



Statue of H. C. Andersen,
by the Town Hall in Copenhagen

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Translation as a creative force in literature: the birth of the European bourgeois fairytale

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This article discusses the emergence of the European bourgeois fairy-tale as the outcome of translation.¹ It is my thesis that the genre came into its own right internationally by virtue of translations of the *Tales* of the brothers Grimm into Danish, and of the *Fairy-tales* of Hans Christian Andersen into German. Apart from comments in footnotes, in passing, in stray articles which discuss relations at the strictly personal level between Danes and Germans at the time, and in the sweeping comments that both the Grimms and Hans Andersen wrote ‘eventyr’, there has been no serious and thorough examination of the relationship between the Grimm *Tales* and the *Tales* of Hans Andersen. By now both the Grimm and the Andersen stories are translated into more than a hundred languages.² Their respective stories are often confused so that editions that come out attribute stories by either party - and occasionally the Frenchman Charles Perrault - to the other one.

The historical setting is, if I may be forgiven the joke, telling. It involves not only history, but also personal backgrounds and the social and cultural context in which the stories were first written and translated.

Tradition pictures the brothers Grimm as the founders of folklore, earnest men who plodded around the German countryside collecting the genuine folk tales of the Germans. There is little truth in this picture. The two brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, were born in 1786 and ‘87 respectively in Hesse, the fief of a landgrave who amassed a fortune and built himself a splendid castle by hiring - leasing is the modern term - his army to the British to fight their wars, including the American War of Independence. The brothers were born in the small town of Hanau as the sons of an official, an ‘Amtmann’.³ He died while they were quite young and they

grew up in Kassel, the capital of Hesse with 20,000 inhabitants. While Napoleon conquered Europe and established the Napoleonic Empire the brothers went to school and university. Wilhelm suffered frail health and stayed in Westphalia, but Jacob went to Paris to help one of his professors. Shortly after his return, Hesse, which Napoleon had turned into a Kurfürstentum, was overrun by French armies on their way to Prussia. The Kurfürst fled. A year later, in 1807, Napoleon established a new kingdom in Germany: Westphalia.⁴ Westphalia was made up of several minor German states, including part of former Hesse. Since it boasted a glamorous castle, Kassel became the capital of the sovereign state ruled by King Jérôme, a brother of Napoleon. Westphalia was a model of French administration and thus promoted the cause of merit, that is, of education and middle class diligence. Thanks to his antiquarian interests, Jacob was brought to the attention of the administration and secured a position as the King's private librarian. Less than a // ... 95 // year later, in January 1809, he was promoted and became the King's secretary, 'auditeur', at council meetings. This meant that Jacob was present at Council meetings without the right to vote. This post is not commented on in Grimm scholarship, but obviously young Jacob had the King's confidence, and, since Jérôme spoke no German, he would have needed somebody to explain - to interpret - the proceedings. In other words: the primary reason why Jacob Grimm became an 'auditeur' was his knowledge of languages and as such, he acted as an interpreter.

During this period, France, Westphalia, and Denmark were allies. Until the Napoleonic wars, the realm of the King of Denmark was large. It comprised Denmark proper (including Schleswig-Holstein down to the Elbe at Hamburg), Norway, the Faeroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland. A curiosity about the Nordic past was natural to the two brothers with their historical interests and they knew Norse - and Danish. Their knowledge of Danish is attested by 1809/1811, but may have been of much older standing.

Unlike the rest of Europe, the Kingdom of Denmark-Norway was not conquered by Napoleon, but joined him of its own volition: the Danish navy was then the third largest in the world, thus a threat to the British should the Danes side with the French. A British naval attack in 1801 forced Denmark to relinquish a neutrality pact with Sweden and Russia. Subsequently the capital of Copenhagen was bombarded in 1807 until the Danes surrendered their navy. After this the Danes became French allies and independently waged a bitter underdog sea-fight with the British until the end of the Napoleonic era in 1814.



The bombardement of Copenhagen, 1807

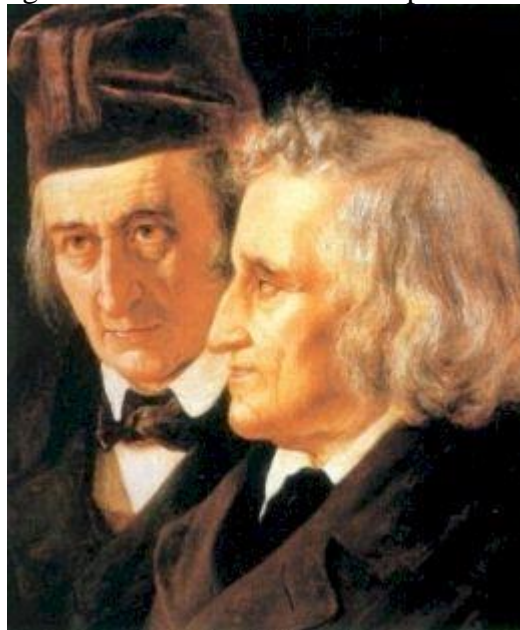
It took the Danes little time to realise that, for their commerce and industry to survive, they had to join the Continental trade alliance, and Westphalia was the closest all-French ally on the road to Paris. Diplomats, soldiers, and scholars went to Westphalia from Copenhagen and vice versa, and Westphalia even had a resident ambassador in Copenhagen.

Wilhelm's familiarity with Danish extended beyond the language. While he was treated for his ailments in the spa of Halle (which had become part of Westphalia) in 1809, he lodged for nearly a year at the same place as the Danish/Norwegian naturalist and philosopher Henrik Steffens, and Wilhelm was also an ardent admirer of the Danish Romantic poet Adam Oehlenschläger. By 1811 Wilhelm had contacts with a number of prominent Danes, notably the grand old man of Danish letters, Professor Rasmus Nyerup. Nyerup was favourably impressed by the brothers' antiquarian knowledge and especially pleased with Wilhelm, who was in the process of publishing his first book, a translation of ancient Danish ballads. Understandably Nyerup met Wilhelm's requests for books and manuscripts for the royal library in Westphalia.

In 1807/1808 the brothers Grimm started to collect folk tales.⁵ This was a Romantically inspired move. Initially, they searched for these narratives in old books, but soon they discovered more fertile ground, namely their sister's female friends, a Kassel coterie of young women from the upper and upper middle classes idling away time until they were married. Apparently, their sister told her friends about her two brothers who were not only acquainted with prominent German poets like Goethe, but were also familiar with old ballads and Norse, that is Germanic, mythology. Since the girls were amusing themselves in a literary vein by telling stories from both written and oral sources, this was a novel and // ... 96 // most welcome approach to storytelling. And in exchange for their lore, the brothers soon heard fairy-tales told by adept female narrators from the highest circles in cosmopolitan Kassel. True, there are some Grimm tales which derive directly from the folk but they are few. There are two from an old woman in Marburg. Some thirty were told by people considered as the 'folk' by the Grimms but which we

would now term the middle classes: an innkeeper's wife, a superannuated officer. Furthermore it may be that some of the stories brought back memories to the brothers of tales told in their father's official residence as Amtmann in the somnolent little town of Hanau. Yet the fact remains that the vast majority of their tales (more than 200 all told⁶) were narrated upper middle-class and lower upper-class girls in their teens and early twenties. The first volume of *Tales* (86 tales) was published in 1812 in Berlin less than two months after the decline of the Napoleon Empire had begun in distant Moscow.

Volume 1 was soon known in Copenhagen in the allied nation of Denmark. When Volume 2 appeared in 1815, Napoleon's Empire was a thing of the past. So was Westphalia. So was Danish power. All this was hammered out at the Congress of Vienna. On that occasion, the Kurfürstentum of Hesse was also re-established. Once again, Jacob Grimm's knowledge of languages made him a valuable asset, so he was employed by the new (and old) Hesse administration for their negotiations in Vienna, but of course Hesse was only one out of many small and insignificant states. Jacob had ample time for other interesting business, such as publishing a circular in which he exhorted all Germanic nations to collect folkloristic material before it was too late. German scholarship maintains that this was a fine but futile gesture which met with no response, although Jacob sent out numerous copies to the Germanic nations.⁷



The brothers Grimm

However, the Germanic nations included Denmark and Norway, and Jacob's call reached Professor Rasmus Nyerup in Copenhagen. Reviewing the lore of his childhood, Nyerup had compiled a descriptive bibliography of published Dano-Norwegian ballads, broadsheets and other folkloristic material. This book appeared in 1816 with a printed dedication to the thirty-year-old "Wilhelm Grimm, one of the greatest literary figures in Germany". Rasmus Nyerup

referred to both Volumes of the Grimm *Tales* in his book. Apparently he also believed that the brothers had been walking around in Hesse, taking down the folk tales they claimed to have collected from oral sources. Nyerup therefore suggested to one of his student assistants, Mathias Thiele, that he should walk around in Denmark and collect - not fairy-tales since the Grimms had clearly done the job for the whole Germanic area - but local legends. Thiele spent the next five summers travelling on foot all over Denmark, collecting about 600 local legends from authentic oral sources. It is odd to record that the true pioneer of the collection of oral material started work on a false premise, a misconception about the Grimms' method of collecting material which the German brothers did nothing to disabuse.

But 1816 also saw the first Danish translation of Grimm *Tales* ('Eventyr') in Danish: the poet Adam Oehlenschläger published six tales in a collection of stories. // ... 97 // Furthermore, an elderly nobleman, the chamberlain Johan Lindencrone, apparently also translated Grimm tales, although only his closest family knew this.

In Germany the *Tales* sold indifferently, yet a new edition was issued in 1819. The first edition had been criticised for tales involving cruelty. Wilhelm Grimm was now solely responsible for the *Tales* and he suppressed or changed the stories which had drawn fire. Let me stress that he was not necessarily manipulating his material: neither Wilhelm nor Jacob had children or associations with children, but they had recognized the *Tales*' potential interest for a juvenile audience all along. The *Tales* are *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in German, so perhaps Wilhelm merely took the advice of conscientious parents. However, he also felt the need to set the *Tales* in a major scholarly and ideological context.

It will be recalled that Wilhelm had previously translated Danish ballads. In the preface to that book, published in 1811, Wilhelm had pointed out common features in Danish and German ballads - similarities which he ascribed to their common Germanic origin. On the other hand, Wilhelm Grimm found it hard to explain similar correspondences between the Germanic folk narratives 'collected by the brothers in Hesse' and stories from other parts of the world, at least until 1818 when he and his brother received a Danish book written by one of their first Danish contacts, the linguist Rasmus Rask. In this book Rasmus Rask discussed the origins of Old Norse (Icelandic) by means of linguistic evidence from a huge array of languages. Rask concluded that the European tongues derived from a common language (which we now term Indo-European) and that Icelandic was closest to that common tongue. When the book was published, Rasmus Rask was on his way to India, and it was Professor Rasmus Nyerup who sent a copy to the brothers Grimm in Kassel. Since the patriot Rasmus Rask had written his thesis in Danish, they were among the chosen few outside Denmark who could assess its importance. Jacob and Wilhelm recognized its potential immediately. Jacob Grimm added a postscript to his German grammar which was then in press and subsequently refined Rask's findings into Grimm's Law concerning Indo-European sound changes. Wilhelm Grimm found that, in the

same way that Rasmus Rask could reconstruct Indo-European from the fragments preserved in disparate languages, he too could posit the existence of a common Indo-European mythology as *the* background for folk tales: they were the sorry remains of that grand fabric. This was the main point of an introduction of some forty pages in which, like Rasmus Rask, Wilhelm Grimm drew almost exclusively on Icelandic material, i.e. Norse mythology as it had survived in Icelandic manuscripts.

The second German edition of the *Tales* soon reached Copenhagen. Chamberlain Lindencrone had died in 1817, but his daughter recovered his translations, revised the stories Wilhelm had changed and translated the new scholarly introduction which flattered the Norse past and assuaged bruised Danish national feelings. The translation should have appeared in 1821, the date on two of the surviving copies, but the official publication was postponed until 1823: this, then, was the year when the first 86 German tales, that is the complete first Volume, became available in Danish. Bearing the name of Chamberlain Lindencrone as its translator, this book continued to appeal to Danish readers for the next ninety years.

It was clearly this translation which in 1823 prompted a native of the Danish island of Funen, Mathias Winther, to publish 20 Danish tales he had heard from oral sources. The stories met with little success. Or the style was awkward // ... 98 // and the narratives ineptly rendered.⁷ But the large German edition had no real success in Germany either. It fared better in an 1823 English translation by Edgar Taylor of selected tales with illustrations by Cruikshank. Taylor's success inspired Wilhelm Grimm to publish in 1825 a German selection of fifty tales specifically for children, the so-called *Kleine Ausgabe* ('Small edition'). This, in turn, gradually led to the establishment of the Grimm collection as a German classic.

In Denmark improved education necessitated new books for classroom use. Rasmus Nyerup's successor at the University of Copenhagen, Professor Christian Molbech, began to search for material, and, German being the first foreign language in Denmark, he soon thought of the Grimm *Tales*, the more appropriate since he had met the brothers. In 1832, he translated stories for a *reader* ('Læsebog') which became popular and was reissued seven times between then and the 1860s. This reader opened the eyes of the Danish public to the marvels of the Grimm tales.

At the time it was a form of commercial enterprise among Danish writers to publish small collections of poetry and stories for 'juveniles' for Christmas or New Year's Eve. Molbech brought out his own series from 1835 to 1840, introducing new stories from Grimm on almost every occasion.

*Christian Molbech*

The very first year Molbech published a 'Christmas present', a promising young Danish writer did so too. He published four tales which he termed 'fairy-tales', i.e. 'Eventyr', the very term also included in the title of the Grimm *Tales* in Danish, i.e. 'Folke-Eventyr': Hans Christian Andersen, thirty years of age, had begun writing fairy-tales. Hans Christian Andersen had actually experimented with the genre once five years before but met with little success.⁹ In the winter of 1834-35, when he lived next-door to Mathias Thiele, the pioneer legend collector, Andersen returned to the genre. This time he used material from the oral tradition for two tales, 'The Tinder Box' and 'Little Claus and Big Claus', and possibly also for 'The Princess and the Pea', whereas the last story, 'Little Ida's flowers' was entirely of his own making. At all events Hans Christian Andersen had started his career as a fairy-tale writer and went on publishing his amiable tales. From then on, only 'The Travelling Companion' and 'The Wild Swans' were inspired by the oral tradition which Hans Christian Andersen had come to know as a child in Odense on the island of Funen.

Relations between Germany and Denmark were close at the time. The Danish Duchies of Slesvig-Holsten were technically part of the German Empire and the two countries were united in their Germanic past and in close contemporary intellectual ties: Oehlenschläger visited every German prominent in cultural life, and the Danes were delighted with Wilhelm Grimm's interest in matters Danish. The interest was reciprocal: to take only a few examples: Fichte stayed with the Danish physicist H.C. Ørsted in Copenhagen when Napoleon's armies overran Berlin, Goethe discussed Danish ballads and literature with Wilhelm Grimm, Oehlenschläger's works appeared in both German and Danish. ... // 99 ... Hans Christian Andersen was also familiar with German.¹⁰ As a child in Odense he had spent happy hours in the theatre where some of the plays were performed in German. He read Heinrich Heine and E.T.A Hoffmann and they influenced his early writings. The only poem he published while he attended school (as an adolescent and adult under private tuition), 'The Dying Child', (1827) was translated into German by a friend and published anonymously in Libau in 1828. When the poem was reprinted in 1831, he was named as the author. In 1833, he was, as it were, formally introduced to the German literary establishment by Adelbert von Chamisso. German knowledge of Andersen was thus early and comprehensive: most of his works were translated into German shortly after their appearance in Danish, as were his fairy-tales.

Andersen's first Danish collection of fairy-tales was finished in 1835 and a German selection (of nine tales) was published in 1839. It was reprinted the following year, so

commercially it was a success; four of the six reviews were favourable. They stressed that Andersen's stories were for children. The second collection of translated fairy-tales appeared in 1844-1845 and was soon reprinted. Hans Andersen promoted his work in Germany personally, for instance by giving public readings. The tales were popular with the public although the reviews were mainly negative. Clearly influenced by their own misconceptions about the Grimm stories, the critics complained that Hans Christian Andersen's tales were "constructed". Yet, less than a year later, the mood changed when the third collection appeared (1845): critical assessment was influenced by a knowledge of Hans Christian Andersen's personality and his fairy-tales were described as "touching", later "naive", and, occasionally, as having a tone which was meant for adults rather than children. The fourth collection appeared in 1846 and the fifth in 1848.

At this stage, it is useful to look at a chart which juxtaposes the appearances of the Grimm and Andersen tales in Germany and Denmark: ...// 100 ...

Table 1: German and Danish *Tales* and Translations 1812–1850

Translation (other languages)	Grimm		Grimm in Danish translation	Andersen in German translation	Andersen (+Winther) in Danish	In translation (other languages)
	Small Edition (German)	Large Edition (German)				
		1812 (Volume 1)				
		1815 (Volume 1)	1816 (Oehlenschläger)			
1820 (Dutch)		1819 (2nd edition)	1821/23 (Lindencrone)		1823 (Winther)	
1823 (English)						
	1825		1832 (Molbech)			
	1833		1835 (Molbech)		1835 (Andersen)	
	1836				1837	
	1839	1837	1838 (Molbech)		1839	
	1841	1840	1839 (Molbech)			
	1844	1843	1840 (Molbech)		1838–42	
			1843 (Molbech)			1844 (Sw)
			1844 (Lindencrone)	1844		
				1845		
	1847			1846	1846–47	1846 (Eng/ Dutch)
	1850	1850		1848	1848	1848 (Fr)

Sources: Möller Christensen. NUC. BLC. Catalogues at the Royal Library, Copenhagen (the table is incomplete)

This juxtaposition illustrates the point of this article: in both Denmark and Germany the genre of the literary folk tale, what we now term the ‘fairy-tale’, was born because tales from the

other country were translated. In each country they called the attention of readers -clearly grown-ups in need of reading material for children - to this new genre. They began to buy tales ('Märchen' in German and 'Eventyr' in Danish), and once they found them appropriate and suited for children, they bought more, regardless of the name of the 'author'. In other words: the sales of Andersen promoted the Grimms and the sales of the Grimms promoted Andersen. This applied to both countries.

I am approaching the end of my own tale, so let me finish by stressing a few points.

German scholarship resents any bracketing of the Grimms' ancient and genuine German folk tales with Hans Christian Andersen's sentimental fairy-tales. Conversely, no Danish Andersen scholar is willing to have Hans Christian Andersen's subtly humorous fairy-tales mistaken for the cruel, unforgiving and primitive Grimm tales. It is true that the Grimm tales are ideologically associated with a romantic notion about some distant Indo-Germanic mythology, as well as the idea that they preserved the true essence of the German national heritage whereas Andersen's tales were the product of his own imagination. In these respects there is no doubt that the German and the Danish stories are, indeed, worlds apart. // 101 ... But in the cool light of the reality of what most readers expect and actually receive, this division is non-existent. Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tales were the products of his imagination, but he did use many features - talking animals and plants, animate nature, princes, princesses, witches and other imagery - from the traditional folk tale; he also moved into the upper middle class, and he told his stories to children and adults before they were published, thus unconsciously adapting the norms of the tales to the norms of polite society. Similarly, the Grimms never really collected their tales from primitive narrators calling upon an oral tradition. The tales were retold by young women who filtered them so that they could be recounted in educated households. The Grimms also made use of the traditional paraphernalia of the folk tale, and, once their tales were transferred to other cultures outside Germany, translators often suppressed the sanguinary details and cruel endings. In this fashion the Grimms and Andersen created the European bourgeois fairy-tale. This they did because they were favoured by time and place, and because their tales were translated and adapted to general European middle class norms. Yet we must not overlook one important feature of the international bourgeois fairy-tale: it is a small genre indeed and comprises only a handful of tales by Hans Christian Andersen and the brothers Grimm (often without the original cruelty) that have really jumped language and cultural barriers and constitute the core of the international fairy-tale genre.

In 1844 Hans Christian Andersen was in Berlin.¹¹ Looking forward to a meeting of kindred spirits, he went to see the brothers Grimm. He came to their house. When the maid asked him which of the brothers he wanted to see, he answered that he wished to meet the one who had written most. He was introduced to Jacob Grimm who did not even know Andersen by name; crestfallen Andersen declined the offer to meet Wilhelm and went back to his lodgings in

dejection. The next time they met, Jacob knew who Andersen was, and the next year Andersen also met Wilhelm. After this last meeting, Andersen sent Wilhelm a copy of his tales. The handwritten dedication ran: "To Germany's great fairy-tale writer" - a simple, direct, and yet more perspicacious comment on the work of Wilhelm Grimm than any of those ponderous tomes that argue that the Grimms salvaged the genuine German folk tale from oblivion.

My tale has some ramifications in a larger historical context which should not be overlooked. The societies in which the Grimms and Hans Christian Andersen grew up were plurilingual, at least as far as educated people were concerned, and had been so for centuries. In the above account, there is, however, a novel feature because we are dealing with a genre which - despite the protestations of both the Grimms and Hans Christian Andersen (and many scholars) - is primarily considered children's fare by publishers, purchasers, and adult readers. It must be up to others to prove or disprove the following assumption about most translation work produced prior to the 19th century. I contend that most earlier translation was done 'con amore' under specific circumstances. Literary critics talk about 'influences' in world literature, about how works affect others, sometimes across language barriers. They disregard the processes behind these influences, presumably because these are hard to document. However, it is my qualified guess that in most cases these 'literary influences' can ultimately be traced back to target culture literati who could read and enjoy the // ... 102 // classics of other cultures in the original languages. If they were authors in their own right, their work might be influenced in more obvious ways, and they might adapt parts of the foreign works for instance in terms of style, themes, and so on. The original classics were then translated after the road had been prepared. Translations did not come out of the blue.

The emergence of the literary fairy-tale genre is an early, perhaps even the earliest situation in which translations create, influence, and promote national literary output, for the simple reason that the genre was considered primarily as literature for children, who would be unfamiliar with foreign languages. What we have seen is therefore the gradual appearance of the profession of translation as a strong formative force in world literature.

Endnotes

1. This article is based primarily on my own research into the Danish translation of the Grimm *Tales*: working title *Telling tales*.
2. For the brothers Grimm, see Denecke, Ludwig, *Jacob Grimm und sein Bruder Wilhelm* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971). For Hans Christian Andersen, private communication supplied by the

Hans Christian Andersen Museum, Odense, Funen, Denmark.

3. The best account of the brothers' life is that of Weishaupt, Jürgen, *Die Märchenbrüder Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm - ihr Leben und Wirken* (Kassel: Thiele & Schwarz, 1985).
4. The information about Westphalia derives from Hassel, Georg, *Geographisch-statistischer Abriss des Königreichs Westphalen* (Weimar: Landes-Industrie-Comptoir, 1809).
5. The story of the efforts at collection is covered most extensively by Heinz Rölleke in numerous publications. The novice is best served by starting with Rölleke, Heinz, *Die Märchen der Brüder Grimm: Eine Einführung* (München und Zürich: Artemis, 1985).
6. The last large German edition published by Wilhelm Grimm in 1957 comprised 200 numbered tales and 10 religious legends. Some of the tales consist of several (disconnected) stories, and there are two versions of tale 151. Over the years more stories were published in one or two editions, later to be discarded.
7. See, for instance, the reprint *Jacob Grimm, Circular wegen Aufsammlung der Volkspoesie*, ed. by Ludwig Denecke, preface by Kurt Ranke (Kassel: Brüder Grimm-Museum, 1968 [Orig. Wien 1815]).
8. Holbek renders Winther's 'The Eleven Swans' in fair and adequate English and juxtaposes it to Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Wild Swans', thus amply demonstrating the inelegance and crudeness of Winther's stories in Holbek, Bengt, "Hans Christian Andersen's Use of Folktales", in *The Telling of Stories: Approaches to a Traditional Craft: a Symposium*, ed. by Morten Nøjgaard, et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1990), 165-182.
9. The study by Holbek (note 8) of Hans Christian Andersen's use of Danish folkloristic material (Holbek 1990) is authoritative.
10. The authoritative study of the German reception of Hans Christian Andersen is Möller Christensen, Ivy York, *Den gyldne trekant: H. C. Andersens gennembrud i Tyskland 1831-1850 med tilhørende bibliografi* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1992).
11. The story of this meeting is told by Hans Christian Andersen himself in *Mit eget eventyr uden digtning*, tr. by H. Topsøe-Jensen (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, Arnold Busck, 1952 [German original: 1847]), 165-167.



The statue of Hans Christian Andersen in the 'King's New Garden