

Wilde versions of Andersen's lexis and themes
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1. Introduction

During the nineteenth century, translations of continental European fairytales helped reinstate the genre in England, where the traditional folktale had fallen into disrepute during the preceding centuries. Now, a number of Victorian writers turned to the fairytale for its potential as an agent in child socialisation, and as a vehicle for protest against the negative effects of the industrial revolution.

Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) was one of the most translated writers. By the middle of the nineteenth century, 44 of Andersen's stories were available in English, in between one and four different versions and he had been very well received by the critics (see Bredsdorff

In this paper, I want to examine Oscar Wilde's (1854-1900) use of themes which are obviously borrowed from Andersen. Both writers address questions of life, art, and God. But whereas Andersen might almost be called a-political, Wilde's socialist/individualist political persuasions are clearly perceptible in his stories.

The fact that Wilde only had access to translations of Andersen's texts further complicates the relationship between the two. In the translations, Andersen's philosophy tends to be obscured, or altogether lost, and the kind of story which remains must have been tempting pray for Wilde.

2. Which Andersen?

Oscar Wilde wrote two collections of fairytales, *The Happy Prince and other Tales* (1888), and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), and the influence from Andersen was as clear to his contemporaries as it is today. What is unfortunately rather unclear is exactly which of the many translations of Andersen which were available by the 1880s Wilde might have read and drawn on. I am assuming that Henry William Dulcken's translations, published in 1864, 1865, and, in one expanded volume, in 1866, were the major source. I do this because I cannot think of any other reason to explain why one of the major editors of Wilde's work should choose to quote Dulcken's translation when comparing Wilde to Andersen. Murray (1979/1980:10) calls the story usually known in English as "The Little Mermaid" "The Little Sea Maid". I know of no translator except Dulcken who uses that title. Murray also quotes Dulcken's opening line from "A Rose from the Grave of Homer", with its odd use of the preposition 'to': 'the love of the nightingale to the rose'.

In any case, Dulcken's 1866 volume was well received and re-printed many times (Bredsdorff, 1954:514). It was also one of the most accurate, as far as content is concerned, and many subsequent efforts were based on it.

3. General effects of contemporary literary and translational norms

Bredsdorff's discussion of Andersen's early English translators shows that they all conformed to certain translational norms, inspired by what was considered suitable topics for literary works, in particular those aimed at a young readership, and by what was considered a suitable literary style. This often meant avoidance of anything suggestive of

reproduction, drunkenness and violence, and a tendency to use a rather high, formal, "literary" register, where Andersen used informal language and colloquialisms. A particularly nice example of this is Clare de Chatelain's, which also shows that considerations of literariness often overrode considerations of the potential youthfulness of the readership:

Johannes could not cease expatiating on the gracious reception he had met with from the princess, and on her extreme beauty

where Andersen has (my translation):

Johannes couldn't stop talking about how nice the princess had been to him, and how lovely she was

They miss or lose much of Andersen's humour, in particular his puns. Many also add to or subtract from the stories as and when they feel that this will produce a more literary, or perhaps more inoffensive text. They are particularly wary of Andersen's much used exclamation, Gud, 'God', as in:

A: "Gud, hvor han er smuk!"
g: God how he is beautiful
H: "Good heavens! how small he is!"

But the presence in a fairytale of the word "God", even when it was not taken in vain, so to speak, was also a problem. One of Andersen's translators, Boner, wrote to him (November 4, 1847; quoted in Bredsdorff, 1954:127):

many, very many, persons did not buy my "Tales of Denmark" because they happened to see in "The Angel" the word "God", and were shocked to find that name in a book of fairy-tales.

Dulcken, by 1866, takes Boner's advice not to use the word in "The Angel", though he has no similar qualms in the case of his translation of "The little Match Girl".

4. Oscar Wilde and Hans Christian Andersen

To avoid unbearable clutter when I talk about Andersen's, Dulcken's and Wilde's texts (section 6), I'll briefly outline some aspects of Andersen's and Wilde's lives and convictions which seem particularly influential on their writings.

Both were well educated and close to important contemporary thinkers. Wilde was taught by Ruskin and Pater, and Ralph Waldo Emerson's (1803-82) doctrine of self reliance is strongly echoed in Wilde's notion of Individualism, celebrated in "The soul of Man under Socialism", which he wrote around the same time as the fairytales. The strongest influence on Andersen's thinking about nature, science and the divine was the "natural philosophy" of H.C. Orsted (1777-1851). He inherited from Orsted the essentially Kantian emphasis on truth, goodness and beauty as three forms of rationality - respectively, the rationality of reason, of will and of the imagination.

Andersen was attracted and attractive to several women and men. But de Mylius speaks of Andersen's sexuality as "never released" (1993:150), and Andersen seems to have associated his own sexuality with sin. When he

speaks of love, it tends to be an asexual love which reflects the love of God (both senses), the force which moves both the artist and the scientist. The concept of God could be perceived in everything and could be approached through reason as well as through the emotions and the imagination. Reason, emotion and imagination were the three rulers in the kingdom of poetry (En Digter's Bazar, quoted in de Mylius, 1993:57)

Wilde married and had children, and his active homosexuality is well known. During his trial, he defended the "love that dare not speak its name" as an expression of "that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect", and which "dictates and pervades great works of art" (quoted in Ellmann, 1987/1988:435). In "The Decay of Lying" (1889), Wilde upholds imagination against reason and observation. Through art, it is possible to achieve "a magnificent isolation from experience, an unreality, a sterility. Art is a kind of trick played on nature and God, an illicit creation by man" (Ellmann, 1987/1988:285).

5. Traces of Andersen in Wilde

These are too numerous for me to cover them all, but see Murray's introduction to Wilde's Complete Shorter Fiction (1979/1980). But the influences on Wilde of Andersen are evidenced almost purely in the presence in Wilde's stories of individually isolated themes from Andersen. The combinations of these, and the story action, are quite different in Wilde's treatment, and there is never a one-to-one correspondence between two stories. In the following section, I shall concentrate on aspects of influence from Andersen on Wilde's "The Happy Prince" and "The Nightingale and the Rose".

6. From Andersen via Dulcken to Wilde

6.1 "Engelen" (1844), "Den lille Pige med Svovlstikkerne" (1848), and "The Happy Prince" (1888).

Wilde's "The Happy Prince" ends:

"Bring me the two most precious things in the city," said God to one of His Angels; and the Angel brought Him the leaden heart and the dead bird.

"You have rightly chosen," said God, "for in my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing for evermore, and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me".

This is a characteristic Wildean condensement into one paragraph of an idea which in Andersen forms the basis for an entire story. "Engelen" begins with a statement that whenever a good child dies, an angel collects the child and flies with it over all the places the child has loved. Together they pick flowers to take to God, who will kiss the flower he loves best, thereby giving it a voice so it can sing along with the heavenly chorus. The next paragraph reveals that this was told by an angel to a dead child the angel was carrying towards heaven. On the way they pick flowers, and, in a poor city street, the angel collects a withered field flower in a broken pot. Then the angel tells the child a story about a sick child whose most treasured possession was a wild flower planted in a pot; this is the wild flower they have just picked up. The angel knows this story because he was that child. God gives this flower among the many a voice by kissing it. By implication, therefore, though it is not stated in Andersen's story as it is in Wilde's, the

angel has chosen rightly. Here are Andersen's and Dulcken's endings (t=my translation of the original; D=Dulcken's translation):

t: And the child opened its eyes fully and looked into the
D: And the child opened his eyes and looked into the

t: angel's lovely, happy face, and at the same moment
D: glorious happy face of the angel; and at the same moment

t: they were in God's heaven, where there was happiness and
D: they entered the regions where there is peace and

t: bliss. And God pressed the dead child to His heart,
D: joy. And the Father pressed the dead child to His bosom,

t: and it had wings then, like the other angel and flew
D: and then it received wings like the angel, and flew

t: hand in hand with him; and God pressed all the
D: hand in hand with him. And the Almighty pressed all the

t: flowers to His heart, but the poor, withered wild flower
D: flowers to His heart, but he kissed the dry withered

t: he kissed and gave voice and it sang with all
D: field flower, and it received a voice and sang with all

t: the angels who circled the air around God, some quite
D: the angels hovering around - some

t: near, others around these, in wide circles, ever further
D: near, and some in wider circles, and some

t: off, into infinity, but all equally happy.
D: in infinite distance, but all equally happy.

t: And they all sang, small and large, the good, blessed
D: And they all sang, little and great, the good, happy

t: child, and the poor wild flower that had lain
D: child, and the poor field flower that had lain there

t: withered, thrown into the sweepings, among the rubbish
D: withered, thrown among the dust, in the rubbish

t: of the moving-day, in the narrow, dark street.
D: of the removal-day, in the narrow, dark lane.

Whereas Wilde closes his story immediately after the gathering into heaven of the heart and the dead bird, Andersen dwells on the glorious aftermath of the transfer. In Wilde's fiction, the other world remains remote, other, unexplicated. In Andersen's, it is accessible to description.

It is also clear that the closeness to the deity allowed for in Andersen's naming of God, is not conveyed by Dulcken's descriptors. And where Andersen allows the child the same status as 'the other angel' as soon as it makes contact with God, Dulcken's 'like the angel' suggests that the child still belongs to a different category.

But the most significant difference between the translation and the original is effected by the translation equivalents chosen for Andersen's *var*, 'were', and *fik*, past tense of the verb *at få*. Dulcken gives 'they entered the regions ...' for Andersen's *vare de i Guds Himmel*, 'they were in God's heaven'. Whereas Andersen's choice of verb reinforces the semantics of 'at the same moment', Dulcken's *moment* must last long enough to allow for a process of entering. In Andersen's text, the equivalent of a process of entering ends when the child opens its eyes fully onto the face of the angel; at that moment, they are in heaven. The process begins when the dead child hears "as if in a dream" the angel's story, and continues when the angel kisses the child, and "the little one half opened its eyes". Dulcken reproduces these two steps faithfully, but the excerpt shows that he does not see them as stages of a process: he does not translate *ganske*, 'quite' or 'fully'.

Dulcken's choice, of 'received' for *fik*, emphasises the deity's power to provide, whereas Andersen's verb suggests its power to transform. The Danish verb *at få* does have the meaning 'receive', but this meaning is more accurately rendered by the more formal *modtage*. In contexts such as those in this story, the semantically reduced 'to get' and 'to have' are more accurate equivalents for *at få* than 'to receive' is. The source, with a gloss, reads:

og da fik det Vinger	and og den fik Stemme
and then got it wings	and it got voice

The sense is that of becoming a person who has *x*, as in *babyen har fået tænder* 'the baby has got teeth' and *hun har fået hund* 'she has acquired a dog'. The Danish expression does not emphasise the process of receiving, and *fik* would be unstressed if the lines in question were spoken. The idea is that upon contact with God the child and the flower have wings and a voice, respectively; that is, they are transformed. In Dulcken's text there are in each case two clearly separate events: first a pressing to the deity's bosom, then a reception of wings; first a kiss from the deity; then a reception of a voice.

Andersen's child's journey takes it through stages of visionariness; when it sees fully, it is with God who transforms it. Dulcken's child simply travels, enters, is greeted, and receives.

This child shares its visionariness with another famous Andersen character, the little match-girl, and it is surely no coincidence that Wilde lets his swallow alleviate the misery and poverty of such a child. but where Andersen's match-seller's story is the story, Wilde's is, again, condensed into a paragraph:

In the square below ... there stands a little match-girl. She has let her matches fall in the gutter, and they are all spoiled. Her father will beat her if she does not bring home some money, and she is crying. She has no shoes or stockings, and her little head is bare. Pluck out my other eye, and give it to her, and her father will not beat her.

The eye in question is a sapphire. On receiving it, Wilde's girl cries "What a lovely bit of glass" and "ran home laughing". This account is given by the prince, with the outcome of the swallow's act of charity being told by the narrator. The point of view is clearly that of an observer, external to the object of observation, the girl.

Andersen's narration, in contrast, is suggestive of the mental state of the child, though this aspect is imperceptible in the translation. Andersen's and Dulcken's narrations begin:

t: It was so terribly cold; it was snowing and it was

D: It was terribly cold; it snowed and was already

t: getting towards dark evening; But then, it was the last

D: almost dark, and evening came on, the last

t: evening of the year, New Year's Eve. In this cold and

D: evening of the year. In the cold and

t: in this dark a little, poor girl walked the street,

D: gloom a poor little girl, bareheaded and barefoot,

t: her head bare and her feet naked...

D: was walking through the streets...

Andersen's intensifier, 'so' in the t-translation, suggests a degree of involvement with the weather which Dulcken's bare description begins to lose, and which falls away altogether with his choice of simple present to describe the snow and the gathering dusk. In this choice, Dulcken follows his source, but in Danish the simple present is compulsory in the given context. The most natural equivalent in English is the continuous.

Text t indicates that Andersen's mode of expression is less economical than Dulcken's. Andersen repeats the dummy subject for the snow and dark, highlights the addition of the information that it was the last evening of the year, and names this as New Year's Eve. Dulcken uses just one dummy 'it', lets his evening be identified through apposition, and avoids the semantic redundancy which results from naming the evening. In the original, the structure of the sentence which says that it was the last evening of the year is that of a, typically spoken, sentence which serves to explain something, in this case the cold and the snow and the dark. It reads, with a gloss:

det var ogsaa den sidste Aften in Aaret
it was also the last evening in the year

Dulcken probably took the word that means 'also' literally, and thought that the structure was awkward. Its function in the original is to heighten the impression of a stream of thought, and the subsequent naming of the evening reinforces this impression.

The reader who follows the stream of thought is supposed to have identified sufficiently closely with it to accept the cold and dark as this cold and this dark. For Dulcken and his readers, the cold and dark are referred to with the deictically neutral 'the'. By the time Andersen's readers meet the central character of the story, their powers of empathy are already engaged. It is not necessary for Andersen to seek sympathy for the child explicitly, since the reader is already walking the cold, dark streets with her. Andersen's *fattig*, 'poor' in t, describes the child's financial circumstances. Dulcken's 'poor', situated before 'little', strongly suggests the 'worthy-of-pity' sense, which Andersen would have conveyed by means of the term *stakkels* had he wished to. It is therefore easier to accuse Dulcken of deliberate pity-seeking and sentimentalising, than it is to accuse Andersen in this way. Compare a sentence from the final paragraph of the story:

t: New Year's morning rose on the little corpse, sitting with the matches, of which one bundle was almost burned.

D: The New Year's sun rose upon a little corpse! The child sat there, stiff and cold, with the matches of which one bundle was burned.

If Wilde's Prince's understated, factual description of a careless girl who has no idea of the value of the sapphire is a mockery, then it is of Dulcken's appeal for pity, rather than Andersen's celebration of the child.

Andersen's girl sees visions in the light of the matches she strikes to keep warm. Here are the first two:

t: ... it was a strange light! It seemed to

D: ... it was a wonderful little light! It really seemed to

t: the little girl that she was sitting in front of a big

D: the little girl as if she sat before a great

t: iron stove with brass knobs and a brass drum;

D: polished stove with brass feet and a brass cover. How

t: the fire burned so blessedly, warmed so well...

D: the fire burned! how comfortable it was! ...

Andersen's light is strange, giving an impression of the mystery of the vision. Dulcken's is wonderful, but remains the little light of a match. Andersen's fire is blessed, Dulcken's is merely comfortable.

t: ... it burned, it shone, and where the light fell onto

D: ... it burned up, and when the light fell upon

t: the wall it became transparent, like a veil;

D: the wall it became transparent like a thin veil, and

t: she could see right into the room, where the table

D: she could see through it into the room. On the table

t: was laid with a shining white cloth, with fine

D: a snow-white cloth was spread; upon it stood a shining

t: china, and the roast goose was steaming

D: dinner service; the roast goose smoked

t: beautifully, filled with prunes and apples ...

D: gloriously, stuffed with apples and dried plums...

Andersen's table cloth shines. Dulcken's reminds us of the cold weather. His shining dinner service is rather less evocative of heaven than shining cloth.

Andersen's girl's visions are born of her intensity of feeling and of her need, and suggest the greater glory to come. They are the childish expressions of an artistic imagination of the divine. Dulcken's girl sees merely earthly finery and comfort.

Finally, Andersen's girl sees her dead grandmother:

t: ... and they flew in brilliance and happiness,

D: ... and both flew in brightness and joy above the earth,

t: so high, so high; and there was no cold, no

D: very very high, and up there was neither cold, nor

t: hunger, no fear, - they were with God!

D: hunger, nor care - they were with God!

Dulcken's additions, 'above the earth' and 'up', creates an emphasises on contrast between heaven and earth which is not in the source. Andersen's emphasis is on a change of state.

Wilde's match girl exemplifies the poor who may be helped temporarily, but whose essential misery will remain. Andersen's match girl demonstrates the power of the imagination which is related to faith. The affluence she sees is not the immoral fruits, enjoyed by the rich, of the labour of the poor, but reflections of God's love. They lead naturally to the final vision, which is real, of her dead grandmother who has come to take her to God.

6.2 "En Rose fra Homers Grav" (1862 as a fairytale, but first written as part of En Digters Bazar, 1842) and "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)

"En Rose fra Homers Grav" began life as part of En Digters Bazar (1842), a travelogue of Andersen's journey through Europe to the East, 31 October 1840 - 13 July 1841 (English translation by Charles Beckwith Lohmeyer published by Bentley in 1846), but Dulcken's translation reflects the fairytale version of 1862. Dulcken begins:

All the songs of the East tell of the love of the
nightingale to the rose; in the silent starlit nights
the winged songster serenades his fragrant flower.

Andersen begins (original with gloss below):

I alle Orientens Sange klinger Nattergalens
In all the Orient's songs sounds the nightingale's

Kj'rlighed til Rosen; i de tause, stjerneklare
love for the rose; in the silent star-bright

N'tter bringer den bevingede Sanger sin duftende Blomst
nights brings the winged singer its fragrant flower

en Serenade.
a serenade.

The meaning is clearly not the same in these two texts. According to Dulcken, all eastern song are about the nightingale's love for the rose, whereas, according to Andersen, you can merely perceive that love in the songs.

Among the songs of the East are those of Homer, repeatedly referred to in the story as a singer. The nightingale's love is for the rose's beauty, which, according to Orsted's natural philosophy is perceived by the rationality of the imagination. In other words, the nightingale's love for the rose, which sounds in the songs of Homer, is the poet's love of the beautiful. The nightingale dies and is buried with Homer.

The rose of the story's title dedicates all its beauty to Homer because of his fame. It does not love, and does not understand the nightingale's love. It is picked, pressed, and placed in a copy of The Iliad.

Andersen does not dwell on the suffering and death of the nightingale (A=source; g=gloss; D=Dulcken's translation):

A: Paa Rosenh'kken var een Blomst blandt dem alle
g: On the rose hedge was one flower among them all
D: The rose hedge bore a flower which was the most

A: skjínnests, og for den sang Nattergalen sin
g: the most beautiful, and for it sang the nightingale its
D: beautiful among all, and the nightingale sang to her of

A: Kj'rlighed's Smerte...
g: love's pain
D: his woes...

A: ...Og Nattergalen sang sig tildíde.
g: And the nightingale sang itself to death.
D: ...And the nightingale sang himself to death.

Dulcken's consistent use of the male and female pronouns suggests that the nightingale is in love with the rose; it evokes less easily Andersen's nightingale's ungendered, poetic love of ungendered beauty.

Wilde's nightingale's love, too, is gendered, and its death is described through a series of passages in which the nightingale's song is accompanied by fatal blood-loss, beginning,

All night long she sang with her breast against the thorn ... All night long she sang, and the thorn went deeper and deeper into her breast, and her life-blood ebbed away from her

and culminating in the death of the bird:

but the nightingale made no answer, for she was lying dead in the long grass, with the thorn in her heart.

He comments: "The nightingale is the true lover, if there is one. She, at least, is Romance, and the student and the girl are, like most of us, unworthy of Romance" (quoted in Murray, 1979/1980:11).

Wilde's nightingale's death is obviously sacrificial:

"One rose is all I want," cried the Nightingale, "only one red rose! Is there no way by which I can get it?"

"There is a way," answered the Tree; "but it is so terrible that I dare not tell it to you."

"Tell it to me," said the Nightingale, "I am not afraid."

"If you want a red rose," said the Tree, "you must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your

life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine."

There is no hint in Andersen's story that the nightingale is sacrificing its life. It dedicates its life's song to beauty, but there is no indication of any other cause it wishes to further. It does not want the rose, which already exists, it simply wants to praise its beauty. The passage just above is more reminiscent of Andersen's Mermaid's sacrifice of her beautiful voice to the sea-witch and of the subsequent pain and bleeding of the feet she buys with her voice, than of Andersen's nightingale's death by poetry. However, whereas Andersen's mermaid suffers for her own ends, Wilde's nightingale's sacrifice is made in order to further what she mistakes for a true reflection of what her songs had always really been about: true love between a man and a woman. Furthermore, even though Andersen's mermaid falls in love with a human and desires feet so that she can join him, her love for him has, at the time of the sacrifice, already led her to love humanity in general, and her ultimate aim is to gain an immortal soul. She achieves a state which can lead her to fulfil this aim, whereas Wilde's nightingale's sacrifice is in vain.

6.3 Conclusion

There is no question about Andersen's importance for the revival of the literary fairytale in England, but the Grimms, Perrault, D'Aulnoy and others were just as important. Among the numerous nineteenth century English writers who used the fairytale genre, most in fact used themes and motifs from the traditional tales, and few, if any, borrowed and transformed themes from Andersen as obviously as Wilde.

There is clearly no guarantee that Wilde would have written one word differently, had he had unmediated access to Andersen's fairytales. Nevertheless, the case is interesting. Andersen used the fairy tale genre to address large questions in the guise of simple language, in the telling of entertaining, imaginative stories. In the nineteenth century translations, the subtler clues to Andersen's conception are lost, leaving, as Dulcken's title has it, a set of "stories for the household" - the kind of household which would uphold the values now presented in the stories. In this guise, they offered Wilde a rich source for scorn, at a time when Andersen was held up as a paragon of literary respectability, and as a master of the literary fairytale genre.

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