On the Rhetoric and Ethics of Andersen's Fairy tales

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I

In "The Emperor's New Clothes", a whole court, including the emperor himself, is the dupe of some clever agents who persuade everybody that the king does wear beautiful clothes even though in fact he is left to walk about in his underwear. Though I admit that there are only few features that are shared by a king's body and a literary text, I want to take up this powerful image of Andersen in order to suggest that, even though literary critics are certainly not as gullible as the characters admiring the king's non-existing clothes, we might be too credulous in our belief that it is possible to separate content and form in literary works of art. To my mind, the timeless attraction and quality of Andersen's tales is not built on his clothing, conventional contents and ethics into beautiful literary garments. Instead, it is impossible to separate the content from the clothes, because they form two aspects of the same aesthetic body which are intricately interwoven. We cannot see through the literary garments and gaze at the naked content.

The morality of a tale, I would argue, does not primarily depend on the content, but on the form of the story. The same action can be depicted in ways that result in a 'moral' or an 'immoral' impact. As hosts of Victorian children realised, the depiction of good actions by faultless characters can be so boring that one tends to despise rather than admire the good characters in the end. On the other hand, the depiction of a murder can be used for didactic ends. Since the way the events of a story are depicted is central for the reconstruction of the values underlying the work of art, I will be concerned with the relations between form and content, giving pride of place to Andersen's narrative devices.

This article is built on two premises. My first starting point is the assumption that fairy tales are primarily read by and written for chil-

dren, and that they are deemed suitable reading for them. Especially in Eastern Europe, Andersen's tales are thought to be particularly suitable for teaching children basic human values.[1] My other premise is based on an insight by W.H. Auden, who claimed that Andersen's tales are "conscious literary art" (1973: 204). They are not just stories told and retold for the enjoyment of children, they rather belong to the field of fiction, and they should be treated as such. Analyses of the tales should therefore not only be concerned with the story, but also with the discourse. In this article, I want to join the two premises I have mentioned and I will therefore not confine myself to the impossible task of asking which moral values are inherent in Andersen's stories without paying heed to their literary garments.[2] Instead, I will concentrate on the ways in which these morals are conveyed.

In the following, I will first give an overview of the narrative strategies which Andersen employs in order to convey the morals of his stories. Secondly, I want to look at one of his famous tales with a quite conventional moral in greater detail, in order to see how Andersen combines a number of narrative techniques for a specific end. In "The Wild Swans" the moral is quite obvious, and the good girl is married to a prince in the end. From the point of view of ethics, this story is well suited for teaching children, as good and bad are clearly separated, and the good ones are rewarded in the end. I would fail to do justice to the intricacy and complexity of Andersen's tales, however, if I left it at that. Andersen sometimes uses the genre of the fairy tale in order to question values which are usually taken for granted. Some of his stories do not convey any moral at all; they rather seem to agree with Oscar Wilde's aesthetic belief in art for art's sake. As far as Wilde was concerned, a writer does not express deeply felt moral truths; on the contrary, as he argued in his essay "The Decay of Lying", lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of art. Some of Andersen's tales do indeed tell beautiful, blatantly untrue things without taking heed of any didactic aims at all. In the last part of my lecture I will therefore shordy analyse two tales without a clear cut moral. In this part I will point to those narrative strategies which Andersen employed to ambivalent ends, and I will also refer to those narrative techniques which are present in those of his stories which contain a conventional moral, but which he did not use in his more ambivalent tales.

II

All in all, one can identify five basic narrative means by which Andersen conveys the moral of his more didactic stories. The most obvious one is, of course, the sententious summary of the lesson to be learned at the end of the story. This is a staple ingredient of many fairy tales, but Andersen does not employ it very often, and if he does, he chooses, more often than not, to modify it. A rather conventional drawing of the moralistic conclusion is to be found, for instance, at the end of "The Shirt Collar", when the narrator makes sure that the lesson of the tale is brought home to a young audience:

> And this is worth bearing in mind, so that *we* don't behave like that; for, after all, we never can be quite certain that we too mayn't find ourselves one day in the rag-bag and be turned into white paper and have the whole story of our life printed on us, even the most private happenings, so that we ourselves have to run around blabbing it out, like the collar (Andersen 2004: 230)[3]

But Andersen rarely ends his stories on such a conventional note.[4] Even when he does use the ending as a means of conveying advice, he usually does so in a more imaginative way. At the end of "The Little Mermaid", for instance, the narrator does not extemporise on the mermaid's painful efforts to get an immortal soul; he rather uses the sympathy he evoked for her sufferings in order to convey a different moral that is only tangibly connected to the plot of the tale, when he has one of the 'daughters of the air', into which the mermaid is transformed, say that they are completely dependent on the conduct of children:

> for every day we find a good child [...] God shortens our time of trial [...] But if we see a child who is naughty or spiteful, then we have to weep tears of sorrow, and every tear adds one more day to our time of trial. (Andersen 2004: 63)[5]

We should not forget, however, that not all of Andersen's fairy tales convey a moral that is easily discernible at the end of the tale. Sometimes a metanarrative comment like "There, that's something like a story, isn't it?" (Andersen 2004: 27) at the end of "The Princess and

the Pea" undercuts the impact of the story and thereby adds a dimension of irony to the conventional moral of the tale, which supports the social hierarchy, confirming that those who are at the top of the ladder are fundamentally, even physically different from those at the bottom. Without the final comment which calls to mind the fictionality of the tale, the moral would therefore be rather reactionary, emphasising that a ridiculously sensitive body combined with an egotistic and ungrateful mind denotes true nobility, and that this proof of 'nobility' is a sufficient reason for a prince to marry. Such metanarrative comments can often be found at the beginning or end of Andersen's tales. Since Greger Andersson provides an impressive array of such comments in his contribution to this volume, I will not consider them in any more detail here.

Moreover, Andersen often integrates explicit advice or moralistic truisms into his stories. He mostly uses the narrator as a mouthpiece for such moralistic generalisations, as, for instance, in his story "The Butterfly", which features a butterfly that looks at many possible brides but finds some fault with all of them, so that he ends up quite alone. After one of the butterfly's adventures, the narrator summarises what has happened, and in order to be quite sure that the message gets home, he evaluates its behaviour explicidy: "So the butterfly got no one [wife] at all. He had been too 'choosy', and that doesn't do. The butterfly remained a bachelor, as they are called" (Andersen 2004: 363)[6]. In the end, all of the butterfly's efforts are thwarted, because his attempts at convincing himself that he did the right thing and is better off without a wife, are shown to be pitifully inadequate. This state of delusion, in which the protagonist remains throughout the story without ever being enlightened, is a typical feature of quite a number of Andersen's tales. The butterfly is a case in point, because he manages to tell himself that he is not worse off than if he had married, even when he is stuck on a pin and put in a box of curiosities, because if he had a wife, he would be stuck and lack freedom of movement as well. Even when a plant tells him that this seems to be a poor consolation, the butterfly remains adamant: "Still, pot-plants aren't always to be trusted" thought the butterfly. "They have too much to do with human beings" (Andersen 2004: 363). The narrator's comment, however, has made sure that the reader is able to see through these delusions.

In many of the stories the moral that goodness will be rewarded in

the end is conveyed not only by the plot and the principle of poetic justice but also by the characteristics of the protagonists. In “Little Tuk”, for instance, the moral is clearly conveyed by the plot which shows that Tuk’s benevolent and altruistic behaviour is rewarded in the end. If a good character is victimised, the character in question is mostly innocent, helpless, young, poor, virtuous, and, if she is female, beautiful. All of these characteristics mark her or him as passive and powerless, and emphasise the fact that they are not responsible for the plight in which they are. If the victim is female, beauty and delicacy are always thrown in, for in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this was a more or less necessary condition for ensuring the reader’s interest in a heroine.[7] Bad characters, by contrast, are rarely beautiful. Wicked witches are ugly by nature, and even the ‘Snow Queen’ only possesses an inferior, cold kind of beauty which only engages the admiration of people who are deluded by some kind of magic.

The underlying values are often embodied in the constellation of characters. The contrast between good and bad, the fact that the sufferings of the virtuous characters are often caused either by evil agents possessed of magical power or by thoroughly wicked characters, makes it easier for the reader to identify with and feel sympathy for the innocent victims. The importance of the relations of contrast between different characters are very pronounced in “Little Tiny” or “Thumbelina”. Here the main character has many attributes of the typical good but powerless and suffering character who triumphs in the end. In this variation of the Cinderella-theme the main character is all the more to be pitied during her long plight, because Tiny is not only good and innocent, she is also a “tiny little creature” (7), and her size is emphasised by her name and the rather superfluous attribute ‘little’ Tiny. Therefore, Tiny is more than just another good little girl, who, *qua* age and gender is powerless and therefore to be pitied - her helplessness and dependence on the good will of others are enhanced by her size of half a thumb. From the beginning, she possesses the attributes of the good heroine of a fairy tale: she came into the world with the help of a good fairy, she is delicate, graceful, innocent, good, beautiful, and has a very sweet voice. Her goodness stands out even more clearly because it is brought into stark contrast with the other characters who victimise her. First a “large, ugly, wet” (6) old toad captures her, because she wants Tiny to become the wife of her ugly son, whose speechlessness further contrasts with Tiny’s elegance (cf.

7). Her next prospective husband, to whom she is at first bound by bonds of gratitude, is an ugly old mole, who is rich and learned, but lacks benevolence and sympathy; he has no pity whatever for the plight of others. The (comparatively large) size, the ugliness and the other negative attributes of these characters contrast vividly with Tiny's goodness and serve to drive home the moral of this story; for in the end Tiny is rescued by a swallow (in the context of fairy tales a bird with good connotations) whom she pitied, cared for, and saved from death, and who brings her to an angel of the flower, indeed, to a prince of these angels, a being just as good, tiny and beautiful as she is.[8] Gerda's goodness in "The Snow Queen" is similarly enhanced by being placed in contrast to the Snow Queen. In "The Wild Swans" Eliza has to face not only the wicked stepmother, but also the wicked archbishop.

Moreover, the good characters are quite often helped by other virtuous characters - with poor and kind old women being in great demand here - or by 'supernatural' agents, sometimes even by God himself. Little Gerda in "The Snow Queen", for instance, is helped by kind crows, a benevolent prince and princess, a reindeer, an old woman, angels, and even a cruel and heartless little robber-girl (whose kindness to Gerda remains inexplicable, but serves to emphasise the virtuous influence Gerda has on others). This principle is even remarked upon by the little heroine, whose goodness will in the end defy the power of the Snow Queen and the magic mirror: Gerda "folded her little hands, and thought, 'How good everyone is to me, men and animals too'" (66). When the reindeer asks the wise old finnish woman to give 'little Gerda' some magic, this old woman even puts this into words:

> "I can give her no greater power than she has already," said the woman; "don't you see how strong that is? How men and animals are obliged to serve her, and how well she has got through the world, barefooted as she is. She cannot receive any power from me greater than she now has, which consists in her own purity and innocence of heart." (72)[9]

In his use of narrative strategies, Andersen does not rely on such moralistic generalisations, on the plot and the constellation of characters and their qualities alone; he also uses a number of devices in or-

der to manipulate the reader's sympathy. This direction of the reader's sympathy is central, indeed constitutive, to the moral impact of a story. Even the depiction of cruelty and murder does not necessarily amount to an 'immoral' story; it can rather be used in a didactic way, teaching abhorrence of such actions. As the Victorians, who insisted on the didactic function of literature, recognised, it is of paramount importance for didactic purposes that readers should be able to identify with the good characters, to admire the heroes, feel compassion for the good, but unfortunate characters, and to despise the villains. The manipulation of sympathy is therefore important in two ways: first, we have to take into account devices that make us identify or feel pity with, or admiration for, the 'good' characters, and secondly, we have to analyse devices which create a distance between the reader and the 'bad' characters.

One popular device of directing the readers' sympathies are comments by the narrator. A quite obvious and simple means of invoking sympathy for the good characters is the use of the epithet 'poor' which indicates that the character in question is to be pitied. This happens, of course, most often in stories in which the hero or heroine has to face great hardships and prove his or her goodness by word or deed. The epithet 'poor' serves as an indication of the fact that it is a good character that suffers here - bad characters are never pitied in their plight. In one of his most popular tales, for instance, "The Brave Tin Soldier"[10] is recommended to our sympathetic approval by the use of this epithet (14), as is, of course, "poor little Tiny"[11]. But it is not only small agents or little girls who are thus singled out; in his tale "The Travelling Companion", Andersen makes quite sure how we should regard the good young man who has lost his father in the first sentence of the story: "Poor John was very sad" (172); and a few lines later he even uses the exclamation "Poor John!" in order to emphasise the helplessness and loneliness of this character.[12]

Secondly, Andersen employs several narrative techniques in order to evoke the plight of the good characters in distress vividly. They are often 'quite alone' and isolated, having to face overwhelming difficulties on their own - a fact, that is often emphasised. What they have to endure is mostly quite extreme. While this is a common feature of fairy tales,[13] Andersen uses a number of narrative devices to heighten the effect. His unfortunate innocent characters lose all their money, all their friends, and no matter whether they have to fend for them-

selves in winter, or on water, it is always extreme destitution and death they face. When little Gerda searches for her friend, she not only has to go to the Snow Queen, travelling through ice and a climate that even the reindeer can hardly endure, she also loses her shoes and has to go barefoot. Even the steadfastness of the 'brave tin soldier', whose trials seem to be negligible, because he has to prove his courage by staying calm while sailing down a gutter in a little paper boat, is depicted in a way that emphasises his difficulties and induces the reader to feel sympathy for him. The noise he hears, the gnashing of the teeth of the rat and other terrifying sounds are not described in the way they would appear to children, but depicted in the way they appear to the soldier. This is partly achieved by comparing the adventures of the soldier in the paper boat to human experiences. The soldier, for instance,

> heard a roaring sound quite terrible enough to frighten the bravest man. At the end of the tunnel the drain fell into a large canal over a steep place, which made it as dangerous for him as a waterfall would be to us. (14)

A third device consists in inducing the reader to identify with the good character and invite him to share his thought processes. Most often this is given in simple forms, using phrases like "he said to himself'; but sometimes we get forms of free indirect discourse, too. We are given the tin soldier's point of view, as he is used as a focalizer:

> But the tin soldier didn't answer and held firmly onto his musket. The boat was off and the rat after it. Ugh! How it did gnash its teeth and cry out to sticks and straw [...]![14]

The use of free indirect thought and the exclamation marks make it possible for the reader to feel for the little soldier, adopt his point of view and realise just how great his courage is.

Another means of directing the reader's sympathy is not yet noticed in narratology, since it is not often to be found in realist fiction. Since this device first came to my notice in Lars-Ake Skalin's lecture, I want to refer to his excellent paper for a more detailed discussion of the topic. It is, however, too important to be left out in a discussion of Andersen's narrative strategies of manipulating the reader's sympathy.

What the story teller quite often does is take over a benevolent reader's point of view and give words to his anticipated reaction. This happens, for instance, in "The Brave Tin Soldier", when the narrator exclaims in sympathy: "Good gracious, what large waves arose in that gutter! and how fast the stream rolled on!" (13). The story teller thus serves as a kind of 'stand-in' for those readers who empathise with the soldier and feel pity for his plight.

A very simple device of directing the reader's sympathy consists in focussing only on the adventures and thoughts of one 'good' character. Even if the character is not used as a focalizer and the narrator does not show us how we should react to his experiences, we often get to know only those things that are within the protagonist's range of experience, or that are of concern to him. This also induces us to see and judge things in the way they appear to the central character.

The last means of invoking sympathy for good characters works by a kind of negative reinforcement, that is, by narrative devices which serve to create a distance between the reader and the bad characters who are set on hurting the victim. Andersen uses several techniques in order to achieve that effect.

The immoral deeds of the bad characters are usually shown from the outside, without ever allowing the reader any insight into the villain's consciousness. The reader's attention is focussed on the good characters, for instance in the story "Everything in the Right Place", when the goose-girl remains at the centre of interest, while the bad squire is only shown riding by and doing his wicked deed.

Another, more explicit distancing device is manifested in certain phrases of the narrator, who makes sure that he does not share the villain's point of view. While the narrator concedes that the squire nearly kills the goose-girl because he thinks it is funny to throw some- one into a ditch, he nonetheless emphasises that he does not share this opinion. Twice, he uses the phrase what is called "fun", thus distancing himself from the narrated events and demonstrating that it does not conform to his idea of fun. Andersen also uses longer comments in order to ensure that no sympathy is to be wasted on these characters. This works very well with regard to lesser characters, which are not in the centre of the reader's attention anyway. In these cases, Andersen shows himself a master of economy, as, for instance, in the following narratorial comment in "The Travelling Companion":

> She was indeed a wicked princess. She possessed beauty enough - nobody could be more elegant or prettier than she was; but what of that? for she was a wicked witch; and in consequence of her conduct many noble young princes had lost their lives. (177)

But Andersen also makes sure that the reader does not feel any pity for those princes who are killed because of the whim of the wicked princess, as the centre of attention is 'poor John', a poor and virtuous young man who has to be rewarded at the end of the story. This is emphasised by a narratorial comment, which makes clear that the hanging and beheading of the noble young princes only serve to exemplify the wickedness of the princess, but should not induce the reader to identify with her victims: "They had all been warned in time, and might have left her alone, if they would" (177).

Another strategy of manipulating the reader's sympathy involves a different kind of distancing device that can be seen in those stories which feature protagonists who exemplify some bad character trait. Since the story evolves around them, their misfortunes might easily be taken to induce sympathy instead of antipathy. This is especially tricky when the characters are helpless and can scarcely move on their own account, because the combination of dependence and misfortunes usually denotes victimisation. But Andersen makes quite sure that the reader is not led to sympathise with such characters. The young tree in "The Fir Tree" for instance, is merely a passive object that is exploited by human beings, a victim of the human drive to celebrate, a young and innocent being whose hopes and dreams are not fulfilled. In this case, Andersen uses the device of repetition, emphasising again and again that the fir tree is discontented and 'not happy', even though it has every reason to be content - and is even told so by the sunbeam. Similarly, the bad character trait of the protagonist in "The Shirt-Collar" is exposed to the reader very early in the story. Here the fact that the collar's proposals for marriage are rebuffed is implicitly explained and justified by a narratorial comment on the shirt-collar's character. When the protagonist tries to enhance his reputation by stating that he possesses a boot-jack and a hair- brush, the narrator puts things right: "This was not true, for these things belonged to his master; but he was a boaster" (159).

III

In order to appreciate Andersen's mastery of these devices, it seems apposite to see them at work in a single tale. I will therefore take a closer look at one of Andersen's more famous fairy tales, "The Wild Swans". In this story that elaborates on the motif of the sister who disenchants her brothers,[15] Andersen uses many of the narrative devices to the same end: All of them point to the virtue of Eliza, who sacrifices her own well-being and is even prepared to offer her life for the release of her eleven brothers, who are under a spell.

A mere summary of the plot and the poetic justice indicate that this is indeed a story with a moral: The king's daughter Eliza and her eleven brothers suffer from the spells of a wicked stepmother, who transforms the princes into swans and manages to drive Eliza away from the court. Eliza spends some time alone in a wood, finally finding her brothers with the help of a wise and kind old woman. She goes with them on a dangerous journey across the sea where they nearly drown at night, fortifying themselves by 'singing hymns' in a thunderstorm. In a dream the selfless Eliza is told how to save her brothers: She has to weave garments out of stinging nettles, suffering physical and mental discomfort, for she is not allowed to talk if she does not want to endanger the life of her brothers. Self-sacrifice prevails even when she is in the palace of a king who wants to marry her: She cannot tell him why she suffers, she mourns and weaves at night and has to go out into a graveyard in the dead of night in order to get more nettles for the garments. When an arch-bishop accuses her of sorcery for a second time, she is condemned to die, continuing to weave the garments even on the way to her execution. Just before the fire is lit, the brothers arrive as swans and are transformed into princes by means of the garments - and when the unconscious Eliza awakes, everything is prepared for the marriage feast with the king.

The characteristics of Eliza are enhanced by the fact that she has to prove her goodness in many climactically arranged situations: first, she has to fend for herself without any food in a dark wood and later on she has to perform her painful tasks in surroundings which make the weaving even more difficult for her. First, she 'only' has to master the pain, then she has to confine her weaving to the nights in her chamber in the palace, sneaking out to get the nettles, and in the end she continues weaving in her death cell and on the way to the scaffold, when the angry mob tries to tear her apart.

The constellation of characters also points in the same direction: The virtue of Eliza is set off by the wickedness of her foes, the evil stepmother who, out of sheer spite, harms Eliza and her brothers by black magic, and the villainous arch-bishop. The wickedness of the stepmother is made quite clear from the beginning, and the context in which she is introduced emphasises the contrast between the innocent children and the bad woman:

> Oh, these children were indeed happy, but it was not to remain so always. Their father, who was king of the country, married a very wicked queen, who did not love the poor children at all (33)

The stepmother is characterized as "very wicked" and the role of the children as victims is made clear by the prolepsis and the epithet 'poor'. In blatant contrast to the bad characters, all the good ones willingly help Eliza. The king who sees her is so struck by her beauty that he takes her with him at once in order to marry her; the kind old woman shows her the way to her brothers and appears in her dream to tell her how to rescue her brothers, and when Eliza is alone in her cell waiting for her execution, even the mice and the thrush support her. The narrator emphasises in a comment that Eliza is not even alone when she is in the wood, because God is always with her:

> She [...] felt sure that God would not forsake her. It is God who makes the wild apples grow in the wood, [...] and He now led her to one of these trees, which was [...] loaded with fruit (36).

By way of magic she is supported when she lies unconscious on the pile of wood that should burn her to death: "Every piece of faggot in the pile had taken root" (43) and the whole place is covered with roses.

The qualities of Eliza, her beauty, her delicacy, her innocence, her virtue and her willingness to self-sacrifice are not only apparent by the arrangement of the plot, the poetic justice and the constellation of characters, they are also emphasised in narratorial comments. Our sympathy is once again directed by the use of the phrase "poor Eliza" (34), and by a comment which confirms the judgements of the roses

and the hymn-book who say that Eliza is more beautiful and more pious than they are: “And the roses and the hymn-book told the real truth” (34).

Finally, the focus remains firmly on Eliza, and the narrator invites us to share her thoughts and suffering in a situation which might not seem so bad at first sight. When Eliza suffers the vividly described physical pain, or when she is on the way to the place of execution, it is not necessary to emphasise that she is to be pitied. But when she is in the palace and treated like a queen by a king whom she loves, it is apparendy deemed necessary to make the reader aware of the fact that she is in a predicament, for here we are given some insight into her consciousness by way of free indirect thought: “Oh, if she had only been able to confide in him and tell him of her grief’ (41). Thus, all of the narrative devices that serve as an indication of the system of values underlying the story converge; there is no contradiction between them - instead, every detail is geared towards praising the virtue, piety and self-sacrifice of the central character.

IV

Whereas “The Wild Swans” is a beautiful tale with a moral and a happy ending that corresponds to conventional assumptions about fairy tales, other stories by Andersen are, as far as ethics are concerned, much more ambivalent. Since I think it is one of the hallmarks of Andersen’s works that he does not always conform to the conventional moralistic and didactic expectations of his time, I want to end my lecture by drawing your attention to two of his tales that defy conventional morals.

In the story “Little Claus and Big Claus”, Little Claus gets the better of his rich great namesake. However, despite the fact that Little Claus is rewarded in the end, this character is less than admirable in moral terms. He suffers from the cruel behaviour of Big Claus, who tries to kill him, but his attempts to come to terms with this situation involve quite a lot of unnecessary harm that he willingly does to others. When he is given shelter for a night and is allowed to come in from the storm by the farmer, who is described as “a good man” (165), he manages to cheat his benefactor out of two bushels of gold. Then he blackmails the sexton, pretending to kill him, in order to get even more money. He even uses the corpse of his grandmother in order to cheat another “good man” (168), a landlord which has a fiery

temper, which is cleverly exploited by Little Claus. The fact that he finally dupes and kills Big Claus may be taken to be a just revenge or even merely a cautionary deed, because after all, his irascible namesake has tried to kill him twice. But Little Claus's exploitation, his cheating, blackmailing and victimisation of characters who are, with the exception of the sexton, described as "good" and who certainly do not deserve such treatment, does not strike one as being moral. In this story, therefore, a character is rewarded for actions which are less than commendable.

But the story is not as easy to categorise as it seems at first sight. After all, the glaring misdeeds of Big Claus call for a punishment of this character, so that, in this respect, one might even read the story as a - rather thwarted - example of poetic justice. Indeed, the governing principle of this kind of farce fairy tale demands that the rich greedy character who imitates the poor one is punished with death at the end of the story.[16] According to the criteria of plot and poetic justice, therefore, it is a morally ambivalent story.

The constellation of characters is ethically ambivalent as well. According to the internal logic of fairy tales, conventional sympathy is reserved for Little Claus, because he is poor and has to work for the rich Big Claus, who grudges his poor namesake his fun. As Draga-Alexandru (1999: 446) has emphasised,

> richness of the mind presupposes material poverty and the other way round. [...] In 'Great Claus and Little Claus', the one who is materially poorer is richer in spirit and finally manages to outwit the proud rich Great Claus, so that he ends up possessing material riches as well.

While one might find fault with the statement that Little Claus is "richer in spirit", it is certainly true that Little Claus is a much better character than his rich namesake. He is less spiteful and cruel than Big Claus; and in contrast to him, he does not wilfully harm others in the beginning - his deeds are only set in motion by the spite of his richer namesake. A closer look, however, reveals that the constellation of characters is just as ambivalent as the plot: On the one hand, Little Claus is plainly not as evil as Big Claus, who even kills his grandmother because he thinks he can sell her corpse (cf. 168), on the other hand, Little Claus unscrupulously exploits good other characters.

The narrative techniques that Andersen employs in this story are therefore ambivalent. The plot and the constellation of characters are ethically complex, and narrative comments are very sparse. The very few signs of directing the reader's sympathy are in favour of Little Claus, for the focus is firmly on this character. We even get a few insights into his consciousness and are thus invited to share his thoughts, but this, again, is only used very rarely because scenic descriptions and dialogue dominate this story. Andersen therefore dispenses with many strategies which serve to appeal to the sympathy of the reader. He only uses very few means of recommending Little Claus to the reader, and manipulates even the basic means of plot and constellation of characters in a way that render them ambivalent from an ethical point of view.

Although "The Tinder-Box" is as ethically ambivalent as "Little Claus and Big Claus", the narrative strategies employed in both tales differ. Strangely enough, "The Tinder-Box" is deemed to be "appropriate for the 5-6 year old kids and close to them and contain understandable moral messages" (Fakirska 1999: 256). Along with "Thumbelina" and "The Princess and the Pea" Jordanka Fakirska considers this story to be very simple and good reading for children who should acquire moral values. The tale, however, does not strike me as very moral - and I would certainly not recommend anyone to build his system of ethics on the values implicit in it. At first sight this tale seems to be just another one of those stories that reward the good poor hero with a kingdom and a princess. The soldier who comes back from war is lucky in finding both gold and a kind of Aladdin's lamp which finally ensures his marriage to the beautiful princess - dramatically emphasised by the fact that, just like Eliza in "The Wild Swans", he has to be rescued from the gallows. There are, however, quite a number of things that make it difficult to think of the hero as someone who is justly rewarded for his deeds. His behaviour to the witch, for instance, is less than commendable. When he meets the witch, he takes advantage of her offer to get her the tinder box in return for great riches, but after he has acquired the gold, he kills her because he wants the tinder-box, too. Even though the witch has been described as an "ugly witch" by the narrator, this does not seem to be a sufficient reason for murder, especially as the soldier promised to bring her the box in return for the gold (cf. 350).[17] Ingratitude and the breaking of promises do not, after all, belong to the more recom-

mendable moral values. This detail is, however, not noticed by people who use this story in order to teach children moral values. Fakirska (1999: 257) thinks that the children reach a point where they can define a particular action as being good, even though it belongs to a negative character, such as "the witch from 'The Tinderbox', because she helps the soldier to become rich". Now if the witch's action of making him rich is good, can his killing her be regarded as a good action too? Some critics do think so:

> A real soldier doesn't care for nonsense, without any scruples he cuts off the witch's head, - to which his critics and the public objected, even though she obviously represents psychological states that must be overcome (Jorgensen 1999: 274)[18]

The critics and the public, however, took a different view of the matter, and Draga-Alexandru (1999: 441) also voices some scepticism concerning the morality of this deed:

> The episode with the witch's murder passes almost unnoticed, but the reader does not miss Andersen's ironical intention to make the audience wonder: who is the evil one, the murdered or the murderer?

I fail to see, however, any sign of irony in this context.

The killing of the witch is, moreover, the most notable, but not the only ethically doubtful event in the story. The young soldier's use of the gold that he got with the help of the witch does not strike one as commendable either. He squanders it without any regard for foresight. At the end, he finds himself penniless, of course, and if the story ended here, it could be held up as a warning to children: Don't squander away your money, because you will be poor and friendless if you do. Instead, the soldier goes on to use the stolen tinder-box in order to become rich and powerful again. If one wanted to draw a lesson from this, it would be that living a purposeless, pleasurable life, without any regard for foresight, will make you rich, powerful and happy in the end. But towards the end of the story it gets even worse, for the soldier repeatedly takes the princess from her parents at night - to my mind a deed to which parents might rightfully object - and,

when he is found out and about to be executed by the irate queen, he responds by having the king and queen killed instead. He and his princess celebrate their wedding in a joyous mood, with all of the people being very happy with their new king - but although the week-long wedding festivities form an appropriate end of a fairy tale, the ending cannot really be said to ensure poetic justice. After all, the queen only wanted to protect her daughter, who was taken from her house at night.

The use of narrative devices in this story differs from that in “Big Claus and Little Claus”. In this tale, Andersen provided a plotline, an ending and a constellation of characters that can be said to be ambivalent, while he more or less refrained from any devices which manipulate the reader’s sympathy. In “The Tinder-Box” neither plot line nor ending are ambivalent, since - at least in my view - the plot shows the immoral deeds of the soldier, while the ending cannot be called a just ending. The constellation of characters is not in favour of the soldier, either: The king and the queen are unimportant, but innocent; and the queen “was a very clever woman; she could do a great deal more than merely ride in a carriage” (352), in contrast to the old lady, who is set to watch the princess at night. The queen even manages to outwit the magical dogs in her - rather understandable - endeavour to prevent her daughter to be taken away by dogs and kissed by strange soldiers. With regard to the witch, there might be some ambivalence, since the witch is ugly - which more or less denotes ‘wicked’ in the world of Andersen’s tales - but even so she does not perform any bad acts; she only helps to make the soldier rich.

If we take for granted that plot line and constellation of characters are not in favour of the soldier, it seems strange that some additional devices recommend the soldier - and, implicitly, his wicked actions - to the reader. Firstly, the soldier is the focus of the reader’s attention: we closely follow his doings. Secondly, readers are invited to share his thought processes, which he verbalises quite often. Andersen even uses free indirect discourse in order to describe his feelings vividly when he sees the large dog for the first time (“‘Ah!’ there sat the dog, with the eyes as large as teacups, staring at him” (350)) and when he is alone in his cell, waiting for his execution: “Oh, how dark and disagreeable it was as he sat there, and the people said to him, ‘To-morrow, you will be hanged’” (353). Thirdly, the narrator’s comments are in favour of the soldier whom he once calls “our soldier”. Thus the

narrator emphasises that the soldier "gave a great deal of money to the poor, which was very good of him" (351); a value judgement that balances the fact that the soldier squanders his money away. There are thus several means which let the soldier appear in a good light and which counter the negative view of him that results from the story-line and the constellation of characters. If one takes all narrative strategies together, the tale is constructed in a way so as to make it impossible to ascribe to it either morality or immorality. Although it contains any number of devices that direct the readers' sympathies, these devices fail to converge.[19]

V

In sum, despite the apparent simplicity of the tales, Andersen skilfully employs a large number of narrative devices which serve to build up an underlying system of values and manipulate the reader's sympathy. Often, these narrative strategies converge, as for instance in "The Wild Swans" or "Thumbelina", where all of the devices highlight the virtue of the central characters. In contrast to the common opinion that Andersen's fairy tales reinforce moral values and are therefore appropriate reading for children, some of the tales are not moral at all. In fact, stories like "Little Claus and Big Claus" and "The Tinder-Box" already point to Oscar Wilde's aestheticism in that they tell beautiful untrue things - without any regard to possible didactic functions. The timeless attraction of Andersen's tales may be due to just these two points: to his skilful manipulation of narrative devices, and to his disregard of Victorian didactic and utilitarian conceptions of art.

If we finally ask in how far Andersen's tales challenge narratological assumptions, we might arrive at the conclusion that the content-oriented analysis of fairy tales that has prevailed so far is just one of several possible and fruitful approaches to tales that are only simple on the surface. Instead of confining ourselves to the structural features of the story, we should take W.H. Auden's statement seriously and treat Andersen's tales as works of art that deserve a stylistic appreciation and an analysis of narrative devices as well. His skilful and economic use of narrative strategies that build up a system of values and direct the reader's sympathy deserves closer investigation, and I hope that further work on the subject will bring to light other strategies that

have not been mentioned in the narratological analysis of works of fiction so far.

Notes

1. A short study on the suitability of Andersen's tales as a vehicle for teaching children from the ages of five to six comes to the conclusion that Andersen's fairy tales are particularly appropriate to teach morals. See Fakirska (1999: 256). Others are more sceptical in that respect. For a short summary of the reservations against the didactic suitability of fairy tales - mainly with regard to cruelty, aggression, and the acceptance of the social hierarchy, see Lüthi (1984: 152f.).
2. Elizabeth Cook (1971: 43), stresses that "two of his strongest themes are the plight of the outsider, and the primacy of Love over Reason". One might also add that self-sacrifice, truthfulness and altruism belong to the values that Andersen most often stresses in his stories.
3. See also his moralistic generalisations at the end of "The Philosopher's Stone" (Andersen 1996: 303).
4. As Draga-Alexandru (1999: 438) notes, Andersen "is faithful to the formal characteristics of the genre: he uses the well established initial and final formulae (even though they are sometimes modified, their place is seldom left empty, being occasionally filled in by fable or parable forms, with their demonstrative and didactic form)". Celia Catlett Anderson (1986: 122), however, states that "Andersen does indeed often deliberately undercut the facile happy ending that is the trademark of fairy tales".
5. In "The Talisman", too, it is the two protagonists who sum up the lesson to be learnt, and not the narrator: 'Yes,' answered the Prince, 'I have gained this knowledge, that contentment is a rare gift on this earth.' (Andersen 1996: 517)
6. In "The Snow Queen", the narrator makes clear that bad plans quite often fail because of the intricacy of situations: "The old woman had forgotten to take [the rose] from her hat when she made all the roses sink into the earth. But it is difficult to keep the thoughts together in everything; one little mistake upsets all our arrangements" (60)
7. There is, however, a tendency to relate beauty to social status. Thus, the goose-girl in "Everything in the Right Place" is called delicate, and a half-child, but not beautiful, while beauty seems to belong by right of birth to princesses, who can be recognized by their beauty, as can be witnessed in "The Tinder Box".
8. The constellation of characters is not necessarily built on contrasts. In "Little Tuk", for instance, Tuk helps his mother and a poor old washerwoman and cares for his little sister, even though he should be doing his homework. There are no relations of contrast here, because all of these characters are 'good', and Tuk is rewarded for helping them in their plight.
9. This comment by the wise old woman is an example of those moralistic generalisations which are voiced not by the narrator but by another character in the story.
10. Celia Cadett Anderson (1986: 122) stresses that the majority of Andersen's most

popular tales, such as “The Ugly Duckling”, “The Little Fir Tree”, and “The Steadfast Tin Soldier” are stories that were original with Andersen.

11. ‘Little’ Tiny is referred to in this rather pleonastic phrase repeatedly - three times alone on page 8.
12. Andersen also employs larger comments in order to direct the reader’s sympathy. One of these is to be found in “The Philosopher’s Stone”: “Now that was not a very elegant expression [that the third brother used], but it was his way, and we must take him as he was. He had a cheerful temper, and was, besides, a real poet” (297).
13. As Lüthi confirms, both the tendency to depict extremes and the principle of isolation belong to the governing features of fairy tales (1984: 42fi).
14. This is Lars-Ake Skalin’s translation of the passage, which is closer to the original version.
15. As Lüthi (1984: 115, 126) stresses, the sister disenchanting her siblings is a com-mon motif of fairy tales, with one featuring a sister of six swans, who has to master a difficult task in order to release them.
16. See Lüthi (1984: 103).
17. In the world of fairy tales, the denomination ‘ugly witch’ does, of course, brand the character in question as being wicked and potentially dangerous. But even though one has to take into account genre conventions, and even though ‘ugly witches’ are, by nature, ‘bad’ characters, even bad characters who are only shown to commit one good deed are complex cases that cannot be subsumed under the categories of characters who deserve death.
18. Jorgensen (1999: 274) also interprets the killing as an action which “amounts to freeing himself from mother fixation”. I do not see any indication in the text, however, which would support this psychoanalytical interpretation.
19. This interpretation may be confirmed by a reading that stresses the inevitability of what is happening. As the title indicates, the tinder-box plays a pronounced role, and it is not the soldier’s decision to kill his wife’s parents, but the dogs’ doing. Moreover, it is predestined that the princess will marry a soldier. Thus one might emphasise the passivity of the soldier with regard to his marriage to the princess and the ending. This reading also tends to stress the non-morality (that is, neither morality nor immorality) of the tale, because what happens does not lie within the range of the human will.

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