HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN – THE JOURNEY OF HIS LIFE

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Hans Christian Andersen’s delight in travel is well-known, as is his talent for describing his progress through Europe and, briefly, the Near East and North Africa. His very earliest works, and his earliest successful works, were travel books or fiction inspired by the experience of travel in the middle of the nineteenth century. They show him integrating fact and fiction seamlessly, so that the reader comes to experience the world through his mind, with his sensitive eye for the significant and the insignificant detail of life in those days.

This present work is indirectly inspired by research into Hans Christian Andersen’s work for the stage, an aspect of his career that has to a great extent remained unseen in the work of critics. Among his thirty stage plays is one originally written for reading rather than for performance: Agnete and the merman (Agnete og Havmanden, 1833). Written in Switzerland during his first long journey through Europe in 1833, it comes across as a strikingly personal and intense account of the nature of exile and the impossibility of making a proper return to one’s homeland, once a decision has been made to leave it behind, even just temporarily.¹

The student of Andersen’s life and work soon becomes aware of the importance of travel and exile as themes both in the author’s own career and in his written work. Both as a man and as an artist, Andersen was ‘on the move’ throughout his life, restlessly changing address both in real terms and metaphorically. There is, perhaps, nothing remarkable in this: it is in the nature of great men and women that they resist the temptation to settle, that they are constantly looking for new paths to travel. But in Andersen’s case the significance is of a specific nature. He offers an opportunity to observe the artist’s mind on the journey through the world.

Andersen is best known as the author of fairy tales for children, and his fame rests on a comparatively small number of the very best. In all, he wrote 157 and increasingly, as his career progressed,

he changed the emphasis from children's tales to something much closer to the short story, which was gaining importance as a genre in nineteenth-century Denmark. However, he never entirely let go of his young audience. After all, much of his fame in the later part of his career depended on it. This article will show that the travel motif acts as a guide through Andersen's career in much more general terms, and this can be taken as an indication of how important it was to Andersen's thinking.

A closer reading of his collected tales reveals that travel plays a part in almost twenty per cent of them. This article will look at how the travel motif is developed in thirty-four of the tales, published between 1835 and 1874. It will also look at the different ways in which the travel motif is made to work for the story teller as he constructs the tales.

It soon becomes clear that it does so in a variety of ways. To a certain, limited extent it provides the plot for his stories. In this respect, the journey becomes a string of episodes, adding up into a full narrative. As in Homer's *Odyssey*, and as in countless folktales, the journey and its constituent parts are made significant for what they have to say both about the places where the travellers go and about the travellers themselves.

But more significant is the way in which Andersen uses the travel motif as part of the theme of a tale. Where this happens, it is possible to see how Andersen gradually moves away from an early reliance on folktale motifs to describe a pessimistic view of the life of the emotional and geographical exile, to a much more self-assured, realistic and cosmopolitan view of life, expressed in a more modern prose style.

At no time does he abandon the fairy tale entirely, in the sense that he continues to include elements of the irrational in many of his stories. This is part of Andersen's world view and fundamental to his art: everything under the heavens, be it animate or inanimate, has a voice, which the author hears and which informs his stories.

Travel feeds into the stories in different ways, sometimes simply by providing casual detail to the description of characters, at other times by providing the actual key to characterization or even the actual physical environment in which the characters move. Travel as such is rarely of great importance in the tales. Andersen is not using them to sell the idea of travel as an important part of the
development in the individual. But they do suggest, by their example, why it is so important, and that is probably how they can contribute to the lives of their readers.

Andersen wrote several autobiographies, starting with the first, hand-written one from 1832, *Levnedsbogen*⁴ (The book of my life), written when he was only twenty-seven years old and three years into his professional career as a writer. Here, for the first time, he puts the view that God has, as it were, written the script for his life, providing him with direction and, perhaps more to the point, offered this son of poor parents unexpected and almost miraculous opportunities in the middle-class world of literature. 'Day by day, my life becomes more and more like poetry', he writes: 'Poetry enters into my life and it seems to me that life itself is a great marvellous poetic work. I feel that an invisible, loving hand guides everything . . .'.⁵ In later autobiographies, he was to update this image: 'My life is a beautiful fairy tale', he was to write, claiming that even a powerful fairy could not have guided him on the path of life with greater happiness and wisdom.⁶

There is no doubt that this is how he saw his life and it is certainly the metaphor which he, as a self-publicist, chose to use when presenting his life to his audience as a typical Romantic artist: the natural talent who had risen almost magically to international status as an artist. But the metaphor does not hold. Not only was magic obviously not involved: he earned his status by using his talent and he was given help by those of his contemporaries who could see that he deserved it.

A better metaphor for Andersen’s life is that of the journey. Andersen remained single all his life and moved between a number of temporary addresses in Copenhagen until he settled in to his first real home in 1866, at the age of sixty-one years. The purchase of his first bed caused him great concern as he imagined that it would one day become his death bed. In fact, he died, still single, in the home of wealthy friends, some of the many who had invited him into their home for shorter or longer periods of his life; not because he was poor but because he was offered hospitality, often by top members of society, sometimes even by royalty.⁷

⁴ Published in 1926. See H. Topsoe-Jensen: *Omkring Levnedsbogen* (1943).
⁶ H.C. Andersen: *Mit eget eventyr uden digtning*, edited from the author's manuscript by H. Topsoe-Jensen (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1942), 5. This is the Danish original of Andersen's first published autobiography, which appeared in German translation as *Das Märchen meines Lebens ohne Dichtung* (Leipzig: Carl B. Lorck, 1847). Andersen's second autobiography, *Mit Livs Eventyr* (1855), uses almost identical terms to the passage quoted.
But somehow he remained 'homeless' in an existential sense. He left his poor background behind when he left for the Danish capital in 1819 and he never truly found another home of his own, except in the world of the arts. His relationship with the family of his benefactor, Jonas Collin, illustrates this excellently. Although Andersen saw a father figure in Jonas Collin and worked hard to get close to Collin's son, Edvard, he was never fully integrated into the family. Andersen accepted this: he was a public figure and he gradually came to accept that he had to live a public life, in other people's families.

Andersen travelled throughout his life. His first significant journey, significant because it changed his life, was the one that he made from his home town to the Danish capital in 1819. But he made many other journeys outside Denmark, from the first to the Harz Mountains in 1831 to his final journey in 1873, and he visited most of Europe. Andersen was not only a passionate traveller but also a professional one, and his experiences of foreign countries found their way not only into his fiction but also into actual travel descriptions. The earliest of these is *Skyggebilleder af en Rejse til Harzen og det sachsiske Schweiz* (1831, *Shadowy images of a journey to the Harz Mountains and Saxony*) where clear description of landscape mingles with humorous description of human behaviour.

His Grand Tour of 1833–34 resulted in a novel (*Improvisatoren* (The improviser), see below). His later, ten-month journey through Europe in 1840–41 inspired one of the great classics of nineteenth-century travel literature: *En Digters Bazar* (1842, *A poet's bazaar*), where the reader experiences all aspects of human nature of contemporary transport systems in a manner that still inspires the reader to follow in the footsteps of their guide.

The two journeys to Italy and beyond were the great formative events in the author's life. The first took him out of himself and away from the limited Danish intellectual environment, into a quite different world of unexpected natural beauty and intellectual challenge. Italy was the Mecca of Danish nineteenth-century artists from all art forms, and in Italy Andersen found himself included in an international artists' community. *Improvisatoren* is clear evidence of the impression which Italy made on Andersen, its artistic maturity reflects the maturity that Andersen himself was reaching, as a man and as an artist.

*En Digters Bazar* is no less indicative of his development. By the 1840s, Andersen was a seasoned traveller and writer who was no longer just observing but also much more directly absorbing and conquering the world around him. The down-side of this professional development is, perhaps, indicated by his final two travel descriptions: *I Spanien* (1863, *In Spain*) and *Et Besøg i Portugal* (1868, *A visit to Portugal*) have greater journalistic than
artistic merit. Here, the experienced writer was drawing on his craft rather than innovating.

But it is not so much the 'straight' travel description that is of interest here. Even taking into account that Hans Christian Andersen was always imaginative in his approach to the objective truth of the world around him, some of his works use travel in a stylized manner which throws clearer light on the way in which travel plays a part in the fairy tale.

In 1829, having completed his school education, Andersen made his official debut on the Danish literary scene with *Fodrejse fra Holmens Kanal til østpynten af Amager (Journey on foot from Holmens Canal to the east point of Amager)*. This fantastic description of an imaginary, dream-like trip on New Year's Eve of 1828 is not only interesting because of its grotesque, surreal atmosphere: the appearance of the supernatural prefigures the later fairy tales. It is also important because it shows Andersen submitting the real world almost completely to his own creative imagination. The reader is taken on a journey through a known location by the author, but it is a journey which could only be made with the author, through his imagination. This becomes particularly clear when, at the end of the novel, Andersen uses the Modernist technique of printing a short chapter consisting only of punctuation. By instinct, this author was a surrealist rather than a realist, and the contemporary reading public immediately took to his idiosyncratic style.

Andersen was to use this mode – the synthesis of reality and the imagination – in several of his travel-inspired works, notably in *Improvisatoren* (1835) and *I Sverrig* (1851, *In Sweden*). The approach is different in both, and both are different from *Fodrejse*.

*Improvisatoren* is an autobiographical novel, an inspired blend of two of Andersen's favourite subjects: his own unusual career, and the world outside his own country. It gave him an international reputation as a novelist, in advance of his fame as a writer of fairy tales, or 'romances' as they were often called in the previous century. *Improvisatoren* tells the story of a young man who rises from humble beginnings to artistic fame. Its success relied – and relies – on the fact that it is told through the mind of the main character and that we witness the colourful Italy of the early nineteenth century through his eyes. He had seen that Italy himself on his Grand Tour in 1833–34 and he chose to present his impressions in fictional form.

The eyes through which the reader sees Italy are those of a talented traveller and fiction writer. To students of Andersen's work,

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8 Andersen uses a similar device in his first stage play, *Kærlighed paa Nicolai Taarn* (1829, *Love on St Nicholas's tower*), which suddenly becomes 'interactive', when the author invites the audience to decide how the play should end.
the narrator’s point-of-view is always of crucial importance. It often says something very directly about how close the reader is to Andersen’s own experience.

*I Sverrig* is a very different kind of work, but it is also testimony to its author’s ability to operate with a range of literary technique. Like *Improvisatoren*, it is the fruit of the actual travel experiences of its author. But *I Sverrig* is no ordinary travel description, any more than *Improvisatoren* is. Rather, it is a collage of impressions of a country that was then not well known in Europe, at least by travellers. The structure is episodic, a collage made up of a variety of linguistic media, using straight prose interspersed with fairy tales and lyrical poetry. Andersen does not restrict himself to straightforward description of what he sees, although such descriptions are included: he ranges from realism to philosophy, using his Scandinavian sister nation as a springboard for all the many thoughts that travel may engender in a receptive mind.

What we have in these three works is evidence of Andersen’s versatility and his ability to juggle narrative styles and levels of realism. They suggest that Andersen was not only crossing geographical borders on his way through Europe but also inhabiting a continent of the imagination, one without boundaries and with endless variety of landscape and experiences. It was this landscape which he was to travel in his fairy tales.

Andersen published his first fairy tales in 1835, in a small volume of *Eventyr fortalte for Børn*, ‘fairy tales told for children’. He continued to write and publish them almost to the end of his life, the last collection being called *Eventyr og Historier*, ‘fairy tales and stories’. The change in title to include the word ‘stories’ was deliberate and suggested Andersen’s own changing prioritie as a writer of short prose: he was increasingly seeing himself as a writer of short stories for adults, without leaving his young audience entirely behind. The truth is that audiences of all ages were always in the implied audience for his tales.

The four titles in the first volume included *The tinder box* and *The princess and the pea*. Both of them make use of the travel motif, but at this point that motif plays only a simple part in straightforward plots: the soldier in *The tinder box* is marching home from war, apparently without aiming for any particular address, and is intercepted by his destiny, in the shape of money, power and love. This is an adaptation of the story about Aladdin from the *Arabian nights*, which Andersen had known since childhood, and as such it is a rare example of Andersen borrowing an idea from the existing folk tradition.

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9 Andersen visited Sweden on several occasions, in 1837, 1838 and 1840. He spent three months in Sweden in 1849, before writing *I Sverrig*.

10 E.g. *Fugl Phenix* and *Poesiens Californien*. 
The princess and the pea shows a prince engaging in a futile journey to find a real princess. Only after his return does such a princess journey to his home, appearing mysteriously out of the blue and settling down as his Queen.

Both these stories have the ring of the true folk-tale about them, their characters are clearly acting without rational motivation and their plots progress in ways that suggest the interference of non-human powers. They represent a particular strand in the use of the travel motif: one that stems from the folk-tale, where the journey is a recurrent and purely functional plot element, offering opportunities for purely functional, one-dimensional characters to meet challenges and complete tasks set by agents of the non-human world.\textsuperscript{11}

The earliest tale to illustrate this use of the motif is also one of Andersen’s finest: The travelling companion (Rejsekammeraten, 1835).\textsuperscript{12} Rejsekammeraten is, in the true sense of the word, a ‘classical’ tale. It shows a young man reaching a turning point in his life: his father dies, he himself is uprooted and sets out on a journey that will ultimately lead to a new equilibrium in his life, in the same way as happens in The tinder box and The princess and the pea. To that extent, the plot of the tale is one that would be recognized by audiences and readers not only now or in Andersen’s own time but as far back as ancient Greece, where the same plot is met in the Odyssey and in classical Greek drama. Throughout the story, the main character moves in a world that is only superficially like our own ‘real’ world: it is, in fact, suffused with the supernatural, in it witchcraft and magic both hinder and help the characters.

The final, happy end is contrived rather than probable in terms of modern realism, for this is story-telling as ritual, the plot is an acting-out of a transition from one stable condition to another. What Andersen has ultimately achieved with this tale is to show a young man undergoing the transition from boyhood to manhood, from living with his father to living, as an adult, with his own wife. He has been helped through this transition by a character with supernatural powers, and this character, the Travelling Companion, takes on the forces of darkness on his behalf.

Andersen is best known as a writer for children, but this is in reality also a tale of adolescence. For all that it involves the forces of

\textsuperscript{11} See, for example, Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and semiotics (London: Methuen, 1977), 67 ff. V.I. Propp is the proponent of this functionalist or syntagmatic analysis of the fairytale in Morphology of the folktale (Russian edition 1928, English translation 1958, revised Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1968).

\textsuperscript{12} In fact, it is also his earliest fairy tale. He published the original version of this tale, Dødnningen ("The dead man") in Digte 1830 (Poems 1830). For the full text of Dødnningen, see H.C. Andersens eventyr, ed. Erik Dal (Copenhagen: Det danske sprog- og litteraturselskab, 1963), 191 ff.
evil, it also carries a comforting message: help is available, the main character does get through to the other side, stability will return.

The traditional tale is particularly characteristic of Andersen’s early tales, from the 1830s, although it continues to appear into the 1850s and 1860s. It is given a variety of uses, from providing the structure for stories with deep metaphysical significance such as *The snow queen* (*Snedronningen*, 1845) to those that are much more straightforwardly amusing like *Clod Hans* (*Klods-Hans*, 1855).

Although Andersen himself refers to the stories told to him in his own childhood, he only relied on the actual oral folk-tale tradition to a limited extent, composing most of his stories independently of known literary or pre-literary models. Although he is often mentioned in the same breath as the Brothers Grimm, he was no folklorist. Rather, he was an author of ‘Kunstmärchen’, a modern Romantic. It is therefore necessary to look immediately beyond the folk-tale as such, to see in what other way he makes the folk-tale work for him. Part of the answer lies in the way he develops as an author of short stories. But at this early point in his career, he appears to have drawn on the folk-tale for other things.

Most obviously Andersen makes travel provide him with plot: it offers a reason for stringing a series of events together, events that shape the life of the main character(s). Thus, in *Inchelina* (*Tommelise*, 1835) the somewhat passive female main character passes through the hands of a series of potential husbands until she is carried off by the swallow to foreign parts. *The ugly duckling* (*Den grimme Ælling*, 1844) gives a similar view of a character passively developing into a more mature character, as a hostile world passes by.

*The snow queen* and *The story of a mother* (*Historien om en Moder*, 1848), by contrast, show two main characters making rather better use of their ability to travel, namely for a search for their loved ones. *The snow queen* and *The story of a mother*, like *The travelling companion*, are stories of human beings maturing, although in the case of *The snow queen* and *The story of a mother*, the process is intellectual or metaphysical rather than social or to do simply with ageing. It is not possible to say of stories such as these that they mainly exemplify a characteristic, conventional use of plot and

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13 In this category we also find *The little mermaid* (1837), *The wild swans* (1838), *The flying trunk* (1839), *The garden of Eden* (1839), *The ugly duckling* (1844), *The story of a mother* (1848), *How to cook soup up a sausage pin* (1858) and *The philosopher’s stone* (1861). Note that in this investigation a tale may exemplify several uses of the travel theme and may therefore appear in different categories.

14 See his preface from 1837, in *H.C. Andersens eventyr* (1963), i, 19ff.

character functions. These tales are far more sophisticated and their effect depends to a much greater extent on the use of symbolism. Although they are good stories, which work as entertainment at the surface, they invite interpretation that goes far beyond their story lines. At the story level, they have elements of the fairy tale, in that they include irrational and supernatural elements. But they also present themes of fundamental importance for human beings: the ability to love and, in the case of The story of a mother, the ability to let go of those we love.

At this point in his life, Andersen had made a reputation as a travel writer with A poet’s bazaar (1842) and his experience as an observer of the world may explain why he was now capable of making better use of his plots. However, it is more likely that we are simply looking at a more mature writer in more general terms, for whom literature as such could be made to carry more meaning. Plot is now made to work harder, the individual events made to reveal more about the characters.

The use of travel as a means of structuring plot peters out in the 1850s along with the use of the folk-tale-like travel motif. It is likely that the two trends are linked. Andersen’s tales were becoming increasingly realistic over the years and the focus moving increasingly away from plot structure to the reactions of the characters within the plots.

Andersen has rightly become renowned as a children’s author, and the tales which most people now remember have become part of our collective unconscious, entering our cultural mythology. The emperor’s new clothes, to mention just one obvious example, has provided countless public writers and speakers with ammunition for attacks on their opponents, and many of Andersen’s tales have been published anonymously, adapted for children, proving that they are now themselves part of our narrative tradition, not even needing their author’s name to survive.

Children are not naive and the universe which they inhabit is not one of simple, innocent bliss. Children know that and the most successful children’s writers succeed by respecting that, as both Astrid Lindgren and Roald Dahl illustrate. Andersen, too, reveals a complex and sometimes even frightening view of the world, both in his children’s stories and in those intended for older audiences. The plots may lead us through landscapes peopled with devils and sprites before taking us up to the happy ending, and we do not forget that we had to see those landscapes as we travelled with the

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characters and that they are still there in the background as we learn that the main characters will live happily ever after.

The little mermaid (Den lille Havfrue, 1837) is a story of love that cannot succeed. That is, of course, not how it comes across in the recent animated version: Andersen’s original tale commits the Mermaid to a fate of which the makers of modern mass entertainment dare not conceive.

Like its predecessor in Andersen’s œuvre, Agnete and the merman (Agnete og Havmanden, 1834), it tells the story of a character who follows her heart in a decisive existential choice, thereby unwittingly committing herself to a life in loneliness and exile. The little mermaid, like Agnete, chooses a partner who is so fundamentally unlike herself that a real relationship is not possible, no matter how great a sacrifice she is prepared to make. The story, revolving around this decisive moment when the wrong step is taken, evolves like a Greek tragedy from hubris to eventual nemesis.

A number of Andersen’s tales show characters unable to engage in harmonious relationships, men and women shipwrecked by life, and this motif recurs from the earliest tales, i.e. Inchelina (1835) to one of the latest, namely The wood nymph (Dryaden, 1868). The flying trunk (Den flyvende Koffert, 1839) provides a humorous example - the main character finds himself deservedly stranded abroad after an accident, but other examples leave little room for merriment. In The garden of Eden (Paradisets Have, 1839) the main character finds himself repeating the original biblical mistake, although without committing the original sin.

In Under the willow tree (Under Piletræet, 1853) a man who emigrates in order to escape from the romantic disappointment of his youth encounters the love of his youth abroad and dies as he tries to escape in the opposite direction, travelling home. Ib and little Christina (Ib og lille Christine, 1855) shows a woman destroying herself as she travels away to partake of sophisticated city life rather than the simpler and healthier provincial life which Ib could have offered her. And A story from the dunes (En Historie fra Klitterne, 1860) has a social misfit die, mad and alone, buried by the sanddunes in an abandoned church, after a life that starts and ends in shipwreck.

What is happening here? How does one account for this sombre aspect of Andersen’s work? It is tempting to do what critics have so often done, namely to seek the reasons in Andersen’s own life, and to a certain extent this makes good sense. Andersen was himself a ‘misfit’, he had left his poor childhood behind but he never truly seemed to arrive anywhere else, in spite of his international fame and comparative wealth. The fact that he never settled down in a love relationship, in spite of several involvements with various ladies, may have inspired his somewhat pessimistic view of love in
the stories referred to here, where the characters are endlessly – and hopelessly – on the move.

One of the finest examples of how this motif is explored in the tales is The steadfast tin soldier (Den standhaftige Tinsoldat, 1838), whose main character only just has time to discover his love for the young ballerina before fate – or some other inexplicable force – casts him out into a hostile world from which he is miraculously and inexplicably saved, but only to be senselessly destroyed. What comes across in this story is that there is no sense to the universe, no apparent meaning or order, just casual and irrational changes of fate. Other stories in this group may not be quite so radical in their world view but they all share the feeling that we do not live in a safe universe.\(^{17}\)

Andersen’s treatment of the motif changes over the years, as he becomes more modern in his narrative style and can distance himself, perhaps, from his own personal experience. A story from the dunes shows tragic events in the lives of its characters, but they are the kind of events that you do tend to find in the nineteenth-century short story, where the sense of fate and of contrast between a person’s young and old age is often what gives the short story its energy. In this particular story, Andersen moves close to the style of Steen Steensen Blicher, the father of the modern Danish short story. Like Blicher, Andersen gives his characters credibility by placing them in a recognizable universe, where events and people do, after all, seem probable even if their fate is extreme. In A story from the dunes, Andersen ‘poses’ as a nineteenth-century topographer, finding similarities between Arabia and Jutland.\(^{18}\) There is still an element of the irrational in the story, but it has more to do with psychological irrationality than with the supernatural.

The homeless man, the exile who is out of his proper cultural environment, is still there but he is increasingly like a modern man. Characteristically, he still does not know what is hitting him, as is also seen in the case of the main character of The ice maiden (Isjomfuen, 1862). But by now the reader can see through the events and Andersen’s technique is increasingly one of dramatic irony rather than the creation of alternative, ‘parallel’ worlds where nature and the supernatural interact.

At the same time as he was exploiting the existing thematic use of the journey in the traditional tale, he was also using it to express much more modern themes of alienation and exile. His inspiration may have come from his personal experience, but the real power of stories obviously depends on their reflection of a more general

17 The shadow (Skyggen, 1847) depends on similarly irrational events, although in this instance the travel motif moves to the background of the story in favour of the drama that develops between the man and his shadow, as the latter to take over his identity.

18 H.C. Andersen, Samlede eventyr og historier (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1972), ii, 386.
condition which his readers of all ages would be able to recognize and relate to, consciously or otherwise.

In about a dozen of his tales we thus meet characters who travel, perhaps because their instinct tells them to keep on the move, perhaps because fate hurls them along for no clear reason, perhaps because they are running away from their own anxieties or their own failure. But they do not escape: in Andersen's darker stories there is nowhere to hide, no home to go to.

To travel is to escape, perhaps from one's daily routine in order to go on holiday, perhaps to create a new life for oneself in new surroundings through emigration. There is, of course, that difference between the exile and the tourist – or the emigré – that the exile is not usually away from his home of his own free will. The exile is a refugee, unsettled, uprooted, only temporarily at his address, waiting for a chance to return. The tourist – and the explorer – engage in a more positive search for something different.

Andersen's later stories reveal a much more settled picture of the character away from home. Part of the change that happens in his narrative style is a greater emphasis on realistic details. Reality is always present in the fairy tales, whether through references to real locations or in details which more or less explicitly place the story in the reader's own universe. But in the later stories, reality becomes ever more obvious and in some cases the element of geographical and psychological realism brings Andersen's narrative close to the prose style of the short story writers of his own time.

This also suggests that the universe described in the stories – the world in which the characters 'live' – is becoming rather more manageable, because it is becoming easier to understand. This does not mean that the characters cope more easily with their world but that their problems are not always embodied in characters from another, metaphysical world. They are not necessarily any happier but they are more like 'real' people.

An example of a transitional story between 'exile' and the more realistic picture of the world abroad is *The pepperman's nightcap (Pebersvendens Nathue, 1858)*, one of the best realistic stories among Andersen's many short tales. It tells the life story of a German merchant's representative, Anton, living in Copenhagen several centuries before Andersen's own time and making a living by selling spices (the 'pepper' of his title) on behalf of Lübeck and Hamburg merchants. The historical details of the story are interesting in themselves but the description of Anton's situation as an exile is more fascinating in this context.

Andersen takes his character's point of view, to the extent of describing German nature as being more attractive than
Denmark's.\textsuperscript{19} This may seem surprising to those who know Andersen as the author of some of the best-loved lyrical descriptions of the Danish countryside, but it is an indication of his cosmopolitan approach and it also says something about his ability to enter into the world of his characters. Andersen, after all, was also a playwright.

Because Anton is described with more psychological detail, his situation also calls to a greater extent on the reader's ability to observe and understand real events, and with Anton we move away from the well-known Andersen world of fairy tale to something that is closer to Andersen's contemporary Søren Kierkegaard. The focus is existential, the main character's problem cannot be solved by fairies or exacerbated by hostile trolls. His problem is one of living in a world that is in constant flux, one that changes constantly and which he is not equipped to understand. Andersen hints that modern nineteenth-century transport would have helped the character cope better with life away from home. At least now, in the 1850s, modern steam power has shrunk Europe to more manageable proportions.

Far from being an impoverishment of the tale, its existential emphasis becomes a sign of its author's versatility as well as, it may be assumed, some of his own experience of life. It is not a happy or desirable life, but as Andersen presents it, it does amount to a valid existence: the author is implicitly claiming to be presenting his reader with reality. Andersen describes his character's loneliness as seen through the character's mind: '. . . he didn't understand himself, he didn't understand the others; but \textit{we} understand! You can be in somebody’s home, with the family, and yet you do not strike root, you converse in the way you might converse on a stage coach, you get to know each other in the way you get to know other passengers on a stage coach, you bother each other, you wish that you were somewhere else or that your good neighbour were'.\textsuperscript{20}

Realism never entirely takes over the Andersen fairy tale, but it grows in importance as an element in his narrative style and in a way it brings him closer to our own century, helps us to see that his world view is not that different from our own as well as allowing him to bring his talents as a creative writer and a travel journalist together.

One may wonder, at reading \textit{The pepperman's nightcap}, whether it is a reflection of Andersen's true experience of 'homelessness'.

\textsuperscript{19} After Denmark’s defeat in 1864 in the war against Prussia, such a liberal gesture would have been much less acceptable. The passage in question is the following: "Great is the beauty of the Danish beech forest!" they said, but to Anton the beeches at Warburg rose even more beautifully' (\textit{Samlede eventyr og historier}, ii, 204.)

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Samlede eventyr og historier}, iii, 208.
The answer would probably be both a ‘yes’ and a ‘no’. He may well have felt what his character does: ‘Bitter is the life of the stranger in a strange country! You are only noticed by others if you are in their way’. What is more, the late twentieth-century reader easily recognizes the experience of living in a world in flux, where one’s sense of belonging is constantly disturbed because modern technology keeps changing one’s sense of what the world looks like. Feeling estranged has become one of the central experiences of life in our century and Andersen was ideally equipped to describe it well before it became commonly understood.

But at the same time he was also becoming used to it. The experience of homelessness, which he had had since childhood and which had become his both by choice and through necessity, had also become a strength. And so it is that late in life his attitude to rootless modern life begins to change. For one thing, foreign countries increasingly provide the setting for his tales or form part of the characters’ world. Thus, The ice maiden (Iisjomfruen, 1862), Psyche (Psychen, 1862) and The wood nymph (Dryaden, 1868) are set outside Denmark. What is more, the author’s attitude to life becomes increasingly cosmopolitan. His outlook, which is never narrow, becomes ever more worldly. He embraces, with enthusiasm, the concept of modern transport and he evidently understands that improved communication will also change the outlook of modern people. The muse of the new century (Det nye Aarhundredes Musa, 1861), The wood nymph (1862), The bird phoenix (Fugl Phenix, 1863) and The thorny path (Ærens Tørnevei, 1863) are celebrations of life in a modern, cosmopolitan world. The ‘Muse’ – that of poetry – is a citizen of a world where, soon ‘the Great Wall of China shall fall; the railways of Europe shall reach the closed cultural archives of Asia – two streams of culture shall meet and flow as one’. The thorny path is an attempt to link the ancient Greek civilization with that of modern engineers, by listing some of the author’s own heroes from world history. The phoenix is, again, creative writing as part of a timeless world-culture.

In The wood nymph, Andersen indulges in a description of the Paris World Exhibition of 1867 that combines his enthusiasm for the real, modern world with his fairy-tale style of writing. The story is described both through the eyes of the wood nymph, the dryad, who is granted twelve hours in human form, so that she can see modern Paris and the Exhibition; and through the eyes of Andersen himself and those of his readers: ‘We are travelling to the Paris Exhibition. We are there! with speed, with a rush, entirely without
witchcraft. We travelled on the wings of speed, at sea and on land. Ours is the age of fairy-tales. We are in the middle of Paris . . . .

Once the wood nymph goes sightseeing in this modern Paris, we find that the author's enthusiasm has not blurred his vision: this is both a Paris of human tragedy and of modern sewers, a Paris where hotels are decorated with fresh flowers and where pollution kills the trees outside.

In a sense, *The wood nymph* brings this journey through Andersen's fairy tales full circle. From using the journey as a conventional folk-tale motif, Andersen had reached the point where the journey was part of the shared experience of modern Europeans, an experience which seemed likely to reach modern people everywhere, tying them together in a shared world with a shared culture.

In his autobiography Andersen describes the city where he grew up, Odense, as being in some senses unchanged since the Middle Ages. His own background, his childhood, was rooted in the past. Towards the end of his life, in 1872, he published a fairy tale in which an old man, *Great-grandfather (Oldefader, 1872)*, appears. 'Great-grandfather' himself comes from Odense and remembers its old-fashioned culture. But now, in his old age, modern technology enables his grandson Frederik to travel to America (by steamship), and the same technological age has provided the means (the telegraph) whereby Frederik is able to stay in contact with 'Great-grandfather'.

Andersen had himself travelled from the world of the Middle Ages to that of Modernism, in both art and culture. In his fairy tales, travel remained a central motif. It played different parts in the tales at different stages of his artistic career and in that respect it reflects changes in his life and in his art. At an early age he set out on his life's journey, through an age of restless cultural, political and technological change. At the early stages, from 1835, travel was predominantly used in the way it happens in the folktale, as a conventional element in story-telling. But he soon began to explore travel at a more personal level in the tales, as a metaphor for homelessness and exile, reflecting his own dark vision of human life as a problematic journey.

But in the 1850s, a change takes place, a change which clearly reflects his own greater maturity as a man of the world: his outlook becomes increasingly cosmopolitan and his fascination grows for the technology of travel and foreign settings for his narratives.

He never loses track of the essential ingredient of the fairy-tale: its ability to merge the rational and irrational worlds. Nor does he ever forget that children are in the audience for the tales, after all

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23 *Samlede eventyr og historier*, ii, 277.
writing tales specifically for children was one of his great achievements. But his view of the world changes and his readers – be they children or adults – are challenged to deal with ever more complex and advanced aspects of the world which they share with the author.

The great joy is that they have been allowed to go with him on his journey. Ivan Klima, remembering a school essay which he wrote in Theresienstadt, said that writing ‘enables you to enter places inaccessible in real life, even the most forbidding spaces. More than that, it allows you to invite guests along’.24 To this day, readers sense Andersen’s generous invitation to go with him on that great journey of his life.

Appendix

Fairy tales considered for this investigation (the English titles in the list are those used in the Penguin Complete fairy tales and stories of Hans Andersen, trans. Erik Haugaard (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>English Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Fyrøjet</td>
<td>The tinderbox</td>
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<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Prinsessen paa Ærten</td>
<td>The princess and the pea</td>
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<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Rejsekarmeraten</td>
<td>The travelling companion</td>
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<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Tømmelise</td>
<td>Inchehina</td>
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<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>Den lille Høvfrue</td>
<td>The little mermaid</td>
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<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>De wilde Svaner</td>
<td>The wild swans</td>
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<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Den standhaftige Tinsoldat</td>
<td>The steadfast tin soldier</td>
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<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Lykkens Kalosker</td>
<td>The magic galoshes</td>
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<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Den flyvende Koffert</td>
<td>The flying trunk</td>
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<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Paradisets Have</td>
<td>The garden of Eden</td>
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<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Metalsvinet</td>
<td>The bronze pig</td>
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<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Den grimmelige Ælling</td>
<td>The ugly duckling</td>
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<td>1845</td>
<td>Snedronningen</td>
<td>The snow queen</td>
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<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Den lykkeelige Familie</td>
<td>The happy family</td>
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<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Historien om en Moder</td>
<td>The story of a mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>Under Piletræet</td>
<td>Under the willow tree</td>
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<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Klods-Hans</td>
<td>Clod Hans</td>
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<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Et Blad fra Himlen</td>
<td>A leaf from heaven</td>
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<td>1855</td>
<td>Ib og lille Christine</td>
<td>Ib and little Christina</td>
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<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>Flaskehalsen</td>
<td>The bottle</td>
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<td>1858</td>
<td>Pøbersvendens Nathue</td>
<td>The pepperman’s nightcap</td>
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<td>1858</td>
<td>Suppe paa en Pølespind</td>
<td>How to cook soup upon a sausage pin</td>
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<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>Et Stykke Perlesnor</td>
<td>A string of pearls</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title in Danish</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td><em>En Historie fra Klitterne</em></td>
<td>A story from the dunes</td>
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<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td><em>I Andegården</em></td>
<td>In the duckyard</td>
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<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td><em>De Vises Sten</em></td>
<td>The philosopher's stone</td>
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<td>1861</td>
<td><em>Det nye Århundredes Muse</em></td>
<td>The muse of the new century</td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td><em>Isjomfruen</em></td>
<td>The ice maiden</td>
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<td>1862</td>
<td><em>Psycchen</em></td>
<td>Psyche</td>
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<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td><em>Fugl Phønix</em></td>
<td>The bird phoenix</td>
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<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td><em>Ærens Tornevej</em></td>
<td>The thorny path</td>
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<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td><em>Dryaden</em></td>
<td>The wood nymph</td>
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<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td><em>Oldefar</em></td>
<td>Great-grandfather</td>
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<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td><em>Laserne</em></td>
<td>The rags</td>
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