the great journey, which we all make. The waves roll from coast to coast. The clouds float across the great sky and the bird joins in the journey across fields and meadows. We are all on a journey. Even the dead in their quiet graves move with the earth around the sun. Indeed, "to travel" is a fixed idea for the entire universe. But we human beings are children. We even like to imagine that we are "travelling" in the middle of our own natural journey and that of the universe. (Andersen, 2011, p. 29)[7]

The inclusion of movement produced by non-human entities, like the waves, clouds and birds in this quote, are symptoms of Andersen's romantic attitude and draw attention to the interconnectedness of all forms of life, as everything supposedly has sprung from the same divine source. A unifying principle of the incredibly diverse and seemingly incoherent natural world is, that it never rests and always is in motion. This conceptualisation of nature and the relationship between human and non-human lifeforms does not come as a surprise, as Andersen was a close friend of the natural scientist Hans Christian Ørsted (1777–1851), and in later life an acquaintance of the German polymath Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859). Both scientists were advocates of the fundamental idea of continuous change in the natural world, and the interconnectedness of all lifeforms.[8]

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[6] The way the word 'metaphysics' is used throughout this article is inspired by H. U. Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (2004), p. xiv.

[7] "O reise! reise! det er dog den lykkeligste Lod! og derfor reise vi ogsaa Alle; Alt reiser i det hele Univers! selv den fattigste Mand eier Tankens vingede Hest, og bliver den svag og gammel, tager Døden ham dog med paa Reisen, den store Reise, vi alle reise. Bølgerne rulle fra Kyst til Kyst; Skyerne seile hen ad den store Himmel og Fuglen flyver med over Mark og Enge. Vi reise Alle, selv de Døde i deres stille Grave, flyve med Jorden rundt om Solen. Ja, "reise," det er en fix Idee hos det hele Univers, men vi Mennesker ere Børn, vi vil endogsaa lege "at reise," midt under vores og Tingenes store, naturlige Reise." (HCA, SV 14, p. 68.)

[8] Consequently, Ørsted and Von Humboldt may be perceived as precursors of the scientific discipline we today know as ecology. Of course, Ørsted's most well-known book is *Aanden i Naturen* (1849–1850), while Von Humboldt's opus magnum is *Kosmos. Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung* (1845–1862).

Andersen and Von Humboldt were both avid travellers and many of their journeys are recorded in diaries, expedition reports and travelogues often including drawings and pictures. In 19th century science, the study of the ever-changing natural world not only was the core business of scientists but also intrigued artists, writers, and the general public. The 19th century truly was a time of wonders, exploration, empire building, technological innovation, evolutionary thinking and, not least, the first groundbreaking steps were taken towards disclosing the workings of the human psyche, until then largely uncharted 'territory'. For Andersen, Von Humboldt, and others, travel had become synonymous with the urge to explore, discover, disclose, and describe 'new' terrain in the 'real' world, and, at the same time, they were deeply interested in the personal, emotional and psychological responses to these 'new' places and puzzling experiences. For Andersen and Von Humboldt, travelling meant venturing into the unknown, both in a concrete spatial sense, but also to probe into the obscure spiritual space of the mind, often with the moment of dying as the enigmatic narrative turning point.[9] Examples of the latter can be found in abundance in Andersen's stories, among others in: "The Little Matchgirl", "The Marsh King's Daughter" and "A Story from the Sand Dunes" (cf. Lilleør, 2006, p. 268).

In the present context it is important to keep in mind that Andersen's joyful glorification of travel in his travelogue *Shadow Pictures* not only establishes an equivalence between mobility and life, but also refers to the metaphysical 'final journey' that each creature – human and nonhuman – at some point in time will be part of.[10] This 'journey' into the unknown corresponds to Andersen's romantic notion of the world's dual composition, consisting of a visible and tangible world – usually call 'reality' – on the one hand, and an ideal, imagined or spiritual world, on the other.

A clear example of the interconnectedness in Andersen's mind of travel on the one hand and the inseparability of life *and* death on the other, can also be observed in his description of the bereavement of one of his closest friends in the Collin family, Jonas Collin's wife Henriette, who passed away in 1845: "Never had I imagined that the departure from this world could be so painless, so blessed" (Andersen, 1847, p. 233).[11] By using the

[9] Johan de Mylius draws attention to one of Andersen's earliest poems called "Det døende Barn" ("The Dying Child"). The poem was written while Andersen still was a schoolboy in 1826, and it clearly shows the importance of death as a literary motif, right from the start of Andersen's career. See J. de Mylius, 2004, pp. 311–312.

[10] Andersen, like many of his contemporaries, was convinced of the immortality of the soul which he, according to Johan de Mylius, understood as "a journey, a movement, preferably towards higher and higher levels" "en reise, en bevægelse, helst mod højere og højere trin" (de Mylius, 2004, p. 335; my translation).

[11] "Aldrig havde jeg tænkt mig at det at forlade denne Verden kunde være saa smertefrit, saa lyksaligt" (HCA, SV 17, p. 301).

word 'departure' for dying, Andersen presents the demise semantically and metaphorically as a mobile process. Hence, life and death are understood as two interdependent aspects under the overarching umbrella term: the universal principle of 'movement'.

Especially in the Romantic era, exposing oneself to unfamiliar surroundings induced new and often unexpected emotional responses. Artists were presumed to be particularly well equipped to capture and respond to the new and unknown and were supposed to possess special skills to transfer these experiences to others through their work. In this conception of the role of artists, they were often bestowed with visionary abilities and proclaimed geniuses, while their ability to register and respond to what is hidden or obscure to 'regular' people, also distances them from the motley crew. Thus, artists were often perceived as border crossers, members of an avantgarde who travel back and forth between known and unknown worlds and lifeforms. In the context of Andersen's religious beliefs, gifted artists could even be granted the privilege to venture into the mysterious realm of the afterlife. Andersen himself puts it as follows: "Dead people cannot walk again, we know that very well, but a work of art can walk again, the body may be broken into pieces, but not the spirit, the spirit of art haunts, and that is no joke." (My translation).[12]

Death in Lübeck

The German city of Lübeck was the first call in Andersen's *Shadow Pictures* and the link between travel, life, and death takes centre stage immediately after the author's arrival in the Hanseatic city. Lübeck is famous for its astronomical clockwork in the Church of St. Mary but even more renowned for a world-famous medieval cycle of paintings, known as *Danse Macabre* or *The Dance of Death*, in the same church. This series of paintings, comprising 26 meters of the church's walls, was destroyed in 1942 because of an Allied bomb raid. Fortunately, much is known from other sources of what Andersen must have witnessed when he visited St. Mary's in 1831. In other European churches, for example in St. Nikolai's church in the Estonian capital Tallinn, versions of similar paintings remain. In *Shadow Pictures* Andersen describes the images on the church walls as follows:

> You see all social classes and ages from the Pope to the child in the cradle being invited to dance the Cotillon of Death. All are dressed in costumes from the time in which they were

[12] "Døde Mennesker kunne ikke gaae igjen, det vide vi meget godt, men et Konstværk kan gaae igjen, Legemet var slaaet i Stykker, men ikke Aanden, Konstaanden spøgede, og det var ingen Spøg" (HCA, SV 3, p. 278). See also Lilleør, 2006, p. 53.

> painted, which is believed to be in *1463*. Underneath each person there is a verse in Low German, which is a dialogue between the dancers. But the verses are not the original, old rhymes but a newer, more poetic attempt dating back to *1701*. It seems that the artist had placed an ironical smile on the face of the dancing skeleton. It was as if the face wanted to say to me and the many spectators, who looked at it: "You now believe that you are standing here quietly, without moving or at least that you are walking about in St. Mary's Church, looking at old paintings. Death has not yet invited you to dance and yet you are all to dance with me. The great dance already begins from the cradle. Life is like the lamp which also begins to burn out as soon as it is lit. I have danced with each of you for as many years as you are old. Each has his or her favourite turn. And the one holds out longer in the dance than the other person." (Andersen, 2011, p. 33)[13]

This playful report of what Andersen saw in Lübeck also ties in with the prominence of Gothic motifs in 19th century popular fiction and art in general.[14] This sentiment also seems at work in various representations of monsters and semi-human creatures in Andersen's oeuvre, and explains his admiration for the version of Elisabeth Jerichau Bauman's painting of a mermaid, which adorned Andersen's apartment in Copenhagen.

Travel with a Purpose

Much of Hans Christian Andersen's work deals with actual travel, and scholars often tend to focus primarily on the concrete biographical aspects of his frequent travels and the accounts thereof. Although Andersen was a genuine pioneer in the early phase of modern tourism and experienced travel as a vital incentive for his creative work, it also meant much more to him than just a source of inspiration. Experiences gathered during many real journeys on the one hand, and the impressive social mobility he went through on the other, made him at an early

[13] Thanks to Monica Wenusch for kindly supplying a copy of the English translation.
"Enhver Stand, enhver Alder, fra Paven til Barnet i Vuggen, seer man her inviteret til Dødens Cotillon, og alle I Costume fra den Tid, hvori de ere malede, som skal have været Aaret 1463; under hver Person staaer et plattysk Vers, en Dialog mellem de Dandsende, som dog ikke ere de oprindelige gamle Riim, men et nyere poetisk Forsøg fra 1701. Det forekom mig, som Maleren havde lagt et ironisk Smiil i den dandsende Beenrads Ansigt, der ret syntes at ville sige til mig og hele Selskabet, som gik her og gjorde Bemærkninger over den: 'I troe nu, at I staae stille, eller i det høieste spadsere om i Mariakirken og see paa de gamle Billeder. Eder har Døden endnu ikke oppe til Dandsen, og saa dandse I dog allerede alle sammen med mig! Fra Vuggen begynder den store Dands. Livet er som Lampen, der ogsaa begynder at brænde ud, idet den tændes! Saa gammel som Enhver af Eder er, saa mange Aar har jeg alt dandset med Eder, hver har sine forskjellige Toure, og den Ene holder Dandsen længere ud end den Anden.'" (HCA, SV 14, pp. 71–72). Also thanks to Martin Hagstrøm for his comprehensive website on the *Danse Macabre*: http://www.dodedans.com/Ehca.htm.

[14] Well-known examples hereof are Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818), Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–1843) and *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker, while Arnold Böcklin's many versions of his painting *Die Toteninsel* can be seen as pictorial representatives of the same *Zeitgeist*.

stage in life aware of both the common characteristics, as well as the differences, between these two distinct forms of travel.

In the 19th century, making a journey was an important cultural signifier for the newly established middle classes. Through travel, members of the middle classes could demonstrate their self-consciousness and make the bourgeoisie aware of their social and cultural ambitions. Of course, the working classes did not have the same opportunities to produce and accumulate cultural capital through travelling. Working class people were in general dependent of their employers or benefactors and would primarily travel for work or were driven by the lack of means of subsistence.

For Andersen, travel meant much more than moving from one place to another. For him travel had additional, existential meaning. Without his uncountable travels, his work and life would have been fundamentally different, a fact of which his diaries, letters and autobiographies, bear ample witness.[15]

Travel means curiosity, an invitation for adventure and pushing boundaries, which even may include investigating the *unknowable,* or in Andersen's words, to visit "det ubekjendte Land" (the unknown territory), which means exploring life after death, a topos that merely seems to have survived in the margins of 20th century European high culture.[16]

Dead Man Walking

When reading Andersen's fairytales and stories closely, it is striking how prominent death and representations of the afterlife are in his work (cf. de Mylius, 2004, p. 310). On the other hand this is not surprising, as death in Andersen's lifetime was omnipresent in everyday life, particularly child and infant mortality was extremely high in comparison to today's numbers (cf. J. Andersen, 2003, vol. I, p. 365). Therefore, it is relevant to study how Andersen formulates his position on issues related to life, death and the afterlife. Johan de Mylius is well aware of the relevance of this issue and introduces an important nuance in Andersen's

[15] Just to mention a few random examples of the motif of travel in Andersen's stories and fairy tales: "Tommelise" ("Thumbelina") (who travels abroad on board of a ship together with swallows as her companions); at least the final scene of "Den flyvende Kuffert" ("The Flying Trunk"); "Lille Claus og store Claus", ("Little Claus and Big Claus"), which is a kind of road movie; "Sneedronningen" ("The Snow Queen") includes a journey to Lapland; "Hyrdinden og Skorsteensfeieren" ("The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep") who travel and overcome a number of obstacles to reach "the wide wide world" which at the same time scares them ("the world is much too big!"); also "Nabofamilierne" ("The Neighbouring Families"); "Stoppenaalen" ("The Darning Needle") and "Skyggen" ("The Shadow") strongly relate to travel.
[16] A rare example of a contemporary philosopher who engages with the topic of dealing with – and denial of – the presence of death in modern culture is the French philosopher Didier Eribon, who states that: "Denn leben heißt, einen Bezug zur Zeit haben, zur Zeitlichkeit und natürlich auch zur Räumlichkeit: Mann muss eine Zukunft entwerfen und sich im Raum bewegen können." (Cf. Eribon, 2024, p. 102). ("Because to live means having a relationship to time, to temporality and, of course, to spatiality: you have to design a future and be able to move in space." My translation).

understanding of 'the final journey': "[I]t has nothing to do with hell or purgatory. It is a process after death, a continued journey further on into *the intermediate state* […] called 'the unknown territory'."[17]Andersen's first book publication, *A Walk from Holmen's Canal to the East Point of the Island of Amager in the Years 1828 and 1829*,[18] is emphatically about a concrete journey but far from a realistic depiction of a walk in the outskirts of Copenhagen. On the contrary, it is an extremely playful and grotesque quasi-travel account in which Andersen plays with the reader's expectations. He mixes concrete reality with unrestrained imagination and derails chronology by wandering off in numerous distracting digressions, away from the main storyline.[19] *A Walk from Holmen's Canal etc.* clearly is a parody and a playful travesty, which also involves talking dogs and owls reciting poetry. Hence the text can hardly be taken as a serious contribution in defining Andersen's ethical or moral position. Still, when the young narrator-cum-protagonist acquires a pair of glasses that enable him to look straight through the earth into hell, it remains noteworthy that Andersen describes hell as an island at the center of the globe, reminiscent of Dante's Purgatory. Furthermore, Andersen's alter ego describes hell from a safe distance and optically mediated through his glasses. Thus, instead of boldly taking on the challenge to travel to hell – the scariest of stations on the 'path of life' – Andersen's protagonist is just watching: "The longer I stared, the more objects I discovered; the more clearly it appeared. – In the middle of the Earth was a great sea of flames, in which lay a well-developed and inhabited island. It was Hell, of course." (My translation).[20] The twist in the final sentence of this quote indicates that this description of hell, must be taken with a grain of salt.

A far more solemn and serious tone concerning death and afterlife is present in many of Andersen's fairytales. Already in his first fairytale, "The Corpse, a Funen Folk Tale" ("Dødningen, et Fyensk folke-Eventyr"), published immediately after *A Walk from Holmen's Canal etc.* in 1830, death is at the very heart of the narrative. The same is the case in "Little Ida's Flowers" ("Den lille Idas Blomster") (1835), where death is not described as the final stage of life but rather as a metaphysical phase in the cyclical course of life, as pointed out

[17] "Og det har hverken noget med helvede eller skærsilden at gøre. Det er en proces efter døden, en fortsat rejse videre ud – mellemtilstanden. Andersens bud på, hvad der møder én i det, som i 'Historien om en Moder' hed 'det ubekjendte Land'" (de Mylius, 2004, p. 342, my translation).
[18] H. C. Andersen, *Fodreise fra Holmens Canal til Østpynten af Amager i Aarene 1828 og 1829* (1829), HCA, SV 9, pp. 165–257.
[19] Biographer Jens Andersen calls *Fodreise* "a caleidoscopic novel" (2003, vol. I, p. 134; see also pp. 190–199).
[20] "Jo længere jeg stirrede, des flere Gjenstande opdagede jeg; des tydeligere viste det sig. – Midt inde i Jorden var et stort Flammehav, hvori laae en velbebygget og beboet Øe. Det var naturligviis Helvede." (HCA, SV 9, p. 238).

by De Mylius. In this text we can apprehend death as a transitional state in the continuous transformation of existence – as a next 'step' on the way to eternal (after)life.[21]

Furthermore, in "Little Ida's Flowers", one of the talking flowers reminds us of the fact that the flowers will perish after the summer and finally die. This though is merely presented as a temporary transformation, because next summer, they "will grow again and grow next summer and be much more beautiful!" (Andersen, 2024c).[22] In this reasoning, we can clearly identify Andersen's romantic and dualistic understanding of life, signifying physical existence in the *hic et nunc* as well as a metaphysical counterpart, "det ubekjendte Land" or the place unkown, where we – simple mortals – are denied access for the time being. In the context of 19th century romantic aesthetics, art could function as a cognitive intermediary that could help the public to acquire insight in the afterlife. In that sense, art functions as a pilot or vehicle to navigate the *terra incognita* of life after death.

The Nonhuman

The metaphysical journey into the unknown is of course related to the evangelical interpretation of the eternity of life as e.g. presented in the gospel of Matthew 10:39, where the modality of life after death depends on the sacrifices each individual being is prepared to make.[23] For Andersen though, this religiously informed perspective is not restricted to humans only. For him it has a much broader scope and even pertains to non- or mediated human lifeforms such as mermaids, plants, and animated objects. But still, it is strictly a human privilege and an intrinsic human urge to assemble knowledge of the life hereafter, in "det ubekjendte Land".

Human and non-human and mediated lifeforms share the same universal dynamic mobility, but humans are exceptional through their possession of a soul, the quintessential quality that makes them part of nature and at the same time of the metaphysical realm of the non-natural. A fine example of this two-step reasoning can be found in Andersen's travelogue *I Sverrig* (*In Sweden*) from 1851. In chapter 10, which is a bit of an anomaly in the narrative context, Andersen unannounced elaborates his views on the relationship between religion and science. The point for Andersen is that science can unveil the 'objective' world,

[21] This also corresponds with theologian Kathrine Lilleør's summary of Andersen's vision of life: "Life is an adventure, and the thrill of life is, that it does not end with death." (My translation). "Livet er nemlig et eventyr, og det eventyrlige ved livet er, at det ikke ender med døden" (Lilleør, 2006, pp. 54–55).
[22] "saa voxe vi op igjen til Sommer og blive meget smukkere!" (HCA, SV 1, p. 106).
[23] Cf. https://www.bibleref.com/Matthew/10/Matthew-10-39.html.

which can be apprehended, 'grasped' and seen by the human eye, but cannot penetrate into the 'unknowable'. This final stage is only accessible by means of prayer and religious belief:

> […] our earthly eye is only able to see into space to a certain extent, also our spiritual gaze only reaches a certain goal, but beyond that the same laws of universal love must prevail as here. […] Prayer is the wing that lifts us to the sphere of influence from which God will extend to us the olive branch of help and grace. (My translation)[24]

In the fairytale "The Little Mermaid" the protagonist has sacrificed everything she values in life, in order to gain the love of the (human) prince. Her quest fails and at the end of the story, she even refuses to take advantage of a possible short-cut, which would enable her to bypass the curse the sea-witch had put on her. Instead, she sacrifices herself and in return she enters what seems to be her real destiny, a life in the sky, as one of the Valkyrie-like "daughters of the air". Of course, this strongly resembles a Wagnerian finale, which not only is in line with the revival of Scandinavian mythology in 19th century aesthetics but also congruent with the dominant clerical and moral doctrines in Andersen's time. The idea that the human soul should undertake a journey after death was – and still is – commonplace in many religions worldwide, and it still was a widely accepted doctrine during Andersen's lifetime in Denmark as well.[25]

Surprisingly many of Andersen's fairytales and stories do not have a traditional happy ending. The little mermaid does not receive any guarantee for how her future existence will unfold. She must prove herself through devotion and self-sacrifice for many years to come, and still, she receives no assurance as to whether she will obtain her final future goal, i.e.: an immortal soul which humans are considered to have. In his introduction to Andersen's collected works, Klaus P. Mortensen summarizes the complex religious position of Andersen vis-à-vis death and afterlife in the following way:

> Love, understood as the capacity for self-forgetful devotion or sacrifice implies a transcendence of the existing – of the self, of man-made reality, of death. In the possibility of resurrection, and that means in the transformation into another, real existence, everything that

[24] "[…] vort jordiske Øie formaaer kun at see til en vis Grændse ind i Rummet, vort sjælelige Blik naaer ogsaa kun til et vist Maal, men hiin Side *det* maa de samme Alkjærlighedens Love herske, som her. […] Bønnen er Vingen, der hæver os til den Indflydelsens Sphære, hvorfra Gud vil række os Hjælpens og Naadens Oliegreen." (HCA, SV 15, p. 101.)

[25] Therefore, it is not surprising that one of Andersen's closest friends in the 1840's is able to write to him: "You should travel into my soul, just like the soul of a departed in India" **(c**f. Möller-Kristensen, 1998, p. 16). "De skulle rejse ind i min sjæl, ligesom en afdød sjæl i Indien", here cited in J. Andersen, 2003, vol. I, p. 486.

> cannot exist on the terms of selfishness and vanity, comes to free expression. […] The resurrection therefore does not exist as a guarantee, at most only as a hope, as an expression of grace. (My translation)[26]

In other words, it is up to the highest authority – the Lord himself – to decide on the course of life, death and the disposition of the afterlife of each individual separately.

The little mermaid and, for example, the flower in the fairytale "The Mayweed" ("Gaaseurten", 1838) must toil their way through existence, suffering and dealing with hostile circumstances and antagonistic forces. Probably the mermaid will find reconciliation through repentance and the same may happen in "The little Match Girl" ("Den lille Pige med Svovlstikkerne", 1845), "The Red Shoes" ("De røde Skoe", 1845), "The Girl who Trod on the Loaf" ("Pigen, som traadte paa Brødet",1859) etc., but much is left in the dark with respect to the actual afterlife and "the unknown territory" (cf. HCA, SV 1, p. 38).

It is a chameleonic ability to describe the transfer from one level of existence to another that characterizes numerous stories by Hans Christian Andersen. Often his stories are vehicles that appeal – and directly cater – to the moral values of the grownups in his readership, while at the same time they are written with children and young people in mind.

An interesting example of this is the fairytale "The Travelling Companion" ("Reisekammeraten", 1835). Here, the protagonist Johannes wanders off into the world like in a regular *Bildungsroman*,[27] one of Andersen's generic favorites, as Johan de Mylius has shown.[28] In the tale, Johannes travels together with a person who appears to be a genuine hobo or vagabond, stereotypically with his "stick in his hand and his knapsack on his back" (Andersen, 2024e).[29] At the end of the adventure, when Johannes – with the help of his companion – has won the princess (and the kingdom), the close bond between the two friends dissolves in the blink of an eye. The moment the anonymous companion takes his

[26] "Kærligheden, forstået som evnen til selvforglemmende hengivelse eller opofrelse, indebærer en overskridelse af det værende – af jeget, af den menneskeskabte virkelighed, og det vil sige i en anden, egentlig eksistens, kommer alt det, der ikke kan eksistere på selviskhedens og forfængelighedens vilkår, til fri udfoldelse. […] Genopstandelsen findes derfor ikke som en Garanti, i det højeste kun som et håb, som et udslag af nåde." (HCA, SV 1, pp. 31–32)

[27] The historical development of the genre of the travelogue coincided in the late 18th century with the emergence of the *Bildungsroman*, in which the protagonist's interaction with secondary characters happens through four subsequent steps: 1. The experience of loss; 2. leaving home as adolescent or young adult; 3. gathering social, cultural and sometimes financial capital and skills, interacting with others as adult; and 4. after some time, return home as a mature individual. Each phase – or step, to stick to the metaphor – differs spatially and temporally and reflects the ideals of nineteen century individualism and liberalism. In his biography Jens Andersen mentions that it was not until 1830 that Andersen gave it a try as author of fairy tales when he presented the local folk tale "Dødningen" at the end of his first collection of poems *Digte*. "Dødningen" was later reworked into "Reisekammeraten" (cf. J. Andersen, 2003, vol. I, pp. 351–352).

[28] Without using the actual word Bildungsroman, Johan de Mylius emphasizes that the narrative scheme of this genre, is one of the most frequently used narrative models in Andersen's oeuvre (cf. de Mylius, 2004, p. 54).

[29] "han havde sin Stok i Haanden og Randselen paa Nakken" (HCA, SV 1, p. 139).

leave, he reveals his identity. This fellow traveler turns out to be the deceased person whom Johannes defended and cared for at the very beginning of the story: a band of thugs or robbers was at the verge of disturbing the dead man's corpse when Johannes intervened by offering them everything he owned in return for the stranger's body.

Immediately before leaving Johannes, the travelling companion reveals his identity by exclaiming: "'[…] I am that dead man!' At that very instant, he was gone! –" (Andersen, 2024e).[30] The travelling companion has obviously done penance in silence and thereby paid back his debt to Johannes by supporting him. Once they have become even, the companion disappears forever. But still the question remains, where did the dead man go, to "the unknown territory"?

Nirvana

Andersen often connects death with some sort of imminent threat in his stories. Death is patient and never forgets wrongdoings from the past and it may claim compensation. Like the proverbial sword of Damocles, it is ready to strike at any given moment. An example of death's looming patience can be found in the final paragraph of "The Garden of Eden" ("Paradisets Have"):

> He will be laid in a coffin, but not yet; I have only set my mark on him, let him roam the world for some time more, atone for his sin, become good and better! – I will return at some point. When he least expects it, I will put him in the black coffin, place it on my head and fly up towards the star. (Andersen, 2024b)[31]

Although the 'final journey' happens after death and has longevity, it must come to some kind of closure – on judgement day perhaps? In any event death does not seem to be something to be afraid of as is indicated by "The Galoshes of Fortune" ("Lykkens Galosker"). In this story the narrator's ultimate motivation is not to travel, i.e. to see and experience "the wide world", as Andersen 'often calls it, but rather the opposite: to find a final (resting) place

[30] "'Den Døde er jeg!' I det samme var han borte. –" (HCA, SV 1, p. 139).
[31] "I Liigkisten skal han lægges, men ikke nu; jeg mærker ham kun, lad ham da en Stund endnu vandre om i Verden, afsone sin Synd, blive god og bedre! – jeg kommer engang. Naar han da mindst venter det, putter jeg ham i den sorte Liigkiste, sætter den paa mit Hoved og flyver op mod Stjernen […]." (HCA, SV 1, p. 224). A similar situation of 'atonement' can be found at the end of the short story "Skyggen", where the narrator appeals directly towards the reader or listener, whereby the threat becomes an ethical admonition.

which requires no mobility whatsoever and does not demand any physical energy or mental activity. It is a state in which life has come to an end. The protagonist simply concludes:

> "Yes, travelling's all very well!" the student sighed, "as long as one does not have a body! if this could only rest and one's spirit fly instead. Wherever I come, there is a deep sense of something lacking that burdens the heart; something better than what is momentary is what I am searching for; yes, something better, the best, but where and what is it! I basically know what I want, I want to reach a fortunate goal, the most fortunate of all!"
>
> As soon as he had spoken these words, he was back home […] and on the middle of the floor there stood a black coffin, in it he lay in the quiet sleep of death – his wish had been fulfilled, his body was resting, his spirit travelling. "Call no man happy until he is dead," *Solon* once said, which is hereby confirmed. (Andersen, 2024a)[32]

In this 'idyllic' state – this Nirvana – the body no longer travels, while the spirit, just as works of art, still can move on. For Andersen and many of his Christian contemporaries, discussing this intermediate phase between death and resurrection was commonplace.[33] Ideas concerning the metaphysical nature of the soul were widely and vehemently discussed in science, philosophy, art, and especially literature in the 1830's and 1840's. Lasse Horne Kjældgaard has in his study *Sjælen efter døden. Guldalderens moderne gennembrud* (2007) outlined the different positions in this critical debate within a broader cultural framework, where theologians and philosophers as Hans Brøchner, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, H. L. Martensen, Poul Martin Møller, and Søren Kierkegaard are the key participants.[34]

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[32] "Ja, reise er godt nok!" sukkede Studenten, "havde man bare intet Legeme! Kunde dette hvile og Aanden derimod flyve. Hvor jeg kommer, er der Savn, der trykker Hjertet; noget bedre, end det Øieblikkelige, er det jeg vil have; ja noget bedre, det Bedste, men hvor og hvad er det! Jeg veed i Grunden nok, hvad jeg vil, jeg vil til et lykkeligt Maal, det Lykkeligste af Alle!" Og i det Ordet var udtalt, var han i Hjemmet […] og midt paa Gulvet stod den sorte Liigkiste, i den laae han i sin stille Dødssøvn, hans Ønske var opfyldt, Legemet hvilte, Aanden reiste. Priis Ingen lykkelig, før han er i sin Grav, var *Solons* Ord, her fornyedes Bekræftelsen." (HCA, SV 1, pp. 484–485).

[33] The clerical expression for this state of the (spiritual) body is *soma pneumaticon* (cf. Kjældgaard, 2007, p. 122).

[34] "The idea that doubting the immortality of the soul was typical of the period, can be found in several places in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings. With Heiberg, Møller and Martensen, he shared the assumption that the belief in immortality was waning and that this was a sign that revealed something significant about the entire age. […] It was not up for debate whether the belief in the immortality of the soul was being dismantled; the question was what this development meant in a broader perspective – in relation to the future of religion, art and all of humanity." (Kjældgaard, 2007, p. 230, my translation). "Tanken om, at tvivlen på sjælens udødelighed var typisk for tidsalderen, finder man altså flere steder i Kierkegaards pseudonyme forfatterskab. Med Heiberg, Møller og Martensen delte han antagelsen af, at udødelighedstroen var aftagende, og at dette var et tegn, der gav noget betydningsfuldt til kende om hele tidsalderen. […] Det var ikke til diskussion, om troen på sjælens udødelighed var under afvikling; spørgsmålet var, hvad denne udvikling i videre forstand betød – i forhold til religionens, kunstens og hele menneskehedens fremtid." (Kjældgaard, 2007, pp. 86; 88–93; 111–112; 125; 281; 284).

For Andersen too, this debate was of great importance and resonated strongly in his work.[35] And therefore we should perhaps extend Andersen's motto "To travel is to live!", to include what comes after life, and rephrase it as: "To travel is to live and pass away!". Because, as maintained earlier, life and death are in Andersen's universe interdependent and strongly connected notions (see Frandsen, 2022, p. 88).

Stories like *A Poet's Bazaar* (*En Digters Bazar*) and "On Judgement Day" ("Paa den yderste Dag") are in tune with this extended aphorism. In *A Poet's Bazaar*, the protagonist embarks on a long journey suggesting death and subsequent rebirth[36] and in "On Judgement Day", Andersen shows that life does not end but continues and morphs into a different modality (de Mylius, 2004, p. 341; Lilleør, 2006, pp. 209–210). Johan de Mylius presents an identical conclusion in his analysis of "The Old Oak Tree's Last Dream" ("Det gamle Egetræs sidste Drøm") by maintaining that Andersen, "attuned to the spirit of the times, operates with a dualism between soul and matter, and postulates the immortality of the soul compared to the transience of matter or the body." (My translation).[37]

The Living Daylights

In other stories, death is brought into play as a moral deterrent, for example in the fairy tale "The Storks" ("Storkene", 1839). Here, a mother stork protects her offspring against aggressive village bullies, who try to chase them away. She employs rather heavy-handed martial methods and military discourse, turning the defense of the storks into a military operation of sorts. The young storks are forced to "exercise" and take part in the "big maneuver" and if they do not do their very best and learn to fly properly, they will be punished. Discipline is required if one wants to survive. The mother stork warns the youngsters: "for if you can't fly, the general will stab you to death with his beak; so make sure you learn something when the drilling starts!" (Andersen, 2024d).[38] Towards the end of the story, the storks are on the verge of flying to "the warm countries" and now the young storks decide to take revenge on the naughty village boys, who scold them and sing mocking songs at them.

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[35] See Kjældgaard, 2007, p. 286. Here Andersen's novel *At være eller ikke være* (1857) is mentioned in this context.

[36] See J. Andersen, 2003, vol. II, p. 176. Kjældgaard draws attention to Andersen's tongue-in-cheek response to the critic J. L. Heiberg's satirical play *En Sjæl efter Døden* (1840; *A Soul after Death*), which makes fun of Andersen's plays *Mulatten* (1834; *The Mulatto*) and *Maurerpigen* (1840; *The Moorish Maiden*) (Kjældgaard, 2007, p. 180). Cf. Berni, 2014, pp. 118–119.

[37] "helt i tidens ånd arbejder [Andersen] med en dualisme mellem sjæl og materie og postulerer sjælens udødelighed over for materiens eller legemets forgængelighed" (de Mylius, 2004, p. 322).

[38] "den som ikke kan flyve, stikker Generalen ihjel med sit Næb; derfor pas vel paa at lære Noget, naar Exercitsen begynder!" (HCA, SV 1, p. 232).

The mother stork initially suggests the youngsters to turn their lust for revenge in a positive direction. And since storks have the special task of delivering babies, she proposes that "each of the children who haven't sung the nasty song and made fun of the storks," (Andersen, 2024d)[39] will get a little brother or little sister, whereas children who have behaved badly towards the storks "aren't to have any!" (Andersen, 2024d).[40] The young, obstinate storks find this solution too soft for the boy who initiated the harassment of them. The mother stork's compromise is that the mischievous boy is handed a dead child instead, and the boy who has tried to stop the rampage against the storks receives both a baby brother and a little sister from the storks as token of their gratitude.

Using a dead child to punish another child because "it's a shame to make fun of these creatures!" (Andersen, 2024d)[41] is quite a crass method; nevertheless it clearly shows that for Andersen and his contemporaries, the notion of death had a fundamentally different emotional and intellectual meaning than death has in our time.

Concluding Remarks

This article is a provisional collection of reflexions on a pivotal thematic and epistemic aspect of Hans Christian Andersen's literary work, i.e. his frequent and consistent deployment of a nexus between travel, life, death and the afterlife. As a springboard for further research, I propose a preliminary categorization of this topos – of life as *perpetuum mobile* – with two distinct modalities:

1. Movement as a fundamental, intrinsic force in all of nature – human and non-human – propelled by time, avoiding stasis, engendering change, and creating a vital state of rupture or constant *flux*.
2. Mobility as an effect of movement; an inherent, exclusively human incitement, motivated by curiosity, to explore *terrae incognitae*, i.e. the urge to encounter new spaces, real as well as imaginary, including the wish to traverse and explore the realm of *the unknowable*, and – in art – to visualise and describe the supposed *afterlife*, often attuned to religious beliefs and traditions.

[39] "hver af de Børn, som ikke have sjunget den onde Vise og gjort Nar af Storkene" (HCA, SV 1, p. 235).
[40] "skulle slet ingen have!" (HCA, SV 1, p. 235).
[41] "det er Synd at giøre Nar af Dyrene!" (HCA, SV 1, p. 235).

The first *apriori* level could be characterized as a 'natural' or 'organic' form of mobility and the second as a specifically human and intellectual exercise. This second form can be observed in a wide range of varieties of travel – exploratory and touristic – mainly driven by curiosity and depending on different forms of human agency, which ultimately may include the quest for the unknowable too. In Andersen's age – an era determined by feverish exploration, discovery and innovation – the invisible and unknown were of great epistemic interest, basically in all the domains of culture.

Notwithstanding that this at first glance may appear somewhat antiquated, similar questions have more recently been addressed by philosopher and literary scholar Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who precisely acknowledges the urge to investigate the metaphysics or 'permeability' of the life world, as an important aspect of the human ontology:

> [I]t belongs to the content of our life world to imagine – and to desire – abilities that lie beyond the borders of the life world. […] The double temporal limitation of human life by birth and death, for example, will produce a desire to cross these two borders of the life world […]. As an underlying force this very desire will motivate all historically specific cultures. (Gumbrecht, 2004, pp. 122–123)

Hans Christian Andersen's oeuvre seems to be imbued with a ubiquitous and intense awareness of the nexus between mobility as a precondition of everything alive, and a presumed exclusive human agency to venture beyond the knowable. This hypothesis and the categorization proposed here, require further clarification. Furthermore, with the examples presented in this article, a preliminary answer may be, that the traveler-storyteller Hans Christian Andersen can be regarded as one of the pioneers of 19th century 'vagrant-thinking' about life and death. Thus the 'narrative nomad' Andersen may even be understood as a precursor of the cultural and theological iconoclasm, that shortly after Andersen's own demise, became an important cultural denominator of the *Zeitgeist* of the next century.[42]

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