The Dreams of Hans Christian Andersen

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Introduction

Tak for sidst, which is to say, "thanks for last time." Copenhagen has been the site of many happy visits with my late husband and some Danes have become dear friends.

In particular, I want to give very special thanks to my Danish friend and translator, Bente Licht Mirow. She not only found Andersen's journals on the Internet but translated his dreams recorded in them from old Danish into English. She even located an additional dream that hadn't been included in the official list of his dreams. Beyond that generosity, our discussions about Andersen over the last months added immeasurably to my understanding of him. *Tak*, Bente.

Olaf Hansen, too, kindly shared his knowledge of Danish culture and sent me a compact disc with the haunting tune from Viking times called "I Dreamt Me A Dream Last Night" (of silk and precious cloth…) *Tak*, Olaf.

Brief Biography of Andersen

Hans Christian Andersen, or H. C. Andersen (as he's called in Denmark), described his life as a fairy tale. It's easy to see why. A barely educated boy from a poor family, only son of a cobbler and an illiterate washerwoman, Andersen became the friend of royal and aristocratic families. A shy adult with fears and faults, he found his voice in tales that spellbound generations of people for almost two centuries.

Next year is the 200th anniversary of Andersen's birth in Odense, a small town on the island of Fyn, Denmark, on April 2nd, 1805. He died seventy years later, on August 4th, 1875, an internationally celebrated writer.

Andersen's shoemaker father, despite his own limited education, encouraged his son's interest in literature and drama, reading to him from the *Arabian Nights*, among other fables and stories. He indulged the boy's many atypical interests, such as making costumes for his puppets. After enlisting as a musketeer during the Napoleonic War, his father returned broken in health. He died at age 33, when Andersen was only eleven years old, leaving the boy with a deep longing for paternal love and approval.

Andersen's mother was a hardy, working woman with no education and many superstitions but she had a warm, loving disposition. After her husband's death, she sent her son to work in a cloth mill, then in a tobacco factory for brief periods. When she remarried and became pregnant, Andersen was eager to leave home. At the age of fourteen, she allowed the boy to travel alone on the two-day trip to Copenhagen to try his luck.

Possessed of a fine soprono voice and total belief in his destiny to become a great poet, he managed to get onstage as a singer, an actor, and a dancer—none with much success. His voice soon changed and he was judged too tall and clumsy to have a good stage presence. Yet he was so persistent, he would knock on doors of prominent citizens and, on the doorstep, would launch into performances of poems and dramas he'd written himself. His efforts astonished whoever opened the door yet his exhibitions suggested that the boy had talent. All his contacts felt, however, that the youngster was hampered by his inadequate education.

On the verge of starvation, by determination and incredible luck, Andersen obtained a patron, the prominent citizen Jonas Collin (pronounced "colleen," JW, p. 56), who obtained for the now seventeen-year-old youth a royal scholarship to attend a country grammar school.

Thrown into classes among educated eleven-year-olds, the teenaged Andersen, who could not yet spell correctly, underwent difficult years that scarred him for life. His harsh Headmaster, Simon Meisling, was also his punitive Latin teacher. Despite severe suffering during his four years with Meisling, Andersen acquired the tools to write in an acceptable form. He read voraciously (especially Sir Walter Scott and Shakespeare), wrote incessantly, and at age twenty-three, qualified for university.

Extensive travel throughout Europe, funded by private contributions and royal scholarship, enriched his education and provided the basis for his first successful novel, *The Improvisatore*, published in 1835, when he was thirty.

That same year, his first *Fairy Tales for Children* appeared. Although they were not immediately appreciated, from the start he wrote his stories in a fresh voice.

Andersen used everyday language, in the rhythms of natural speech, with short, broken sentences, full of action. He had crisp openings, frequent asides, comic details, and slang.

One biographer describes his style as "arch, chatty, and purposefully silly." [Franks] His conversational tone was a lively contrast to the contemporary formal Danish.

Here's a short sample:

They got into the carriage—'goodbye, Dad! goodbye, Mum!'—the whip cracked smack! smack! And away they went, come on! gee up!"

And another:

"Quickly now, and no pigeon toes! A well brought-up duckling holds his legs far apart, just like Mom and Dad. Okay. Bow your heads and say quack!"

And they did. But all the other ducks looked at them and said, loudly, "Oh, well.

Now we're stuck with that bunch—as if there weren't enough of us already. And, yuck—that duckling is disgusting. We can't stand him." Right away, a duck flew over and bit his neck.

"Leave him alone," his mother said. "He's not bothering anyone."

"But he's so big and strange-looking," the duck who'd bit him replied, "It just makes you want to pick on him."

As Andersen read aloud, he acted out his stories. People's initial impression of him was poor. He was tall, lanky, and awkward, with long, thin limbs attached to huge feet and hands, the quintessential Ugly Duckling. A Swedish writer likened him to a crane; another writer called him the "tree-high Dane." Yet another contemporary said, "His nose was like a mighty cannon, his eyes like two small green peas." His features were homely, even ugly, yet when Andersen spoke people were struck with the quality of his spirit that shone through. His readings were infused with exceptional liveliness.

One witness recorded that as he performed, Andersen's plain features were transformed, "...a kind of exaltation in his face, a beaming, his eyes though small had interesting and changing expressions...". He soon became a popular guest of distinguished families all over Europe.

Between 1835 and 1872 he wrote 156 "wonder tales" (*eventyr* is the Danish term). Some accounts say 170. Andersen's tales became enormously popular and in a

short time were illustrated by well-known artists. Ever since, not a year passes without new visual interpretations of his best-loved stories. Their success far surpassed that of his 36 dramas, 6 novels, 6 travel accounts, and hundreds of poems.

At the same time as the brothers Grimm were merely *collecting* oral tales, sometimes altering them, Andersen *invented* original stories. His new tales became classics, indistinguishable in people's minds from those that had been honed over hundreds of years. *The Princess and the Pea; The Ugly Duckling; The Little Mermaid; The Emperor's New Clothes; The Little Match Girl; The Snow Queen; The Steadfast Tin Soldier*—these and many others from Andersen's pen have become part of our daily language.

Now we discover that Andersen's dreams, recorded in his travel journals from age twenty to seventy, add to our knowledge of this singular man. They show us how a person's imagination can blend waking life experience and dream experience to shape unique literary riches.

Understanding Andersen's dreams gives us a window into the creative mind and helps us see how we can use our own dreams to enrich our productive lives.

In this presentation, I'll describe:

- Andersen's frequent *dream themes*, chiefly his universal and his unique ones.
- Show the relationship of his dreams to his waking life and,
- Reveal how his dreams and his life found *expression in his tales*.

To help us enter Andersen's world, here is one of his favorite characters, Ole Lukøje, "Johnny Shuteye." This elf blows on the back of the neck, making the drowsy person nod. He squirts sweet milk into the eyes, making them close; and he twirls his umbrella

with its pictures inside above the drooping head, making the mind swirl into colorful dreams. Unless of course, the sleeper was naughty, in which case the black umbrella was unfurled for dark, empty sleep.

I. Negative Dream Themes for Andersen

1. Chase or Attack

A. Chase or Attack in Andersen's Dreams

The most frequent theme I found in Andersen's 100 recorded dreams is also the most common dream in the world: being chased or attacked (N=39). Those of you familiar with my work in universal dreams know this category is a major theme for nearly all.

Thus, Andersen shares with the rest of humanity a hefty concern about personal threat. Of course, as with everyone, his expression of this typical theme is highly individualized, based on his life experience.

Andersen's Chase or Attack dreams break down into three sub-categories:

- <u>Verbal attacks</u> by the two major authority figures in Andersen's life (N=16), his cruel headmaster/Latin teacher, Meisling, and/or Andersen's patron, Collin.
- Physical attacks by animals (N=12). These were mostly assaults by dogs (N=6), toward which Andersen had a waking phobia. Animal attacks in his dreams included an aggressive cat (N=1), a lion (N=1), a devil-faced fish (N=1), a horse (N=1), and recurrent nightmares about a bat (N=2) that grew bigger as he struggled against it.
- [S-8, BAT] These animals were never friendly in his dreams. In one case, ferocious dogs turned into people with nails to scratch him. This transformation

suggests that the physical aggression in Andersen's dreams were related to the verbal faultfinding he suffered from his peers and superiors and, later, critics.

 <u>Physical attacks by strangers</u> (N=7), including some (N=4) that occurred during dreams of being imprisoned.

B. Chase or Attack in Andersen's Waking Life

Qualities of the Dream Villain.

Looking more closely at the first category, that of verbal attacks in dreams by the two key male figures in Andersen's waking life (after his father's death), we notice that both men share several characteristics. He mentions these qualities in his day notes, along with descriptions of how these men made him feel.

Andersen described Meisling as harsh, critical, emotionally cold, and mocking.

His relationship with the Latin teacher was almost totally negative. As a seventeen-yearold boy he lived in fear of the headmaster's disapproval and discipline. He endured
nightmares about this cruel teacher his entire life.

Andersen depicts his patron, Jonas Collin, toward whom he held mixed feelings, as scolding, cold, and distant. His nightmares about Collin were regular but less frequent.

Reactions to the Dream Villain's Qualities.

Since Andersen was totally dependent on Collin's goodwill as well as his sponsorship, Andersen reacted with a mix of reverence, awe, and fear of disapproval.

Both Headmaster Meisling and the patron Collin made Andersen feel unhappy and awkward. He was anxious in their presence, felt oppressed and, at times, deeply depressed by their treatment of him. In one nightmare, Andersen added the Pope to the presence of Meisling and Collin, making their authority even heavier. The roles of the

two constant villains in Andersen's dreams paralleled their waking behavior and Andersen's reactions to it.

Self-Therapy through Story

How did this naïve and overly sensitive boy from the country cope with the burdensome feelings and fear evoked by these two men and by later critics who seemed to hold the same carping opinion of him? He wrote stories.

I have come to believe that Andersen created in his luminous tales a kind of self-therapy that allowed him to express his bitter feelings and eventually to alter his role in life. To use current terminology: he re-framed his life story; he engaged in narrative therapy; he re-entered his dreams; he re-dreamed his nightmares; he employed active imagination. In fairy tale terms, he spun the straw of his life into real gold.

C. Chase or Attack Themes in Andersen's Tales

None of Andersen's stories dealt directly with the two specific men who verbally attacked him in dreams. We might suspect, however, that the emperor who wore no clothes, believing he had on the finest garment, and the emperor who, at first, could not appreciate the real voice of the nightingale compared to the mechanical copy of it were related to the two men. These characters probably, in part, expressed Andersen's feelings toward these two authority figures, (as well as to the rivals regarded as his models).

However, in the category of physical attacks by animals (N=12), we know that one of Andersen's waking phobias—fear of dogs—played an important role in his tales.

In Andersen's dreams all dogs threatened him (N=6). Dogs attacked and bit him in nightmares, tore his coat, and in one "Hellish" dream, three huge dogs tormented him so much that he awoke in terror.

In waking life, Andersen avoided dogs as much as possible. However, one of his very first stories featured dogs. In his 1835 tale "The Tinder Box" he transformed these animals that alarmed him into helpful creatures. Still as awesome as the ones from his "Hellish" nightmare, each dog was larger than the one before:

The soldier-hero in Andersen's story is directed by an old witch to climb inside a hollow tree where he encounters three dogs guarding treasures. The first, with eyes as big as teacups, defends a chest of brass coins; the second, guardian of a chest of silver, has eyes as big as mill wheels; the third dog, with eyes as big as the Round Tower, watches over a chest of gold coins. The soldier sets the dogs aside on the witch's blue and white apron and fills his pockets with as much gold as he can carry. He also carries back out of the tree a magic tinderbox the witch requested. When she refuses to tell him why, he kills her and keeps the box, too. Eventually the soldier discovers that by striking a match on the tinderbox, he can call the three dogs which ask "What does my master command?" Each night, with the help of this magical tool, the hero orders one of the dogs to fetch the gorgeous sleeping princess to his bedchamber and the next morning return her to the castle.

When the soldier is arrested for this adventure and is about to be hung he requests a last smoke from his tinderbox. Request granted, he strikes a match three times calling the dogs, which promptly demolish the hangman, the judge who condemned him, and the king and queen who had arranged the trial. The people declare the triumphant soldier to be the new king and he marries the princess.

The three dogs dance before the royal carriage that takes the couple to the

ceremony. "The wedding lasted eight days, and the dogs sat at the table, wideeyed with wonder."

Andersen's fear of dogs and fear of being arrested and thrown into jail, although innocent, then being threatened with execution, were features of several of his nightmares. By creating the story of the soldier who escapes execution by the help of friendly dogs, Andersen, in a sense, *gave himself psychotherapy*, as discussed later.

2. Injury or Death

A. Injury or Death in Andersen's Dreams

Andersen, like many impressionable people, had several nightmares about being injured or dying (N=39).

The universal dream theme of injury or death is fairly common. It usually occurs when the dreamer feels emotionally wounded or hurt. Sometimes an injury or death in a dream refers to an actual physical problem. An example of Andersen's of this general type is:

I was crushed on the train tracks. I think I have liver disease.

In fact, about thirty years later, Andersen died of liver cancer. Was he experiencing some early symptoms at this time of this dream? We'll never know, but it's possible. We do know that he often felt emotionally crushed.

Among Andersen's nightmares about injury and death, one personal variation is outstanding and recurrent (N=6). Here's a sample:

Usual horrible dream about a live child I lay on my sleeve and it died and became wet skin. [#50, October 15, 1864]

B. Injury and Death in Andersen's Waking Life

What did Andersen's shrinking, dying child represent?

We know that Andersen was childless, so his recurrent nightmare about a dying child is obviously symbolic. One possibility is that his "inner child" was suffering at the time he had this dream. Certainly, throughout his life Andersen remained extremely vulnerable to lack of attention and to any criticism. His need for praise seemed pathological, so that he often felt offended.

Another possibility is that the dying child in Andersen's dream life represented a current project, his "baby" that was deteriorating. His nightmares on this subject occurred most frequently during the middle portion of his life, when he was struggling to maintain recognition and respect.

Andersen biographer Jackie Wullschlager believes that Andersen's dying child dreams and tales were a metaphor for his own despair as an overgrown child. At age 17, you recall, he was thrown into schoolroom competition with 11 year-old grammar school boys who knew far more Latin and other subjects than he did. They mocked his awkward clumsiness as well as his lack of education. He was subjected to this social humiliation for almost four years of grammar school.

Trapped in the schoolroom, literally locked in after school hours by the cruel headmaster, Andersen was 21 years-old when he wrote his poem "The Dying Child." A few lines from the last verse run:

Mother, I shall always be with you...

Yes, but then you mustn't go on sighing;

When you cry I cry as well, you see.

I'm so tired—my eyes they won't stay open—

Mother—look—the Angel's kissing me!

Although touching, the 1826 poem is highly sentimental to our ears. At the time he wrote it, however, children were dying in families of every class. The poem became and remained enormously popular. Andersen was the first, Wullschlager says, to speak as the child itself.

In his poem, Andersen was trying to comfort himself. In a way he felt that Meisling was trying to destroy his precious imagination. We know that his nightmare of a child that died in his arms was recurrent during his lifetime. He seemed to experience, in his dreams and in his waking hours, the sense of his talent being reduced from a living child to a dying, "wet rag." Death in literature, as it is in dreams, is a metaphor for being rendered unable to function. In his later tales, Andersen wrote about many dying children.

Still in school, the troubled youth showed the poem to some people in Copenhagen. Soon it was printed in a German translation and then published in a newspaper in Copenhagen. When Meisling asked to see the poem he'd heard about, he proclaimed it "idle trash."

Near the Easter holiday during Andersen's fourth year at the school, a young teacher befriended him. Shocked to observe Meisling's treatment of the young man, the teacher encouraged him to again ask Collin to let him leave the grammar school.

Andersen did so during the holiday in Copenhagen. When Collin once more refused, the teacher himself went to plead Andersen's cause. This time Collin listened and agreed.

Almost immediately, Andersen was moved to Copenhagen to finish his studies with a private tutor (and eventually pass his university entrance exams).

Saying goodbye to Meisling, Andersen was cursed by the slovenly headmaster, told that his verses would "grow moldy on the floor of the bookseller's shop," and that he would end his days in a madhouse. Andersen recorded that his last year with Meisling was "the darkest, the most unhappy time of my life." Until he died, he dreamed about the severe headmaster, who epitomized for him the dry intellectual life in contrast to passionate imagination.

C. Injury or Death Themes in Andersen's Tales

Knowing Andersen's background, it's no wonder that suffering is a major quality of Andersen's heroes and heroines. In *The Little Match Girl*, the heroine is wretched, cold, and poor on Christmas Eve. Her torment ends only when she is freed by dying. Embraced by her dead grandmother (representing Andersen's own beloved, deceased paternal grandmother who told him stories), she is lifted into heaven.

Elisa, the long-suffering sister in *The Wild Swans* dreams of how to save her brothers who are under the spell of their evil stepmother who has cursed them to live in the form of swans during the daytime. She wounds her hands gathering the flax she needs and cuts her feet crushing it so she can spin the fiber to knit into jackets for her brothers with bleeding hands. Her pain stops only after a long test of endurance.

The Ugly Duckling is tormented when the other ducks, chickens and the turkey bite, push, and tease him. His siblings are mean and the girl who feeds the poultry kicks

him. Finally he flees to escape the cruelty, but everyone he meets think he is ugly and useless. Only a year later, ready to be pecked to death by the beautiful swans, willing to sacrifice his life, does he discover that he is one of them—the most beautiful of all.

The Little Mermaid, in order to live near the prince that she rescued from drowning, has to sacrifice her exquisite singing voice to gain legs. The transformation from tail to legs is agonizing and, once accomplished, each step she takes is like walking on broken glass. Yet she dances gracefully through her pain to please the prince.

Gerda in *The Snow Queen* loses her boots as she treks through icy lands, is kidnapped by robbers, and faces great danger to rescue her playmate. He, meanwhile, is slowly being turned into a block of ice.

The sensitivity that causes suffering is especially obvious in *The Princess and the Pea*. Bruised black and blue, sleepless despite a buffer of twenty mattresses plus twenty eiderdowns, the heroine proves herself a true princess, worthy of her prince.

Pain and suffering is the thus the theme song of many of the characters in Andersen's tales. Yet there is always something positive they gain in exchange, even if it's ascending to Heaven.

Subcategory of Injury or Death: Teeth and Mouth

A. Teeth and Mouth in Andersen's Dreams

A striking sub-category of Andersen's dreams about physical suffering are those nightmares that involve his teeth and mouth (N=8).

We know that dreams about crumbling teeth are fairly frequent, as in this dream of Andersen's that is typical of the type:

Nasty dream about all my teeth falling out of my mouth. [#42, July 17, 1863]

Yet Andersen's variations are unusual: of a polyp in his throat; of his mouth and throat being full of hair; of his mouth being full of pieces of bitter-tasting cardboard; and, of his jawbone as well as his teeth falling out.

B. Teeth and Mouth in Andersen's Waking Life

Andersen's mother was highly superstitious. She passed these fears on to her only son. In this case, she taught him to believe that to dream of teeth falling out is a premonition of bad news.

In addition to holding this belief, Andersen suffered from frequent, severe toothaches. In the 1800's dental care was relatively primitive. When he eventually had his teeth removed and wore dentures, Andersen had the following nightmare:

Dreamt the maid had thrown my teeth out, I was upset and crying.

[#81, Nov. 27, 1869]

Toothaches, along with numerous other aches and pains, are frequently noted in Andersen's journals. For instance, "...the teeth are playing the devil with me—first piano, then crescendo, all the melodies of pain at every shift in the weather...I didn't go anywhere because of my toothache and went to bed at 9 o'clock." As a person who's recently endured a number of root canals, I sympathized with his tooth complaints.

C. Teeth and Mouth Themes in Andersen's Tales

Andersen gave toothache a prominent role in only one of his stories, *Auntie Toothache*. The witch-like hag in this tale, one of his last stories, emerges during the night to torture the hero.

Wullschlager views Andersen's toothaches as "a symbol for what he felt was his suffering as an artist." In his story he says, "The throes of writing and the throes of toothache. You see I have attacks of both."

I suggest that Andersen's nightmares about his mouth and tooth problems have a symbolism beyond his suffering as an artist. I believe these bad dreams represent his struggle to express himself, to get his voice heard. People who dream about crumbling teeth, I find, often refer symbolically to their unexpressed or held back anger. Frequently they grit their teeth while sleeping, stimulating even more dreams of this type. Tooth trouble dreams may be related to dreams dealing with the voice, or lack of it.

Subcategory of Injury or Death: Voiceless

A. Voice in Andersen's Dreams

Only one of Andersen's dreams refers to his voice, a dream I'll describe later.

B. Voice in Andersen's Waking Life

Before it changed at adolescence, Andersen had a high, pure soprano voice. It was his singing voice that first got him attention as a boy and led to invitations to perform in the homes of the wealthy. Untrained, he had a gift for improvisation that enabled him to invent and elaborate tunes that were pleasurable to his self and to others. Subsequently, his voice gave him entrée to the stage in Copenhagen when he was fourteen or fifteen.

As an adult, another source of the value of voice for Andersen was his crush on Jenny Lind. His contemporary and eventual friend, the "Swedish Nightingale" was his ideal combination of spirituality and exquisite singing. She is thought to be the inspiration for the nightingale in Andersen's tale of that name.

C. Voice Themes in Andersen's Tales

The presence or absence of voice is an important element in Andersen's stories.

Various main characters are deprived of their voices for lengths of time. *The Little Mermaid*, you recall, had to trade her exquisite singing voice for legs instead of a tail.

Elisa in *The Wild Swans* voluntarily sacrificed her voice for the year it took her to knit the jackets to free her brothers from their enchanted form as swans. While the bird in *The Nightingale* was in favor, it could no longer fly but was made to walk, on an outing from its cage, hampered by the twelve silken cords tied to one of its legs held by servants.

When the bird's natural voice had to compete with a mechanical bird, it sorrowfully flew home, unnoticed. Only when the toy bird broke and the emperor was on the verge of death did he come to value the nightingale's precious song. Out of compassion, the bird returned to revive the monarch, but remained forever afterward free to come and go (based on an experience of Jenny Lind's singing at the sickbed of a man who recovered).

In these tales of lost voices, withheld voices, or hampered voices, Andersen expressed what he felt he must sacrifice in order to be heard. He emphasized the invaluable quality of a free, natural "voice." This priceless attribute is always at risk, but, eventually, its worth is recognized. Indeed, naturalness is the quality for which his tales are now celebrated.

3. Trapped or Lost

A. Trapped or Lost in Andersen's Dreams

I've already mentioned that another recurrent nightmare theme for Andersen was the universal one of being trapped or lost (N=16). In Andersen's bad dreams this theme most

often took the form of being put into prison (N-11), despite being innocent. A typical example is:

I was in a crowd when a commotion broke out. The police took me although I had done nothing and I was put into jail.

Aware of his frequency of these dreams, Andersen speculated that perhaps these events actually happened to him in a former lifetime.

A few (n=3) of his nightmares of being trapped in prison ended with Andersen about to be executed by firing squad or about to be beheaded.

Other nightmares (N=3) in the category of being trapped included being squeezed between houses and unable to move; being in streets that were too narrow; and having paralyzed legs. Two of his nightmares in this category took the form of being lost (N=2): one in Paris and another while searching for his mother's grave.

B. Trapped or Lost in Andersen's Waking Life

Andersen never was imprisoned, let alone executed, stuck between houses, or paralyzed.

As a youth, remember, he witnessed a triple execution by hanging to which his Latin class had been taken to observe as a lesson in morality. These hangings made a profound impression on Andersen's fragile self and the scene replayed in his tales.

Nonetheless, I suggest that Andersen's dreams of entrapment were probably a direct result of his feeling socially and emotionally trapped. Firstly, he was stuck in his origin as a boy from a poor, working class with little education. Additionally he was caught in his role as a dependent on the goodwill of his cool patron and his harsh headmaster, both of who m he had to satisfy in order to fulfill his burning desire for fame and appreciation. These situations were not of his own doing, that is, he was "innocent."

I am told that even in the more egalitarian society of today's Denmark, to exhibit outstanding talent is acceptable only so long as one doesn't openly seek it or appear to want credit for it. The so-called "Jante's laws" demand that no one think himself or herself better than anyone else. To the extent that this was true in Andersen's time, perhaps more so from a poor youngster, Andersen was indeed trapped by his fierce ambition to be a great poet clashing with prevailing Danish mores.

A drawing that Andersen made after he was turned down as a suitor by a young woman named Riborg shows him trapped in a bottle unable to reach the angel-like lady who hovers outside—his feeling of being stuck is vividly depicted.

C. Trapped or Lost Themes in Andersen's Tales

How is the theme of entrapment that existed in Andersen's life and nightmares dramatized in his stories? Obviously, spells or curses trap many of his characters.

In addition, several of his main figures are imprisoned and threatened with execution, exactly as in his bad dreams on this subject. In every story, however, in sharp contrast to his nightmares, the characters in these dire circumstances escape to triumph over their enemies. We need only think of the soldier in *The Tinder Box* who is clapped into prison and about to be executed when his three huge helpful dogs free him.

In *The Ugly Duckling*, the castoff creature finds his true family and finally recognizes his own beautiful swan nature as he comes into maturity—no longer trapped.

In *Thumbilina*, the heroine flies to sunny lands on the back of her friend the swallow (whom she had saved from freezing to death), thereby escaping a dreaded marriage to a mole that would condemn her to a cold, damp life underground. In the

warm country to which the he takes her, she finds a flower-dwelling prince just her size and to her taste.

The suffering sister in *The Wild Swans* manages to free her eleven brothers from their enchanted swan form by knitting jackets from nettles that cut her hands. She cannot finish one sleeve in time to escape execution, dooming the youngest brother to live with a wing instead of an arm, but she breaks the spell cast on her brothers, freeing them and herself.

And you recall the nightingale that was forced to walk with twelve silken cords attached to its leg before setting itself free to follow its heart.

These characters are only a sample of the many that liberate themselves from entrapment in Andersen's tales. It took Andersen a long time to free himself in the waking world, but he found the way to gain the recognition he sought. Fame came first from outside Denmark, when he was awarded medals and gifts from royalty in Germany and other European countries in appreciation for his entertaining tales. Eventually even his own land joined in the chorus of praise. In his hometown, late in his life, Andersen was given the key to the city and he received admiration from those who had mocked him as a child.

In most of his nightmares, Andersen remained attacked or trapped—with a notable exception to be described later. In his self-therapeutic tales, Andersen's heroes and heroines fight back or escape, usually through clever or kindly action. In his waking life, Andersen never completely freed himself of fear and suffering but he vastly improved his quality of life.

4. Barefoot or Shod

A. Shoes in Andersen's Dreams

There is only one mention of shoes among Andersen's 100 dreams, but it may be significant:

Important dream in the early morning that my right hand peeled off in a big earth crust. Later in the morning I dreamt of going out into a deep, unknown body of water. My trousers were full of earth, I rinsed them off, but discovered than that the boots had gotten stuck and had been lost in the water. I looked down under the water, but couldn't find them. Coming to the shore, however, heard that the water was 60 fathoms deep (360 feet) close to where I had been standing. I could have drowned, I got scared because I woke up, and I thought it was going too far to have risked my life for a pair of boots. [#57, Oct. 12, 1865]

Boots are especially important in Andersen's childhood.

B. Shoes in Andersen's Waking Life

Firstly, you recall that Andersen's father was a cobbler. Andersen remembered that his father had once tried to win the favor of a lady who asked him to make slippers for her from the red silk she provided. She was so displeased with the result she said that the shoemaker had ruined her silk and refused to pay him. In anger, Andersen's father slashed the leather, making it unusable.

This event, combined with another childhood experience, became the raw material for a famous story. During the days of Andersen's childhood, confirmation was a major event, the prerequisite of being permitted to work—an impossibility without a confirmation certificate. When Andersen was confirmed in church at the age of 13 or 14,

he was given a pair of new boots. As he walked down the aisle of the church toward the altar to be blessed, wearing his dead father's coat and the new boots, Andersen swelled with pride because his boots squeaked, announcing to the entire congregation that they were brand new. Later he was tormented with guilt for allowing his vanity to taint the holy ceremony.

His dream of many years later that to risk his life trying to recover his boots was going too far, suggests that Andersen was advising himself to let go of his pride in some current situation.

C. Shoe Themes in Andersen's Tales

So, we know that Andersen's father was a cobbler who botched a pair of red silk shoes for a lady. And we are aware that Andersen was so proud of his new boots at confirmation he was unable to focus on the holy service. These facts allow us to better understand the primary role he gave to shoes and feet in several of his stories. Most notably, the heroine of *The Red Shoes* is only released from the curse that forbids her to enter the church and consecrated graveyard until she is rid of the red shoes that force her to constantly dance.

When her feet are chopped off, the shoes—symbol of her wicked vanity (as Andersen's boots were), with her feet still inside, dance off into the forest. The now-crippled girl, not simply barefooted, but footless and in a wheelchair, is pure enough to enter the church for repentance. Moira Shearer dancing this role in the film *The Red Shoes* was unforgettable.

Other tales of Andersen's involve barefoot children, from the heroine of *The Little Match Girl* to Gerda who loses her red boots as she searches for her playmate in *The Snow Queen*.

5. Coldness

A. Coldness in Andersen's Dreams

Only a few of Andersen's dreams refer to physical cold (N=4), such as a nasty winter's day, or a thin ice crust on the ocean. One involved the death of a woman named "Miss Cold."

B. Coldness in Andersen's Waking Life

Yet, in Andersen's day notes, his journals often mention the emotional reaction to him of people he meets, for example, a family in Marseilles whom he thought hostile and "cold," along with Collin.

Shortly before his father took ill and died, Andersen was impressed when his father showed him a pattern of ice frozen on the glass window that looked like a woman with outstretched arms. His father said, "She is come to fetch me." After the father's death, his mother commented, "The Ice Maiden has carried him off." [JW, p. 26]

C. Coldness Themes in Andersen's Tales

In his tales, Andersen gave the quality of physical cold a major, usually negative, role. His suffering heroines, as we saw, often go barefoot or lose their shoes and must walk through cold landscapes.

The best known of Andersen's stories involving the quality of coldness is *The Snow Queen*:

Flying demons carry a mirror through the air that shatters. One of the splinters falling to earth enters the eye of a little boy and travels to his heart. Now all that was pretty before seems ugly to him; all that was evil seems alluring.

The beautiful and enticing Snow Queen lures the boy Kai into her sleigh and carries him north to her palace of ice. She bestows kisses that chill Kai's heart, each one bringing him closer to death.

His little playmate, Gerda, is left behind mourning her friend. She sets out to rescue him. Along the way she has numerous adventures, including losing her red boots, but eventually she reaches the Snow Queen's palace of ice. There, Gerda's warm tears fall on her cross playmate, washing out and melting the slivers of evil glass. She saves him from freezing to death, and, together, they escape to the south. Flowers and springtime surround their return.

Thumbelina, too, recall, saves a swallow that is nearly frozen to death. Likewise, she escapes a hateful fate condemned to live under the cold earth with a mole as mate and is flown to the warm, sunlit south where she finds love.

In his stories, Andersen gave voice, I believe, to his desperate longing for the warmth of love. He saw it as lifesaving, in contrast to the cold formality or active hostility that he sensed around him. He never felt fully loved the way he desired by women or men with whom he became infatuated. Despite visits to Parisian brothels—for the first time at age 61—where he felt sorry for the girls and just looked, he may have never experienced sexual intercourse.

Andersen's tales allowed him to put his needs into a socially accepted form. They evoked from listeners, who often could not find their way to express similar needs, a warm appreciation. Sometimes he found they brought him real, if sublimated, affection.

III. Positive Dream Themes

Finally, we turn to Andersen's few uplifting dreams (N=14). In two of these, he simply won the lottery or had the number to do so (N=2). Four of his good dreams involved flowers or plants (N=7), images became significant symbols of happiness in his tales.

Two dreams started out as nightmares but had happy endings; one was about three types of smiles; one involved his voice. There may not be many of Andersen's positive dream themes but some are ingeniously beautiful.

1. Voice in Andersen's Good Dreams

Earlier I mentioned that Andersen had one dream about his voice, in reference to the role of the voice in his stories. It was the second dream of the night, the first being one of his recurrent nightmares:

The unpleasant dream I often dream, about a child dying at my breast and becoming nothing but a wet rag, bothered me. But in the early morning I had a lovely dream, only once before have I dreamt anything like it, I had the most wonderful singing voice and I was able to joyfully express every thought in notes. [#97, Aug. 29, 1874/1, 2]

This delightful and satisfying imagery, one of Andersen's few good dreams, arose near the end of his life. In it, he seems to have "found his voice" as an author—a consolation

for the dying child dream that, on the same night, directly preceded his dream of a wonderful singing voice.

2. Flowers in Andersen's Good Dreams

Among his positive dreams is the striking dream of the blue flower—one of the most appealing I've encountered. Here it is in its three parts:

This night I had three successive dreams.

- (1) First a man spreading seeds, and across fields and in streets, and around houses grew grains and greens (could also be vegetables), so full, so rich. I seemed to read it first, then see it.
- (2) Then I dreamt of three sisters who were showing the most beautiful smiles, the one for the lover, the child's for the mother. Then I woke up.
- (3) Then I dreamt about the fairytale queen, who put a blue flower on my bed, a sign I wasn't dreaming, and I felt I woke up, [and] found the blue flower. (False awakening.) From its juicy leaf came color with which I painted the most radiant picture on the floor. A swan ate one of the blue flowers, and its intestines became strings sounding a tune. I put a wreath of the blue flowers on my head, and thoughts and poetry shimmered in there so much I awoke [#74, 1, 2, 3, July 7, 1868].

This dazzling dream about the blue flower, a symbol of highest aspiration to the German Romantics that Andersen admired, is an exquisite expression of his sense of imaginative fertility. Notice the seeds, grains, grass and field—the rich nourishment that is spread before his dreaming eyes. Then the loving smiles. The essence of this growth and love is condensed into a blue flower, the juice of which becomes paint for the dreamer's picture.

Next, a swan, the only animal that acts positively in Andersen's dreams, ingests the same magical blue essence and it becomes the instrument on which Andersen can play his life's song—his vibrant stories. When he wears a wreath of the magical essence, his ideas shimmer like a halo from the garland on his brow.

In general, flowers in Andersen's tales, as well as in his dreams, represent warm feelings and happiness.

3. Exotic Settings in Andersen's Dreams

We've seen how Andersen associated warm, sunny lands with loving feelings. Likewise, in his dreams, exotic settings—more likely to be hot and bright—brought happy images. In one of these,

Here at Basnaes I dream a lot and quite pleasantly. Last night I seemed to be in Constantinobel, saw and recognized a lot which had kind of gotten erased from my memory. Suddenly I was in Japan, strange flowers, a quiet Moorish arcade. I knew it would cost me my life to go there, but I was quite comfortable, because I also knew that if they came to kill me I would wake up at Basnaes, and the whole thing would have been just a dream.

[#25, May 5, 1856]

We see in this dream, in addition to the pleasant setting, danger is lurking.

4. Reconciliation in Andersen's Dreams

I conclude with Andersen's last recorded dream, which is one of reconciliation. He wrote it into his journal when quite ill, eight months prior to his death:

The morphine must have worked really well. I had nice dreams, and especially a comfortable one, in which I was at an exam in a nice and peaceful mood, and Meisling walked in. I said that I didn't want him to hear me being examined, because it would make me feel so depressed that I would give stupid answers, which I did anyway.

A little while after I was walking with Meisling, he was in the kind of mood he has, I felt free and easy, soon we were discussing art and everything beautiful and in the end we became very good friends, he seemed to hold me in esteem, and I him. When I woke up I was really happy about the dream of reconciliation.

[#100, December 9, 1874]

Andersen was unique. The universality in his dreams carried over to the universality found in his tales. His personal suffering in bad dreams and life eventually became the raw material he shaped into story. He was the dying child, the awkward, overgrown Ugly Duckling, the oversensitive Princess sleeping on the pea, the Mermaid who gave her voice to find love, along with his countless other deathless characters. Andersen's life work was a journey of self-healing. His tales were full of dreams because he regarded them as vital in his life.

By the year before he died, Andersen was probably better known than any other living writer, an international celebrity. The first translations of his tales into English

were shoddy and prudish. Eventually good ones appeared—most recently the collection by the Franks in 2003.

American and British movies give a distorted impression of the scope of Andersen's oeuvre (such as the 1952 Danny Kaye film and the film of *The Red Shoes*). Disney films of his work are rewritten versions of the original, often with happy endings substituted. In Scandinavia, however, Andersen is regarded as a literary genius and is studied seriously in the way other scholars examine the life and work of his contemporary Søren Kierkegaard. His complete tales have been annotated and an exhaustive year by year chronology of his life produced. His journals have been explored down to the frequency of his masturbation, which he indicated by special Greek symbols, sometimes in the middle of another word—diarists take note.

Like millions of children before and after me, I came to love Andersen's tales. For my ninth birthday, my father built me a marionette stage complete with a curtain that rose and "footlights" made from Christmas tree bulbs. He painted sets of a throne room, village, forest and made props such as a magic well. He constructed more than 30 marionettes with which my brother and I acted out the tales we loved. This miniature world was like my dreams come to life. You can see why I, too, love Andersen.

By means of his 156 (or 170) fairy tales, Andersen achieved fame, honor, and riches during his lifetime. His enduring classics helped soothe his troubled soul and also gave later generations the templates to grasp their own suffering. He had many faults that were a trial to his friends, especially his hypersensitivity to real or imagined offense.

Andersen didn't dispel his sensitivity, but he used it in a positive way, to create. Then his creations brought him the attention, appreciation, and adulation he craved.

He encapsulated this notion in his famous line from The Ugly Duckling: "It doesn't matter if you were born in a duck yard, if you hatched from a swan's egg."

Andersen's stories, like those anonymous folktales that developed over hundreds of years, give listeners hope.

All people, of every walk of life, carry the same self-healing potential as

Andersen. May we all find the peace as he found with his former enemy at the end of his

life. May we all leave behind—as he did—a legacy of love.

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