

## **Jackie Wullschlager 'Hans Christian Andersen'**

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A pair of red shoes, a tin soldier, a darning needle, a collar, a porcelain shepherdess, a spinning top and a ball... the everyday world of inanimate objects comes alive in the stories of Hans Christian Andersen more vividly than anywhere else in literature. His genius was above all to make the imagined world of storytelling brilliantly real. Although a sophisticated author, he had both the child's instinctive empathy with objects and people, and an unbridled infant egoism which enabled him to see his own story in all things, whether it be a snowman or a soldier, a silver shilling or a butterfly. 'I have heaps of material', he said once, 'it often seems to me as if every hoarding, every little flower is saying to me, "Look at me, just for a moment, and then my story will go right through you"', and then, if I feel like it, I have the story'. He is a writer, according to novelist and Hans Christian Andersen-bicentennial ambassador A.S. Byatt, who 'can make us see a palace of ice, a forest of seaweed, a mechanical nightingale, a naked king clothed in imaginary clothes, a princess on a tower of mattresses over a pea, so that it is in many cases our first lesson in invention'.

Traditional folk tales, passed on by oral lore from generation to generation, have anonymous authors, and their landscapes and characters – the dark wood, the handsome prince – are archetypal rather than individualised. Andersen, by contrast, made up his own tales. The great difference, and his great strength, is his sharply personal tone, the rich, fantastical detail and the distinct, piquant humour. Andersen was the first writer to elevate the fairy tale to literary art. His is a voice unique in storytelling: while capturing the mythic resonance of traditional tales, he transformed folk-story listeners into imaginative readers, making them suffer in the cold palace of the Snow Queen, fear for the agony of the Little Mermaid, or writhe in embarrassment for the Ugly Duckling and even for the naked monarch of the 'Emperor's New Clothes'. 'When I was little I half-hated him for it', A.S. Byatt wrote, 'But he crept into my heart like the splinter of broken mirror of little Kai, making the child see the world grim and terrifying.'

Such precisely emotional responses to Andersen are common. They are what urged me to want to unravel and write his biography. They inspired diverse writers: Oscar Wilde, whose fairy tale motifs – 'The Nightingale and the Rose', the swallow in 'The Happy Prince' – come straight out of Andersen; Thomas Mann, who called 'The Steadfast Tin Soldier' 'fundamentally the story of my life'; and C.S. Lewis, whose White Witch of Narnia luring young Edmund to the land that is always winter, is a descendent of Andersen's romantic seductress the Snow Queen. Emotional responses are even what drove Andersen's early English translators to engage so passionately with him, that they changed his stories – Alfred Wehnert in 1861, for example, enraged that in 'The Nightingale' the emperor's court preferred the mechanical bird, lost the satire when he felt compelled to add 'the practised ear of a musician might easily have detected a grating sound of the machinery. But the reader must recollect that they were only Chinese.' Composers, actors, dancers and impresarios, from Stravinsky, Alexandre Benois and Diaghilev's lush art nouveau ballet *Le Rossignol*

(*The Nightingale*), to Leonid Massine and Robert Helpmann's *The Red Shoes*, have similarly been driven to bring to life their own Andersen stagings.

As the British Library exhibition shows, Andersen's universe is, like the theatre, a world of its own in which some of the great unchanging themes of art – childhood, love, loss and death – are distilled. They are starkly dramatised in ways that a child can grasp, yet built up out of shadowy depths which one appreciates only later, and which invite creative interpretations. 'I seize an idea for the grown-ups', Andersen wrote, 'and then tell the story to the little ones while always remembering that Father and Mother often listen, and you must also give them something for their minds'.

It is one of the ironies of the relationship between his life and his art that Andersen, arch-creator of the 19th-century bourgeois idyll of childhood, grew up far removed from the charmed nursery circle that stories such as 'The Steadfast Tin Soldier', 'The Little Fir Tree' and 'The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep' encapsulate. Born in 1805 in Odense, a country town on the island of Funen in Denmark, he was the son of a shoemaker and an illiterate washerwoman and spent his childhood in abject poverty. In fanciful form, he retold his mother's hard life in the story 'She Was No Good'; Vilhelm Pedersen's illustration – made in Andersen's lifetime – faithfully captures its sad details. Andersen's father, an intelligent, depressive, under-educated man who read his son tales from the *Arabian Nights* and made him toy theatres, died in 1814, and Andersen became known in the slums of Odense as a lonely, gawky, ridiculous boy who dressed his dolls, wrote plays and sang in a beautiful tenor voice while the other children were street-fighting. His grandfather was mad; his gentle grandmother worked in a lunatic asylum where she and other old ladies in the spinning room recounted old folk tales; his aunt ran a brothel and his half-sister, his mother's illegitimate older child, was probably a prostitute; later she tried to blackmail him.

Like Charles Dickens' experience at the blacking factory, the difficulties, indignities and sense of exclusion that made up Andersen's childhood underlay every word he wrote: his sympathy for the outsider, his identification with the child or an animal such as the duckling or the nightingale, ignored or unheeded above the crowd and babble; his vision of life as a solitary struggle often ending in tragedy. While romanticism – Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality*, with its idea that the child is born with an innate wisdom that the grimy commercial and industrial environment and cynical adult society slowly erodes – prepared the way for the Victorian obsession with childhood. It was not until the novels of Dickens and the stories of Andersen in the 1830s and 1840s that literature first became sensitized to the plight of the 19th-century child in a harsh utilitarian climate, and it is no coincidence that early legislation to protect children, such as the Factory Act, was passed at exactly this time. Dickens and Andersen transformed their own bitterness to express the new sensibility of a generation. Andersen's first published work, in 1827, was a poem called 'The Dying Child', which, unprecedented at the time, spoke with the voice of the child himself; his story 'The Little Match Girl', inspired by the Danish artist Johan Lundbye's drawing, remains iconic as an account of how a child is both desperately vulnerable and infinitely enriched by a transcendent imagination. Andersen's own unhappiness, fixed in youth, was, says the writer Ellen Handler Spitz, 'the deep ground of his genius ... the source of the profoundest grief in the story of the little match girl. The story is only four pages long, but it epitomises all that Andersen understood about the gap between desire and truth. In it, he honoured the rough matter of his own earliest childhood, brought it through fire, and cut a gem'.

After a rudimentary schooling, Andersen fled Odense, saving pocket money acquired from singing to the town's gentry for his fare for the two-day journey to Copenhagen, the Danish capital. He needed a visa to cross from Funen to the main Danish island of Zealand – the first of many passports to dog his travelling life, immortalised in the rat demanding passports in 'The Steadfast Tin Soldier' – and, his mother predicted that 'when he sees the rough sea, he will be frightened and turn back'. But on 6 September 1819, aged 14, he reached Frederiksberg, the castle on the hill outside Copenhagen which was the king's summer residence; he had not paid enough for the coach to take him the final lap into the capital, and he walked the last 10 miles through the suburbs. At the West Gate – the city was then locked nightly, and the king was said to sleep with the keys under his pillow – Andersen joined the carriages, traders, farmers leading their cattle, horses and riders, and other pedestrians, and entered the busy, mercantile harbour town where he knew no one and had no idea how to make a living. However, here was release from the confined expectations of Odense, and he celebrated the date every year for the rest of his life. In 1869, a banquet for 250 people was given to mark the 50th anniversary of his arrival in the city: the city with which his stories are indissolubly associated, whether it be from the dog with eyes as big as Copenhagen's Round Towers in his first tale 'The Tinderbox', or his character the Little Mermaid, her image fixed in Edvard Eriksen's 1913 sculpted figure who watches the city with its spires and bells and lights from a rock on Langelinie quay, inspired by the dancer Ellen Price's interpretation of the story at Copenhagen's Royal Theatre.

A century earlier, the leaping Pierrots and ballerinas which Andersen cut out of paper, and the printed programme for the ballet *Armida* on 12 April 1821 – which shows the 16-year-old Andersen appearing as a troll – at this same Royal Theatre, suggest the stage-struck aspirations of the young boy in the capital. He lived in a windowless attic in the red-light district and poured his energies into trying to sing, act, dance, and write plays for the theatre, where he hung around so persistently that he was given the nickname '*der kleine Deklamator*' (the little declaimer). As a performer he was gauche and talentless, but after three years his efforts came to the notice of Copenhagen's leading philanthropist, Jonas Collin, who arranged for him to go belatedly to grammar school, with his fees and expenses paid. Thus in 1822, aged 17, Andersen entered the second form of the distinguished provincial grammar at Slagelse, where the other pupils were 11 years old. He was the classic, over-sized ugly duckling: long and lanky, with hair flapping over his angular, anxious face and he was so tall, said one of the teachers, that he could be cut in half and two puppies made of him. Yet he knew no Latin, no geometry, little grammar (he never learnt to spell, and always relied on proof-readers later in his publishing career) and once, when asked to point out Copenhagen on a map, he had to admit he had not a clue how to find it.

His five years at school were the start of a long struggle to belong, which, after he matriculated, took him on cultural tours of Germany and later to Italy in 1834. In Germany he met the romantic authors of the elaborate 'kunstmärchen' (art fairy tales) Ludwig van Tieck and Adalbert Chamisso. During this time Andersen was steeped in romantic literature: Walter Scott, Byron and the German writers Heinrich Heine and E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose fantastical, supernatural stories had some influence on his own tales, were youthful heroes. He experimented with fiction, poetry and drama, and had considerable success with his first novel *The Improvisatore*. But not until he remembered and rewrote some folk tales he had heard in Odense did he find, almost by accident, his own authentic storytelling voice.

'I have also written some fairy tales for children', he told a friend on 16 March 1835, 'Orsted [the Danish physicist Hans Christian Orsted] says about them that if 'The Improvisatore' makes me famous, these tales will make me immortal, for they are the most perfect things I have ever written; but I myself do not think so.'

The first volume, a slim pamphlet called 'Eventyr, fortalte for Born' (*Fairy Tales, told for Children*), containing 'The Tinder Box', 'Little Claus and Big Claus', 'The Princess on the Pea' and 'Little Ida's Flowers', appeared on 8 May 1835 and astonished Danish literary circles by its raw unpolished language, easy, conversational tone and satirical energy. It is not an accident that all four tales turn on the revenge by the downtrodden and obscure on those establishment figures who have oppressed them. 'The Tinderbox' in particular is a jaunty wish-fulfilment story of a poor young man whose boldness and hope conquers the world; a Danish version of *Aladdin*, it was a deliberate challenge to the high literary style of the five-act verse drama *Aladdin*, by Copenhagen's leading playwright Adam Oehlenschläger.

Andersen's success was so great that eight years and many fairy stories later he was able to write another wish-fulfilment autobiographical tale, 'The Ugly Duckling' (1843), where, at the end, the children acclaim the new young swan:

'They clapped their hands and danced about and ran for Father and Mother; and bread and cakes were thrown into the water, and everybody said: "The new one is the nicest – so young and handsome!" And the old swans curtsied to him... It doesn't matter being born in a duck-yard, when you have been hatched out of a swan's egg!'

An early Danish critic objected that it would have been grander had the duckling-swallow flown away, high above those who had persecuted him, but as Andersen's seminal biographer Elias Bredsdorff pointed out, this would have been impossible because it was untrue: for the rest of his life, Andersen, like the swan, flapped his wings before his bourgeois, cultured and even royal friends and lapped up the titbits of praise and flattery they threw his way, while slowly the older writers accepted his pre-eminence. Admiration and fame became a drug for Andersen, who never fully overcame his bitterness at his early hardship, and remained still lonely in spite of his acclaim, nervous in temperament, gawky in appearance, sexually uncertain; he wavered between crushes on men and women, never developing a full relationship with anyone and tending to set his sights only on those of either sex who were safely unattainable – the best known was the singer Jenny Lind. Thus, 'my name is gradually starting to shine, and that is the only thing I live for', he wrote in 1837. 'I covet honour as a miser covets gold; both are said to be empty, but one has to have something to get excited about in this world, otherwise one would break down and rot.'

And so began the foreign tours which made Andersen, from the 1840s to the 1860s, the most famous writer in Europe. In the context of the limitations of mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century travel, before railways were fully established and at a time when many of his compatriots never left Denmark, the extent of Andersen's travels, from the north of Sweden to Constantinople, was extraordinary. 'Your trip to Greece will probably come to nothing', wrote his patron Jonas Collin in 1840, 'and I do not regret this, for God knows why you wish to go there'. But Andersen did go as far as Turkey, by rail, stagecoach and steamship, and returned with pictures he had drawn of the whirling dervishes, and a popular travel book, *A Poet's Bazaar*. 'I belong to the world!' he boasted. Like the swallow in his story 'Thumbelina', his need to travel was compulsive; he sought inspiration and escape from social constraint at home, but he

was also driven by ambitions to present himself as an international author, and to connect with the European mainstream. In Paris and especially in Germany, which he called his second home, Andersen sought out the leading cultural figures of his times: Balzac, Victor Hugo, Heinrich Heine, Schumann, Liszt, Mendelssohn, the famous Parisian actress Rachel and the singer Jenny Lind. 'Visited Jakob Grimm, who talked with me about tales', runs his diary for Christmas Eve 1845, in Berlin; and on Christmas Day, 'the evening at Count Bismarck-Bohlen's, where I read two tales. Wilhelm Grimm was there; his personality appealed to me. He liked "The Fir Tree" a lot.' How one longs to have eavesdropped on those talks between the great collectors of old tales and the great creator of new ones, at the bourgeois children's festival in the heart of mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. Afterwards, Andersen swept on, dancing helplessly to the tune of fame like his character Karen in her doomed red shoes, across the small German principalities, the guest of dukes and kings. 'Went to sleep with wistful happy feelings that I was a guest of this strange prince at his castle and he loved me', he noted in his diary in Weimar in 1846. 'The footmen call me *gnadiger Herr!* [Honoured Sir!] It is like a fairy tale.' It took the politically liberal Heinrich Heine to see the underside: 'Andersen called upon me some years ago', he wrote, 'I thought he looked like a tailor. He is a lean man with a hollow lantern-jawed face, and in his outward appearance he betrays a servile lack of self-confidence which is appreciated by dukes and princes. He fulfils exactly a prince's idea of a poet. When he visited me he had decked himself out with a big tie-pin; I asked what it was that he had put there. He replied very unctuously, "It is a present which the Electress of Hessen has been gracious enough to bestow on me". Otherwise Andersen is a man of some spirit.'

Nowhere is the triumph and tragedy of Andersen's public/private life better embodied than in his two well-chronicled visits to Britain. Emerging in June 1847 from his first night in London at the Sabloniere Hotel in Leicester Square, a rather unfashionable address, the first thing he saw in a shop on the square was his own picture staring out from *Howitt's Journal*, a magazine published by his translator Mary Howitt. Her versions of his tales, though translated second-hand from the German, peppered with inaccuracies and written in stilted prose, had introduced Andersen to English readers in 1846; subsequent florid efforts by Charles Boner, Caroline Peachey and others were worse. But aspects of his tales which they highlighted – sentimentality and fantasy, idealisation of the nursery world – tapped more immediately into Victorian taste than the robust fatalism and gruesome violence of the Grimms' collections, which had been translated earlier. Andersen's tales were therefore instantly popular and he arrived in London to find himself a celebrity. 'Hans Christian Andersen, have you read him? I am wild about him, having only just discovered that delightful fanciful creature', William Thackeray told a friend in January 1847. 'It says in the newspapers where my portrait is that I am "one of the most remarkable and interesting men of his day"', Andersen scribbled home ecstatically to Denmark, where praise had been more muted and his foreign success led to his being dubbed 'our orang-outang so famous abroad'.

Andersen, wrote the author Miss Mitford, 'is the lion of London this year – dukes, princes and ministers are all disputing for an hour of his company.' To the vain Dane, the aristocratic soirees where he 'was peered at like a strange animal' passed 'like a dream'. 'The highest of the nobility were here', he panted after an evening at Lord Palmerston's. 'I was presented to one lady after the other. Each one knew almost all of my writings ... English ladies overwhelmed me with enthusiasm for "The Ugly Duckling", "The Top and the Ball"'. At Lady Morgan's, 'how polite the English are, and how nice their compliments sound!' One 'middle-aged lady in velvet with a gold chain

... sat looking at me, lost in adoration; and once she grabbed my hand and wanted to kiss it. "I must kiss that precious hand" she said.' At another gathering, 'I was fussed over a lot, the young ladies fanned me. I was allowed to leave the table with the ladies. They were clinging to me.' Jenny Lind, the famous 'Swedish nightingale', who made her name singing Swedish folksongs, was also in London and the mania surrounding her probably increased the public's fervour for Andersen; their names were linked as northern artists, wrote the *Literary Gazette*, sharing 'originality of genius and poetic imagination, a simplicity most captivating, and a candour and truth of that rare nature which lays the individual soul open'. To the writer Leigh Hunt, who met Andersen at Lord Stanley's house, 'he looks like a large child, a sort of half-angel. There were many people of rank present, yet no one in the room looked more *distingue* than Andersen, the shoemaker's son'. To the young Irish writer William Allingham, who turned up to pay homage at the Sabloniere Hotel and was turned away by a nervous Andersen as a beggar, 'he had not English enough to allow of our conversing, asked me to write to him; but I have nothing to say save that I love him, and many people tell him that. He is tall and lanky, with a queer long face, but friendliness and intelligence shining through'.

After two weeks, 'It is a fact: I am a famous man ... I cannot achieve more here in this metropolis than I already have.' Yet the highlight was to come. Toward the end of this first visit, as he was signing a book for Lady Blessington at her salon, 'a man came into the room, quite like the portrait we have all seen, someone who had come to town for my sake and had written "I *must* see Andersen!" When he had greeted the company I ran from the writing desk to meet him, we seized both each other's hands, gazed into each other's eyes, laughed and rejoiced. We knew each other so well, though we met for the first time – it was Charles Dickens.' The next day Dickens left an inscribed edition of his works in twelve volumes at the Sabloniere Hotel. 'Yesterday I returned from the country I found all his works he haw given my! O I am verry heppy!' Andersen noted to an English friend. After a delightful stay in Sevenoaks with his publishers Richard Bentley – 'footmen in silk stockings wait on you – there's a bookseller!' – Andersen left from Ramsgate for Ostend at the end of August and found Dickens standing on the wharf to see him off. 'He had walked from Broadstairs in order to say goodbye to me, dressed in a green Scottish dress coat and colourful shirt – exceedingly, elegantly English. He was the last to shake my hand in England.'

For 10 years this fond memory flickered through Andersen's associations with England, and when he thought of returning, it was to Dickens that he wrote, for 'my visit is intended for you alone. Above all, always leave me a small corner in your heart.' But by 1857, Dickens' heart was a busy place: he was on the point of separating from his wife and setting up Ellen Ternan as his mistress; his nine children were fraught and distressed; one of his best friends had just died and he was consumed by rehearsals for a play, Wilkie Collins' *The Frozen Deep*, with which he aimed to raise money for the widow. A visit from Andersen was the last thing he needed; he invited him nevertheless for a fortnight, but found him an irritant before he even stepped off the boat. 'Hans Christian Andersen may perhaps be with us, but you won't mind *him* – especially as he knows no language but his own Danish, and is suspected of not even knowing that', he wrote maliciously to a friend.

Surrounded by wild roses and ivy, with a view of woods, fields, the winding Thames and the sea, Dickens' home at Gads Hill Place near Rochester looked idyllic when Andersen arrived in the summer of 1857. But trouble started at once: the house was too cold; no one came to shave him on the first morning; Dickens himself took off for

business in London leaving Andersen to be looked after by his sons, who were neglectful and hooted with laughter behind his back; daughter Kate was 'cutting'. Unable to communicate properly, Andersen tried to woo the family with his party trick of making paper cuttings, which Henry Dickens acknowledged his 'one beautiful accomplishment', but at dinner the first evening, 'he greatly embarrassed my father, who was offering his arm to a lady to take her into dinner, by suddenly seizing his hand, putting it into his own bosom and leading him triumphantly into the dining room'. Soon five-year-old Edward was threatening the gauche guest that 'I will put you out of the window'; a bad review of one of his novels led Andersen to fling himself prostrate on the lawn, sobbing uncontrollably; and there 'was too little sugar in the tea' – i.e. the family was not sweet enough to him.

Five weeks later he was still there, resentfully watching *The Frozen Deep* in which he had no part. After a month, 'we are suffering a good deal from Andersen,' wrote Dickens, who was nonetheless exemplary in politeness when he was there, but relentless in mockery afterwards. 'Hans Andersen slept in this room for five weeks – which seemed to the family AGES' read the cruel note Dickens pinned in his room after he had left, while Kate Dickens summed him up: 'he was a bony bore, and stayed on and on'.

Yet in England, the bony bore lived on. When Andersen first arrived in London in 1847, there was almost no English children's literature, but soon his imitators appeared: Mark Lemon's 'The Enchanted Doll' (1849), Frances Browne's 'The Wonderful Chair' (1856), fairy tales by Anne Isabella Ritchie in the 1860s and Juliana Ewing in 1870. 'Enlarged sympathy with children was one of the chief contributions made by the Victorian English to real civilization', wrote G. M. Trevelyan in *English Social History*. Children's books, empathetic with a child's vision and intended to be shared with adults, were an essential ingredient of the 19th-century invention of childhood, and Andersen played a definitive part in their development in England. He gave the fairy tale a key place in our culture; as early as 1858 music for Labalestier's *The Snow Queen Polka* was circulating, while a century later in 1949 Moira Shearer became a ballet icon in the film *The Red Shoes*. Andersen introduced the idea of fantasy in children's stories, preparing the climate for Lewis Carroll in the 1860s, and, in creating a children's world of talking toys and animals, he heralded later classics such as *The Wind in the Willows* and *Winnie the Pooh*. Both of these – one written just before the First World War, the other in its aftermath – look back to the Victorian cult of childhood of which G.K. Chesterton wrote in 1915, 'When the English romantics wanted to find the folk-tale spirit still alive... they found a whole fairyland under one head and under one 19th-century top hat. Those of the English who were then children owe to Hans Andersen more than to any of their own writers, the essential educational emotion which feels that domesticity is not dull but rather fantastic; that sense of the fairyland of the furniture, and the travel and adventure of the farmyard.' This legacy continues in contemporary Anglo-Saxon culture, from Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (with a happy ending!) to films such as *Toy Story*; children today would not collect figures of Buzz Lightyear had the Steadfast Tin Soldier not come alive before him and endured adventures in the big wide world after being carelessly lost by his owner.

If 19th-century England benefited from Andersen, Andersen also gained something from England. His success in 1847 crystallised his European status, and gave him the confidence to see himself as an international author especially when, after the Danish-Prussian wars from 1848 on, he could no longer count on his German connections. After 1847, he published several volumes of his tales in English

translation first, before the Danish originals appeared; in the days before international copyright, this was the only way to avoid pirated translations, and it ensured Andersen both an eager English audience and royalties. Dickens never spoke or wrote to him again after the ill-fated visit to Gad's Hill – a silence which Andersen neither resented nor understood – but many other English men and women were among his correspondents in later life, from the writer Edmond Gosse to Anna Mary Livingstone, daughter of the explorer: 'I *do* like your fairy tales so much that I would like to go and see you but I cannot do that so I thought I would write to you when papa comes home from Africa I will ask him to take me to see you.'

It is typical of the range of Andersen's genius, expressed on a miniaturist's scale, that he condensed so many intense impressions and different inspirations from his first visit to England in his 1847 collection of five tales, *A Christmas Greeting to My English Friends*. The volume contains two tragic stories of unmistakably Dickensian flavour, 'The Old House', which Dickens read 'over and over again, with the most unspeakable delight', and 'The Story of a Mother', where a child's death recalls the poignancy of Little Nell's death in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Two other stories recall London: 'The Drop of Water' depicts a metropolis as a ruthless jungle, and 'The Happy Family', about a snail from the forest who aspires to be cooked black and lie on a silver dish in a manor house, alludes to English snobbery and the Danish ambassador's advice to Andersen to conceal from his aristocratic admirers that he was staying in the unfashionable Sabloniere Hotel. But it is in the 'The Collar', that exquisite animation of an everyday object which serves as autobiographical focus, that Andersen charts his story of London's admiration and the Danish mockery of it. In a self-portrait at once hilarious and heart-breaking, the Collar is frequently 'turned down' in love – by an iron, a pair of scissors, a garter – and his proposals grow ever less flattering ('It's remarkable the way you keep all your teeth, ma'am', he says to the comb), but he boasts about his conquests until he is turned into paper in a paper mill – 'the very piece of white paper we have here, and on which this story was printed. And that was because it boasted so dreadfull... so let us bear this in mind... that we also won't land in the rag box and get made into white paper and have our whole history printed on us, every secret bit of it'. Yet that was the genius of Andersen: some secret bit of his history is printed on every object in this show, because, like the collar, he couldn't stop telling stories.

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Hans Christian Andersen (/ˈhɑːndɪˈnsən/, Danish: [ˈhɑːnˈɛ̃ːs ˈkʰɛːstjɑːn ˈɛːnɛsn] (listen); 2 April 1805 – 4 August 1875), in Denmark usually called H.C. Andersen, was a Danish author. Although a prolific writer of plays, travelogues, novels, and poems, he is best remembered for his fairy tales. Andersen's fairy tales, consisting of 156 stories across nine volumes and translated into more than 125 languages, have become culturally embedded in the West's collective consciousness, readily accessible to children... Hans Christian Andersen achieved worldwide fame for writing innovative and influential fairy tales. Many of his stories, including "The Ugly Duckling" and "The Princess and the Pea," remain classics of the genre. **Early Life.** Andersen was born on April 2, 1805, in Odense, Denmark. Hans Andersen Sr. died in 1816, leaving his son and a wife, Anne Marie. While the Andersen family was not wealthy, young Andersen was educated in boarding schools for the privileged.