

Hans Christian Andersen's
Magic Trunk

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Hans Christian Andersen's Magic Trunk

Short tales commented on in images and words

Editors:

Lene Kryger and Johs. Nørregaard Frandsen

University Press of Southern Denmark 2015



Hans Christian Andersen was 31 years old when he was painted by Christian Albrecht Jensen. The portrait was exhibited in October 1836 at the Art Association in Copenhagen. And the writer was extremely satisfied – both with the result and the public reception of it.

In a letter to his friend Henriette Hanck he wrote: "The ladies sat on chairs on all sides – with binoculars, watching the writer – who, indeed, right there does look like a genius! I think: wonderful!"

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Foreword

Hans Christian Andersen created his fairytales and stories by writing about what lay around him. Hen runs, animals, hollow trees, rose bushes, balls and toys, tin soldiers and a piggy bank – all of them came alive through his storytelling and were transformed into figures in fairytales that have gained an eternal life. He could write about human sorrows, losses and joys, and was able to portray love as that which gave life meaning and direction.

Hans Christian Andersen's stories expand the world and our conception of it. For it is fantasy, love, poetry and the child's open way of looking at the way the world is ordered and to human moods that are to the fore in his narrative art. Hans Christian Andersen imaginative writing is world-class art.

Andersen wrote and created many different kinds of art, ranging from large-scale novels and play via travel accounts and poetry to his fairytales, stories and a great many papercuts, drawings and collages. Here we have collected fifteen of the short stories – we have chosen some of the best known and some that are much less familiar. We have made a small bouquet of these short stories, all of which are of great artistic stature. For it is world-class art to be able to express oneself about the large things in life on such a small scale.

The book and the selection was originally in Danish as a present to young people who wished to enhance their knowledge of the writer via the content of an attractive gift-book. It has therefore been provided with small interpretations and comments by researchers as well as with completely new illustrations done by young visual artists from The Funen Art Academy.

We wish you pleasant reading of stories that can be read while travelling – just as Hans Christian Andersen created so many of his fantastic stories while on his travels. Our intention has been to pack a small trunk of such great narrative stature that your journey will not only take you through various countries and landscapes but also allow you to have Hans Christian Andersen's imaginative fantasy as your travelling companion.

Every success on the rest of your journey!

Johs. Nørregaard Frandsen
Professor, University of Southern Denmark
Head of the Hans Christian Andersen Center

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Lene Kryger

Cultural editor, Fyens Stiftstidende

Ideas Come like Chickens

In actual fact, this book started as a newspaper project.

Johs. Nørregaard Frandsen, leader of the Hans Christian Andersen Centre at the University of Southern Denmark, came with an offer I couldn't refuse: If the regional newspaper *Fyens Stiftstidende*, printed in Andersen's native city, were prepared to feature some fairytales by Hans Christian Andersen, he would find specialists willing to send the fairytales off with a few well-chosen words.

We met over a cup of coffee and had a brainstorming session. For why print some 150-year-old fairytales by a writer all Danes admittedly know of, but who only the very fewest have seriously tried to read?

'For that very reason,' Johs. replied.

Everyone remembers 'The Ugly Duckling' and 'The Emperor's New Clothes', but Hans Christian Andersen has written many other tales that deserve to be read.

The special thing about Andersen's fairytales is that they contain so many truths., so many descriptions of people's thoughts, acts and dreams, and the internal or external barriers – familial as well as social – that prevent us from fully realising our dreams.

Hans Christian Andersen strips those in power naked, he criticises a society in which some people have to live as outcasts, but he does so without wagging a moralising finger, always with an ingenious twist or by turning things upside-down. And then he is a past master at equipping pine trees, darning needles, tea pots and tin soldiers with human emotions and characteristics.

In short: Hans Christian Andersen's fairytales reflect the world we live in, and the way in which humans treat each other, and they have just as much bite and wit now as when he wrote them.

'But the fairytales are not to be there on their own. We must explain why precisely the fairytales we have chosen are worth reading today,' Johs. went on.

Along with colleagues from the University of Southern Denmark and Odense City Museums, which include The Hans Christian Andersen Museum, Johs. had had the fairytales provided with comments. Not analyses or summaries, but more personally angled appetisers about the plot and underlying messages of the tales.

'How about getting some artists to illustrate the fairytales?'

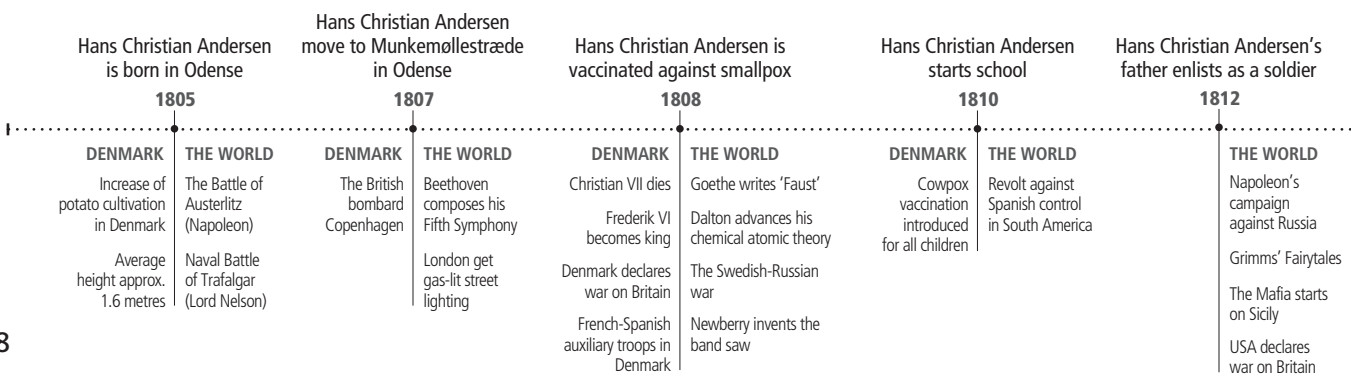
'Yes, good idea! And then publish the whole thing as a book.'

No sooner said than done!

The idea just grew and grew – yes, you could say that a feather became five hens – and here is the result.

But if it hadn't been for a number of dedicated individuals, neither the book nor the images would have seen the light of day. All of them have worked for free – out of a love of Hans Christian Andersen and with the wish of passing on the old writer to new readers, who will hopefully come to realise just how important his fairytales are for Danish culture and Danish self-understanding.

We wish you enjoyable reading and, as Andersen himself said: 'Ideas come like chickens, one on top of the other!'



Hans Christian Andersen's Life and Fairytales

Hans Christian Andersen (1805–75) is known and famous for his fairytales and tales throughout the world. He also wrote novels, plays, poems and travel accounts that are quite excellent. But it is particularly his fairytales and short stories, such as 'The Ugly Duckling', 'The Little Match-Stick Girl', 'The Emperor's New Clothes', 'The Tinder-Box', 'The Swineherd', 'Thumbelina', 'The Nightingale', 'The Little Mermaid', 'The Princess and the Pea' and 'The Story of a Mother' that are read, told and re-told everywhere in the world.

Today, there are versions of Andersen's fairytales in more than 160 languages, and it is fantastic to think that his stories are read by schoolchildren in such countries as China, The Philippines, Korea, USA, Australia, Brazil, South Africa, Mali, Spain, France, Germany, Romania and Russia. For they certainly are. Schoolchildren in China read around 25 of his fairytales within their first 6-7 years at school, for in China Hans Christian Andersen is considered to be one of the most important writers anywhere and an author who writes about the true and important things in life.

Hans Christian Andersen's fairytales are among the most important things we have and own in Denmark, for through them and with our common knowledge of Andersen we can get into contact and converse with practically anyone in the world. We can refer to the fact that we come from the small country that gave birth to such a great writer.

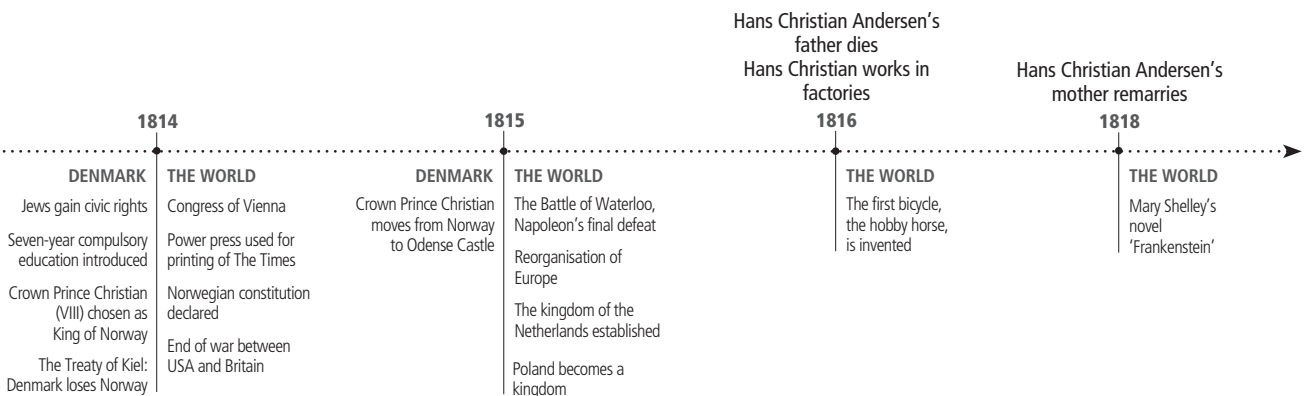
The fantastic space of the fairytales

Fairytales and fantasy! These are the first two words that spring to mind when one is to describe the writer and storyteller Hans Christian Andersen. And that is no coincidence. The Danish word for fairytales is 'eventyr' and this comes from a Latin word that means that something happens or appears on the scene. It is related to the English word 'adventure'. The word 'fantasy', though, comes from a Greek word which means that something becomes visible, comes into sight or becomes reality.

There is so much in Andersen's fairytales that becomes visible in a new way, and that one never forgets once one has been there are been allowed to see it. The world, for example, was never the same again for me when for the first time the opening lines of 'The Tinder-Box' had been read aloud to me:

'A soldier came marching down the high road – one, two! one, two! He had his knapsack on his back and a sword at his side, for he had been fighting in a war, and now he was on his way home.'

That's exactly how a soldier moves of course – one two, one two. That is the logic of a child, and it is equally clear that it can only be a soldier when he marches one two, one two. And what do soldiers do? Well, they fight wars, and after that they long to return home. The child mind can easily understand that, and in that sense the story was clear. Something had to happen, something strange, for here was a soldier ready for the unexpected: one two, one two!



It is just as self-evident that the child mind opens wide when it meets the opening lines of 'The Nightingale':

'The Emperor of China is a Chinaman, as I'm sure you very well know, and all those around him are Chinamen too.'

The reader is immediately allowed to enter an intimate space, the fantastic space that a great story-teller can create by laying down the rules for what we are about to hear – and this then is a story all the way from the country of the Emperor of China, where everyone is Chinese. So the story can now unfold! This applies to 'The Swineherd':

'There was once a poor Prince; he had a kingdom that was very small, though it was of course always large enough to get married in, and marriage was something he had set his heart on.'

Now all of us know what is going to happen, for the prince wants to get married, and it is his wish to get married rather than wealth or money that will be the crucial thing, for he is a poor prince with a very small kingdom. So now the listener or reader has been allowed to enter the rich kingdom of the fairytale.

Hans Christian Andersen creates recognisability immediately. No one is in any doubt when meeting these words:

'It was so delightful out in the country – it was summer! The fields of wheat stood yellow, the oats green, the hay had been stacked up down in the green meadows where the stork strutted on its long, red legs nattering away in Egyptian, for that was the language it had learnt from its mother. Bordering the cornfields and meadows there were woods, and in the heart of the woods deep lakes – oh yes, it really was delightful out in the country.'

What is far away becomes so close and what is close far away enough for us to see it with new

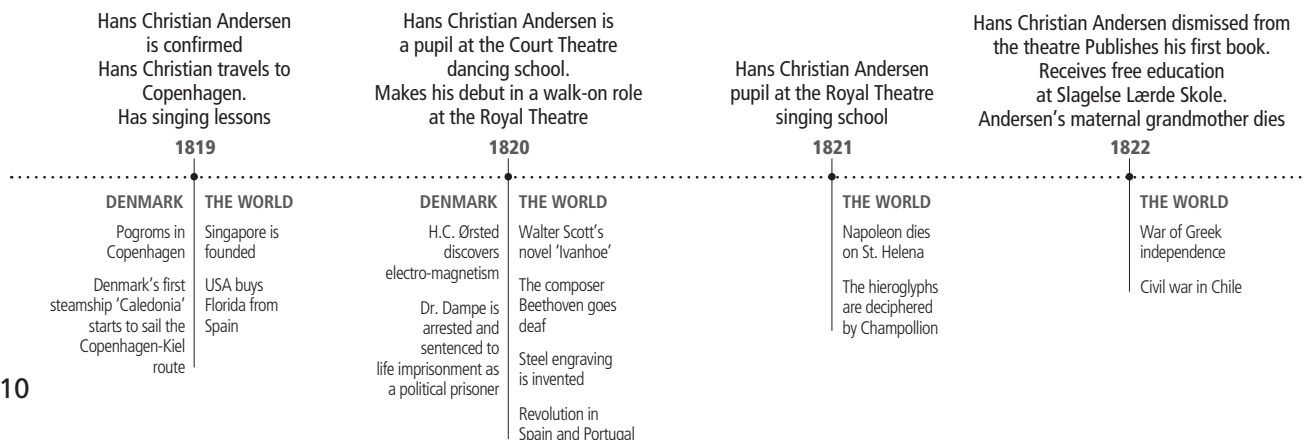
eyes when Andersen takes out his fantastic palette of colours and shapes in these opening lines to 'The Ugly Duckling'.

Hans Christian Andersen's fairytales create a fantastic space that one is invited to come and live in. In these 'spaces' everything is basically so very simple, because everything has its own logic. In 'The Snow Queen', the snow queen at one point offers the boy Kay 'the whole world and a new pair of skates'. The expression 'the whole world' is quite abstract, but a new pair of skates is immediately understandable to the child in us. Who wouldn't like to have a new pair of skates? Even if one has just been given the whole world – for what can one really do with that?

Fantasy moves people

Andersen is amusing and he uses irony to create the small distance needed for us to be able to see ourselves and human characteristics in things – and partly be amused at ourselves when we see ourselves, well, presented as things and objects that sometimes behave in stupid ways. A ball for example can bounce up and down past a swallow's nest under the eaves, for balls happen to be able to do that, also when they have a cork stuck in them.

But in 'Sweethearts' the ball doesn't just make do with being a ball. It is so in love with itself and so snobbish that doesn't even notice the painted top that so much wants to be its sweetheart. But the ball can never be the sweetheart of a top, for not only does it have a cork stuck in it but it is also made of the finest leather. Dear me, no! The ball is convinced it is something extremely fine and noble – and it has no eyes for anything else than itself! But the ball is also a ball, just an inflated ball, and when it ends up in the roof gutter, it can lie there and go on leaking until it is unrecognisable.



Andersen's fairytales often have to do with completely everyday things that are given life and a voice. Or with animals that are also given particular roles on the fairytale stage. They are assigned traits or points of view that we recognise from human life. Even so, they are not transformed into human or magic figures, as for example in Disney's universe. In Andersen, a ball is a ball and a mouse a mouse, to which a particular character or moral have been added that we easily recognise from human life. This is the essence of Andersen's wonderful irony! He creates things that are close by and yet far away at one and the same time.

That is basically also the case with the over-sophisticated princess in 'The Swineherd'. She becomes her own victim and therefore can also become the victim of Andersen's biting irony. Princesses are always fine and refined in his work, but this one lacks inner nobility and cannot see the genuine, upright qualities of the prince, which means that inside she is not a real princess at all. She is unmoved by the scent and beauty of real roses, as she also is by the beautiful voice of the nightingale. On the other hand, she falls for cheap tricks and knick-knacks in the form of strange cooking pots and odd rattles. She prefers cheap trash to the real thing. She ends up paying a high price for this. That is the moral of the story. She does not get her prince, or her share of the kingdom, but is left standing outside bemoaning her fate.

Stripped naked like the emperor

In his fairytales Hans Christian Andersen took up such issues as the difference between the genuine and the non-genuine, or between what has to do with the heart and that which is merely outer appearance and therefore a matter of indifference. This, among other things, is what makes Ander-

sen such a great artist. He wanted to move people! He knew that fantasy is among the strongest forces that exist. There is no force that can move people so much or open up so many possibilities as fantasy. Andersen placed fantasy centre-stage and turned the child's-eye view of the world into what is crucial to human existence – and in doing so he created world art.

Everywhere in the world there is a need of fairytales and the great story. And the fairytale is, by the way, one of the oldest genres in existence. From his earliest boyhood, Andersen was familiar with the traditional folktale. At that time, many of the so-called 'Kunstmärchen' or chimerical tales were being written by such writers as the Dane Adam Oehlenschläger, the German E.T.A. Hoffmann and many more – and Andersen was familiar with them. But despite this, he did not write either folktales or Kunstmärchen. He created something completely new: fantasising stories about the occurrences of life told in a narrative form that had never been seen before.

In his tales, human nature is mirrored, for better or worse. And this makes it easy for them to cross national and social borders. All of us can find ourselves stripped completely naked like the emperor, who is blinded by his own vanity, and when we laugh with the child, we are laughing at ourselves, because we see ourselves in the magic mirror Hans Christian Andersen is holding up. The world of the fairytale is spacious, global and high-ceilinged.

The fairytale has deep roots within us. We were there ourselves when we were children – in that boundless, magic world. In his fairytales we find once more the playfulness and joy in relating that belong to childhood, we find the existential, the universal and the universally human. We find what touches and concerns us. Humour can also cross

