

The Family in four of Andersen's tales: An Empty Shell or a Community in a Nutshell?

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Abstract

Family is a key institution in Andersen's fiction, but my focus on its role will be limited to the four tales in which (forms of) the word family appear(s) in the very title: (1) "Nabofamilierne" [The Neighboring Families] (1847), (2) "Den lykkelige Familie" [The Happy Family] (1848), (3) "Høns-Grethes Familie" [Chicken Grethe's Family] (1869), and (4) "Hvad hele Familien sagde" [What the Whole Family Said] (1872). Taken as a whole, these four texts, spanning a quarter of a century, reveal how the topoi of family and community – major signifiers of collective sameness versus otherness – typically reinforce and problematize each other within Andersen's corpus. As his narratives display the variations of this "dialectic" over time, they invite us to reflect on the intricate boundaries between family and community past and present, be it as sociocultural domains or aesthetic tropes.

Introduction

A *family*, "a group consisting of parents and children living together in a household," is a special instance of a *community*, "a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common." But family and community can also be compatible in a more pointed sense of both terms. A family can be a unit distinguished by "a special loyalty or intimacy" among its members, and likewise, a member of a community can harbor "a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals."¹

While family is a key institution in Hans Christian Andersen's fiction and clearly instantiates a community in the first sense of the two terms, the question I want to address in this article is whether his portrayals of families also pertain to communities in the second, more value-charged, sense of both concepts. For if a family, with its potential for "special loyalty and intimacy," can be a (spiritual) community – "of fellowship" and shared "attitudes, interests, and goals" – in a nutshell, can it not also represent a community as an empty shell, namely, in such

cases where the “special loyalty or intimacy” is conspicuously absent within the family unit – and where this absence reflects a community short of “a feeling of fellowship with others” because it is haunted by a dearth of “common attitudes, interests and goals”?

Not only are questions like these value-laden, but as they involve evaluation of non-literary matters within literary (con)texts, they raise concerns of the kind the literary theoretician Barbara Herrnstein Smith has labeled *Contingencies of Value* in her book with this title (1988). For practical reasons, I abstain from engaging this hornet’s nest head on as I center my discussion of the family’s role in Andersen’s corpus on the four tales in which the word family appears in the title: (1) “Nabofamilierne” [The Neighboring Families] (1847), (2) “Den lykkelige Familie” [The Happy Family] (1848), (3) “Høns-Grethes Familie” [Chicken Grethe’s Family] (1869), and (4) “Hvad hele Familien sagde” [What the Whole Family Said] (1872).ⁱⁱ That said, as much as my take on the value aspects will be implicit for now, I will briefly address them in my conclusion.

Whereas “The Neighboring Families” replies ambiguously to the question posed in my title, the family in “The Happy Family” is obviously a delusional community in a nutshell. By comparison, “Chicken Grethe’s Family” shows the noted Marie Grubbe family gradually *becoming* an empty shell. Its last remaining member, Chicken Grethe, dies humbly unaware of her reputed family history, and only her true “family” of animals, domestic and wild, knows about it and how to tell it – if only to “us” and not to her. A shared community of non-human beings and perceptive readers thus becomes the last resort for (memory of) any human life in “Chicken-Grethe’s Family.” In “What the Whole Family Said,” meanwhile, synthesis and harmony reign supreme as a whole(some) family shares an open-minded view of the world as one lovely fairy tale. Girl and boys, young people and old Godfather, this and that family branch – all respond to a complex world with optimism and trust in social progress. Family in “What the Whole Family Said” is the human community in a nutshell, both really and ideally – and *seemingly* as far from an empty shell as *apparently* close to one.

Taken as a whole, the four texts, spanning a central quarter of the nineteenth century, reveal how the topoi of family and community – each a major signifier of collective sameness versus otherness – typically reinforce and problematize each other within Andersen’s oeuvre. As this “dialectic” unfolds its variations over time, it allows us to reflect on the boundaries between family and community past and present, be it as sociocultural domains or aesthetic tropes.

“The Neighboring Families”

In “The Neighboring Families,” a tale about species of (mostly common) birds interacting with each other and with roses and humans in their environment, the question of community takes on an inter- as well as an intra-cultural dimension. Do the different families of plants and birds function as communities inwardly, and do they reach out to one another to form a larger community? Simply put, the answer in both instances is no – with the family of roses as a stellar exception. Typically, while sparrows consider the roses to be thick-headed, boring neighbors, the roses do not reciprocate in kind; to them, the birds are a source of joy.

Unlike the roses and rare birds like nightingales, the sparrows believe they understand everything – except for beauty, the only thing truly worth understanding – whereas the dumb roses (according to the narrator’s subtle account of the sparrows’ view) are for sensuous pleasures only. So, besides exaggerating their own gift for wisdom, the sparrows ignore every other faculty, most notably the intuition and feeling that connect the roses to beauty. To these bland and presumptuous little birds, beauty is nothing, and the roses, who symbolize it perfectly, but also self-effacingly, ironically seem to concur in the verdict. When they hear the nightingale’s beautiful song, they cannot believe it is about them – the roses – and not about the singer itself, either because they are too unselfish to imagine otherwise or simply so accustomed to selfishness around them that songs of beauty must be meant for the singer alone.

The sparrows, meanwhile, are selfish to the point of self-annihilation. They dream of embellishing their greyness with feathers stolen from peacocks, and when mother sparrow gets dressed up by an old farmhand to look like a golden bird, mutually assured destruction is exactly the destiny that befalls her, as she is picked to death by fellow birds of an even greyer feather. And while she is offered a last respite in the shelter of the generous rosebush (whom she earlier despised), such generosity can save neither her day nor her legacy. As for the latter, selfishness and division soon possess her bereaved descendants, whose own futures are cut short by a fire back in their ancestral home – which only the rosebush outside and the humans inside the house survive. To add insult to injury, when siblings of a young male sparrow killed in this fire pay a return visit to the burnt-down place, they smugly credit his misfortune to his privileged inheritance – he was too full of himself – all the while blaming the roses for not mourning him.

But not only sparrows deride genuine community spirit; so do pigeons, a squabbling, peer pressured bunch, slightly condescending of the sparrows, who tellingly bang their heads into a

beautiful painting of nature. While beauty may be especially wasted on a sparrow, both sparrows and pigeons make for poor communities, whether internally or in relation to other species. One sparrow does seem to escape this downward spiral and make it to Copenhagen, even to a rosebush in the courtyard of Thorvaldsen's Museum, where the bird is recognized by its own kind. But beauty remains out of its reach, and when the rosebush, now celebrated by all and sundry, proves to be the one from the scorched home, it just adds to the sparrow's jealousy. While the snails we shall soon meet in "The Happy Family" rejoice in being at the center of *their* world, the sparrows in "The Neighboring Families" resent the roses being at the center of Thorvaldsen's museum. To these selfish little birds, the fine-smelling flowers are nothing but a beggar set on horseback seen riding off to the devil.

It is beyond doubt that community in this tale is disparaged, by the sparrows in particular and by their bloated narrowmindedness in general, witness their final utterance about the roses: "Twit!" said the sparrows. 'Yes, they are our old neighbors. We remember them from the duckpond! Twit! How they have been honored! But then some people are while they're asleep. And what there is so wonderful in a red lump like that, I don't know! Ah, there's a withered leaf, for that I can see!'" Yet the beauty they discount from the outset reigns supreme at the story's end, rejuvenating the symbolic site of Thorvaldsen's grave in particular – and in perpetuity. As the real source of community spirit, beauty's rosy scent is the unifying force that ultimately envelops this tale of strife and conflict. Immediately following the disgruntled verdict just cited, the narrative's finish line reads: "So they pecked at the leaf until it fell off, but it only made the rose tree look fresher and greener. And the roses bloomed fragrantly in the sunshine on the grave of Thorvaldsen, with whose immortal name their beauty thus became linked."ⁱⁱⁱ

To clarify this outcome, we should bear in mind that families, like the birds and plants in the tale under scrutiny, can mean relatives as well as others. Precisely in the mid-nineteenth century, when "The Neighboring Families" was written, a longstanding identity between family and household finally yielded to a marked influence of kinship on family definitions. Individualism being on the rise, even the term house gives way to the more intimate home; as the translator and family scholar Beatrice Gottlieb puts it, "the values and feelings associated with home have come to dominate the way people think about kinship" (Gottlieb, 1993, p. 250). The effects of this enhancement of personal freedom is debatable, however. Some may have come to celebrate their kinship relations more deeply, while others may have felt free to seek equally close contacts

outside their circles of kin. In Gottlieb's words: "Alongside a strong reliance on kin went a reliance on other kinds of networks, whose functions overlapped those of kinship networks, as they do today" (Gottlieb, 1993, pp. 189 f.).

One way or another, the "idea that a family is people who know each other well and have deep feelings about each other" was taking root in the century of Andersen to the extent that it has become "such a cliché today it may be hard to believe that it was rarely expressed in earlier times" (Gottlieb, 1993, p. 250). A formulation worth pondering, as the word "cliché" suggests a self-evident truth – but also one that may be too good to be true and thus one of those shadow effects Andersen relishes in probing.

As for Gottlieb's point about family bonding, the connections within the groups of sparrows, pigeons, and roses, respectively, as well as between members of one such group and another, clearly qualify as familial ties. Yet few of these ties have the strength of family bonds. In fact, family dysfunction reigns the day, and Gottlieb's lingo highlights *how* the family standard gets shortchanged. Instead of bonding with *the other*, Andersen's animal subjects self-congratulate and litigate old grudges as their feathered emotions turn sour and all individuality gets crushed by a crowd mentality that could be taken right out of Søren Kierkegaard's playbook. In *Works of Love*, for instance, Kierkegaard "aims to correct the modern loss of authenticity due to a collectivized 'crowd' existence, but so as to create a communal existential ontology through which one learns 'all over again the most important thing, to understand oneself in one's longing for community'" (Berry, 1992, p. 206). This Dane was "not an impossible 'individualist' but a profound visionary of the actualities and potentialities of human community" (Bellinger, 1992, p. 229).

These are insights Andersen's neighboring families sorely lack. Instead of embracing the roses' beauty and generosity as a source of inspiration to realize themselves in the company of family members (broadly speaking), the tale's birds turn the modern family into an empty shell, in fact, leaving us with an image of the family in a nutshell they themselves have prevented from coming into being. Call this a dubious blessing for the reader to behold, or perhaps a scenic route to a sinkhole. While it certainly shows a promise that is worth fulfilling, the actual fulfilment appears unfit for this world: family as both the epitome and deconstruction of community.

"The Happy Family"

Ambiguities indeed, but are they lingering? As alluded to earlier, the snails in “The Happy Family” were certain that the manor and the burdocks around it, in whose leaves they lived, were all put in place for them so they could be properly fed, then cooked, and ultimately eaten off silver plates. Keeping up appearances – at all costs – seems to be all that matters to this family, especially now, when most of them are dead and the burdocks have spread like a forest. The lonelier and more doomed their life, the more inflated their outlook and claims to happiness; even as their son, an adopted common snail, fails to grow, their imagination is unperturbed: “The old white snails knew they were by far the most important people in the world.”^{iv}

Yet while these are the laurels on which father snail is inclined to rest, mother snail is more ambitious – after all, the manor and the endgame on the silver plate beat the burdocks, and that’s the outcome she strives for. To that end she will have her youngster married, while father warns against the likely spouses: “Black snails without houses! Much too vulgar!”^v So, ants are sent out to look for better prospects for the white snails’ son, but the search team’s selfish opportunists see a chance to marry off their ant queen to the young male. The ambition of his mother goes further, however, and when mosquitos tell her of a little snail in a bush, she finds her a more promising match for her son – provided she will come to him, as his family possesses the whole burdock forest. Ultimately, a deal is struck and a wedding arranged. The old snails seem to have won the day as they die with the best of all worlds seemingly secured within their horizon.

That the prized silver dish eludes them – and continues to elude their offspring – only takes the family’s delusion to a new level. Apparently, the lordships – if not all humans – who would otherwise have delighted in consuming them, must have died off as well. But so what? The burdocks are thriving – entirely for the sake of the snails – and the tautological force of delusion has once again reinvented itself; it now reads that the snails “were very happy, and the whole family was happy, for so it was”!^{vi}

Also, once again, real community shows itself conspicuous by its absence in this Andersen tale, a fact which in no way prevents delusions from filling the vacuum with compelling simulacra. The transformative power of illusion is boundless and enables “The Happy Family” to produce the prototype of an *imagined community* in which happiness becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more relative the scope of the world in which we live, the more tempted we feel to populate it with our wildest fantasies. The last thing we want to do is taking reality for what it is. Such is the type of prioritizing that defines imagined communities for better *and* worse.^{vii}

As a story about a family dancing on the brink of extinction – and about family sentiments running idle on steroids – its contradictions do indeed have consequences beyond the borderlines directly being crossed, especially for the community at large. To gauge this impact more precisely, the American philosopher Michael Tilley’s discussion of certain kinds of individualism and community, subtitled “Kierkegaard’s Precarious Understanding of Self and Other” and involving the thoughts of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, seems a useful tool.

As in Nancy’s scenario, Andersen’s protagonists – his snails – having lost their original community in a big way, tend to compensate for their loss by exaggerating its import without realizing that exactly “the attempt to recover this original unity, has the effect of excluding the other and denying the inherent sociality of being” (Tilley, 2014, p. 91). Nancy, as Tilley reads him, goes on to argue that

all finite and temporal beings are essentially relational but they are also fundamentally unique. This relationality opens up the possibility of the experience of community; but community can never be grounded on common characteristics because of the unique way each singular being is constituted in his or her relation to others. (Tilley, 2014, p. 92)

It’s a point well taken in our context because it’s the point both taken by and lost on the snails in “The Happy Family.” What they envisage as a community at large is shaped like pie in the sky and unlikely to become a real community. If that were to occur, all snails would have to be singular beings uniquely “constituted in his or her relation to others,” which they are not. Thus, the Achilles’ heel of their communal aspiration is not that it lacks a “common vision, set of beliefs” (Tilley, 2014, p. 93), but what Nancy also points out – in some accordance with Kierkegaard – in Tilley’s rendition of his community profile, namely, that they “may be inherently social beings, but this idea does not entail that they practically live out this reality” (Tilley, 2014, p. 95). Indeed, they rather binge on their pie in the sky!

Since I have mentioned him in passing, let me finally draw on Kierkegaard to clarify Andersen’s outlook by showing how the former’s grappling with community throws the latter’s image of a “happy family” into non-communal relief. To avert Andersen’s inverted commas, Kierkegaard, on Tilley’s view, suggests a delicate balance in refuting, on the one hand, “a nostalgic return to earlier forms of life where the communal took priority over the individual,” while

suggesting, on the other hand, “an alternative that abandons the very idea that unity consists in a unifying idea” (Tilley, 2014, p. 102).

What is remarkably absent in the snails’ case is a free passage in either direction. They certainly dream of “a nostalgic return to earlier forms of life,” but as the term “nostalgic” makes clear, it’s a no brainer that this is a trajectory with no returns! At the same time, abandoning the idea of a “unifying idea” seems equally out of the question for the snails. And the fact that their highfalutin ambitions fall short of any idea only makes the intensity with which they pursue their flat-footed project augur a harshly humorous end. A community of selves concretely committed to one another, yet independent of all commonality, is both the high bar to which Kierkegaard aspires to rise and the one from which Andersen’s snails are in free fall.

“Chicken Grethe’s Family”

More than twenty years later, Andersen published “Chicken Grethe’s Family,” his story about Marie Grubbe and her controversial role in Danish history, an aspect of the tale that has been visited frequently and in English quite recently by Paul Binding, British critic and expert in Scandinavian literature, at the end of his book *Hans Christian Andersen: European Witness* (2014), where readers will find a reliable account of the fictional treatment and historical evidence offered not only by Andersen in his tale but by J.P. Jacobsen in his later novel (while no mention is given of Steen Steensen Blicher’s literary precursor of both narratives) (Binding, 2014, p. 390-399). Rather than rehearsing these con-textual de-facto aspects of Andersen’s story line, my aim will be to show how the decline of Marie Grubbe’s family tree, down to its last branch, historically speaking, goes hand in hand with its resurrection in memory, culturally, aesthetically, and existentially speaking.

To begin, Grethe resides in a henhouse where Marie Grubbe’s childhood manor formerly stood, and where the current lady of the manor proudly showcases Grethe’s neat little room. Unlike her good-hearted and flower-growing mother, Marie Grubbe was a hard-nosed and deer-hunting tomboy, much in the vein of her father. As a child, she rebuts the flirtations of the king’s half-brother, and though she later marries him, their union proves short-lived. Back in her father’s house, harmony continues to elude her, which the story concludes from reports (culled from the village vicar’s diary) of despair among the manor’s wild birds, whose eggs had earlier fallen prey to Marie’s childhood adventures.

Where Chicken Grethe is now down, Marie was once up, with her hunting sprees as the single distraction from loneliness and boredom – until Palle Dyre, an unrestrained noble braggart, enters her vacuum and marries her. Then her patience runs out once again, and she starts restlessly crisscrossing the land, causing as much discord among white beach birds as she had caused among tree-dwelling black ones earlier. Eventually she is rescued by a simple ferryman and future criminal, whom she marries all the same and insists has been her spouse for good rather than ill. This verdict – in favor of lowlifes and their plight – is imparted to a young Ludvig Holberg, future Nordic giant of universal reason but temporarily on the run from Copenhagen’s 1711 plague and soon to become a room and boarder for months at Marie’s remote ferry location on the island of Falster.

While Holberg’s espousal of enlightenment and progress leaves Marie untouched, her story sticks with him and from here becomes a source of inspiration – for Blicher, Andersen, and Jacobsen. Surrounded by the screaming black birds, she simply takes ownership of her brutal destiny, of which her last marriage – the one below her level – was the highpoint, while its two high-flown precursors were the opposite. A few years later, she dies, with some black birds overflying her corpse in silence and others noisily carrying the word of her demise back to her Jutland homeland. In each their way, the two flocks mark the end of Marie’s noble past.

Where the Grubbe family ruled their manor and its wild bird environs for so long sits now Chicken Grethe surrounded by domesticated pigeons, turkeys, and ducks. Not an entirely different story, for Grethe turns out to be Marie’s grandchild, but still a story and not a historical narrative, as no historian (such as the clerk whom Holberg, the historian, drew upon) could vouch for its veracity. Nor can Grethe herself. Only an old crow, of the kind Andersen would turn into a mouthpiece for his narrator, claims to know that Grethe, settled among her homey birds, is indeed noble Marie’s last descendent. And when she and her family tree die in peace accordingly, only this old crow will know of her grave – if the bird itself has not died, that is!

What we *know* thus hinges on a story, a narrative as instinctively alert to the signs of life as its cast of wild – and narrating – birds. This is Andersen’s image of community: an assembly of mouthpieces creatively interconnecting humans (and their affairs), where the humans themselves (the old Erik Grubbe or his daughter Marie in her different marriages, say) failed to make connections – or where the ones they did make were effaced in real time. Narrative time is different

– and lasting – as the narrative gleans what was lost in narrated time. Chicken Grethe’s *told* family of animals is the one that endures, not Marie’s record of humans that may have been both higher-up and more real but were only told *about*!

As for its present subject, of whom the narrative repeatedly reminds us, Grethe’s home is at the place where grandma Marie had become homeless. “[W]here the old castle had stood” and “where the wild birds croaked” is now where her grandchild sits “among her tame fowls, known by them and on friendly terms with them.” This is *community* in its fundamental, consummated sense: “Chicken Grethe had nothing more to wish for. She was happy to die and old enough to die.”^{viii}

This link between Marie and Grethe is Andersen’s pivotal creation. As a storyline it could not *in itself* stand the test of time, but as it leads to historical building blocks to be connected in narrative time, it provides the stuff creativity needs to succeed on its own. Thus, its *narrative time* pivots on a Marie it has extracted from its *narrated time*. Only barely and roughly did Marie Grubbe make it in life, but in Andersen’s narrative perspective precisely these qualities were indispensable for a durable completion to occur – still not one of this world, but of the world of imagination, and all the more a world meant to *prove* itself to be real.

So, if the proof is in the pudding, the pudding in “Chicken Grethe’s Family” is Marie Grubbe’s human history told as a story by crows with non-human voices. Johan de Mylius puts it this way:

The story’s memory, its interconnection and thereby its meaning is [not lost but] to be found within a strata of beings that cannot utter anything but [various crow words in Danish and Swedish rendition, including the word for “grave, grave”]. Yet it is one of these beings that gets elevated to the position of real narrator. (de Mylius, 2005, pp. 290-91)

And further:

The story about Chicken Grethe only becomes a story by appearing to the reader as a weaving, a pattern. And it is the crows who as a leitmotif throughout the text interconnect its parts and produce the meaning which then becomes visible to the reader but remains invisible to the actors within the story – whether or not these are themselves storytellers or simply actors. (de Mylius, 2005, p. 291)

As a consequence, these storytelling birds take on a larger-than-life dimension, like the “chorus” in classical antiquity, or the Erinyes in Greek mythology. As de Mylius concludes about the story: “Their screams become a refrain which emanates from History and enters Andersen’s story, from where it proceeds into our history, to which it adds rhythm, color, and sound” (de Mylius, 2005, p. 296).^{ix}

This need to step out of the human to tell a human story that is based on history has particular bearing on Andersen’s portrayal of family and community. de Mylius only intimates as much when he says of “Chicken Grethe’s Family” that (a) what was once “the manor house has become a henhouse, and that is the wild birds’ triumph,” and that (b) the central role of young Marie Grubbe’s “pride, wildness, and obstinance” are essential “expressions of the old manor house culture, the culture of nobility” (de Mylius, 2005, p. 295). Yet both claims, I believe, conform with – and confirm – the tenor of my own discussion.

Any human family and community worth its salt is embedded in nature and the larger world. When that order is broken, no matter how socially or personally powerful the violator, revenge and destruction are in store for him or her, and a family life in a nutshell – as well as any community shaped in its image – ends up an empty shell. Both the community of wild birds in distress after Marie’s infringements and the community of quiet poultry surrounding Chicken Grethe reflect the station of these humans. The screaming wild birds are the excluded others on whom the manorial hierarchy has been preying: the repressed return to tell the history of repression and the story of the repressor. A vital flip side of a family and community defaulted behind a noble façade.

Fast forward to Grethe in her placid henhouse. No harm done here, so no destruction in return. No repression to be avenged, so no dire repercussions to follow. Instead of brutal disruption: fading away, forgetfulness, and ignorance. But no vitality either. This is how Marie and Grethe personify two different family and community fates as two forms of empty nutshells: one vividly stripped of its core, the other slowly atrophying.

“What the Whole Family Said” – and What These Tales as a Whole Said About Family
“[L]ife is the most wonderful adventure,”^x proclaims Godfather in “What the Whole Family Said,” and that no matter who experiences it or when: little Marie on her birthday, or her big brothers

with their appetite for discovery and adventure. Meanwhile, a different branch of the same family, living upstairs, consists entirely of well-to-do grown-ups, who, unsurprisingly, share in Godfather's optimistic outlook and wide view of the whole world. Then there are the parents, who are more seasoned and conscious of life's flipside – but who, too, believe in Godfather's dictum. Finally, all the way up in the attic and a bit closer to God himself dwells *Godfather* himself, old and widely traveled, with great memories from every part of the world (except from the unglamorous reality right outdoors!). Even the sparks in his fireplace hold good memories for Godfather – and for little Marie, too. And his Bible tells of all that has happened and will happen, tailwind and headwind, grace and comfort, given by God in eternity.

Around this promise, and its godlike messenger, we see an extended family united unconditionally and trustfully, perhaps indicating how Andersen at the end of his life wanted to strike his most resounding communal chord, whether or not the sound might ring as hollow as it rings hallow. Godfather's final words seem to suggest as much: "The older one grows, the clearer one sees, in both prosperity and misfortune, that our Lord always is with us and that life is the most beautiful of all fairy tales, and this He alone can give us – and so it will be into eternity."^{xi}

Taken as a whole, these four texts, penned by Andersen over twenty-five years, reveal how his family and community topoi negotiate collective sameness and otherness – and how these opposites both reinforce and problematize each other. As I claimed above, the ins and outs of this narrative interplay invite reflections on both family and community boundaries in both real time and aesthetic terms, so let me begin my conclusion with one such reflection.

The recent centennial of the Bolshevik Revolution alerted me to a topical text that raises the question of family vis-à-vis community in a communist context. The study quotes an old ideologue saying, "the family of a Communist must be a prototype of a small Communist cell ... a collectivity of comrades in which *one lives in the family the same way as outside the family.*" I mention this particular equating of community with family because of its proven failure.^{xii} A reviewer of the study in question even suggests that the revolutionaries' ultimate Achilles' heel was their inability to enforce this very equation, or to put their political money where their ideological mouths were.^{xiii}

Fast backward, as it were, to Andersen past and present. Family and community indisputably *overlap* in his tales. But the fact that attempts elsewhere in the world to *equate* the

same two units may have derailed an entire revolution, I find quite consonant with his insights as well. Whether one ignores the overlap or, conversely, confuses it with an equation, one's gesture makes the family-community train run idle (socio-culturally speaking), if loudly (aesthetically speaking). The challenge Andersen passes on to his reader is instead to detect a balance between these extremes, a "dialectical" point of gravity at which both family and community are seen revealing their limitations as well as their potential for productive intersections. Put differently – somewhat in terms of Herrnstein Smith's title concept and its meaning – while both family and community are generally defined by certain intrinsic values, in Andersen's four tales they are further distinguished by an exchange value in the sense that the intrinsic value of each domain is partly contingent upon the intrinsic value of the other, and vice versa.

A precarious interpretational site features this interplay. For instance, as difference within one domain is negotiated in light of its counterpart within the other, the outcome may be enriching but also the opposite. As for the former, a broad spectrum of community differences may gain from contact with the "special loyalty and intimacy" characteristic of a family unit, which in turn may find its social enclosure inspired to more open-mindedness by a functioning community fellowship; in either case the mutual contingency is a nutshell effect. As for the opposite of an enriching outcome, a community may fall prey to the lures of a self-sufficient family unit, which in turn may find its intrinsic values conveniently relaxed by a free-floating type of community life; in such cases their mutual contingency has turned both the family and the community into empty shells. It is Andersen's achievement, in his best tales, to have it both ways, or to have the nutshell and the empty shell shed light – and shadow – on each other!

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ⁱ These word definitions are all standard google fare; a typical recent exchange in the same currency is Mr. Crummles' praise in the 2002 *Nicholas Nickleby* movie of those who realize that "family need not be defined merely as those with whom we share blood, but as those for whom we would give our blood."

ⁱⁱ (1) and (2) are cited from Andersen, *Samlede Eventyr og Historier*, vol. I, 364-73 and 403-06, respectively, while (3) and (4) are cited from Andersen, *Samlede Eventyr og Historier*, vol III, 300-313 and 356-59, respectively.

Unless otherwise indicated, all four tales are cited in English from the online version of *The Complete Andersen*, translated by Jean Hersholt.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hersholt's translation of Andersen, *Samlede Eventyr og Historier*, vol. I, 373: "'Pip!' sagde Spurvene, 'jo det er de gamle Naboer! Deres Herkomst fra Gadekjæret huske vi! pip! Hvor de ere komne til Ære! Somme komme da ogsaa sovende til det. Og hvad Rart der er ved saadan en rød Klat, veed jeg ikke! – Og der sidder da et vissent Blad, for det kan jeg se!' [...] Og saa nippede de i det, saa at Bladet faldt af, og friskere og grønnere stod Træet, og Roserne duftede i Solskinnet paa Thorvaldsens Grav, til hvis udødelige Navn deres Skjønhed sluttede sig."

^{iv} Hersholt's translation of Andersen, *Samlede Eventyr og Historier*, vol. I, 404: "De gamle, hvide snegle vare de fornemste i Verden, vidste de."

^v Hersholt's translation of Andersen, *Samlede Eventyr og Historier*, vol. I, 405: "sorte Snegle uden Hus, men det er saa simpelt og de have Indbildninger."

^{vi} My translation of "var meget lykkelige, og hele Familien var lykkelig, thi den var det" (Andersen, 1962, p. 406).

^{vii} Certainly, the history of ideas immediately preceding Andersen's era (roughly the revolutionary age of the 18th century) offers ideological counterpoints to his fictional display of the family as a site of illusionary community imaging. Edmund Burke, for one, resorts to the family, delusional or otherwise, as indispensable to his prescription for defending civil society against the powerful state and its "bureaucratic rationality": "Such a defence is found in the hierarchical structure and filiative possibilities of the family. Because he believes the family to be both a natural and social form, it provides the site where nature and society meet" (During, 1990, p. 146). Would Andersen disagree? Or is his fairy tale "happy family's" deluded imagination of community rather caused by its members facing extinction – in which case the tale's scenario may not be a warning against the family as a delusional entity as such, but against the delusional (but artistically inviting) consequences of borderlining – putting even (or especially) the most valuable "natural and social form[s]" at risk.

^{viii} Hersholt's translation of these lines, respectively, from Andersen, *Samlede Eventyr og Historier*, vol. III, 313: "hvor den gamle Gaard havde staaet, hvor de sorte fugle skreg," ... "mellem de tamme fugle, kjendt af dem og kjendt med dem." ... "Hønse-Grethe havde ikke mere at ønske, hun var glad til at døe, gammel til at døe."

^{ix} See also de Mylius, *Forvandlingens pris – H.C. Andersen og hans eventyr*, 292, 293, and 295. Translations of quotes from this volume are mine.

^x Hersholt's translation of Andersen, *Samlede Eventyr og Historier*, vol. III, 356 f.: "Livet er det deiligste Eventyr."

^{xi} Hersholt's translation of Andersen, *Samlede Eventyr og Historier*, vol. III, 358: "'Jo ældre man bliver, desbedre seer man i Modgang og Medgang, at Vor Herre altid er med, at Livet er det deiligste Eventyr, og det kan kun han give os, og det varer ved ind i Evighed!'"

^{xii} As such it perfectly fits the bill of the Bolshevik state as one that "constituted a quintessential Enlightenment utopia," according to Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, 364.

^{xiii} The book under review is Yuri Slezkine's *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (2017), and the review from which I quote is Nathans, "Bolshevism's New Believers," 18-21. Going back to note 1, I find the semblance between the words of the character in the Dickens movie and those just cited rather striking.