

EN AMERIKANSK VISIT HOS H. C. ANDERSEN

AF

SVEND JUEL MØLLER

Som led i forberedelsen af Det kgl. Biblioteks bibliografi over H. C. Andersens værker i engelsk oversættelse er naturligvis også husets to store særsamlinger gennemgået: Laage-Petersens og Arne Portmans. Begge indeholder de en mængde excerpter af engelske tidsskrifter fra 1846 til 1960, med hele eller fragmentariske oversættelser af HCA-værker, samt en broget samling essays vedrørende HCA, ofte med tekst lånt fra andre publikationer, en del uden større interesse.

Charmen ved en bogforskers hyppigt trælsomme arbejde i litterært ørkensand ligger jo i den uventede belønning: fundet af oasen, det liflige kildevæld, som gør arbejdet frugtbart og umagen værd. Således lå der en dag i arbejdsbunken et klip fra et af de engelske tidsskrifter i Laage-Petersens samling: „Supplement to the Manchester Weekly Times, Saturday, December 19, 1863“, med overskriften „Hans Christian Andersen“, og undertitlen „A Californian in Iceland“, med kildehenvisningen „Harper's New Monthly Magazine“ (uden årgangsbetegnelse, årstal eller sidetal). Artiklen viste sig at være en californisk rejsendes skildring af et besøg hos HCA i hans daværende bolig i Nyhavn¹⁾ under forfatterens midlertidige ophold i København, mens han ventede på skibslejlighed til Island. Hans navn står ikke anført.

Forud for skildringen af besøget læser man om forfatterens motiver til at foretage en sådan rejse. Bl.a. har han hørt om de historiske steder – Tingsletten, Lovhjerget, de varme kilder, som han gerne vil se og tegne. Og han vil prøve at finde den sjældne islandske Geirfugl.²⁾ Siden meddeler han så, at han d. 4. juni – året nævnes ikke – går ombord i dampen Arcturus.³⁾ Forf.s besøg hos Andersen belyser iøvrigt det velkendte faktum, at HCA i de sidste 25 år af sit liv var en af Københavns turistattraktioner; utallige udlændinge, der kom til Danmark, opsøgte ham for bagefter at kunne sige, de havde truffet den berømte eventyrdigter.⁴⁾

Der findes næppe blandt samtidens mange forskellige beretninger om besøg hos eller samtaler med HCA en mere præcis, mere lunerig og medlevende gengivelse af hans meget bevægelige ansigtstræk, hans skikkelse, adfærd og væsen – undtagen måske hos to af de bedste: Edmund Gosse og Annie Wood.⁵⁾ Det er et kunstnerisk portræt, vi har for os, hvad der hænger sammen med, at forfatteren tillige er tegner. Det fremgår klart af de følgende kommentarer samt af den kendsgerning, at hele stedets atmosfære, som er en ikke uvæsentlig del af skildringen, er så levende fremstillet, at ordet filmudkast måske med nogen ret kunne karakterisere det lille essay, som nedenfor gives in extenso:

„... I could not do myself the injustice to leave Copenhagen without forming the personal acquaintance of a man to whom a debt of gratitude is due by the young and the old in all countries – the ramblers in fairyland, the lovers of romance, and the friends of humanity – all who can feel the divine influence of genius... the quaint, pathetic, genial Hans Christian Andersen. Not wishing to impose any obligation of courtesy on him by a letter of introduction or the obliging services of my Danish friends, I called at his house unattended and merely sent in my name and address. Unfortunately he was out taking his morning walk and would not be back till the afternoon. By calling at three o'clock, the servant said, I would be very likely to find him at home. I then added to my card the simple fact that I was an American traveler on my way to Iceland for the purpose of making some sketches of the country, and would take the liberty of calling at the appointed hour.

It may be a matter of interest to an American reader to have some idea of the peculiar neighborhood and style of house in which a great Danish author has chosen to take up his abode.

The city of Copenhagen, it should be borne in mind, is intersected by canals which, during the summer months, are crowded with small trading vessels from Sweden and Jutland, and fishing smacks from the neighboring islands and coast of Norway. The wharves bordering on these canals present an exceedingly animated appearance. Peasants, sailors, traders, and fishermen in every variety of costume, are gathered in groups enjoying a social gossip or interchanging their various products and wares, and strawberries from Amak and fish from the Skager-Rack mingle their odors. In the second story of a dingy and dilapidated house, fronting one of these unsavory canals, a confused pile of dirty, shambling old tenements in the rear, and a curious medley of fish and fishermen, sloops and schooners, mud-scows and skiffs in front, lives the world-

renowned author, Hans Christian Andersen. I say he lives there, but properly speaking he only lodges. It seems to be a peculiarity of his nature to move about from time to time into all the queer and uninviting places possible to be discovered within the limits of Copenhagen⁶) – not where

The mantling vine
Lays forth her grape and gently creeps
Luxuriant⁷)

but where the roughest, noisiest, busiest, and fishiest of an amphibious population is to be found. Here it is, apparently amidst the most incongruous elements, that he draws from all around him the most delicate traits of human nature, and matures for the great outer world the most exquisite creations of fancy. It is purely a labor of love in which he spends his life. The products of his pen have furnished him with ample means to live in elegant style, surrounded by all the allurements of rank and fashion, but he prefers the obscurity of a plain lodging amidst the haunts of those classes whose lives and pursuits he so well portrays.

Here he cordially receives all who call upon him, and they are not few. Pilgrims of every condition in life and from all nations do homage to his genius; yet valuable as his time is, he finds enough to spare for the kindly reception of his visitors. His only household companions appear to be two old peasant women whom he employs as domestics; weather-beaten and decrepit old creatures, with faces and forms very much like a pair of antiquated nut-crackers. He occupies only two or three rooms plainly furnished, and apparently lives in the simplest and most abstemious style. When I called, according to directions, one of the ancient nut-crackers merely pointed to the door, and said she thought Herr Andersen was in, but didn't know. I could knock there and try; so I knocked.

Presently I heard a rapid step, and the door was thrown open. Before me stood the tall, thin, shambling, raw-boned figure of a man a little beyond the prime of life, but not yet old, with a pair of dancing gray eyes and a hatchet-face, all alive with twists and wrinkles and muscles; a long, lean face upon which stood out prominently a great nose, diverted by a freak of nature a little to one side, and flanked by a tremendous pair of cheek-bones with great hollows underneath. Innumerable ridges and furrows swept semicircularly downward around the corners of a great mouth – a broad, deep, rugged fissure across the face, that might have been mistaken for the dreadful child-trap of an ogre but for the sunny beams of benevolence that lurked around the lips and the genial humanity that glimmered from every nook and turn. Neither mustache nor

beard obscured the strong individuality of this remarkable face, which for the most part was of a dull granite color, a little mixed with limestone and spotted with patches of porphyry. A dented gutta-percha forehead, very prominent about the brows, and somewhat resembling in its general topography a raised map of Switzerland, sloped upward and backward to the top of the head; not a very large head, but wonderfully bumped and battered by the operations of the brain, and partially covered by a mop of dark wavy hair, a little thin in front and somewhat grizzled behind; a long bony pair of arms, with long hands on them; a long lank body with a long black coat on it; a long loose pair of legs, with long boots on the feet; all in motion at the same time; all shining and wriggling and working with an indescribable vitality; a voice bubbling up from the vast depths below with cheery, spasmodic, and unintelligible words of welcome – this was the wonderful man that stood before me, the great Danish improvisator, the lover of little children, the gentle Caliban who dwells among fairies and holds sweet converse with fishes and frogs and beetles! I would have picked him out from among a thousand men at a first glance as a candidate for Congress, or the proprietor of a tavern, if I had met him any where in the United States.

But the resemblance was only momentary. In the quaint awkwardness of his gestures and the simplicity of his speech there was a certain refinement not usually found among men of that class. Something in the spontaneous and almost childlike cordiality of his greeting; the unworldly impulsiveness of his nature, as he grasped both my hands in his, patted me affectionately on the shoulder and bade me welcome, convinced me in a moment that this was no other, and could be no other, than Hans Christian Andersen.

„Come in! Come in!“ he said, in a gush of broken English. „Come in and sit down! You are very welcome! Thank you! Thank you very much! I am very glad to see you! It is a rare thing to meet a traveler all the way from California – quite a surprise! Sit down! Thank you!“

And then followed a variety of friendly compliments and remarks about the Americans. He liked them; he was sorry they were so unfortunate as to be engaged in a civil war,⁶⁾ but hoped it would soon be over. Did I speak French? he asked, after a pause. Not very well. Or German? Still worse, was my answer. „What a pity!“ he exclaimed, „it must trouble you to understand my English! I speak it so badly. It is only within a few years that I have learned to speak it at all!“ Of course I complimented him upon his English, which was really better than I had been led to expect. „Can you understand it?“ he asked, looking earnestly in

my face. „Certainly!“ I answered, „almost every word.“ „Oh, thank you! thank you! You are very good!“ he cried, grasping me by the hand. „I am very much obliged to you for understanding me!“ I naturally thanked him for being obliged to me, and we shook hands cordially, and mutually thanked one another over again for being so amiable. The conversation, if such it could be called, flew from subject to subject with a rapidity that almost took my breath away. The great improvisator dashed recklessly into every thing that he thought would be interesting to an American traveler, but with the difficulty of his utterance in English, and the absence of any knowledge on his part of my name and history, it was evident he was a little embarrassed in what way to oblige me most; and the trouble on my side was that I was too busy listening to find time for talking.

„Dear! dear! And you are going to Iceland!“ he continued. „A long way from California! I would like to visit America, but it is a very dangerous travel by sea. A vessel was burned up not long since, and many of my friends were lost. It was a dreadful affair.“⁹⁾

From this he diverged to a trip he then had in contemplation through Switzerland and Spain.¹⁰⁾ He was sitting for his statuette, which he desired to leave as a memento to his friends prior to his departure. A young Danish sculptor was making it.¹¹⁾ Would I like to see it? And forthwith I was introduced to the young Danish sculptor. The likeness was very good, and my comments upon it elicited many additional thanks and several squeezes of the hand – it was so kind of me to be pleased with it! „He is a young student,“ said Andersen, approvingly; „a very good young man. I want to encourage him. He will be a great artist some day or other.“

Talking of likenesses reminded me of a photograph which I had purchased a few days before, and to which I now asked the addition of an autograph.¹²⁾

„Oh, you have a libel on me here!“ cried the poet, laughing joyously – „a very bad likeness. Wait! I have several much better; here they are –“ And he rushed into the next room, tumbled over a lot of papers and ransacked a number of drawers till he found the desired package – „here’s a dozen of them; take your choice! help yourself – as many as you please!“

While looking over the collection I said the likeness of one who had done so much to promote the happiness of some little friends I had at home would be valued beyond measure; that I knew at least half a dozen youngsters who were as well acquainted with the „Little match Girl“, and the „Ugly Duck“, and the „Poor Idiot Boy“ [Klods-Hans], as he

was himself; and his name was as familiar in California as it was in Denmark. At this he grasped both my hands, and looking straight in my face with a kind of ecstatic expression, said: „Oh, is it possible! Do they really read my books in California! so far away! Oh! I thank you very much! Some of my stories, I am aware, have been published in New York,¹³⁾ but I did not think they had found their way to the Pacific coast. Dear me! Thank you! thank you! Have you seen my last – the – what do you call it in English? – a little animal –“

„Mouse,“ I suggested.

„No – not a mouse; a little animal with wings.“

„Oh, a bat!“ [Flagermus]

„Nay, nay! a little animal with wings and many legs. Dear me! I forget the name in English, but you certainly know it in America – a very small animal!“

In vain I tried to make a selection from all the little animals of my acquaintance with wings and many legs. The case was getting both embarrassing and vexatious. At length a light broke upon me.

„A mosquito!“ I exclaimed, triumphantly.

„Nay, nay!“ cried the bothered poet; „a little animal with a hard skin on its back. Dear me, I can't remember the name!“

„Oh, I have it now,“ said I, really desirous of relieving his mind – „A flea!“

At this the great improvisator scratched his head, looked at the ceiling and then at the floor, after which he took several rapid strides up and down the room, and struck himself repeatedly on the forehead. Suddenly grasping up a pen he exclaimed somewhat energetically – „Here! I'll draw it for you!“ and forthwith he drew on a scrap of paper a diagram, of which the above engraving is a fac-simile [here p. 196].

„A tumble-bug!“ I shouted, astonished at my former stupidity [Amerikansk for Skarnbasse. Engelsk: Beetle].

The poet looked puzzled and distressed. Evidently I had not yet succeeded. What could it be?

„A beetle!“ I next ventured to suggest, rather disappointed at the result of my previous guess.

„A beetle! A beetle! – that's it; now I remember – a beetle!“ and the delighted author of „The Beetle“ patted me approvingly on the back, and chuckled gleefully at his own adroit method of explanation. „I'll give you „The Beetle“, he said; „you shall have the only copy in my possession. But you don't read Danish! What are we to do? There is a partial translation in French – a mere notice.“¹⁴⁾



J. L. Bredt

Træsnit efter fot. af Georg E. Hansen 1862, foræret Browne af H. C. Andersen, gengivet i Harper's New Monthly Magazine, jan. 1863. Jvf. N. L. Faaborg: Grafiske portrætter af H. C. A., 1971, nr. 77.

„No matter,“ I answered. „A specimen of the Danish language will be very acceptable, and the book will be a pleasant souvenir of my visit.“

He then darted into the next room, tumbled over a dozen piles of books; then out again, ransacked the desks and drawers and heaps of old papers and rubbish – talking all the time in his joyous, cheery way about his books and his travels in Jutland, and his visit to Charles Dickens,¹⁵⁾ and his intended journey through Spain, and his delight at meeting a traveler all the way from California, and whatever else came into his head; all in such mixed up broken English that the meaning must have been utterly lost but for the wonderful expressiveness of his face and the striking oddity of his motions. It came to me mesmerically. He seemed like one who glowed all over with bright and happy thoughts which permeated all around him with a new intelligence. His presence shed a light upon others like the rays that beamed from the eyes of „Little Sunshine“. ¹⁶⁾ The book was found at last, and when he had written his name

in it, with a friendly inscription, and pressed both my hands on the gift, and patted me once more on the shoulder, and promised to call at Frankfort¹⁷⁾ on his return from Switzerland to see his little friends who knew all about the „Ugly Duck“ and the „Little Match Girl“, I took my leave, more delighted, if possible, with the author than I had ever before been with his books. Such a man, the brightest, happiest, simplest, most genial of human beings, is Hans Christian Andersen.“

Men hvem er da denne ubenævnte californiske rejsende?

Den nærmeste vej til identifikation blev forsøgt: HCA's dagbøger. Ved eftersyn af materialet omkring 1860-62 ses der under fredag 23. maj 1862, „Besøg af Amerikanere, Braune. Han kom fra Finland, Sverrig, Norge, tidligere Afrika, Spanien, ville nu til Iisland.“ Navnet kunne jo være galt opfattet af HCA og f.eks. være Brown eller Browne. Ingen af navneformerne findes i personregistret til dagbøgerne. Men via biblioteket i H. C. Andersen-huset i Odense fik man rede på navnet, som også omtales af Elias Bredsdorff, men i forbindelse med et senere skrift.¹⁸⁾ Først da biblioteket ved University of California, Berkeley, blev aktiveret, blev der stillet omfattende materiale til rådighed, grundlaget for følgende præcise og fyldige oplysninger, som undervejs, navnlig m.h.t. noterne, suppleredes gennem gode kollegers råd og nyttige vink.

John Ross Browne er født 11. febr. 1821 i Dublin, død 8. dec. 1875. Kom med sine forældre til Amerika 1832 eller -33, hvor familien slog sig ned i Louisville, Kentucky. Fik ingen boglig uddannelse, men opnåede som 20-årig en stilling som reporter i senatet i Washington. Et årstid efter tog han hyre på en hvalfanger og tilbragte de følgende 25 år på rejser over det meste af verden. I løbet af disse år skrev han adskillige bøger og artikler om sine rejser, mest med et let humoristisk anstrøg. Men også regeringen gjorde brug af hans evner. Han var bl. a. en overgang udsendt som minister i Kina.¹⁹⁾ Beretningen om Islandsrejsen findes ikke i bogform, men alene som artikler i Harper's New Monthly Magazine.²⁰⁾ Besøget hos HCA er skildret i januarnummeret 1863, s. 147-149, med gengivelse af et portræt (et af HCA's mange „Portrætkort“) samt af den meget omtalte „Beetle“. Men omend nævnte besøg ikke oprindeligt indgik i nogen monografisk rejseskildring, er materialet som tidligere anført udnyttet i en senere bog af Ross Browne.²¹⁾

Besøget af den rejsende fra det fjerne Californien gjorde jo tydeligvis stærkt indtryk på HCA. Men han hentyder kun en enkelt gang senere dertil, da han i dagbogen et årstid derefter refererer, at Mathilde (Ørsted) berettede om en avis fra Californien, hvori der „stod fortalt, at jeg kunde

boe i et Palais, men boede i et Skipperhuus i et Qvarteer kun for den ringere Klasse“. Han nævner også „the Bille“, som han tegnede, og noterer: „... gav ham [Ross Browne] mit sidste Eventyr.“²²)

Man kunne måske nok, i betragtning af besøgets af ham selv fremhævede sjældenhed, have ventet en smule glad og smigret tilbageskuen på tildragelsen, eller en antydning af brevveksling mellem de to parter. Men noget sådant synes ikke at foreligge. Vi må nøjes med at konstatere klarlæggelsen af en del kendsgerninger vedrørende den her behandlede skildring af HCA.

Men nye bidrag til karakteristik af vor danske digter kan stadig dukke op. Vi er næppe endnu kommet helt rundt om eller tilbunds i vor mangfoldige Andersen.

NOTER

Anvendte forkortelser:

BFN: Birger Frank Nielsen: H. C. Andersen Bibliografi. Digterens danske Værker 1822-1875. 1942.

Bre.: Elias Bredsdorff: H. C. Andersen og England. 1954.

Dagb.: H. C. Andersens Dagbøger 1825-1875. 1971-77.

HCA: H. C. Andersen.

RBr.: John Ross Browne.

(1) HCA boede tilleje i Nyhavn 67, 2. Sal, hos Madam Anholm, fra 1848 til 1865 – ikke som angivet på facadens mindetavle 1845-1864. Se Robert Egevang og Godfred Hartmann: Et Hus i Nyhavn. 1973. – (2) The Auk. Den store Geirfugl (en Alkefugl). Den sidste blev dræbt i Island 1844. – (3) Iflg. D.F.D.S.s oplysning havde Arcturus's rederi, Koch og Henderson, koncession på ruten Kbh.-Reykjavik. – (4) Bre. s. 273. (5) Bre. s. 295-297 (Edmund Gosse) og s. 285-294 (Annie Wood). – (6) Den modne HCA logerede før 1848 i Hotel du Nord (nu Magasin du N.) – Amaliegade 141 – St. Annæ Plads 22; fra 1848 i Nyhavn 67; fra 1865 i Hotel d'Angleterre – Lille Kongensgade 1 – Tordenskjoldsgade 17 – Hotel d'Angleterre – Nyhavn 18 – Hotel Royal (nu Ved Stranden 16) – Nyhavn 18. – (7) [Frit] citat fra Milton's Lycidas eller fra Paradise Lost. – (8) Den amerikanske borgerkrig 1861-1865. – (9) Ved damperen Austria's brand i Atlanterhavet 13. sept. 1858 omkom Henriette (Jette) Wulff, en af HCA's moderlige veninder, datter af kontreadmiral P. F. Wulff. – (10) Rejse til Svejts og Spanien 1862-1863. – (11) Frederik Christian Stramboe, f. 14.3.1833. Død 5.1.1908. Busten var færdig i 1863. Findes nu i Odense-museet. – (12) Gengivet i Harper's Magazine. – (13) Wonderful stories for children. Oversat af Mary Howitt. New York: Wiley & Putnam. 1846. – (14) Skarnbassen udkom i Eventyr og Historier af HCA. Anden Rk. Kbh. 1861. HCA havde under besøg på Basnæs bladet i en del arabiske ordsprog og talemåder, samlet af Dickens. Der traf han på sætningen: „When they came to shoe

the Pasha's horses the beetle stretched out his leg". Dickens havde vedføjet en note: This is exquisite. We commend it to the attention of HaChrA. „Da sprang frem Eventyret Skarnbassen“, skriver HCA. Se: Mit Livs Eventyr. II. Kbh. 1975, s. 235. The „partial translation in French“ – hentydningen er tvivlsom.

(15) Skildret i „Et Besøg hos Charles Dickens i Sommeren 1857“. Se BFN nr. 802. (16) Little Sunshine. Formodentlig identisk med „Little Sunbeam“, som repræsenterer ideen i den allegoriske fortælling „A trap to catch a sunbeam“ [af Matilda Anne Mackarness]. 12. udg., London 1850. Oversat til dansk. Kbh.: Th. Lind. 1862. – (17) RBr. kom til Kbh. efter besøg hos venner i Frankfurt. – (18) Bre. s. 273–274. Citat fra J. Ross Browne: The land of Thor. N. Y. Harper. 1867. Kap. 38. Bre. noterer, at RBr. kom til Danmark i 1866 og opsøgte HCA. Episoden med The Beetle, og hele besøget hos HCA, fandt som omtalt sted i 1862 og er refereret i The land of Thor a. st., og i samme bog, illustreret af forf., London: Sampson Low, Son etc. 1867, s. 387. – (19) J. Ross Browne. A biography . . . By Francis J. Rock, M.A., udgivet af The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 1949. Dertil er knyttet en bibliografi over RBr.'s værker, bl.a. et særligt afsnit om hans forskellige bidrag til Harper's Monthly, men uden „A Californian in Iceland“. Biografien noterer dog besøget hos HCA. Videre kan nævnes Emma Miriam Lone: Check-list of first editions of the works of John Ross Browne, a Californian pioneer, with a chronology. N.Y.: Lathron C. Harper. 1930. Men blandt tidsskrift-bidragene savnes også her artiklen i Harper's Monthly. Forfatteren noterer, at RBr. på Islandsrejsen var korrespondent til The San Francisco Bulletin, The Sacramento Union og Harper's Monthly, men fikserer fejlagtigt besøget i Danmark til 1860. En kort biografi af Browne findes i The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, VIII, s. 117–118. – (20) A Californian in Iceland [by J. Ross Browne] i Harper's New Monthly Magazine. N.Y., January, February, March 1863. No. CLII, s. 145–162, 259–311 og 448–467, med gengivelse af portræt af HCA samt tegningen af „a beetle“. – (21) Se note 18. – (22) Dagb. Onsdag 23. juni 1863.



Skarnbassen som H. C. Andersen tegnede den. Gengivet fra Harper's New Monthly Magazine, jan. 1863.