The Endurance of Female Love

Romantic Ideology in H. C. Andersen’s The Snow Queen

ABSTRACT Like all H. C. Andersen’s stories, the fairy tale The Snow Queen (1844) is a text with many links to the tradition of Romanticism. This article concentrates on (a) Andersen’s use of symbols, especially ice and snow; (b) the three-fold composition in the story, and (c) the allegorical structure. These levels in Andersen’s text are placed in the framework of a larger Romantic ideology or philosophy. When focusing on the Romantic tradition in a larger sense, special attention will be paid to the female protagonist in the story in relation to the male and/or Faustian ideal, whose origins are to be found in Goethe’s drama Faust. Within the allegorical scheme special attention will be paid to the Lilith, also appearing in Faust, and to 1 Cor. 13, a text where the distorted mirror and the divergence between child and adult are key symbols, as in Andersen’s tale. Finally, the tale’s female protagonist Gerda is interpreted as the bearer of Rousseau’s educational ideas and the Christian notion of agape.

KEYWORDS H. C. Andersen, The Snow Queen, Goethe, Faust, Rousseau, Paul, 1 Cor., allegory, agape
H. C. Andersen’s (1805-1875) *Sneedronningen* [The Snow Queen], first published in 1844, is regarded as one of the great fairy tales of the world. It has been the subject of many different kinds of interpretations, not least Freudian, Jungian and biographical (Lederer 1986, Lotz 1988: 203-16, Misheff 1989: 1-7). A common denominator in such readings of *The Snow Queen* and other stories by Andersen is the tendency to either draw parallels between content and assumed structures in the human psyche or to explain the texts not so much as examples of fictions with their own set of rules, but as symptoms of real-life events. The aim of this study is to make no such claims but instead to focus on some aspects of Andersen’s text seen in relation to the tradition of Romanticism. It is true to say, using the words of Niels Kofoed, that “all tendencies of Romanticism are gathered in his writings” [“i hans författarskab samles alle romantikkens tendenser”] (Kofoed 1967: 97, my translation). This discussion, however, will primarily attend to (a) the use of symbols, especially ice and snow; (b) the three-fold composition of the story; and, finally (c) the allegorical structure. These levels or dimensions of Andersen’s text are seen as parts of a larger Romantic ideology or philosophy. When focusing on the Romantic tradition more generally, special attention will be paid to the female protagonist in the story in the context of the male and/or Faustian ideal, whose origin is to be found in Goethe’s drama *Faust*. One may think of (a – c) as patterns, or, alluding to the story itself, as footsteps in the snow that will be followed through the text and finally converge.

*The Snow Queen* is segmented into seven parts, telling the story of a boy and a girl, Kay and Gerda, their separation and reunification through the power of love. However, the boy and girl are not introduced at the beginning of the story. In part one, a kind of overture, the reader is introduced to the Devil, “a goblin of the very wickedest sort” (Andersen 2005: 214), and his new invention: a mirror.

This diabolical mirror has the power to change people’s views of themselves and the surrounding world. It transforms everything good and beautiful into something evil and ugly. “[T]he loveliest landscapes looked just like boiled spinach, and even the very best people became hideous, or stood on their heads and had no stomachs” (214 f). In the
lowest domains, the students who attend the Demon school are astonished by their master’s great invention. They run around in the world holding the mirror and through it everything is transformed into its worst: “there was not a person alive nor a land on earth that had not been distorted” (215). After this they decide to carry the mirror to the heavenly spheres where it will reflect the Lord and his angels. However, when God is inverted in the mirror, to its absolute opposite, the mirror-glass starts to shake and cracks into “hundreds of millions of billions of bits, or perhaps even more” (215). This, according to the story-teller, makes the devilish instrument even more evil than before. Now the bits of mirror-glass are spread in all kinds of sizes all over the world. They get into the houses as windows and into eye-glasses. Through these people see only the ugliness and the evil in the world. The reader is also told that the mirror-glass gets into some people’s hearts and that this makes them into “lumps of ice” (215). With this the first, introductory part of The Snow Queen ends.

*  

A metaphorical transformation has taken place when the second part begins. The primary exponents of the evil in the first tale, the mirror and the glass, have now taken the form of ice possessing the human heart. Reflection and transparency are features associated with the rational aspect of perception. Warmth and cold are features associated with life and death, or being home and safe versus exposed to the elements.

In the second story the reader is acquainted with Kay and Gerda. We learn that their parents are poor and that they are playing together on the roof where the houses of their families meet. The two children are the best of friends. On the roof they are surrounded by flowers, which suggests a sort of Eden-like enclosure. This condition of summer, foliage, playfulness innocence, love, nearness and beauty is contrasted with its seasonal opposite. During the summer Kay and Gerda may easily join each other on the roof. In the winter this is not possible. Their windows on each side of the roof were “often frosted over completely” (216). Still they manage to overcome their isolation by heating a coin on the stove and putting it on the surface of the window. This creates “the finest of peepholes” (216) through the rime and
“[b]ehind them appeared a bright, friendly eye” (216). Keeping in mind the evil pieces of glass that were incorporated into people’s windows, and which isolated them from their fellow-creatures, the warm hole in the icy window may be seen as a symbol of love overcoming alienation. Thus, not surprisingly, winter connotes isolation and alienation. The contrasting symbolical figure is summer and warmth, connoting love and the unifying forces in life. This far into the story love seems to be the prevailing force.

However, one winter evening, the boy looks out through the little round hole. He sees how two snowflakes are falling and how one of them, the largest, grows in front of his eyes. It grows into “a woman, who was dressed in the finest white gauze which looked as if it had been made from millions of star-shaped flakes” (216). The boy is fascinated by what he sees: “She was so beautiful and she was graceful, but she was ice-shining, glittering ice. She was alive, for all that, and her eyes sparkled like two bright stars, but in them there was neither rest nor peace” (216).

The Snow Queen nods towards his window and disappears. Shortly afterwards it becomes warmer outside and winter turns into summer: the seasonal cycle turns. Later in the summer while playing with Greta, Kay feels a sudden pain when a part of the mirror-glass gets into his heart and turns it into something very like a lump of ice. When his heart turns into this cold state the pain stops.

When the mirror-glass gets into Kay’s heart and transforms it into ice, everything he sees is turned upside down. The rose-garden becomes ugly. He runs back into his house through the open window. Later, when he listens to the stories told by his grandmother he is filled with scepticism. He “always broke in with a ‘but - ’” (217). He also gets an eye for the not so pleasant sides in others, making jokes by imitating them. The laughs are on his side and people see him as very talented.

The seasonal turn is an important motif in the second story. The reader follows the two protagonists from summer to winter and then through another turn of the year ending in winter. Before the second story is finished Kay’s mind has changed according to this turn. His games have become quite different, less emotional and “more sensible” (217). Like a teacher of natural sciences he shows Gerda a snowflake under his magnifying glass:
‘Now look through the glass,’ he told Gerda. Each snowflake seemed much larger, and looked like a magnificent flower or a ten-pointed star. It was marvellous to look at. ‘Look, how artistic!’ said Kay. ‘They are much more interesting to look at than real flowers, for they are absolutely perfect. There isn’t a flaw in them, until they start melting.’ (218)

When playing in the town square one day Kay ties his sledge behind a larger sledge. The pulling sledge starts to move, accelerates to a high speed and drives out through the city gates. The snow starts to fall so thickly that Kay cannot see his hand in front of him. Terror seizes him and he tries to say the Lord’s Prayer, “but all he could remember was the multiplication tables” (218). Then in the midst of his great despair with the snowflakes growing even larger around him, the vehicle suddenly comes to a halt. In the sledge before him is the Snow Queen. As before Kay is struck by her beauty. She talks to him:

‘We have made a good time,’ she said. ‘Is it possible that you tremble from cold? Crawl under my bear coat.’ She took him up in the sleigh beside her, and as she wrapped the fur about him he felt as if he were sinking in the snowdrift.

‘Are you still cold?’ she asked, and kissed him on the forehead. Brer-r-r. That kiss was colder than ice. He felt it right down to his heart, half of which was already an icy lump. He felt as if he were dying, but only for a moment. Then he felt quite comfortable, and no longer noticed the cold. (218)

Kay, enchanted by the beauty of the Snow Queen, becomes deeply attached to her. After he has tasted her kiss he no longer thinks of his grandmother and little Gerda. The Snow Queen seems to have taken on a more human shape. “She no longer seemed to be made of ice, as she had seemed when she sat outside his window and beckoned to him” (220). The second part of the story ends when Kay and the Snow Queen fly away in her carriage heading north.

When Kay is gone, many think that he has fallen into the river and drowned. Gerda is, however, persuaded by the sunshine and the swallows who tell her that her beloved friend is alive. Story three to seven focus on Gerda’s adventures during her journey to Lapland, trying to find Kay.
Andersen’s story was published in 1844 at a time when Scandinavian literature was still influenced by Romanticism (Andersen 2003: 368-70). One characteristic aspect of the Romantic imagination is its affinity to dualist patterns of thought. One typical antithetical figure in the literature of the Romantic period is the disjunction between reason and emotion. This dichotomy in turn, is often linked to a presumed difference between the sexes: male rationality is contrasted with female sensibility. Andersen’s story fits well into the epochal paradigm of Romanticism and illustrates several of its aspects.

A common trait in this Romantic ideology or philosophy of opposites is a triadic historical development. This developmental process is outlined either phylogenetically, through the biographical development of one single individual, or ontogenetically, regarding humankind and its history – or, sometimes, both synchronically (Abrams 1973: 197-252). First, it is assumed, there is an initial stage of unity between the individual, nature and humanity. In this golden age there is a ‘natural’ or ‘organic’ link between people that confirms a larger homogeneity of being. Then this stage of innocence and harmony is altered through a second and middle stage. The main predicament of this phase is separation. The unity of the first world is broken and alienation becomes the key social element. Finally stage one and two terminate in a third stage of renewed unity. This final destination of development may have the shape of a replica, mirroring the initial unity or symbiosis. It may also have the shape of sublation, that is to say imitating the first stage but at the same time transgressing it. In this case the triadic figure has a dialectical content. The first phase is a thesis, the second is its opposite and the third unites and synthesises the previous two in one single vision.

This major triadic figure, here outlined in a quite simplistic manner, has many different facets in the literature of Romanticism. On the individual level it could be experienced as a loss of identity and a predicament of alienation finally replaced by love, affection and some sort of insight. In *The Snow Queen* it is possible to see the first symbiotic stage in the scheme exemplified in the first part of the second story. This is the part where Kay and Gerda play happily with each other on the roof during the summer, enclosed in the rose garden. The second
stage begins when the Snow Queen makes contact with Kay. After this initial meeting with – or seduction by – the Snow Queen, Kay is separated from the initial unity, or is destined to be so from the very next day when the demon-splinters get into his heart and eyes. The second state reaches all the way through story three to seven. Gerda makes an adventurous journey aiming to rescue Kay from The Snow Queen. In the seventh tale she finds him sitting in the glacial halls of the Snow Queen’s palace. The palace is lit by the northern lights. In the middle of the empty hall of snow is a frozen lake cracked into a thousand pieces all shaped alike (one may think of Blake’s “fearful symmetry”). The symbols of ice and cold are closely linked to the notion of reason and abstract structures. When at home, the Snow Queen sits “in the exact centre” (236) of the lake and calls it the “Mirror of Reason” (236). It is, according to her, the only one and the best in the world (236). Little Kay is spellbound by the Snow Queen and is completely absorbed by the game he is playing with some pieces of ice:

He was shifting some sharp, flat pieces of ice to and fro, trying to fit them into every possible pattern, for he wanted to make something with them. It was like the Chinese puzzle game that we play at home, juggling little flat pieces of wood about into special designs. Kay was cleverly arranging his pieces in the game of ice-cold reason. To him the patterns were highly remarkable and of the utmost importance, for the chip of glass in his eye made him see them that way. He arranged his pieces to spell out many words; but he could never find the way to make the one word he was so eager to form. The word was ‘Eternity.’ The Snow Queen had said to him, ‘If you can puzzle that out you shall be your own master, and I’ll give you the whole world and a new pair of skates.’ But he could not puzzle it out. (236)

As in episode two, the ice is symbolically linked to rationality and the aims of reason. In the second episode Kay compares the snow-flake to the flower and finds the former much more interesting and absolutely perfect. A common denominator between that situation and the one quoted above is, apart from the presence of reason, the drive for perfection. Kay’s mind is, when enchanted by reason, intellectually absorbed into a kind of Platonic sphere where the eternal absolute reigns and ephemeral emotions play no part at all. Still, all his efforts to reach eternity seem to be in vain. Eternity is unreachable through
the intellect. The eternal absolute and the transient human existence converge only in man’s heart and the self-sacrificing love that Gerda represents. It is only when Kay becomes an integrated part of this love that he can find God’s eternal grace:

She recognized him at once, and ran to throw her arms around him. She held him close and cried, ‘Kay, dearest little Kay! I’ve found you at last!’

But he sat still, and stiff, and cold. Gerda shed hot tears, and when they fell upon him they went straight to his heart. They melted the lump of ice and burned away the splinter of glass in it. He looked up at her, and she sang:

*Where roses bloom so sweetly in the vale*
*There shall you find the Christ Child, without fail.*

Kay burst into tears. He cried so freely that the little piece of glass in his eye was washed right out. ‘Gerda!’ He knew her, and cried out in his happiness, ‘My sweet little Gerda, were have you been so long? And were have I been?’ he looked around him and said, ‘How cold it is here! How enormous and empty!’ (236)

Being a part of Gerda’s love, which is also the eternal love of God, is the leap that takes Andersen’s story from the second stage to the third and last. Now what once was separated is reunited. Hand in hand Gerda and her beloved Kay return to the house with the red roses on the roof. “Both of them had forgotten the icy, empty splendour of the Snow Queen’s palace as completely as if it were some bad dream” (238). At first sight the third stage in *The Snow Queen* seems to be a repetition of the first, adding no further content than the reunion, which in turn confirms a closed annual circle, including summer and winter (the seventh story ends in “summer, warm, glorious summer” (Flahault 1972, Andersen 2005: 238). At the end of the seventh episode, however, we are told that Gerda and Kay when at home together are “grown-up but children still – children at heart” (238). This is a turn giving the story less of a circular content and more of a climbing spiralling dialectical ditto. A developmental transformation has taken place in the seventh story, not only amalgamating the rational and the imaginary, male intellect and female affection, but also the innocence of the child and mature responsibility.
This far the main focus of my interpretation of the text has been the symbolic transformation. The symbols of ice and snow may be understood as signs in a larger semiosis, a triptych-like pattern. One important aspect should be included in this pattern: the allegorical structure that is closely intertwined with the first, second and third stage in the primary scheme. In fact it is not uncommon to see the three-fold narrative mentioned as an integrated part of Romantic allegory. The typical allegorical pattern merges with the Christian idea of the Trinity, that is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Michelsen 1940: 44). The main story is segmented into an initial phase, sometimes called ‘the Age of the Father’, where people live in innocence, united as brothers and sisters with each other, with nature and God. This first phase, the old order, is almost immediately fractured or defragmented by vengeful evil forces, forming the second order, ‘the Age of the Son’. In the third phase, the evil forces are conquered when God and human beings reunite in ‘the Age of the Holy Spirit’, often by the means of sacrifice. The prototype of this sacrifice is Jesus on the cross, represented in the allegory by the Figura, a Christ-like protagonist.

The shift from the first to the second stage in the allegorical structure is exemplified in Andersen’s tale when the diabolical mirror falls down to Earth from God’s higher spheres and cracks into small pieces of glass and ice that enter people’s hearts and minds. Following the prototypical allegorical pattern this disintegration may be seen as synonymous with the Fall of Man, that is to say the transition from a state of innocence to a state of knowledge and reflection. Kay’s increasing desire for reason and his ambition to understand the outer world in terms of science may be seen as important aspects of this knowledge. Another dimension of this knowledge is the human self-awareness that manifests itself in the ironic and sarcastic attitude that Kay expresses towards his social environment. The emblem for this attitude is of course the mirror as self-reflection. Seeing one’s own apparition in the mirror is, transferred to the level of the mind, seeing the self as something alien and “other.” This self-estrangement has a hampering influence on people’s feelings. One may say that they are “frozen” in the metaphorical sense exemplified in Andersen’s story.
However, when interpreting any story not only as a work of fiction but as a work within the tradition of allegory one must not forget its deep relation to the Scriptures. Christian allegory is not only a compositional structure, three-fold or other, but also a way of connecting episodes in the story with biblical key-episodes or symbols. The totality of the allegory is found neither in the compositional setting nor in the episodic-symbolic features, but in the dialectic or playful interaction of these aspects.

One example of such a single symbol is the red shoes that Gerda puts on in the third story (220). In Christian symbolism, two connotations among others associated with the colour red is Christ’s sufferings and the Holy Spirit. When Gerda puts on the shoes this could mean that she will follow in the footsteps of the Master and that she is the figura of the story. Her decision to throw the shoes, her “dearest possession” (220), in the river in order to have Kay back indicates that she is ready to sacrifice to be able to receive love.

This exemplifies a possible rather straightforward one-to-one-relationship between the literary text and the Scriptures. However, usually an elaborate allegory is built upon a more complex interconnection with passages from the Bible and ideas within the traditions of Christianity. One such biblical passage is 1 Cor. 13 where Paul contrasts knowledge and other gifts with a form of free and unconditional love, presenting the latter as the only way to divine grace. This has made the section a pivotal expression in the Bible and Christian tradition of the notion of \(\text{agape}\), a persisting unselfish love. When making the case for allegoresis, in other words an allegorical interpretation of *The Snow Queen*, verses 9-13 are of particular interest. Here knowledge in any form is interpreted by Paul as partial and imperfect in contrast with the “perfect” that will prevail in the name of love. As long as we see things “in parts” everything will be distorted and unrevealed. Only agape will reveal the truth of being. Knowing or not knowing this truth is symbolically linked to a significant difference between the child and the adult. “When I was a child,” Paul writes, “I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” However, with the redemption of humanity we will see it all clearly. But before seeing things again, revealed, we see them distorted “through a glass, darkly.” That is, referring to the original text, through \(\text{espotron}\), a mirror in metal giving a distorted and unclear reflection. A compari-
son of the use of symbols could be made between Andersen and the Biblical text, with Kay seeing perfection in the form of a single snowflake through the magnifying glass that distorts things beyond divine proportions, or with the “partial” pieces of ice in the game of ice-cold reason, each bearing one single letter impossible to place with another in a meaningful pattern through the means of knowledge. As a corollary the opacity of the mirror in Paul’s writing may inform Andersen’s use of the distorted mirror as a symbol of the Fall of Man. According to Paul, when love finally prevails we will see things “face to face.” In Andersen’s text it is possible to see this Pauline figure of speech in the guise of Kay and Gerda, looking at each other through their little peepholes, one “bright, friendly eye” (216) meeting the other through each “frost-coated glass” (216). The regained love between the adult couple in the final story is in one sense Kay and Gerda seeing each other again, like children and face to face through the once icy but now transparent glass. In another and parallel sense it is the symbol of resurrection. When Gerda kisses Kay and he awakes from his bewitched and frozen sleep, it is the dead being awakened on the Last Day by God’s eternal love (de Mylius 2007: 23-38).

However, before receiving the grace that eschatology withholds, the protagonists have to pass through the needle’s eye of the second stage in the triadic scheme. This stage and the corresponding Fall- or Exile-phase in the allegorical structure are both initiated with shame and self-awareness. Usually this event is associated with the Biblical episode when the serpent persuades Eve to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree. According to Sumerian, Hebrew and folk tradition the serpent has a female disguise in Lilith. This serpent-Lilith with a beautiful female head, connected with the power of seduction, is a common iconographic depiction of the serpent of Eden. One example of its presence is Michelangelo’s painting *The Temptation and Expulsion from Paradise*. The tradition has also made its marks in the Romantic tradition, for instance in Keats’ Lamia-figure in his poem “La Belle Dame sans Merci” from 1819, where the stock character – rightly or wrongly associated with Lilith by interpreters – became the archetypal “seductress.” However, the most important and distinct literary source of the tradition of Lilith in the days of Andersen is Goethe’s *Faust I* (1808). In the “Walpurgisnacht”-episode of the drama the reader meets Mephistopheles in the figure of Lilith in dialogue with Faust.
They dance together and Lilith, a pretty witch, is described as “Adams erste Frau” [Adam’s first wife] (Goethe 1988: 302). Faust was Andersen’s favourite reading at the time of writing The Snow Queen (Kofoed 2005: 104ff), and there are in fact some interconnected elements in Andersen’s story that make possible a rather firm linkage to Goethe’s drama. Goethe’s use of Lilith as Adam’s first wife refers to the Hebrew myth, or at least the reading of the Old Testament within folk tradition. This reading is supported by the fact that there are two creation stories in the Book of Genesis. In Gen 1:27 “male and female” are created “in the image of God.” In Gen 2:18 the text instead says that “it is not good for a man to be alone,” after which God creates a woman out of one of Adam’s ribs, in other words out of the clay from which he once formed Adam (Hurwitz 1999: 174). According to the myth this woman is Lilith. When she claims she is made of the same substance as Adam and therefore should not “lie below him” the two start to bicker. Lilith is separated from Adam and replaced by Eve. This is one important source for Lilith being the archetypal witch, disobeying not only Adam but also God. In her witch form, and in many other guises, Lilith is the demonic woman.²

When Kay in Andersen’s tale looks out through the window and sees how the beautiful woman is formed out of the snow crystals this corresponds to Lilith being formed out of clay according to God’s will. The woman that Kay sees actually takes shape out of the snow, perhaps as a result of Kay’s fantasy, his male desire. In the original text Andersen uses the words “et Par Sneeflokker” (Andersen 1963-90: 51) [a pair of snow flakes]. This should be compared to how Faust, when reminded of the days in Eden by Lilith/Mephistopheles, has a vision of the Tree of Life and how “Zwei schöne Äpfel glänzten dran” [Two apples glittered there] (Goethe 1988: 302). Dancing with the young woman Faust, with obvious erotic overtones, declares that he wants to climb the tree and hold the two apples. The woman answers that this is what men have always desired. Later in the text, when the main protagonist, now with remorse, says he sees Gretchen in what was originally Lilith, Mephistopheles tells him that the beautiful woman is a chimera, “ein Zauberbild [...] ein Idol” (Goethe 1988: 304) In the eyes of Mephistopheles she is the Medusa, who “erstarrt des Menschen Blut,” [freezes human blood] (Goethe: 1988: 304), thus having much the same function as the Snow Queen in Andersen’s story (Lederer 1986: 28 ff).
Within the allegorical pattern, a connection may be found not only between *The Snow Queen* and the biblical tradition in different shapes, but also between Andersen’s and Goethe’s use of this tradition. This is true also about the first story in Andersen’s tale, with the subtitle “Which Has to Do with a Mirror and Its Fragments.” This episode has affinities with Job 1:1-1:12, often referred to as “the council in heaven” and constituting a frame or pre-text to the story of Job’s trials and tribulations. In this part of the Book of Job, God permits Satan to put the virtue of Job to a test. In the “Prolog im Himmel” [Prologue in Heaven] in *Faust* I Goethe alludes to this episode in the Old Testament. As in the Book of Job God is having a discussion with the Devil regarding the inherent nature of the main protagonist. This results in Mephistopheles being permitted by God to lead Faust astray only so that he may learn from his misdeeds (Johansen 1997: 41-53). The easiest way of making the analogy in this case is to say that in Andersen’s story Kay is the protagonist who is being tested. However, stating this would be to seriously contradict the story in *The Snow Queen*, which for most of its length focuses not on Kay’s but on Gerda’s actions. Using Vladimir Propp’s classical term “quest” in *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) and identifying the quest as the central function in Andersen’s story would, on the other hand, give the story completely to its female protagonist. If Kay’s true identity is revealed as a result of the bet between the good and evil forces of life, this is made possible through the persistent work of his childhood friend. Thus keeping the allegorical and Faustian background intact it is possible to say that Andersen makes an antithetical claim in relation to the tradition. Neither does Kay receive grace directly through God’s intervention, like the righteous Job in the Old Testament, nor through his own efforts, like Goethe’s Faust, but through the unselfish love, the agape, from another human being.

There is also a thematic relationship between *The Snow Queen* and *Faust*. A common denominator is the shared interest in what may be called “the true nature of human beings” and how to achieve knowledge of this true essence. What is it to be truly human? Is it possible to *know* this by using one’s intellectual tools? Or is it something that is only given to us through feeling, love and divine grace? These questions, regarding *humanitas*, are penetrated in both texts. Like so many other works of literature written in the Romantic period Goethe’s
Faust, known as the classic Gelehrtentragödie, has as its main theme the relationship between intellect and emotion. The restless “Faustian ambition” has become synonymous with the struggle to embrace these opposites. The redeeming and dialectical mediation between the two, making, in the end, the grasp of life in its entirety possible, people’s, or perhaps more precisely men’s, desire. This is the primus motor of every single line in Goethe’s drama. But also Kay in Andersen’s story is, I would claim, a vehicle for Faustian desire. It is possible to interpret Kay’s desire to know nature’s true essence through the means of science and abstract formulas as a photocopy of his male desire for the Snow Queen.

A lot has been said and written about the lack of erotic sensibility in Andersen’s writing. More than often this is linked to Andersen’s own life, sometimes implying his “sexual failure,” sometimes his “alleged homosexuality,” “bisexuality” – or “non-sexuality.” This reception was a fact already in Andersen’s own lifetime – the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard’s (1813-1855) comparison between the writer and a hermaphroditic plant being representative. There is an androgyous feature in The Snow Queen. In the first phase of the triadic pattern, the state of innocence according to the allegory, the boy and girl may be described as an inseparable unity, before the Snow Queen arrives and tempts Kay out of the initial symbiotic stage. This claim would not be foreign to the Romantic tradition where androgyny is almost a leitmotif. An interpretation pointing in this direction is also in line with the folk traditions and the traditions of mysticism which once inspired the writers of the Romantic period. According to one of these traditions, Adam and Eve constitute “one” androgynous being with a male and female correspondent, Samael and, again, Lilith (Patai 1978: 231).

On the other hand it is possible to claim that erotic symbols are very present in The Snow Queen. One Andersen interpreter, Ib Johansen, focuses on the speech of “Illdlillien” [the Fire lily] in the third episode:

The Hindoo woman in her long red robe stands on the funeral pyre. The flames rise around her and her dead husband, but the Hindoo woman is thinking of that living man in the crowd around them. She is thinking of him whose eyes are burning hotter than the flames – of him whose fiery glances have pierced her heart more deeply than these flames that soon will burn her body to ashes. Can the flame of the heart die in the flame of the funeral pyre? (222f.)
In Johansen's reading the sexual content in the flower’s speech makes Andersen's story something more than an edifying bourgeois tale about the return to childhood innocence (Johansen 1997: 46). Another episode with obvious sexual content is when Kay meets the Snow Queen the second time. Here the Snow Queen invites Kay to lie down beside her and wraps the fur around him. She welcomes him: “kryb ind i min Bjørnepels!” [sneak into my bear coat!] (Andersen 1963-90: 54). Now Kay feels as if he is sinking in the snowdrift. Then he feels he is dying, “but only for a moment” (218). Then he feels “quite comfortable” (218). The petit mort Kay experiences in the carriage with the cold woman could be compared to the enduring passion in the story of the Fire lily. The cold snow in which Kay feels he is sinking makes a contrast to the burning fire that consumes the woman at the stake. The superficial/external in Kay’s alienating intercourse stands against the unifying/inner community the Hindoo woman experiences with her lover. Male and female sexuality are not only juxtaposed in Andersen's story but also stages in a moral development where the female vastly supersedes her male counterpart. Thus it is possible to say that the Fall that takes place within the allegory is a Fall into male sexuality or – into Faustian desire.

The final section of the allegory represents people’s way back to their fellow human beings, nature and God through redemption in Christ. It has been asserted that the Fall is induced by the male telos or inclination, whose prototype is to be found in Goethe’s drama. One important trait in this desire is its estrangement from nature. Kay’s Faustian desire to reify nature and life through the means of knowledge not only transforms this nature and life to discrete and abstract entities; it also corrupts his own nature and alienates him from his female part. Since tasting the Fruit of Knowledge he has forgotten what it is to feel pain or joy. This condition, the death-in-life, is explicitly expressed in Andersen’s story by the symbols of snow and ice. Kay’s knowledge a priori is paralleled in the story by Gerda’s search for love. Her way of finding knowledge and thus finding Kay involves all human modalities. The episode with the Fire lily involves Gerda listening directly to the flower, that is communicating with nature without any intermediary. In her innocence she does not understand the subtext of the speech, unlike the adult reader, but her main strategy to attain knowledge, her anti-Faustian form of Bildung, remains to in-
interpret the various life forms that her adventurous and dangerous task forces her to encounter. Her main source of knowledge is the stories she takes part in and not abstract models. Interpreting these stories and taking part in the adventure involves a dialogue between her inner and outer nature. The ice puzzle in the Snow Queen’s palace is finally solved when she and then Kay express their inner feelings. This way of “knowing” *a posteriori* presumes childishness, a certain form of naivety and an *art of receiving*, features Andersen has given to his female protagonist. One might claim that Gerda’s only characteristic is her invincible love and that beyond this she is a *tabula rasa*, open to the inscriptions of experience. It is obvious that this strategy, whose characteristic is knowledge through life itself, is directly derived from the educational philosophy of Rousseau, whom Andersen evidently admired (Andersen 2003: 466). However, when letting a young girl enter the educational program of *Émile*, contrary to his master’s advice (Rousseau thought that this form of education was reserved for boys only), Andersen takes a more modern stance vis-à-vis the difference between the sexes. This stance is also the point where the tracks in the snow finally converge, not so much in the finding of Kay, the rather anonymous male protagonist, and not so much in the Goethean *Ewig-Weibliche*, the prototype of the Romantic all-embracing feminine – but in the endlessly active female protagonist of *The Snow Queen*, Andersen’s vehicle of a redeeming love beyond all bounds.

NOTES

1 Such an idea may also be understood as a notion within the tradition of biblical interpretation or theology. For example on an allegorical level the metaphorical change from the mirroring glass in the otherworldly realm of demons and angels to the pieces of glass and ice scattered around the human realm, may be interpreted as a transformation from transcendence (the notion of God and salvation as something outside human existence) to immanence (God and salvation as a process within existence).

2 In some myths Lilith is referred to as a child-stealing female demon (which would fit Andersen’s tale). The only occurrence of Lilith in the Hebrew Bible is in Isaiah 34:14. Here Lilith takes the guise of an owl finding a place of rest in a deserted palace in the desert. This could be compared with the episode when the Snow Queen leaves Kay’s sight; “da var det, som der udenfor fløi en stor Fugl forbi Vinduet” [then it was as if a great bird flew outside the window] (Andersen
1963-90: 52). The second time Kay meets her he is taken to an empty palace where the Snow Queen resides.

REFERENCES


