

## **Hans Christian Andersen in Trumpland**

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### **Abstract**

Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales have recently helped political and cultural observers figure out the Trump phenomenon. In post-election discussions of the Trump victory, frustrated Americans have drawn sustenance from Andersen's fairy tale communities, both in "The Ugly Duckling" and most significantly in "The Emperor's New Clothes." Emotion takes center stage both in Andersen's fairy tales and in representations of Trumpland in sculpture, cartoons, political commentary and in J. D. Vance's best-selling "Hillbilly Elegy" (2016), set among Trump's white, working-class supporters. In contemporary US culture, Andersen assists worried Americans in explaining the dysfunctional community of Trump voters and the mental instabilities of the President. Andersen also stresses resistance and celebrates those confronting community conventions. Ultimately, he sees literature as a safeguard against fakery and abuse and shows the path towards resistance and truth, despite the endeavors of the 45<sup>th</sup> US President to take his country in the opposite direction.

### **Introduction**

Amidst the shock and disbelief following the November 2016 presidential election, many Americans began to scrutinize their belief in democracy and its institutions and embark on a new journey towards understanding and recovery. Americans who had not seen Donald Trump coming began to consider white working-class voters and their ignored experiences: deteriorating cities marked by factory shut-downs, financial crisis foreclosures, racial divides, physical and emotional abuse, changing generational and patriarchal power structures, educational disadvantages, opiate addictions, distance to Washington political elites, and a nostalgic, patriotic attachment to an elusive past. Political and cultural observers considered the power of emotion as well to dupe and seduce. To help figure out contemporary American politics, or for their own emotional sustenance, many of them turned to Hans Christian Andersen and his fairy tales, especially "The Emperor's New Clothes." The Emperor's empire and Donald Trump's fantasy world occupy the same psychological terrain, in that Andersen's well-known story assists American analysts and observers in explaining what happened to American democracy and decency. The celebrated Danish writer never himself visited America, but he entered

post-election discussions on the rise of Donald Trump. Andersen had already, as it were, explored the uncanny mixture of the familiar and the unknown in “The Ugly Duckling” and a populist, mentally disturbed political figure in “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” The famous writer also stresses resistance and voice and celebrates those speaking out against narrow-minded conformity. Ultimately, he sees literature and art as a safeguard against abuse and trauma.

### **Emotional Communities**

Emotion takes center stage both in Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale, in the election of Donald Trump, and in J. D. Vance’s “Hillbilly Elegy”, which in 2016 became an instant bestseller because it offered a tour of Rustbelt America, where Trump’s angry, frustrated voters reside. In Andersen’s fairy tale community and in Vance’s Trumpland, citizens are duped by an inauthentic populist, who needs flattery and admiration to uphold his fragile ego. As Evan Osnos, who writes about politics for *The New Yorker*, concludes about Trump’s White House in May 2018, it is “isolated, fortified against nonbelievers, entranced by its mythmaker, and constantly vulnerable to the risks of revelation” (p. 65). Amidst the contemporary chaos, Osnos holds out the promise of the truth-sayer, who, like the young boy in “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” will put an end to fakery and tyranny by stating the obvious.

Both Andersen and Vance invite us into the emotional landscape which theorist Sara Ahmed explores in “The Cultural Politics of Emotion” (2004). In her analysis, emotion links bodies with communities or situates them outside dominant frameworks, in the process creating social relations that constitute the terrain of the nation. Ahmed moves discussion of power into linguistic and emotional terrain, “in which emotions align some bodies with others, as well as stick different figures together, by the way they move us” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 195). In Andersen’s fairy tale, those who support the Emperor and end up admiring his choices constitute a community of worried yes-men. The Prime Minister admits to himself that he cannot see anything except the empty looms, but he holds his tongue out of anxiety and insecurity. The distinguished gentlemen-in-waiting fear for their positions and join in praising the toxic masculinity the Emperor represents. People watching the procession in the street are nervous and needy in terms of community acceptance. Though Vance does not mention the 45<sup>th</sup> President in “Hillbilly Elegy”, the white working-class communities in Kentucky and Ohio link up with Donald Trump in similar fashion. They unite in anxiety, bravado, and toxicity and long for the President’s patriarchal power. Without education and employment, the angry hillbillies turn to violence or apathy, to the cognitive dissonance of looking for jobs and then

letting them go, and to voting for Trump, the billionaire populist (Rothman, 2016; Presidential Results 2016a and 2016b). In contemporary US culture, the Danish fairy tale writer helps troubled Americans explain the community of Trump voters and the mental instabilities of the president they elected.

In “How America Lost Its Mind,” from the September 2017 issue of *The Atlantic*, author and public-radio host Kurt Andersen argues that “the election of Donald Trump revealed that a critical mass of Americans has become untethered from reality” (Andersen, 2017, p. 77). His survey of this unreal realm includes his attempt to find answers: “[B]eing American means we can believe in anything we want; that our beliefs are equal or superior to anyone else’s, experts be damned,” he writes. “Once people commit to that approach, the world turns inside out, and no cause-and-effect connection is fixed. The credible becomes incredible and the incredible credible” (Andersen, 2017, p. 79). He concludes that contemporary America has seen “The Triumph of the Fantasy-Industrial Complex” (Andersen, 2017, p. 87). Other observers have turned directly to fairy tale images and scenarios to explain the transformation of the US into Fantasyland.

The fairy tale genre functions as a “theater of dislocation,” a phrase Garry Leonard, Professor of English at the University of Toronto, coined in his analysis of Edward Albee’s plays (Leonard, 2004, p. 118). In a fairy tale context, dislocation suggests that biographical and political themes may be relocated and reenacted in a magic realm, since the fairy tale allows for the emotional impact of unsettling developments. The genre highlights self-creation and absence, the expulsion of what has been labelled “the hereditary ghost” (VanStavern, 2004, p. 153). In fairy tales, the ghost of familial or social malfunctions and the spiteful emotions that often accompany painful or ugly experiences may be revived. In a sense, fairy tales constitute safety zones, where situations and topics too dangerous - or too painful - to articulate in other literary genres or in non-fiction may occupy the terrain. Fairy tales have heroes and villains, and they may serve, as Leonard argues, as repositories of anger projected onto fantasy figures and plots (Leonard, 2004, p. 126). The fairy tale inhabits fantasyland, with soil ripe for political issues, since fantasy allows for comprehending what Margot G. Backus, Professor of English at the University of Houston, calls the “unspeakable and incomprehensible situation” (Backus, 2004, p. 140) in which many Americans now find themselves.

### **The Duckling and the Donald**

In fairy tales, we enter the “otherworld” (De Soto, 2004, p. 193) of origin and alternative identities. Hans Christian Andersen stresses this disturbing mixture of the familiar and the exotic in the opening of “The Ugly Duckling”:

It was so beautiful out on [sic] the country, it was summer - the wheat fields were golden, the oats were green, and down among the green meadows the hay was stacked. There the stork minced about on his red legs, clacking away in Egyptian, which was the language his mother had taught him. Round about the field and meadow lands rose vast forests, in which deep lakes lay hidden.

On the one hand, the duckling sees yellow wheat, green oats, orderly stacks of hay and a stork who chatters away in this reassuring and familiar setting. But on the other hand, more unsettling or downright scary worlds hover on the horizon. The stork speaks Egyptian, and large, unfamiliar woods hiding deep, unknowable lakes circle the idyllic setting in which the duckling finds himself. Andersen's fairy tales open a psychological terrain in which to imagine the future, but his protagonists also embark on journeys taking them to uncertain or scary destinations of belonging.

American intellectuals and humorists have accordingly imported Hans Christian Andersen to help them handle the Trump phenomenon. Ugly duckling comparisons exist at both ends of the political spectrum - and not only because of Walt Disney's Donald Duck and the President's nickname, the Donald. In Amazon's line of bathroom toys, Trump-as-Duckling is bright orange, as in innumerable comments on the President's skin and hair color, which invite the comparison to Andersen's Ugly Duckling protagonist. Andre Ratkai, who blogs on *InvestmentAcademy*, asks readers to recall the early stages of the election campaign:

Trump was mocked, shunned and given up for lost in the early stages of the race. He was even publicly denounced by Mitt Romney, marking the low point of the GOP's revulsion toward the Trump nomination. Like the ugly duckling in the childhood fable, however, he persevered, and in the meantime tapped into a simmering sense that politics is broken, and maybe a bulldozer is what's needed to change it. (Ratkai, 2017)

He headlines this entry "From Ugly Duckling to Black Swan," which, in the world of finance markets, means not only an event that is extremely rare but also one with severe side effects.

Yet Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling" only begins to explain the environment in which Americans find themselves. The parallels between Trump and the duckling of the fairy tale remain superficial, because Trump never changes on his way to The White House and because he is only by an impossible stretch of the imagination a victim. Andersen's duckling has a difficult childhood indeed. When the ugly duckling finally tumbles out of his egg, the mother duck distances herself from

the result: “‘That’s a frightfully big duckling,’ she said. ‘He doesn’t look the least like the others. Can he really be a turkey baby?’” He is met with cruelty and lack of understanding from those around him: “‘See here! Must we have this brood too, just as if there weren’t enough of us already? And - fie! what an ugly-looking fellow that duckling is! We won’t stand for him.’ One duck charged up and bit his neck.” Things go from bad to worse in his home community:

The poor duckling was chased and buffeted about by everyone. Even his own brothers and sisters abused him. “Oh,” they would always say, “how we wish the cat would catch you, you ugly thing.” And his mother said, “How I do wish you were miles away.” The ducks nipped him, and the hens pecked him, and the girl who fed them kicked him with her foot.

The duckling is simultaneously discredited and despised, and the other ducks and their associates pull together and condemn the outsider in their midst. Unlike many fairy tale characters leaving a secure home to seek adventures elsewhere, the duckling encounters from the outset a hostile world, a landscape threatening to destroy him, with guns going off, blood-hounds chasing him, water turning red, and frosty skies and whirling winds threatening his survival. Yet Andersen’s fairy tale flurries up topics that also circulate in Trump’s America: the split between insiders and outsiders, the notion of belonging and not belonging to a community, and emotional and physical abuse. Questions of identity abound as well, as the duckling tries to grasp who and what he is. This theme links up with traditional (and popular) American quests for identity, but it also paves the way for speculations about Donald Trump, who agrees with his latest conversation partner and overall seems to be skin deep only, with no core identity.

### **The Emperor and the Populist**

Comparisons to Andersen’s Ugly Duckling may be skin deep themselves and serve as ways to ridicule and criticize the Donald, but when journalists and commentators turn to “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” they draw on the themes - and the admiring community - from Andersen’s tale. This fairy tale clearly applies to contemporary American issues such as fake news, mass psychology, voter appeal, masculine posturing and final exposure, if not impeachment, as well as concerns about character and morality. In 2016, sculptures of a naked Donald Trump across the US linked him to Andersen’s Emperor. In decline, an activist art community, installed a series of less than flattering statues entitled “The Emperor Has No Balls” in five American cities: Cleveland, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle. The orange-pink color and the bulging gut, the missing testicles

and a tiny male member inspired multiple references to Trump as a naked Emperor, Andersen style, though accusations of politically incorrect fat-shaming also flew around.

Republican senator Paul Rand of Kentucky came out early against Donald Trump, as reported on August 10, 2015, in *The New York Times*:

“‘I think if no one stands up to a bully, a bully will just keep doing what they’re doing,’ Mr. Paul said. ‘Unless someone points out the emperor has no clothes, they will continue to strut about, and then we’ll end up with a reality TV star as our nominee.’” (Rappeport, 2015)

The idea caught on widely. Also before the election, blogger Bonnie Engstrom captioned an entry with an image of Donald Trump marching naked in front of a line of courtiers in medieval outfits. Her title read: “Donald Trump is Naked: The Truth about the Emperor's New Clothes.” The entry explores the comparison further:

“I don’t want to make anyone blush, but I think we all need to talk about the Emperor’s new clothes.... I know it looks like Trump’s wearing a shiny new suit but the fact is, the man is naked. He’s got nothing on - no policy, no plans, no diplomacy... he is showing us his true self and it is ugly.” (Engstrom, 2016)

Artists and illustrators pounced on the idea. By March 26, 2018, the reference to Andersen’s naked Emperor no longer needed any explanation whatsoever. *The New Yorker* front page had a naked Donald Trump on the lectern in the White House press room in front of eager reporters, and his lack of clothes says it all (Blitt, 2018). Among the 58.600.000 results on a Google search for “Donald Trump Is Naked,” conducted on September 4, 2018, one cartoon has a young boy call out, as in Andersen’s fairy tale, “But he’s not wearing any clothes.” Another member of the phone-clutching crowd of onlookers exclaims, “I’ll be the first to tweet it” (“Exposing Trump the Weaver” n.d.).

### **Narcissistic Personality Disorder**

Also, the compulsive lying and the mental issues associated with President Trump invited observers and private citizens into Andersen’s emotional otherworld, in which his Emperor suffers from the psychological malfunction that many American psychologists and psychiatrists bring up in observing and discussing Donald Trump: Narcissistic Personality Disorder or NPD. Since Professor of Psychology and Director of the Foley Center for the Study of Lives at Northwestern University Dan

McAdams outlined “The Mind of Donald Trump” in the June 2016 issue of *The Atlantic*, political scientists and psychologists, not to mention internet bloggers, have commented on the disposition of the 45<sup>th</sup> President. In his *New Yorker* Daily Comment of April 22, 2017, “The Persistence of Trump Derangement Syndrome,” journalist Adam Gopnik writes:

Our problem is not Trump Derangement Syndrome; our problem is Deranged Trump Self-Delusion. This is the habit of willfully substituting, as a motive for Trump’s latest action, a conventional political or geostrategic ambition, rather than recognizing the action as the daily spasm of narcissistic gratification and episodic vanity that it truly is.

Gopnik concludes that “the politics of a mad king with a court are no more reassuring than those of a mad king alone” (Gopnik, 2017). Definitions of Narcissistic Personality Disorder abound, but all include the following elements: Narcissists have a grandiose sense of self-importance and live in a world of illusion that supports this delusion of grandeur. Narcissists seek constant praise and admiration, which they need as supply so as to prop up their shame-based existences, and they feel a sense of entitlement that allows them to exploit other people without guilt or empathy. They will belittle, intimidate or bully others and discard those no longer useful to them without remorse. They hide the ugliness within by acting, lying, or mirroring their surroundings, to the point that they no longer have any authentic selves. And if they feel this fake self to be threatened, through criticism, refusal or anything they perceive as an attack on their ego and control of power, they erupt in narcissistic rage. This excessive response serves as still another manipulative tool, often randomly employed (Boyd, 2013).

### **Diagnosing the Emperor**

“The Emperor’s New Clothes” reads in contemporary US culture as a checklist of narcissistic symptoms. Like someone diagnosed with NPD, the Emperor focuses exclusively on himself and his own appearance. Andersen writes: “Many years ago there was an Emperor so exceedingly fond of new clothes that he spent all his money on being well dressed. He cared nothing about reviewing his soldiers, going to the theatre, or going for a ride in his carriage, except to show off his new clothes.” His protagonist centres all attention on his own superficial self and has no interest in anything outside of his own ego. Andersen continues: “He had a coat for every hour of the day, and instead of saying, as one might, about any other ruler, ‘The King’s in council,’ here they always said. ‘The Emperor’s

in his dressing room.” The Emperor suffers from the insecurity, anxiety and shame in which this self has taken root. His fears of incompetence begin once the two swindlers work at their empty looms:

“I’d like to know how those weavers are getting on with the cloth,” the Emperor thought, but he felt slightly uncomfortable when he remembered that those who were unfit for their position would not be able to see the fabric. It couldn’t have been that he doubted himself, yet he thought he’d rather send someone else to see how things were going.

He feels inadequate to his high office and its many responsibilities and is afraid of exposure, the one thing that might crack his false front. So as to prevent this anxiety from taking hold, he lives in fantasyland, a world of illusion. He is wearing splendid clothes though he has nothing on.

The Emperor of Andersen’s tale needs a series of admirers and yes-men to create and uphold his false self. His shame-based inner core must remain hidden by maintaining an illusion of competence and grandiosity, which Andersen accurately portrays. Once two supposedly honest ministers have praised the charming designs and the splendid materials, the Emperor’s weak self-esteem becomes obvious: “‘What’s this?’ thought the Emperor. ‘I can’t see anything. This is terrible! Am I a fool? Am I unfit to be the Emperor? What a thing to happen to me of all people.’” To hide these anxious thoughts, the Emperor must now maintain his false façade in front of the swindlers and the courtiers: “‘Oh! It’s very pretty,’ he said. ‘It has my highest approval.’ And he nodded approbation at the empty loom. Nothing could make him say that he couldn’t see anything.

The ministers and officials of his circle provide him with the admiration that fuels his narcissism and helps him hide his inner chaos; the Emperor’s yes-men mirror his grandiose desire for excellence: “His whole retinue stared and stared. One saw no more than another, but they all joined the Emperor in exclaiming, ‘Oh! It’s very pretty’.” They advise the Emperor to wear his new outfit for the upcoming grand procession, and they fake admiration and praise. Andersen records the response of the Emperor’s closest circle: “‘Magnificent! Excellent! Unsurpassed!’ were bandied from mouth to mouth, and everyone did his best to seem well pleased.” They serve up the narcissistic supply the Emperor needs and sacrifice in the process whatever honesty and integrity they may have possessed.

At the end of Andersen’s tale, the Emperor meets with the greatest fear of the narcissist: exposure. To expose a narcissist requires courage, and, in Andersen’s world, a state of innocence, since the consequences might be dire, even vicious, as readers of President Trump’s twitter account may also have noticed. Most people in Andersen’s fairy tale simply play along:



Everyone in the streets and the windows said, “Oh, how fine are the Emperor's new clothes! Don't they fit him to perfection? And see his long train!” Nobody would confess that he couldn't see anything, for that would prove him either unfit for his position, or a fool. No costume the Emperor had worn before was ever such a complete success.

Only Andersen's hero, an innocent child, dares call out this fraud, because he is oblivious to power, to mass pressure, and to narcissistic grandiosity: “But he hasn't got anything on!” Nonetheless, the Emperor cannot reflect on his own personality and behavior. Without his illusion, he is simply an empty shell, and accordingly, he projects onto his surroundings the façade that is himself: “The Emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought, ‘This procession has got to go on.’ So he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all.” Andersen exposes his protagonist at the end of “The Emperor's New Clothes,” and this conclusion also invites the innumerable comparisons between Andersen's monarch and the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. But the empty bravado of populism, and narcissism, appeals to the voters in Trumpland, at least the inhabitants of Rustbelt communities.

### **Exposing the President**

Both Hans Christian Andersen and critical observers of Trump point out certain NPD behaviors in the leadership figures they create or confront. In *The New York Times* article above, Rand Paul called Trump “an empty suit” (Rappeport, 2015), thus pointing to the lack of authentic personality structures in the current President. *The New Yorker* recently featured an interview with former FBI Director James Comey pointing to this characteristic NPD trait in the President's personality make-up: “The ‘Emptiness’ inside Trump” (Lach, 2018). Engstrom stresses this notion in her blog:

If you vote for Donald Trump you are supporting his wardrobe. Don't associate with the man. I know he seems like this great candidate ... but he is a belittling, bigoted bully. You cannot support a man like this without becoming what he clearly is. Your emperor has no clothes on and it's time to face the ugly truth (Engstrom, 2016).

She too finds Trump fake and notes the narcissistic traits of a leader who needs to bully and project so as to lord it over others. On June 23, 2017, *The New York Times* listed, in shocking detail, the new

President's lies; the staff authors of "Trump's Lies," David Leonhardt and Stuart A. Thompson, explained their intent:

Many Americans have become accustomed to President Trump's lies. But as regular as they have become, the country should not allow itself to become numb to them. So we have catalogued nearly every outright lie he has told publicly since taking the oath of office (Leonhardt and Thompson, 2017).

This unfortunate habit again points towards NPD. The narcissist will say anything to support his own agenda and has no moral code to restrain him.

Overall, cartoonists and satirists have had a ball. President Trump's first cabinet meeting on June 12, 2017, went viral on YouTube, because it showed one Republican politician after another praising Trump with excessive docility. As in Andersen's fairy tale, Trump himself soaked up this narcissistic supply. Afterwards, one cartoonist depicted Emperor Trump surrounded by admiring elephants, symbolic representatives of Republicans. The elephants again lavished praise on their naked leader: "nice threads," "nice threads," "nice threads," say the first three, while others exclaim: "Umm...not seeing it," "just pretend what's not there is there," and "like our pride, or dignity, or values." The Emperor-Bully controls and consents ("Nice Threads!" 2017). He also explodes quite frequently in narcissistic rage. This tendency inspired best-selling author Michael Wolff's title in his 2018 book "Fire and Fury", which reports on life behind the scenes inside The Trump White House. Those trying to establish a counter-narrative to the current political discourse in Washington thus draw on the cultural treasures of Andersen's fairy tales, where hope, advice, and comfort provide them with material for resistance and revelation. In Andersen's fairy tale world, we enter an emotional community that resembles Trump's America, but Andersen stresses that value systems do exist. In the midst of folly or moral corruption, inauthenticity will be exposed and critical, candid outsiders recognized for their worth. A number of Trump observers obviously believe that the grandiose 45<sup>th</sup> President suffers from NPD, a mental illness that connects him both to Andersen's Emperor and to Rustbelt communities.

### **Trumpist Communities**

In "Hillbilly Elegy" (2016), J. D. Vance zooms in on white Americans in Rustbelt Ohio and Appalachian Kentucky, communities that parallel Andersen's "otherworld" in "The Emperor's New Clothes" and support a leader in similar fashion. These poor, working-class communities are connected by the hillbilly highway, along which Kentucky, West Virginia and Tennessee post-WWII

migrants traveled north to work in the new, industrial plants. They hoped to leave behind the poverty, if not the culture and extended network, of the hills that even Vance, a third-generation Ohioan, calls home. His great-grandmother's house in Jackson, Kentucky, sits in the heart of southeastern Kentucky's coal country, where most of the people live in the hills around Kentucky Highway 15 - in trailers, in government-subsidized housing, in mountain homesteads. Hillbilly values spread along with the hillbilly people and dominated the town where Vance grew up. Along with his friends, he called Middletown, Ohio, "Middletucky" (Vance, 2016, p. 21). The Middletown kids also joked that their home town was so generic that it did not even have a real name: it exemplifies the manufacturing-based Rust Belt town. In short, "Hillbilly Elegy" is set among Trump supporters, and J.D. Vance became the spokesman for the white working-class community he himself had left behind. Suddenly, Vance, who served in the Marine Corps in Iraq and graduated from Yale Law School, appeared in TED talks, on YouTube, in high altitudes on Amazon and on talk shows across the country. In July 2016, an interview with Vance crashed the website of *The American Conservative* magazine. Vance's map of Trumpland has become uncannily popular, his first-hand experiences especially appealing to those stunned Americans who did not see Trump coming.

The Rustbelt communities we meet in "Hillbilly Elegy" occupy the same emotional terrain as Andersen's Emperor and Donald Trump. In his September 12, 2016, *New Yorker* review of Vance's best-seller, Joshua Rothman identifies a psychological discourse in "Hillbilly Elegy". He notes that residents of Vance's Trumpland, like the Emperor's supporters, suffer "learned helplessness" (Rothman, 2016, p. 3), and he plugs into psychological terminology with words such as "toxicity," shame, and "blame-shifting" (Rothman, 2016, p. 5-6), which go with the behaviors in the dark end of the psychological spectrum, where narcissism is situated. The author of "Hillbilly Elegy" encourages this reading himself. Throughout his autobiography, he repeats that psychological interpretations are paramount. As he writes, "our elegy is a sociological one, yes, but it is also about psychology and community and culture and faith" (Vance, 2016, p. 145). Vance also draws on psychology with statements such as this one: "unless you're a particular capable sociopath, dishonesty can only take you so far" (Vance, 2016, p. 81). He describes his mother's lack of empathy, a red flag nudging readers towards recognizing a narcissist. He lists as well other NPD traits: "No remorse, no moral compass, no guilt" (Vance, 2016, p. 130). Vance mentions consistently her frequent, sudden discard of boyfriends and husbands, as well as her lack of "even a modicum of temper control" (Vance, 2016, p. 111). Obviously, he grew up with constant eruptions of narcissistic rage. "Our lives were so charged that I was constantly on guard," he writes. "It was like we were living among

landmines—one wrong step, and *kaboom*” (Vance, 2016, p. 72). He remembers somatic complaints, severe stomachaches, headaches, and weight changes and concludes that his health problems were caused by trauma, brought about by anger and abuse. Indeed, young Vance suffers from the “cognitive dissonance” of narcissists’ targets: he cannot reconcile his mother’s abuse with her role as caretaker. This toxic psychology and cognitive dissonance extends to the hillbilly community as a whole, which constitutes the world of illusion they share with the Emperor’s underlings in Andersen’s fairy tale.

Both the Emperor’s cohorts and Vance’s Trump voters inhabit extreme emotional communities, dominated by fear, anger, and shame. Vance recalls in detail the rage that propels his grandmother, “Mamaw,” to pour petrol over the sleeping “Papaw” and strike a match after his grandfather returns home drunk one time too many. Vance also stresses the disconnection between hillbilly values and hillbilly behavior by mentioning “the young man with every reason to work - carelessly tossing aside a good job with excellent health insurance” (Vance, 2016, p. 7). He finds in this young hillbilly and in his community “a willingness to blame everyone but yourself,” the narcissistic blame-shifting again. And he concludes that “this is distinct from the larger economic landscape of modern America” (Vance, 2016, p. 7). But in “Hillbilly Elegy”, this psychological landscape links up with the Trump victory. Many Trump critics locate in his twitters, talks, demeanor and personality traits of an overt narcissist, but in Trumpland, he makes good sense and gets votes. Like the Emperor’s subjects, the Trump supporters buy into the illusion of grandeur and power, without recognizing the dangers of Fantasyland.

The grandiosity that President Trump shares with Andersen’s Emperor strutting ahead of his parade appeals to Rustbelt or Appalachian men. Not only do Vance’s male relatives identify with the unapologetic sexism of the pussy-grabbing alpha warrior, whose wife smiles only when he turns around at the Inauguration ceremony. Like the old minister and the gentlemen at the Emperor’s court, they find in him the patriarchal power they themselves covet. The Blanton men in Jackson, Kentucky, fit this bill. One older man in town is accused of ravishing a young girl and is found floating face-down in a nearby lake with sixteen bullet wounds in his back (Vance, 2016, p. 16). A young man wants to “eat the panties” of Uncle Teaberry’s sister and is forced to consume a pair of her underwear at gunpoint. Vance’s Blanton uncles enforce hillbilly justice and act like predators in defending their women’s honor. They also leave behind what Vance calls a trail of “neglected children, cheated wives, or both” (Vance, 2016, p. 17). The economic melt-down in Vance’s world threatens masculine pride, and wounded masculinity results in domestic abuse and violence. Hillbillies belong in the

community sociologist Michael Kimmel describes in “Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era” (2013). “Seeing people insult, scream, and sometimes physically fight was just a part of our life,” Vance writes. “After a while, you did not even notice it” (Vance, 2016, p. 73). As Ahmed suggests, emotions constitute community, and residents of Andersen’s fairy tale and Vance’s Trumpland stick together because their negative, violent emotions correspond and serve as common bonds.

As in certain Andersen scenes, hillbilly women also get out of hand, as in the petrol incident where Pawpaw is burned by his wife while sleeping. In “Female Masculinity” (1998), Gender Studies Professor Judith Halberstam claims that female bodies might enact masculinity as perfectly as the “heroic masculinities” we recognize, fear or trust. Female masculinity operates not as imitation, she argues, “but actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity.” She finds that masculinity signified by women’s bodies “are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing. But what we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies” (Halberstam, 1998, pp. 1-2). Halberstam focuses on female articulations of masculinity, in “The Ugly Duckling” perhaps the old woman who throws out the struggling duckling from her property, or in “Hillbilly Elegy” someone like Mamaw, who picks up J.D. from school in “her uniform of baggy jeans and a men’s T-shirt - with a giant menthol cigarette hanging from her lip” (Vance, 2016, p. 137), in this theoretical context maybe as a substitute phallus. Halberstam argues provocatively that masculinity without men highlights the naturalized correlation between maleness and power. Masculinity, in short, becomes readable the moment it leaves the white, male, privileged body. Hillary Clinton may wear her jumpsuits and come across as a phallic woman, but she presents only Halberstam’s rejected scraps of powerful masculinity. Trump’s winning formula returns again. An alpha male in the White House or a “nasty woman”?

### **The Emperor Goes to America**

Hans Christian Andersen has mapped an emotional and psychological landscape that resembles, but helps expose, Trump’s America. Despite his compassionate emotional stance, Vance warns travelers in Trumpland of its dangers, as in his book’s dedication: “For Mamaw and Papaw, my very own hillbilly terminators” (Vance, 2016, n.p.) This danger echoes in Andersen’s famous fairy tale about power and emotion in Fantasyland. “The Emperor’s New Clothes” provides American commentators with a structure of comprehension and a means of communicating their truth in a world of fake news.

The Emperor is as vain as the sitting American President, and, as Andersen emphasizes, he prefers his mirror and his wardrobe to the world outside his comfort zone, though both in the Emperor's city and in Trump's Washington D.C., there is plenty going on. Both men in charge lead everything back to themselves, narcissist style, and they both work on the image they present to the world. The Emperor takes several turns in front of the mirror: "Well, I'm supposed to be ready," the Emperor said, and turned again for one last look in the mirror. "It is a remarkable fit, isn't it?" He seemed to regard his costume with the greatest interest." The newly installed 45<sup>th</sup> President wakes up and counts, without consulting reality, those attending the Inauguration Ceremony on the Washington Mall. Both are powerful men who inhabit a masculine world in which they must hide shame and weakness, and they both seem oblivious to truth and facts. The cartoonists contribute the humor that also resides in Andersen's text, as when the Emperor goes through with it all in the end. The Emperor leaves the fairy tale but not his own illusion, as he straightens his posture and walks ahead of the chamberlains entrusted with "the train that wasn't there at all."

The hope and optimism reside in Andersen's text in the young boy who exposes the Emperor. The child exists outside scripted scenarios and gendered experiences and occupies in Andersen's fairy tale the absolute margin - he is an onlooker behind other onlookers, while the Emperor occupies not only the front of his own procession but also the fairy tale title. Nonetheless, the boy has two major assets that seem central to anxious Americans in Trumpland: his honesty and his voice. By calling out the truth in a world of fakeness, he represents in contemporary America much-needed resistance and integrity. This resistance may come from the margins, be it Black Lives Matter, #me too victims of abuse, or the #never again high school students from Portland, Florida, who fight for gun control. It certainly comes from newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, from *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* magazines, to mention just a few, and from newsrooms, writers, and protesters across the US trying to uphold American democracy. Most recently, highly-respected investigative journalist Bob Woodward, instrumental in exposing the Watergate scandal and bringing down President Nixon, has published an exposé of Trump's presidency, appropriately titled "Fear" (2018). The title stresses the emotional nature of Ahmed's communities and points to the fear that holds together insecure or dysfunctional leaders and their constituencies.

### **Conclusion: The Writer and the Truth**

Hans Christian Andersen points the way, because he believed in the power of stories and the importance of words and voice. His fairy tales teach readers about communities, and about the

schisms between those who conform and those who are brave enough to resist the corrosion of moral values and truth. Both his ugly duckling and the child unimpressed by the populist Emperor raise their voices and let themselves be heard so as to hold on to or invent themselves. In “The Ugly Duckling,” the new swan feels, hears, and thinks again and finally speaks to the world: “I never dreamed there could be so much happiness, when I was the ugly duckling.” And the boy breaks with his own voice the narcissistic illusion in which the Emperor resides. From their marginal perspectives, both Andersen’s duckling and his young, outspoken hero take on traditional customs and narrow-minded mass beliefs. His stories map the emotional terrain of Trumpland, where ugly emotions - anger, fear, envy and shame - dominate. But Andersen’s heroes communicate to audiences then and now also their own bravery and resistance as well as the value of words. The 2014 recipient of the Hans Christian Andersen Award, novelist Salman Rushdie, declares in “Truth, Lies, and Literature” (2018) about the present moment of Trumpism: “it is for us - writers, thinkers, journalists, philosophers - to undertake the task of rebuilding our readers’ belief in reality, their faith in the truth. And to do it with new language, from the ground up.” (Rushdie, 2018) Writers must, in short, clean up corrupted language and reinstate honesty, and, like Hans Christian Andersen, enthrall and persuade through their craft: the power of their words will uphold authentic meaning and values. Both in Fantasyland and in Trumpland, the writer serves as a bulwark against tyranny, abuse and trauma in a turbulent world.

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