Imagining Gender in Nineteenth-Century Fairy Tales by Hans Christian Andersen and Richard Henry Stoddard

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Abstract
Fairy tales have often been controversial, and today much of the controversy appears to revolve around gender issues. With a focus on gendered appearances and relationships, this article examines Hans Christian Andersen's 'Tommelise' and 'The Snow-Queen' as well as *Adventures in Fairyland* (1853), a book of fairy tales written by one of Andersen's admirers and promoters in nineteenth-century USA, Richard Henry Stoddard. Depictions of female characters in these tales are varied, with protagonists not always adhering to the feminine beauty ideal. The portrayal of both girls and boys are sometimes influenced by the notion of the Romantic child, which seems to tone down gender differences in descriptions of characters. Some of Stoddard's fairy tales have a masculinist bias, but on the other hand his tales often go beyond the happily-ever-after ending. Indeed, a few of his fairy tales are remarkably explicit about adult erotic love, physical attraction, and sexual desire. So, when viewed through the lens of gender, both Andersen's and Stoddard's nineteenth-century literary fairy tales offer a twenty-first-century reader quite a few surprises and much food for thought and discussion.

Keywords: nineteenth-century fairy tales; gender; the Romantic child; Hans Christian Andersen; Richard Henry Stoddard

Literary fairy tales have created controversies throughout the history of Anglophone literature; over time, and sometimes at the same time, they have been used to promote both free imagination and didacticism as well as both norm-breaking behavior and social conventions. After an early beginning with 'fairy-tale elements in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1386–1400), in Spenser's *The Faerie Queen[e]* (1590–96), and, of course, in many of Shakespeare's plays such as *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's [Dream]*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Tempest*,' the genre did not find fertile ground to continue to develop in Puritan seventeenth-century England, which was hostile against what was regarded as frivolous entertainment (Zipes 2007: 12). What is also obvious about the early days of the literary fairy tale's development—in Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, among others—is that the genre was for adults and not a kind of children's literature. The Puritan distaste for the fairy tale did,

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nevertheless, persist and reverberate with the "fear" of fictional fairies in the early nineteenth century in both Great Britain and the USA, once the literary fairy tale—which flourished in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—was developing into crossover and children's fiction. Indeed, as Jack Zipes notes in *Victorian fairy tales: the revolt of the fairies and elves*, 'German, French, and Danish works of fantasy had first to pave the way for the resurgence of the literary fairy tale and the defense of the imagination in cultural products for children' in Great Britain (Zipes 1989: xvi–xvii). The same was true in the USA, where the tension between education or didacticism versus imagination in children's literature was if anything even more pronounced and long-lasting (Avery 1994: 68–69).

Fairy tales from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries are still part of children's literature today, but now they are often seen as proponents of stereotypical gender roles and behavior and as imposers of patriarchal gender patterns on unsuspecting child listeners and readers: 'Children's fairy tales, which emphasize such things as women's passivity and beauty, are indeed gendered scripts and serve to legitimize and support the dominant gender system' (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 2003: 711). For example, the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales, as Jeanette Sky (2002) observes, 'show a remarkable tendency to rationalise and naturalise male domination and patriarchy' (369). This tendency is apparent in the ending of many fairy tales, with its brief mention of a wedding and a "happily ever after" for the couple consisting of the beautiful passive woman and the powerful active man. Consequently, at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, many popular fairy tales from earlier centuries, such as 'Cinderella' and 'Sleeping beauty,' have been subject to feminist criticism and gendered rewritings (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 2003; Parsons 2004). There are, however, also examples of fairy tales being seen as liberating narratives; for instance, Leland G. Spencer (2014) reads Hans Christian Andersen's 'The little mermaid' as 'a story about a performance of transgender identity' (112). Spencer's reading indicates that it would make sense to examine Andersen's and other nineteenth-century writers' fairy tales more closely in terms of gender as some of these tales may go beyond expected stereotypes in their depiction of female and male characters as well as gendered relationships.

In this article, then, I investigate how gender is depicted in fairy tales from the mid-nineteenth century written by Andersen and one of his American admirers: Richard Henry Stoddard. As I will show, depictions of female characters in these tales are varied, if not always nuanced, while the portrayal of both girls and boys are sometimes influenced by the notion of the Romantic child,[1] which, as it seems in these tales, works to tone down gendered differences in how the characters' physical appearances are described. Some of Stoddard's fairy tales have a masculinist bias, but on the other hand his tales often go beyond the happily-ever-after ending. Unlike Andersen in his fairy tales, Stoddard does not shy away from adult erotic love, physical attraction, and sexual desire; indeed, a few of his fairy tales are remarkably explicit about this kind of love.

Hans Christian Andersen's 'Tommelise' and 'The Snow-Queen'

The variety of characters in Andersen's fairy tales is awe-inspiring; some are human, while others are supernatural beings, animals, plants, or more or less animated inanimate objects. Some are designated as being female, some male, and some neither: she, he, it. Despite memorable male main characters in fairy tales such as the 'The emperor's new clothes,' 'The steadfast tin soldier,' and 'The ugly duckling,' as well as the non-gendered eponymous fir tree, it may be fair to say that it is Andersen's female protagonists such as the princess on the pea, Tommelise (also known as Little Thumb or Thumbelina in some English translations), and the little mermaid that most readily capture and hold readers', listeners', and—in the case of illustrations and audiovisual adaptations—viewers'

[1] McGillis (2012) categorizes 'conceptions of "the child" from the seventeenth century' to the beginning of the nineteenth century as follows: 'the Puritan child as a "brand of hell" (James Janeway), the Enlightenment child of reason based on the association of the senses (John Locke), the natural child connected to the world (Jean-Jacques Rousseau), and the Romantic child that we see in Wordsworth's "Ode" [1807] who represents imagination and innocence' (102). In nineteenth-century USA, 'Calvinist conceptions of "infant depravity" and the inherent sinfulness of children, Lockean conceptions of childhood as a "blank slate" upon which parental authority must write, Romantic visions of the child as natural and as innocent as nature vied and mingled with each other' (Sánchez-Eppler 2005: xviii). For a critique of the myth of the Romantic child in connection with fairy tales, see Sky (2002).

imagination. The same is true for more sinister female characters such as the sea witch in 'The little mermaid' and the eponymous Snow Queen.[2]

Here I will examine two of Andersen's fairy tales that both include what may be described as a young female protagonist in motion, if not a questing *picara*, as well as a number of other female characters: 'Tommelise' (1835) and 'The Snow-Queen' ('Sneedronningen,' 1844).[3] The focus will be on characterization related to notions of gender and gendered behavior.

'Tommelise' is the story of a small female protagonist whose life, to a great extent, is formed by the desire and actions of others. Although it is not evident in the 1846 English translation of this fairy tale, it starts with a woman's desire for a daughter.[4] The woman obtains a barley-corn, which grows into a tulip: 'It was a real tulip, only one could see that in the middle of the flower there sat upon the pointal a little tiny girl, so delicate and lovely, and not half so big as my thumb, and, therefore, the woman called her Tommelise' (Andersen 1846: 34). The plot is driven

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[2] For comments on the gothic elements in Andersen's 'The little mermaid,' 'The Snow-Queen,' and 'The wild swans,' see Troy et al (2020: 32–36). See also Kastbjerg (2013: 179–234), for the gothic in Andersen's works.

[3] Due to the focus on the mid-nineteenth century in this article, the quotations are taken from two of the earliest nineteenth-century English translations of Andersen's fairy tales: *Wonderful stories for children* (1846) and *The shoes of fortune and other tales* (1847). For twenty-first-century translations that are closer to the original Danish texts, see Hans Christian Andersen's *Fairy tales* (2004) translated by Tiina Nunnally.

[4] The rewriting of the beginning of this fairy tale in the 1846 translation has gendered implications. In the Danish original, as well as in other English translations (1861; 2004), the story is about a single woman who visits an old witch because she wants a child. It is the witch who gives the woman the barley-corn in response to her desire for a child. In Howitt's 1846 translation, the woman is a peasant's wife, who gives bread and milk to a beggar woman who then unsolicited presents her with the barley-corn. In a discussion of Swedish twentieth-century illustrated versions of Andersen's fairy tale, Söderberg brings up the problems that Andersen's beginning causes for illustrators of children's books: a single woman who has a child, and who subsequently loses the child, never to be mentioned again. Three of the mid-twentieth-century versions that Söderberg discusses actually call her 'wife' (*hustru*, *fru*) and 'peasant's wife' (*bondhustru*) although no husband is present, with the possible implication that a woman who has a child has to have a husband (Söderberg 2016: 32).

by different creatures' desire to procure Tommelise for a wife for their son (a frog), themselves (a stag-beetle), and a male neighbor (a mole). She is abducted twice, first by the mother frog, and then, after having been saved by fishes, by the stag-beetle. After living alone in the woods during the summer, she is taken in by a female fieldmouse, who starts grooming her to be the wife of the fieldmouse's neighbor, a rich old mole. During the winter, Tommelise secretly nurses an apparently dead swallow back to life; the swallow leaves in the spring. When the wedding, which she dreads, approaches in the fall, the swallow comes back and takes her south to the 'warm countries' where she quickly says yes to marry the tiny king of the flowers and is given a new name: Maia. The fairy tale ends with the swallow flying back to Denmark and conveying the story to 'a poet, who can tell beautiful tales' (54)—which can be read as a cameo appearance of Andersen himself.

One important gendered aspect of Tommelise is the emphasizing of her feminine beauty throughout the fairy tale. It is indeed Tommelise's beauty that causes her to be abducted by the female frog in the first place: '"This would be a beautiful wife for my son!" said the frog' (Andersen 1846: 35). The frog places her on a water-lily leaf in order to keep her captive while the frog and her son prepare a house in the mud. It is also Tommelise's beauty that prompts the 'little fishes' to help her escape by gnawing off the stalk of the water-lily: they 'put up … their heads, to look at the little girl. The moment they saw her they thought her very pretty; and they felt sorry that she should have to go down in the mud and live with the frog' (37). When she sails down the river on the water-lily leaf, the birds sing 'What a pretty little maiden!' (37). It is because of her beauty that the stag-beetle snatches her off the water-lily leaf and puts her up in a tree: he 'said that she was very pretty, although she was not at all like a stag-beetle' (39). Here Tommelise's hitherto unremarked cross-species attraction is actually highlighted and subsequently breaks down due to unkind comments from other stag-beetles: '"Why, she has only two legs, that is very extraordinary!" "She has no antennæ!" said the others. "She has such a thin body! Why she looks just like a human being!" "How ugly she is!" said all the lady stag-beetles; and yet Tommelise was exceedingly pretty' (39). Although the narrator assures the reader that she is 'exceedingly pretty,' the female stag-beetles manage to convince the male stag-beetle as well as Tommelise herself of their point of view. She is dispatched from the tree

and placed on a daisy: 'Here she wept, because she was so ugly, and the stag-beetles would have nothing to do with her; and yet she really was so very lovely as nobody could imagine, as delicate and bright as the most beautiful rose leaf!' (39). The mole, her next suitor is blind, so he does not fall in love with her due to her appearance but because of her beautiful singing voice; she is encouraged by the female fieldmouse to sing while he is visiting. When the swallow has finally brought Tommelise to the warm countries and the king of the flowers sees Tommelise, 'she was the prettiest little maiden that ever had he seen' (53). Thus, her feminine beauty, as well as her small stature, is emphasized throughout the fairy tale.

That it is feminine beauty in particular that is important can be seen when Tommelise's characterization is contrasted to that of her final and successful suitor: 'There sat a little man in the middle of the flower, as white and transparent as if he were of glass; the most lovely crown of gold was upon his head, and the most beautiful bright wings upon his shoulders' (Andersen 1846: 52). In this introduction to the male character, it is his crown that is 'lovely' and his wings that are described as 'beautiful,' not the man himself. Tommelise's first reaction on seeing him is 'Good heavens! How small he is!' (Andersen 1846: 52). When he immediately as he sees Tommelise puts his crown on her head and asks her to marry him, her reaction is 'Yes, he was really and truly a little man, quite different to the frog's son, and to the mole, with his black velvet dress; she therefore said, Yes, to the pretty prince' (52). So, although he is at one point designated as 'the pretty prince,' it is his smallness and humanoid maleness that are the primary aspects of his characteristics.

It may be the case that it is precisely because this near obsession with Tommelise's feminine beauty that this fairy tale still has a place in our cultural imagery today. In many ways the tale is an example of what feminist sociologist Judith Lorber (1994) defines as 'gender imagery,' that is, 'the cultural representations of gender and embodiment of gender in symbolic language and artistic productions that reproduce and legitimate gender statuses' (31). Referring to Lorber's definition of gender imagery in an article that focuses on Grimms' fairy tales, feminist sociologists Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz (2003) observe that it is the fairy tales that have feminine beauty as an important theme that have survived over the centuries. They argue that this theme does not

disappear in more recent rewritings and adaptations, but is instead enhanced and functions to reinforce a gendered normative social control. 'Tommelise' actually thematizes the mechanisms of social control and internalization inherent in the feminine beauty ideal in Tommelise's encounter with the stag-beetle community—her omission at the end of the story to think about the stag-beetle as one of her non-humanoid suitors signals that this encounter is a traumatic event for her. Due to the social pressure of the presumably jealous female stag-beetles, Tommelise loses the love and regard of the male stag-beetle, who has abducted her but also provides for her. She is cast out, believes that she is ugly, and has to fend for herself during a period which is arguably the least passive and least dependent one in her entire life.

In contrast to Tommelise, two older female characters in this fairy tale are depicted as active agents with elaborate agendas: the frog mother and the fieldmouse. The first initially abducts Tommelise in order to provide a wife for her son, who apparently does not have much to say for himself; he only croaks and does not speak at all. The frog mother, in contrast, shows that she knows how to behave and speaks well: 'The old frog courtesyed to her in the water, and said,—"Allow me to introduce my son to you, and you shall live together, so charmingly, down in the mud!"' (Andersen 1846: 36). The fieldmouse is kind enough to take in Tommelise when she is cold and begs for food. Very soon, though, the fieldmouse develops her scheme to have her marry the neighbor, the rich old mole, although Tommelise is very much against it 'for she did not like the wealthy old gentleman' (48), and she does not look forward to spending her whole life under ground. When she objects, the fieldmouse does not hesitate to threaten her with violence:

> "Snick, snack! … do not go and be obstinate, else I shall bite thee with my white teeth! He is, indeed, a very fine gentleman! The queen herself has not got a dress equal to his black velvet! He has riches both in kitchen and coffer. Be thankful that thou canst get such a one!"
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> (Andersen 1846: 49)

In comparison with the frog mother and fieldmouse, the frog son and the mole are passive characters served and supported by the two active female characters. The mole, in particular, may be seen as a patriarch in a

hegemonic patriarchal system who does not have to exert his power; his position and power are upheld by the female fieldmouse.[5]

In an article on different permutations and rewritings of 'Cinderella,' Linda T. Parsons (2004) submits: 'Fairy tales in the patriarchal tradition portray women as weak, submissive, dependent, and self-sacrificing, while men are powerful, active, and dominant' (137). Tommelise may indeed be regarded as an example of a weak, submissive, and dependent female protagonist in this tradition. According to Parsons,

> rather than being empowered through sisterhood and community, the heroines in traditional tales are most often isolated: intensifying their submission and lack of power. They are disassociated as good or evil and also as women who must vie for the one prince. Furthermore, women suffer at the hands of other women. … The lack of feminine collaboration perpetuates patriarchal values by separating women from men and from other women as well. (138).

Parts of Parsons' analysis of these other tales are valid for 'Tommelise' as well, but Andersen does, however, complicate gender issues in this fairy tale. Apart from the stag-beetle, the male characters are not portrayed as particularly active. While it is true that Tommelise is not 'empowered through sisterhood and community,' the tale includes powerful, active, and dominant older female characters that cannot easily be described as evil antagonists, or competitors 'vying for the prince.' Instead, as I have shown, these older female characters actively work to uphold social norms and patriarchy by finding and grooming a beautiful and submissive wife for their son and neighbor, respectively, although they do not succeed in carrying through either of those marriage plans. In this work for the patriarchy and also through its failure, 'Tommelise' illustrates one way in which patriarchal values separate the female protagonist from other female characters. 'Feminine collaboration' is, nonetheless, an important aspect of Andersen's 'The Snow Queen,' as well as one of Stoddard's fairy tales, which will be discussed below.

'The Snow-Queen' is a long fairy tale including, among many other things, a heroic girl protagonist (Gerda) who saves a boy (Kay) who has

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[5] Söderberg (2016) makes a similar comment about these two characters: 'paddmor och åkersorken … agerar som patriarkatets förlängda arm i Andersens saga' [mother frog and the fieldmouse … act like the prolonged arm of the patriarchy in Andersen's fairy tale] (43).

been abducted by the powerful female title character. The fairy tale is divided into seven stories: I. 'Which treats of a Mirror and of the Splinters'; II. 'A Little Boy and a Little Girl'; III. 'The Flower-Garden'; IV 'The Prince and the Princess'; V. 'The Little Robber-Maiden'; VI. 'The Lapland Woman and the Finland Woman'; VII. 'The Palace of the Snow-Queen' (Andersen 1847). The first story is about 'a mirror with the power of causing all that was good and beautiful when it was reflected therein to look poor and mean; but that which was good for nothing and looked ugly was shewn magnified and increased in ugliness' (Andersen 1847: 63–64). The mirror is made by and played with by evil supernatural beings;[6] it eventually shatters 'in a hundred million and more pieces,' which makes it cause even more trouble, because when the splinters get into people's eyes they 'saw every thing perverted,' and when people 'got a splinter in their heart … [it] became like a lump of ice' (64–65). This is what happens to Kay, who gets a splinter in his eye and also one in his heart. His behavior towards other people, including his best friend Gerda, deteriorates; he excels in unfeeling cleverness and begins to value rationality above everything else, which even makes him forget the Lord's prayer at a critical moment. He thus becomes an easy target for the Snow-Queen, who kidnaps him and brings him to her palace in the North. Most of the fairy tale, though, is focused on Gerda's quest to find Kay and bring him back home.

Gerda encounters a number of powerful female characters—a benevolent witch who wants to adopt her, a princess, an old female

[6] In the Danish original, and in Nunnally's 2004 translation, these beings are the Devil and trolls (Andersen 2004: 176). In the nineteenth-century translation used in this article they are 'sprites' (Andersen 1847: 63–64); in others they are 'a wicked magician' and '[t]hose who frequented the school of magic where he taught' (Andersen 1860: 150–51); or 'a wicked sorcerer' and 'all who attended his school of magic' (Andersen 1861: 96). So, these translations appear to avoid mentioning the Devil—which takes the edge off the tension between the metaphysical evil of the first story and Gerda's rescue by a legion of angels right before she reaches the Snow-Queen's palace (Andersen 1847: 101)—as well as showing a lack of knowledge about trolls, which belong to Nordic mythology. There is the close homonym *trolla* in Swedish, meaning to perform magic, which may explain the magician and sorcerer in the translations. In Danish, troll is *trold* and to perform magic is *trylle*, but some English translations are based on translations in other languages rather than on the original Danish version.

robber, a robber-maiden, a Lapland woman, and a Finland woman—most of whom assist her in her search for Kay, which ends happily with her rescuing him by melting the splinters and bringing him back home the same way she came. Gerda and Kay briefly encounter many of the helpful female characters who have aided her on the way to the Snow-Queen's palace, but in reversed order. The focus on female power and agency is also indicated in quite a few of the subheadings as well as in the title of this fairy tale.

Despite this title, however, the Snow-Queen only appears in person in the second of the seven stories. This may be extra surprising to twenty-first-century readers recognizing the story of an unpleasant boy being carried away in a sledge by a white queen who has power over ice and snow, as it has been replayed with variations in C. S. Lewis' *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe* (1950) and its audiovisual adaptations.[7] Nevertheless, the Snow-Queen's appearance in Andersen's fairy tale is carefully described when Kay first sees her—before he is afflicted by the splinters—through the window as the snow falls outside. This happens after Kay's grandmother has told the children about the Snow-Queen and he has vouched that he will put her in the stove if she comes in:

> The flake of snow grew larger and larger; and at last it was like a young lady, dressed in the finest white gauze, made of a million little flakes, like stars. She was so beautiful and delicate, but she was of ice, of dazzling, sparkling ice; yet she lived; her eyes gazed fixedly, like two stars; but there was neither quiet or repose in them. (Andersen 1847: 67)

Similar to female characters in other fairy tales that have survived over centuries, the Snow-Queen is an exemplar of feminine beauty. She is also uncanny, combining traits that signal death and life, or living death: consisting of ice, yet alive, and with a fixed but restless gaze.

That the Snow-Queen is a *femme fatale* with the power to kill is made clear after she has abducted Kay; she kisses him a couple of times, which makes him forget Gerda and his grandmother in addition to making him more comfortable in the cold, and tells him, '"Now you will have no more kisses … or else I should kiss you to death!"' (Andersen

[7] For a comparison of Andersen's Snow Queen to Lewis's White Witch, see Miller (2009: 120–22).

1847: 72). She is moreover always described through the male (Kay's) point of view: 'She was very beautiful; a more clever or a more lovely countenance he could not fancy to himself …' (72). Here, her beauty is coupled with cleverness, which Kay has started to prize above all else after getting the splinters in his eye and heart.[8]

Unlike the Snow-Queen, little Gerda is not described through a male character's point of view. It is two older women who react to her appearance and want her for themselves, but for different reasons. Gerda encounters the first of these in the flower garden of the third story: 'While she [Gerda] was eating, the old woman combed her hair with a golden comb, and her hair curled and shone with a lovely golden colour around that sweet little face, which was so round and so like a rose' (Andersen 1847: 76). While her hair is combed Gerda forgets about Kay and her search for him for 'the old woman understood magic; but she was no evil being, she only practiced witchcraft a little for her own private amusement, and now she wanted very much to keep little Gerda' (77). To do so by keeping her forgetful about Kay, the old woman also sinks her rose bushes under the ground, so they won't remind Gerda of her quest for her friend. The old woman does, however, forget the rose that is painted on her hat, which destroys her scheme as it makes Gerda remember Kay. The other female character—this one with distinctly masculine physical traits—who wants her is 'the old female Robber'; she literally wants to devour Gerda:

> "How plump, how beautiful she is! She must have been fed on nut-kernels," said the old female Robber, who had a long scrubby beard, and bushy eyebrows that hung down over her eyes: "she is as good as a fattened lamb! How nice she will be!" And then she drew out a knife, the blade of which shone so that it was quite dreadful to behold.
> (Andersen 1847: 92)

In both cases, Gerda manages to avoid appropriation: being adopted, or being eaten. Her physical appearance, as depicted in these encounters, has the roundness of a healthy child, and what today may be understood

[8] Johansen (2002) reads Kay's splinters in terms of 'a fall/Fall,' which, in connection with the 'advent of male puberty,' entails 'a break up of . . . the happy and innocent relationship between male and female children . . . Instead, little Kai is spellbound by the Snow Queen, a beautiful, mature woman incapable of caring and loving' (137).

as her feminine attributes, her 'lovely golden' curls and her resembling a rose, are part of a Romantic discourse used when describing children of both sexes, celebrating their purity and closeness to nature.[9] As will become apparent, Gerda can be seen as exemplifying the idea of the Romantic child.

The Robber-Maiden is described even less in particularly feminine terms: 'The little Robber-maiden was as tall as Gerda, but stronger, broader-shouldered, and of dark complexion; her eyes were quite black; they looked almost melancholy' (Andersen 1847: 92–93). Somewhat sturdier and darker than Gerda, she is powerful with agency unlimited by her gender. Although frightening, she saves Gerda from being killed by the Robbers and also helps her continue her quest once she has heard the story about Kay. The Robber-Maiden helps Gerda on her way by releasing the Reindeer, one of the speaking animals in this fairy tale, on condition that he brings Gerda to Lapland, where the Wood-pigeons believe that the Snow-Queen has taken Kay (Andersen 1847: 95–96). When Gerda and Kay encounter the Robber-Maiden on their way back home, they see, 'riding on a magnificent horse,' 'a young damsel with a bright-red cap on her head, and armed with pistols.' At this point, she is 'tired of being at home' and 'had determined to make a journey to the north; and afterwards in another direction, if that did not please her' (106). This encounter between the active, self-sufficient, and powerful Robber-Maiden and Gerda, who has successfully managed to save a boy in distress, is described as 'a joyful meeting'; Kay does not even have a line in the dialogue in which at one point the Robber-Maiden asks him: 'I should like to know, faith, if you deserve that one should run from one end of the world to the other for your sake?' (106). This question is followed by Gerda patting the Robber-Maiden's cheek. Despite Kay's presence, then, this interaction is purely between two active girls who, unlike Tommelise, are doers instead of being done to. It is an example of a complete reversal of how male and female characters, as well as their gendered relationships, are depicted in traditional fairy tales—such as 'Cinderella' and 'Sleeping beauty'—that support patriarchal gender patterns. Moreover, this joyful encounter between the two girls hints at

[9] In the US, for instance, 'cherishing [children's] lack of development and celebrating *their resemblance to sweet blossoms* and romping kittens … led to a growing popular acceptance of childhood innocence by the final third of the [nineteenth] century' (Heininger 1984: 15, my emphasis).

the possibility of a non-normative or queer love relationship, signaled in Gerda's touching the Robber-Maiden's cheek when she wonders whether Kay is worth the other girl's efforts.

After Gerda's first encounter with the Robber-Maiden, the Reindeer brings her up north, which introduces local color to this fairy tale; the sixth story's heading, 'The Lapland woman and the Finland woman,' places it firmly in specific areas in the Nordic countries. The old Lapland woman lives in poor conditions, but is willing to help Gerda to the best of her ability. She does, however, emphasize the distance Gerda will have to travel, which also gives a sense of the actual distances in the North:

> "Poor thing, … you have far to run still. You have more than a hundred miles to go before you get to Finland; there the Snow-Queen has her country-house, and burns blue lights every evening. I will give you a few words from me, which I will write on a dried haberdine, for paper I have none; this you can take to the Finland woman, and she will be able to give you more information than I can." (Andersen 1847: 98)

When they finally reach Finland and the dwelling of the Finland woman, they have to knock on the chimney because there is no door. 'There was such heat inside that the Finland woman herself went about almost naked. She was diminutive and dirty' (98). She reads what the Lapland woman has written on the fish skin and listens to their stories, after which she whispers to the Reindeer that the splinters of glass in Kay's eye and heart need to be removed to break the Snow-Queen's power over him: 'otherwise he will never go back to mankind …' (100). She gives the Reindeer directions to the Snow-Queen's garden, but when he begs the Finland woman to grant little Gerda some power, she refuses on the grounds that Gerda already has the power needed but should not be told about it, in order not to lose it.

Gerda's power is her innocence. The Finland woman tells the Reindeer:

> "I can give her no more power than what she has already. Don't you see how great it is? Don't you see how men and animals are forced to serve her; how well she gets through the world barefooted? She must not hear of her power from us: that power lies in her heart, because she is a sweet and innocent child! If she cannot get to the Snow-Queen

> by herself, and rid little Kay of the glass we cannot help her. …" (Andersen 1847: 100)

In her critique of myths of innocence and imagination in fairy tales, Sky observes:

> What the Romantics bequeathed to the later nineteenth century was an image of the child as innocence incarnated; it was a child written into a most prestigious religious dimension that it had not earlier belonged to—that of Paradise. (Sky 2002: 366)

In this part of the fairy tale, Gerda clearly emerges as an example of the Romantic child. In the fashion of the Romantics that Sky refers to—Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Lamb—Andersen highlights the religious dimension of Gerda's innocence, after her repeating the Lord's Prayer, by having a legion of angels protect her from the cold and horrors in the Snow-Queen's garden, and help her reach the palace. Here Gerda finds a numbed and cold Kay, who is thawed by her tears, which 'consumed the splinters of the looking-glass,' after which he recognizes her and becomes aware of the emptiness and coldness of his surroundings (Andersen 1847: 104). A psalm and Gerda's kisses restore him completely, and they can now begin their journey back before the Snow-Queen returns. That these kisses are entirely innocent and lacks sexual desire is confirmed in the ending of the tale.

The fairy tale ends with the grandmother reading aloud from the Bible: 'Unless ye become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven,' and Kay and Gerda sitting on 'the little children's chairs' holding hands, although they are now adults: 'There sat the two grown-up persons; grown-up, and yet children; children at least in heart: and it was summer-time; summer, glorious summer!' (107). The wavering between adulthood and childish innocence in this sentence illustrates Andersen's reluctance to depict adult love 'in the sense of eros, i.e. erotic love, physical attraction and sexual desire' in his fairy tales (Lundskær-Nielsen 2007: 213). Although 'The Snow-Queen' and 'Tommelise' actually feature female protagonists who are united with their male counterparts at the end of the tale, as Tom Lundskær-Nielsen (2007)

observes, Andersen's tales seldom adhere to the happily-ever-after formula with a marriage based on an adult love relationship (214).[10]

In the 'Snow-Queen,' though, Andersen depicts a very different set of female characters than he does in 'Tommelise.' The powerful Snow-Queen is a cold, uncanny, if not outright evil, antagonist that kidnaps, seduces, and almost kills Kay, but she is in no way depicted as a defender of patriarchy. As discussed above, other female characters in this fairy tale have powers of various kinds, not least the heroic little Gerda, who also receives help from many of the other female characters. Thus, as well as including older female characters who act out of self-interest and threaten to hinder the advance of the girl protagonist, the tale is rife with what Parsons calls 'feminine collaboration.' Gerda even develops a sense of friendship, or sisterhood, or even an inkling of a queer relationship with the intimidating Robber-Maiden, which takes centerstage even when Kay is around.

Richard Henry Stoddard's Adventures in Fairyland

The poet and editor Richard Henry Stoddard's sincere interest in the fairy tale as a literary genre is not only evidenced in his 1853 publication of *Adventures in Fairyland*, but also in his article on Hans Christian Andersen published in the *National Magazine* in 1855. In what might be considered the first American article of literary criticism on Andersen's work (Rowland 2006: 110–11), Stoddard pronounces Andersen 'the very sovereign of the whole realm of fairy-land' and his fairy tales 'the finest ever written'; he moreover doubts that Andersen's 'poetry is near so poetical as his tales; certainly it cannot exhibit their creative imagination' (Stoddard 1855: 433).

The 'Prologue' to Stoddard's *Adventures in Fairyland* sets the scene of the telling of fairy tales on six consecutive nights before Christmas at an old family homestead, and the narrator, Richard, places Andersen's 'fairy lore,' 'as translated by Mary Howitt,' in the context of that of Perrault, Madame D'Aulnoy, Tieck, the brothers Grimm, and 'our own dear Hawthorne' (Stoddard 1853: 15).[11] When Richard is asked to tell

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[10] For more details on the avoidance of adult sexuality in 'The Snow-Queen,' see Johansen (2002).

[11] In Hawthorne's *Wonder book for girls and boys*, first published in 1851, followed by *Tanglewood tales* in 1853—the same year as Stoddard's *Adventures*

some of his own fairy tales he protests that he is afraid 'that the best stories have all been told.' His uncle points out that '[i]t is never too late for genius. Hans Christian Andersen is the last of the fairy school, and, in my opinion, the best. I wish you could write like him!' (Stoddard 1853: 16). Stoddard draws on both Andersen and Hawthorne in *Adventures in Fairyland*. The frame story about Richard telling stories to a number of children at the old homestead, which has been in the family's possession for over two hundred years, resembles that of Hawthorne's *Wonder book for girls and boys* (1851). Like Hawthorne, Stoddard brings the reader back to the setting of the storytelling situation both before and after each tale. The storytelling setting in Stoddard's *Adventures in Fairyland* and in Hawthorne's *Wonder book* and *Tanglewood tales* grounds these tales in a specifically American setting that is not present—or at least not as explicitly present—in the fairy tales themselves.

However, while Hawthorne's student narrator relates Greek myths to the children at the 'country-seat called Tanglewood' (Hawthorne 1972: 5), Richard tells his fairy tales to a mixed audience of children and adults, a scenario that visualizes Andersen's preferred fairy-tale readership. Towards the end of his life, in 1875, Andersen wrote in his diary, 'my fairy tales were just as much for the adults as for the children, who would only understand the surface. Only as matured adults [would they] be able to see and understand all' (qtd. in de Mylius 2006: 168). Although the storyteller is sometimes briefly visible as well as audible in his tales, Andersen's fairy tales are not framed in the same manner as Stoddard's are in *Adventures in Fairyland*. This framing not only grounds these fairy tales in a specific American locale, but, as indicated above, also offers a space for comments on the fairy tales as literature, as well as some clarifying didactic comments, often in response to questions from the children listening to the tales.

Stoddard's fairy tales are Romantic in their portrayal of children as well as in their celebration of Nature and imagination. Like many other Romantic texts, there is also a clear Christian tendency, which is perhaps

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in Fairyland—a student story-teller relates Greek mythology to a group of children. Tracing the fantasy tradition in American literature, Brian Attebury (1980) observes, 'Hawthorne led the way for a great many American children's writers in the nineteenth century. Largely from his innovations, a tradition grew up of fairy tales that were not absolutely original or genuinely American, but not entirely derivative either' (63).

most pronounced in the only two tales featuring a child protagonist: 'The white lamb' and 'The light boy of Shadowland.' These tales feature redemptive children who are morally superior to the adults around them, a girl (Agnes) and a boy, respectively, who manage to turn the people in their surroundings into good Christians. Like Harriet Beecher Stowe's little Eva in *Uncle Tom's cabin* (1852), both of these children die. As cultural studies scholar Gillian Brown points out, 'Such sentimental narratives of the ultimate triumph of the child's values, usually at the cost of her life or suffering, clearly express and celebrate the softer Christianity that was gaining ascendancy over Calvinism during the nineteenth century' (Brown 2003: 19). In Stoddard's stories, the narrative of the redemptive Romantic child is wrapped in fairy-tale garb.

These two child protagonists are conventionally gendered in that the light boy shows more agency than Agnes: he is actively searching for knowledge about his condition and tries to remedy it. Although he lives in Shadowland, he wishes to get rid of his shadow. Little Agnes is a younger child, only three years old, and more dependent and passive. Like Tommelise, she has a beautiful singing voice, which she uses in church. The physical appearance of the light boy is, however, much more carefully described than that of Agnes: he is 'as beautiful as a prince in a fairy story.' Indeed, '[h]is complexion was white as a lily before any thing had soiled it; his hair was like a shower of sunbeams; and his eyes were as blue as the illimitable heavens, and seemingly as deep … his thoughts rising there … like the stars at twilight from the sea' (Stoddard 1853: 42). This poetical portrayal by similes does not conjure up conventional ideas of masculinity; much like little Gerda in 'The Snow-Queen' he is compared to a flower and his hair resembles her golden curls. At least in these tales, the idea of the Romantic child seems to make gender differences in the portrayal of female and male characters less distinct.

Although tempered by a Romantic imagination and poetical language, moralism is still a part of Stoddard's fairy tales, and so is didacticism.[12] For example, the last fairy tale, 'Helpless and Helpful,' promotes a Protestant work ethic—'thrift and industry' (Stoddard 1853:

[12] In *Juvenile fantasy stories from nineteenth-century America* (1989), West includes Stoddard's tale 'The light in the attic' under the heading 'Didactic stories' (109–22).

198)—and tells the story of a spoiled male protagonist's downfall and rehabilitation in a from-riches-to-rags-and-back-to-riches narrative. What the protagonist Helpless has to learn is how to help himself through hard work: instead of waiting for others to provide for him, he needs to embrace not only the Protestant work ethic but also widely held American values such as self-reliance and independence, which in gender terms have traditionally been coded masculine.

In contrast to the focus on a male protagonist in 'Helpless and Helpful,' the fairy tale entitled 'Patience and Angela' thematizes feminine collaboration and friendship, albeit on a more limited and domestic scale than 'The Snow-Queen.' This tale moreover provides a deep insight into the debilitating aspects of poverty and drudgery, without blaming the victims of those conditions. Patience works day and night spinning to take care of her sick mother in a shack of a house. This constant drudgery is draining the life out of her until she meets Angela when in town on an errand. Angela, who has a magical fleece and seems to be a thinly disguised angel, moves in with Patience and her mother and helps with the spinning, which improves their conditions remarkably: they are less poverty-stricken and can afford to mend their house, Patience's mother recovers, and Patience gets her life back, including her suitor. At the end of the tale, Patience and her husband names their daughter Angela, since Angela has left on other missions.

A tale that revels in Romantic masculinity by featuring the male Romantic poet as genius is 'The light in the attic,' which is about a poor, lonely poet with a writer's block who is finally visited by the Goddess of Poetry. She advises him: 'Make thy manhood sublime, my poet, despite thy sorrow, sublime with high thoughts and heroic deeds, with rare and beautiful songs' (Stoddard 1853: 172). One reason is that 'man loves the poet, as being more divine than himself. Not a man in the land but he rouses with his brave thoughts; not a woman but he moves with his loving songs; not a child but he captivates with his wonderful dreams' (174). The poet is not only necessarily a man, it seems, but also manly and heroic. She points out that '[a]ll nature is poetry, and God the Poet thereof,' which should make him content to be a poet, although '[t]he life of genius is hell on earth' (177). To cap it off, she goes on for a full page using warlike (masculine) language to stir him into action: 'Thou must make thy province a kingdom, thy kingdom an empire. But first make thyself a king and an emperor. Live royally, act imperially, and victory

shall be thine' (178). When he has agreed to be a poet again and the goddess leaves him, all of his books turn into their authors, a veritable bonanza of male poets from Homer to Coleridge, preparing a space for the poet to join them. The poet's attic is transformed into a place of dreams and visions; among other things, he sees 'scores of fair women, singing hymns to the infants on their bosoms' (184). This is a conventionally gendered vision of women as pious mothers. Another vision expresses male adult sexual desire and adds a touch of orientalism in the form of enticing virgins likened to Muslim houris: 'beyond were groves and gardens, and cool kiosks, and in the kiosks and seraglios maidens like the red-lipped Houris!' (Stoddard 1853: 187). Most aspects of this tale, then, highlights the masculinist biases of Romanticism.

Unlike Andersen, Stoddard does not shy away from adult sexuality in his fairy tales; he also tends to write beyond the happily-ever-after ending in tales with adult protagonists. In the last two pages of 'The light in the attic,' the poet has a vision, dream, or memory of his beloved that is highly sexually charged: 'He pressed her to his bosom, and wound his arms around her neck, and their lips met again, kissing and kissing; and their hearts beat, and their souls flashed, and they quivered like two pale spirits at the gates of Death!' (188–89). What is depicted here may be read as a sexual encounter including the *petite mort* of orgasm, which is further underlined: 'for a death of love like theirs, quick and intense, is better than a loveless life' (189). There is a total reciprocity between the man and the woman in this erotic love making, which goes against the nineteenth-century idea of the true woman as a passive receptacle for the man's active sexual urges. A tale that provides details, but of a less erotic nature, beyond a traditional fairy-tale's sketchy mention of a wedding at the end is 'Helpless and Helpful' in which the male protagonist works hard on a farm and wins the farmer's daughter; this fairy tale includes both the wedding feast and what happens to the happy, loving couple years afterwards.

'The false fawn' is a fairy tale that goes far beyond the conventional happily-ever-after ending as it deals with adultery. It begins with a married couple, a prince (Warm Heart) and a beautiful princess (Pure Soul), who, although she is 'of nobler birth' than him, at first seems to be his equal: they rule together 'as was the custom in the Isle of Man, sitting both on the same throne, in the midst of the same court of lords and

ladies' (79). This promise of gender equality on the same terms is, however, immediately broken:

> Nothing could be more opposite than their persons and manner of life. The prince was tall and strong of limb; the princess of only womanly height, and delicate: the prince was frank, bold, and impetuous; the princess somewhat timid and retiring; and while the prince sat in his broad halls in council with his lords, she sat with her ladies in the secret chambers of the palace, busied with the distaff, or lost in the pages of some old book of philosophy. (Stoddard 1853: 79–80)

This portrayal of the two characters mainly adheres to conventional ideas about gender differences, with one exception: women are not stereotypically readers of philosophy. Here, Pure Soul's reading underlines her quiet, withdrawn habits, compared to those of the extrovert and active prince, but the distribution of intellect and emotion in this fairy tale may be somewhat unconventional, with the woman as the head and the man as the heart.

During a hunting trip, the prince strays into the woods and encounters an enchantress who makes him believe that she is his wife's twin sister called Sweets of Sense and puts him under her spell: 'he saw nothing save the princess, so courteous and beautiful was she, and so like Princess Pure Soul; like her in form and face, but not in attire. For princess Pure Soul always attired herself in white; whereas the princess before him was clad in scarlet' (Stoddard 1853: 92). Just as Kay is by the Snow-Queen, Warm Heart is taken in by the beauty of this powerful female antagonist, who can actually assume any form she wants, and the reader sees her through the male character's eyes. The physical aspects of this illicit affair are described over a number of pages. The prince is then abandoned by this scarlet woman, which painfully awakens him to his crime and actual losses. It takes a long, agonizing time before he finds his way back to his wife, who despite his betrayal—which she has seen in her crystal mirror that reflects the whole world—receives him as her lord and king and forgives him: 'not, however, … arrayed in white, but clad in royal robes, and crowned in her royal crown—so saintly, and chaste, and beautiful, but O, so sad! Verily, the sin of those we love is the deepest of griefs' (109). Thus, this fairy tale at least in part reinforces the male/female dichotomy, and, to a certain extent, also buys into the madonna/whore dichotomy with the saintly, chaste wife versus the other

sexualized woman, defined by providing extra-marital sexual services for the man. The enchantress in this tale does, however, have both agency and power.

Concluding remarks

Reading Andersen's and Stoddard's mid-nineteenth-century fairy tales closely with a focus on gender both confirms and confounds expectations. The feminine beauty ideal—which according to Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz socially controls girls and women through internalization—is certainly present in Andersen's 'Tommelise' and Stoddard's 'The false fawn.' Tommelise and little Agnes in Stoddard's 'The white lamb' are also weak, submissive, and dependent, which makes them typical female fairy-tale characters in 'the patriarchal tradition' (Parsons 2004: 137). In 'Tommelise,' Andersen actually discloses both the social mechanisms of the feminine beauty ideal and older female characters' active support of the hegemonic workings of patriarchy, but he still settles for a conventional fairy-tale ending.

'The Snow-Queen' imagines female characters very differently from 'Tommelise,' although this fairy tale also features a young female protagonist. Little Gerda is actively and heroically going on an arduous quest to save the boy Kay who has been abducted by the Snow-Queen, which is a complete reversal of stereotypical gender roles. The feminine beauty ideal is not that relevant in regard to Gerda; like the child protagonists in Stoddard's tales, she is an example of the Romantic child, a figure that seems to be less distinctly gendered than other characters. In addition, the joyful encounter between Gerda and the Robber-Maiden hints at a non-normative love relationship between two young women. As is also the case in Stoddard's 'Patience and Angela,' Andersen's fairy tale includes a great deal of 'feminine collaboration,' which is not common in 'traditional tales' such as 'Cinderella' (Parsons 2004: 138).

Moreover, the endings of most of the fairy tales examined in this article are different from that of tales that end with a wedding and a vague indication of a happily-ever-after. Although 'Tommelise' basically ends in this manner, 'The Snow-Queen' ends on a more ambiguous note with Gerda and Kay reunited as adults but still being children at heart, which appears to exclude an adult love relationship between the two. If Andersen does not include adult, erotic relationships in his fairy tales, some of Stoddard's fairy tales are remarkably explicit about the physical

aspects of erotic love. Stoddard also tends to write beyond the wedding of the happily-ever-after ending.

So, when viewed through the lens of gender, both Andersen's and Stoddard's nineteenth-century literary fairy tales offer a twenty-first-century reader quite a few surprises and much food for thought and discussion. The two authors' tales have, however, fared very differently over the past two centuries: while Stoddard's tales are all but forgotten and never reached beyond the borders of the USA to begin with, Andersen's fairy tales had an international audience already in the mid-nineteenth century and is now part of a global cultural imaginary.[13] Following Andersen's and Stoddard's lead, I would suggest that we should not see their fairy tales as literature exclusively for children. Andersen's fairy tales, in particular, deserve cross-generational (re)reading and dialogue rather than simplification, adaptation, and even feminist rewriting.

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[13] See for instance Sanders (2017).

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