

**Hans Christian Andersen's Media Ecology:
'The Old Church Bell' in *Folkekalender for Danmark* (1862)**

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Abstract

This paper is part of a larger project that investigates the interdependence of Andersen's authorship and print culture. The project is preoccupied with the relationship between Andersen and the periodical press, which became a popular medium of visually enhanced, dialogic texts in the nineteenth century. From its first issue in 1852 to 1872, Andersen had 21 tales published in the yearly *Folkekalender for Danmark*. 'The Old Church Bell' appeared in *Folkekalender* in 1862 but was originally published in German translation as part of the commemorative *Schiller-Album* (1860). The paper will explore how the 'ecologies and economies' of the tale's changing media networks affect its reading. It will be argued that changing national-political and publishing contexts, from one foregrounding commemoration to one marked by ephemerality, exemplify how Andersen appropriated material aspects of periodicals, and how his authorial practices sought to counter or playfully give poetic shape to the disenchantments of modernity.

Folkekalender for Danmark, the peoples' calendar for Denmark, was borne out of crisis. As the publishers state in the Preface to the first issue of 1852, published towards the end of the previous year, they have carefully considered the challenges of producing "et billigt illustreret folkeblad" (a cheap illustrated magazine for the people). More than any other type of publication, they state, this kind is in dire need of supportive readers, as the Danish readership is small compared to other nations.

The publishers, however, not merely appeal for financial support to continue a long but waning tradition of calendars or almanacs – the moment is ripe, they insist, as "Our nation for three years has had to fight for its independence" ["Vort Fædreland har nemlig i 3 aar maatte kæmpe for sin Selvstændighed"] – as, they write, "they have tried to rob our language of its rights". Recalling the recent end to the First Schleswig War, or Three-Year War, from 1848 to 1851, the confrontation between Schleswig-Holstein and the German Confederation on one side and an emerging democratic and nationalist Denmark set on keeping Schleswig part of the Danish state on the other, the calendar seeks to enlist potential readers in the national-liberal cause, to form a community that also includes the featured authors, who, they claim, vigorously desire to lay claim to Danish independence by offering their texts to this publication. The publishers express the hope that "the national character" of this small publication, "reflected in its treatment of national topics and its popular renditions of objects of common interest, will justify its publication and earn its right to carry the title: Peoples Calendar for Denmark".

The calendar is an explicit and self-conscious example of Benedict Anderson's argument that newspaper, print technologies and communication infrastructures were instrumental in shaping imagined national communities in Europe in the nineteenth century; here by enlisting readers and authors alike in a common cause to assert linguistic and national independence in a state of perceived persistent national crisis arising from the recent war, its political context and aftermath.

In the nineteenth century as well, popular causes could be boosted by enlisting celebrities. It was, therefore, a real scoop for the publishers that they succeeded in enlisting Hans Christian Andersen among their contributing authors; his world-famous fairy tales and author persona at mid-century were already the pride of the nation – it was also well-known that despite his deep affection for German culture and his friendships with numerous German nobilities and artists, he had letters published in foreign newspapers calling for sympathy with the Danish cause and had produced patriotic poems and songs. It might still be surprising to us that Andersen eventually contributed 29 original texts, including poems, songs, travel descriptions from Skagen and Silkeborg, portraits of notabilities and 22 tales and stories to *Folkebladet*.

While in the years 1835 to 1872 Andersen published no less than 25 small books of tales and stories (100 of his tales were first printed in such books) 60, particularly later tales, were first published in newspapers, magazines, calendars and other kinds of periodicals. Attending to the media networks, their economies and visual-textual ecologies, through which a large share of Andersen's tales and stories were disseminated to contemporary readers provides us, I believe, with new perspectives on the tales themselves, but also on Andersen's authorship more generally, how he became, against all odds, one of the most successful European writers of the century. While we are probably most used to reading Andersen in various kinds of Collections that in different ways monumentalise and de-contextualise his works, reading Andersen in nineteenth-century periodicals offers a different experience. We should consider the expressed purpose of the periodical publication, of course, but also its motley assemblage of texts and images.

In the first issue of *Folkekalender for Danmark*, we get the standard calendar with a helpful list of holidays, amusing and thought-provoking aphorisms, witticisms and poems provided for each month of the year; then a genealogy of the Danish Royal family, a list of foreign Royals including all the German Dukes, members of Statsraadet (the government), and foreign ambassadors in Denmark – it is a cornucopia of diverse reading materials and visual

attention-grabbers. We read a poem praising Prince Christian of Glücksburgh followed by his xylographic portrait, printed in such a way that it could be torn out and hung on the wall at home. It is notable that the Prince is not depicted in military or Royal regalia but instead dressed as one of the new bourgeois elite. With all the formalities noted, and following the year-book's top story, a description of the Danish Constitution of 1849 and a (not very good) woodcut of Folketingssalen, we find Andersen's tale "Der er Forskjel" [There is difference].

Further in, his patriotic poem "Fest-Sang til Landsoldaten" and his tale "Verdens Dejligste Rose" can be read side by side with stories from the battlefield, an article about the history of lighthouses, the lavishly illustrated story of Erik and Abel, the history of the manor house Gammel Estrup, a translated tale by Dickens, an article about Danish marine Vessels, Grundtvig's poem "Den Tapre Landsoldat" with an illustration of Bissen's famous sculpture naturally found its way into *Folkebladet*, as well as an article about new and improved harnesses for horses and tools for agriculture. There seems to be something for almost everyone, and surely Andersen's tales and patriotic song were meant to last the readers and their families the entire year, to be returned to, read or sung out aloud.

My interest in Andersen and *Folkebladet* in my paper today is part of a larger book project concerned with the interdependence of Andersen and the nineteenth-century periodical press. Here I pursue the argument that contrary to still prevalent conceptions of Andersen as exclusively a writer of fairy tales for children, whose timeless stories grew out of a rich oral folk tradition or his own quaint naïveté, his authorship appropriated and was conditioned by a great variety of contemporary print, visual, and mixed media. I argue that Andersen's success as a writer in the nineteenth century was to a significant degree due to his ability to make use of and respond imaginatively to the interests and daily lives of a growing mass-reading public and the needs and possibilities of an expanding and diversifying ecosystem of periodical print available in Denmark and from abroad.

In my project, I consider the expanding international periodical press as a central medium for understanding the evolution of Andersen as a modern, cosmopolitan writer. I trace this development from his early 'periodical poems' (of which the widely reprinted and illustrated 'The Dying Child' from 1827 is a central example) to his 'periodical tales' (tales that were written for and printed in, in the style of or referring to periodicals) such as 'The Little Match Girl' (1846), 'The Drop of Water' (1847), 'A Thousand Years from Now' (1852), 'The

Wood Nymph' (1868), 'Godfather's Picture Book' (1868) and 'The Great Sea Serpent' (1871). I place Andersen's periodical authorship in relation to his visual collage technique preserved in the private picture books he made as gifts to the children of friends and benefactors made from the scraps of nineteenth-century periodicals and other visual media. It is a central argument of this study that Andersen's mature literary style was conditioned by the way he used the visual and textual materials of illustrated periodicals in such private, dialogic and intermedial book productions.

In addition to providing an infrastructure for the stylistic development and material dissemination of Andersen's works throughout his career, I am also investigating how Andersen's self-fashioned author myth was disseminated through the press at home and abroad, how he used the press to promote national causes (as in relation to the First Schleswig War), and how he used the periodical press to fashion himself as a journalist of modernity, as when he visits the Universal Exposition in Paris through the tale of 'The Wood Nymph'.

Returning to Andersen's more than 20 years relationship with *Folkekalender for Danmark* we should consider if it makes any difference to us if we read Andersen's tales through or dependent upon, as it were, this medium's media ecology and economy – and here I am being quite liberal with the usage of those terms. Evidently, periodicals offered a revenue stream for the author, the first issue of *Folkebladet* quickly sold out its print run of 4000 copies, and it is also clear that Andersen didn't shy away from aligning himself with the dominant national-liberal spirit of the time by producing a song in celebration of the common soldier and tales such as "Der er Forskel" and "Verdens Dejligste Rose", which animate the flora of fashionable Biedermeier gardens. Gardening was a frequent topic for later calendars, and, as in Andersen's tale, careful aesthetic curation of the natural world has here as much to do with self-cultivation.

In the case of "Der er Forskjel", it is significant that the tale situates the calendar reader in a semi-rural, Spring time, it is May, in a recognisable Danish topography with fields, meadows, and lindens. In the tale, spring is given a voice from inside a small apple tree. A countess stops her carriage in admiration of the tree, snaps off a branch ready to bloom, and brings it to her manor house where it takes centre stage between the other cut flowers from her garden. The branch is haughty, which, the reader is reminded, is a common human folly, "det er menneskeligt". The proud apple branch insists on the necessary

difference between plant species which, it is implied, is similar to human differences in social class. From its elevated position of distinction and difference, the apple branch finds sympathy with the lowest species of flora, singling out “fandens mælkebøtte”, the devil’s dandelion. The sun, on the other hand, will have none of it and kisses all the plants equally, the poor as well as the rich. The apple branch, we are told, had never thought about Our Lords love for all things, had never thought about all the beautiful things that might appear hidden but should never be forgotten – but, we are reminded, that was also very human!

Innocent children arrive in the field and are on the contrary thrilled with “fandens mælebøtter”, which they play with and turn into wreaths – children and common folk, it is suggested, know their hidden worth. They blow at the seeds and if they clear them all they will get new clothes before the year is over, as their grandmother said. Despite its name and humble appearance, the dandelion is a prophet, as the sun explains, “Do you not see its beauty, its power”. The apple branch retorts that this is only for children, but an old woman is then seen to uproot the plant to make coffee from it and sell to the Chemist as a medicinal herb. We then see the countess arriving with a flower sheltered carefully between leaves and cared for like no other plant in the manor house. This, of course, turns out to be “fandens mælkebøtte”; and the moral is clear. While belonging to different species and classes, they are still both children of the kingdom of beauty and, we are told, the countess will proceed to paint a still life of the apple branch and the dandelion together – those noble at heart can become like children and despite learned distinctions see things for their inherent worth.

If not the best of Andersen’s tales, it was by then already an Andersen classic. It is a tale fit for its medium, for family consumption, to be picked up over the year and read aloud. Its temporality and topography fit the “inexpensive illustrated” calendar with its desire to put “common objects” in front of the reader in text and, sometimes, merely suggested images; common objects now elevated to new significance in words and images. The tale’s message about the equality of all God’s beings, social dynamics and mobility, and suggestive self-cultivation through the avatar of an apple branch fitted the national-liberal mindset of a growing urban class of readers and a rural class with social, political and industrial aspirations – *Folkebladet*’s and Andersen’s key audiences. While the text does not change substantially when later included by Andersen in story collections, I believe that Andersen wrote this tale with its particular medium and potential readership in mind; he recycled already used tropes, characters, styles and sentiments now packaged with a new purpose, in new company, between textual and visual scraps from a nation bend on reasserting its independence and self-consciousness.

If Andersen's "Der er Forskjel" expounded a sense of national harmony by placing social classes, species of local plants and knowledge within the same frame on a background of crisis and threat from an increasingly more powerful neighbour to the South, ten years later Andersen would turn away from a sentimental, provincial nationalism towards a, perhaps, equally sentimental cosmopolitanism in his tale "Den gamle Kirkeklokke" ["The Old Church Bell"], which was printed in the 1862 issue of *Folkebladet*. Uniquely, the periodical publication of this tale is a recycling of a tale published a few months before in German translation, "Die alte Kirchenglocke" in a commemorative collection celebrating the centenary of the, by then, German national poet Friedrich Schiller. In addition, Andersen's "Schiller tale" is a further recycling or rewriting of Schiller's own most famous poem at the time "Das Lied von der Glocke" ["Song of the Bell"], which had not only been adapted for multiple dramatizations to musical settings, of which Andersen had seen at least two, but also widely parodied – in particular its minute description of the founding of a bell. Andersen's tale does not begin in a Danish garden in Spring but instead takes us into:

... the German country of Württemberg, where the beautiful acacia trees bloom beside the highways, and the apple and pear trees bend down in autumn under the weight of their ripe blessings, there lies the little town of Marbach. It belongs to the class of quite unimportant towns, but it is located in a beautiful spot near the Neckar, the river that flows swiftly past towns and green vineyards and old knights' castles, to join its waters with those of the proud Rhine.

This of course is the birthplace of Schiller, and Andersen's tale, his tribute to Schiller, traces his rise from birth, from "obscurity and poverty to fame and relative fortune, stressing the obstacles he encountered along the way" (Rowland). His life "is idealized as a sentimental lower-middle-class rags-to-riches story which leaves out no clichés," as Heinrich Detering formulates it. At Schiller's birth, the Bell in the Marbach church tower chimes, sending forth his mother's joy "over town and country", and Andersen uses the motif so that "Schiller's life runs parallel to the fate of the old Marbach church bell, which is first broken, demeaned and forgotten and then raised as the material of the memorial which is finally erected in honor of the poet" (Detering).

While Andersen's rather kitschy nativity scene of the birth of the German national poet clearly demonstrates a Romantic cult of the artist (Detering), the making of his monument

from the metal of the ruined and forgotten bell is imagined as an act of worlding that draws together artistic sensibilities across nations:

“Many years had passed since it fell from the tower; and now it was to be melted down, to become part of the casting of a great monument, a statue in honor of one of the German people’s great men. Now listen to how it all came about. Strange and beautiful things do happen in this world! Up in Denmark, on one of the green islands where the beech tree grows and there are many ancient viking graves, there once lived a very poor little boy who wore wooden shoes and used to carry the meals, wrapped up in an old piece of cloth, to his father who worked on the wharves, carving figureheads for ships. This poor child had become his country’s pride; he carved out of marble such wonderful things that they amazed the whole world, and to him the noble task was given to shape from clay a majestic and beautiful figure that would be cast in bronze ...”

Though not mentioned by name, Andersen is here, of course, referring to Thorvaldsen and his statue of Schiller, which Andersen had seen in Stuttgart in 1855 where it was erected in 1838, possibly as the first public monument to a writer in Germany (Leerssen), in an age that witnessed a surge of public monuments to artists. Just as Andersen recycles Schiller’s lied as material for his commemorative tale in honour of the poet, so, Andersen imagines, another world-famous Danish artist could have recycled the bell – the bell that first chimed in the poet’s heart – in casting a statue that would complement the poet’s work and make it chime not only across Germany but across borders as world literature proper.

Folkebladet’s printing of the Danish version of Andersen’s tale at the end of 1861, together with an illustration of the Stuttgart monument, further bridges “the gap between German and Danish cultures” (Detering), which is a central ambition of Andersen’s tale itself. As in the tale “Der er Forskel”, Andersen overcomes initial differences, here national ones between German and Danish cultures, by narrating a borderless, interdependent world of arts and letters. It is a world shaped by translations, recycled aesthetic experiences, where the old, the overlooked and demeaned are recycled into new visual and textual materials and forms that insist on Danish-German harmony and a world republic of print.