H. C. Andersen og det Uhyggelige
Hans Christian Andersen and the uncanny

Ed. by Jacob Bøggild, Ane Grum-Swensen, and Torsten Bøgh Thomsen
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One of the most uncanny moments in the works of Hans Christian Andersen occurs at the end of 'The Snow Queen'. Hans and Gerda have returned from their journey to the palace of the Snow Queen and enter their grandmother's apartment: 'Nothing had changed. The clock said "Tick-tack . . ." and the wheels moved. But as they stepped through the doorway they realized that they had grown: they were no longer children. The roses were blooming in the wooden boxes and the window was open. There were the little stools they used to sit on. Still holding each other's hands, they sat down . . . There they sat down, the two grown-ups; and yet in their hearts they were children'. What is uncanny about this passage is the fact that they have returned safely home, but they no longer fit the homely chairs on the tiny balcony. The familiar world of childhood is intact, and, yet it is not. They have come home, and yet they are not *at home*. They have become estranged from the well-known. They sit there, awkwardly we must assume, *as if* they were children while the wheel of time mechanically 'tick-tacks' in the background.

In the anthology *H. C. Andersen og det Uhyggelige*, a number of Andersen scholars discuss this figure of the hidden within the homely. On the one hand, this might come as a surprise since Andersen to the broad public is still considered an author of fairy tales told to children. Even Freud, in his rich essay about the uncanny, 'Das Unheimliche', claims that Andersen is not uncanny since all the brutal acts take place within the safe and reliable space of the fairy tale imaginary. On the other hand, it will come as no surprise that there is a double bind to most of what occurs in Andersen's writings, and most obviously in the fairy tales. It is a general assumption that Andersen speaks with two tongues, one that is childish and another that addresses the adult. This ventriloquism, as Karin Sanders calls it in her contribution to the book, seems to me to be at the very heart of Andersen's uncanniness. Sanders speaks about how Andersen posits an adult consciousness within the safe horizon of the child, making the unhomely appear homely and at the same time emphasizing that it is a matter of appearances. In the first es-

say in the book, on Freud's *unheimliche* [uncanny] and Todorov's concept of the fantastic, Jacob Bøggild makes a productive distinction between the thematic and the discursive uncanny, the first comprising instances such as the one I mentioned from the end of 'The Snow Queen', and the second involving exactly the kind of double talk that is quintessential to Andersen's narrators. It would, however, have been worthwhile for one of the contributors to have examined this uncanny play of two tongues more thoroughly.

Making a concept the centre of an anthology demands an inspiring and apt concept and some discipline from the selected writers, as well as determination from the editors. Measured on these scales, this anthology is successful. The best articles relate to Freud's essay either by elaborating on some of the specific traits of the uncanny to which he points, or by pairing the general figure of the uncanny to similar figures. Klaus Müller-Wille does the latter as he studies the rhetoric of the uncanny by way of the puzzle picture, the kind of picture with two pictures in it, depending on which one the onlooker becomes fixated. Here the uncanny is related to the sudden switch in point of view. In two of Bøggild's articles, the fantastic, irony, and allegory work in a way that is similar to uncanny double talk and twisting appearances. These are essays of insight and clarity that nevertheless beg a question of figure and substance that is crucial to the anthology. Does any double-sided figure necessarily indicate the uncanny, or does it require a certain amount, not of general uneasiness, but of unfamiliarity within the familiar? It does of course, but not all of the authors keep this balance of innovative expansion and conceptual precision. That being said, it is in the careful and strict moves toward the similar – like Wille's and Bøggild's – that the concept proves its strength as a generator of ideas and insights.

Another divide with which the essays of the book may be ordered, is between those which are historically-oriented and those which are more inclined towards close reading. In 'The Detachment of the Pictures', Lasse Horne Kjældgaard intriguingly relates the figure of the shadow from the story with that title to two of the new media of the period, the *Schattenspiel* [play of shadows] and the daguerreotype, by way of Walter Benjamin's concept of the optical unconscious. The uncanny feeling of losing one's shadow so often interpreted psychologically in the doppelgänger motif, may be a reflection of the technology of the times. Another historical outlook is found in Sanders' before-mentioned article 'In Control of Things', where the Freudian repression is displaced from the psychological to the historical as romanticism becomes the shadow that haunts the Enlightenment. That at least is one of the ideas of this rich article. Among the approaches in the book there is a surprising lack of attention to the relationship between the uncanny and gender, a perspective that seems ripe for the picking in Andersen. Instead, another of the currently dominant modes of reading, eco-criticism, is represented in an article by Torsten Bøgh Thomsen, which tracks down

the dark ecology of Andersen's first novel, *The Improvisatore*. Following Timothy Morton, Thomsen convincingly points to the sudden shifts in Andersen's descriptions of landscape from idyll or genre picture to its opposite, a shift that has been noted before, but usually under the sign of realism or perhaps as a condensation of poetic language; here we are given a sense of the natural as uncanny.

The uncanny is a much-visited concept. It nevertheless proves itself fruitful as an approach to the strange and mind-blowing worlds of Hans Christian Andersen. To some of the contributors to this anthology, the uncanny works as a mere stepping-stone or an initial inspiration, to others it becomes a strategy of interpretation. In any case, it is certainly established as a concept that is congenial with its object and yet another important argument for the fact that Andersen is much more than the world-famous author of fairy tales told to children for whom even Freud, in his daring essay, momentarily mistook him.

Dan Ringgaard
Aarhus University