

THE KALEIDOSCOPE CHRONICLE



The Year of
Hans Christian Andersen

INAUGURAL

ISSUE

Department of English
The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong

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The Year of
Hans Christian Andersen

THE KALEIDOSCOPE
CHRONICLE INAUGURAL ISSUE

i The Kaleidoscope Chronicle focuses on literature, language, culture, and the creative humanities, celebrating the remarkable talents of our students and the vibrant community within the English Department. Each year, the Department of English forms a team to review and edit student essays and creative works submitted to the journal. This publication showcases the writing talents at the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong and is edited and produced by faculty members of the Department of English.

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PREFACE

Dr. Anna Tso, Associate Professor,
Department of English

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The journey to launch the English Department's inaugural journal issue has spanned over a year, evolving from a simple collection of student writings to a comprehensive showcase of our department's diverse achievements. The preparation for this journal publication has sparked lively discussions around our title, *Kaleidoscope*, which symbolises the vibrant blend of voices within our community. The term "kaleidoscope" reflects the rich variety of contributions from students and faculty alike, capturing both creative and analytical expressions.

We are excited to present this first issue in celebration of the 150th anniversary of Hans Christian Andersen's passing during the 45th anniversary of The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong in 2025. Andersen's narratives, rich with whimsy, depth, and moral complexity, have captivated readers for generations, providing ample material for reinterpretation. Inside this special issue, you will find an array of genres including poetry, song(s) and lyrics, short stories, and artworks, all inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairytales. The song and lyrics are written for the musical on H.C. Andersen, whereas the poetry, short stories, and artworks are students' works shortlisted in the series of creative competitions held by the Department of English in early 2025. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Kwok-kan Tam, Dr. Amy Kong, Dr. Miguel Lizada, Ms. Sophina Chu, Ms. Claire Zhou, Ms Regina Zeng, and Ms. Kitty Kong for their invaluable assistance in selecting the poems, short stories, and art illustrations featured in this issue. Your contributions have greatly enriched our publication.

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This special issue also features students' essays and reviews that analyze Andersen's fairytale interpretations, some of which include a cross-cultural comparative study of Andersen, Chekhov, and Blake; employ a biographical approach to study H.C. Andersen; explore the symbolic meanings in Andersen's tales; and examine how adaptations breathe new life into familiar stories while reflecting contemporary themes, cultural shifts, and artistic innovations. Engaging with a variety of perspectives – such as literary analysis, cultural studies, narrative theory, and comparative literature – these contributions offer a rich landscape for literary exploration. We are especially grateful to Dr. Jay Parker and Dr Heidi Wong who serve as peer reviewers for the journal issue. Their guidance and expertise have been invaluable in shaping this collection.

Readers can expect to encounter poignant narratives, insightful critiques, and innovative interpretations of classic texts, all addressing universal themes such as love, compassion, sacrifice, death and immortality, and human nature. We hope you enjoy this collection as much as we have enjoyed bringing it to life.

Anna Tso
April 2025

FOREWORD

Professor Kwok-kan Tam, Chair Professor,
School of Humanities and Social Science

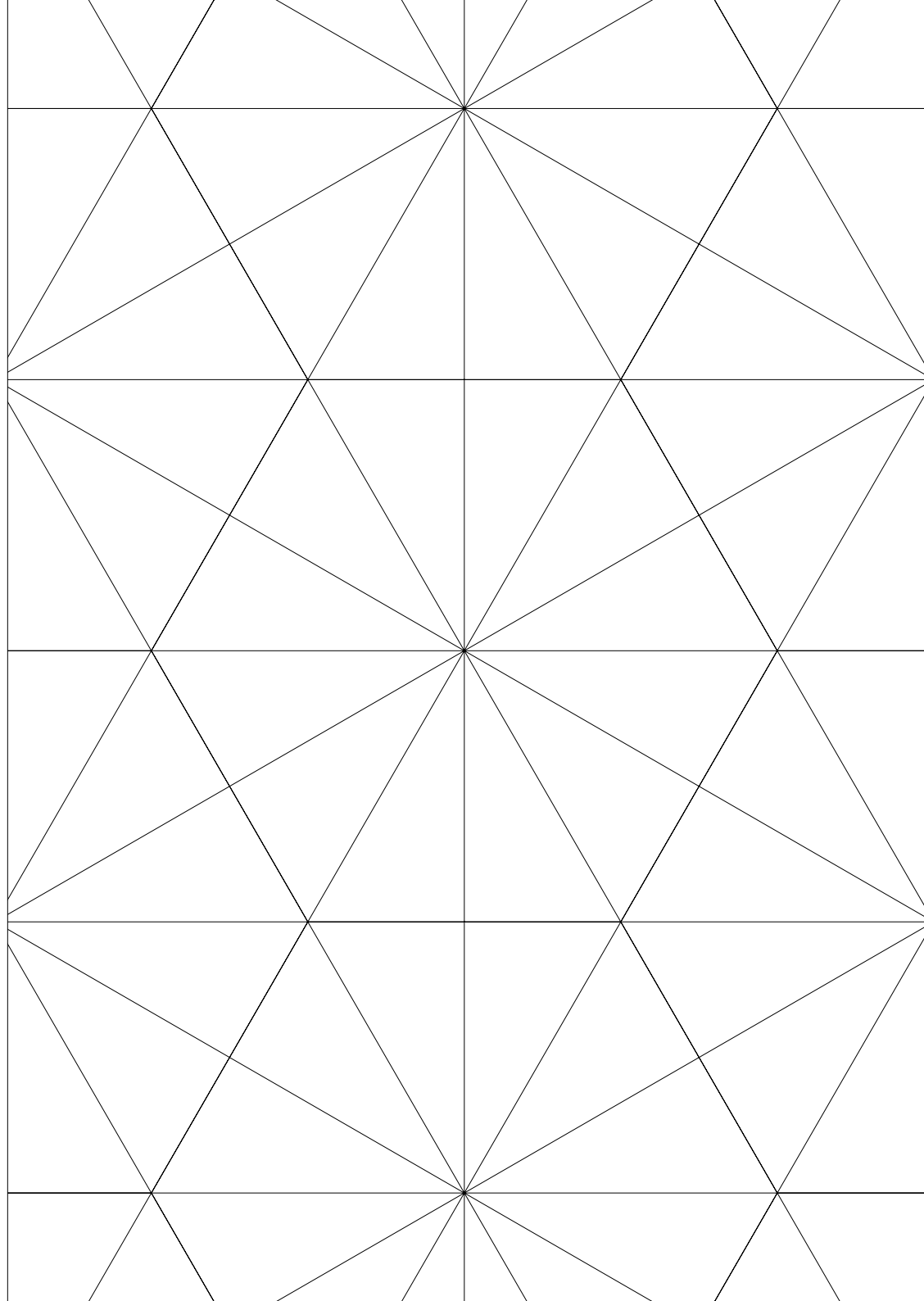
Congratulations to the English Department on the successful launch of Kaleidoscope Chronicle, a new journal founded by Dr. Anna Tso and her team. The word “kaleidoscope” evokes images of ever-changing patterns in myriad forms and colours, while “chronicle” brings a sense of record and permanence. The Kaleidoscope Chronicle, title of the journal, is an oxymoron producing multiple meanings combining the imaginary with the factual, while conjuring change, growth and development. It carries the Department’s aspiration for students.

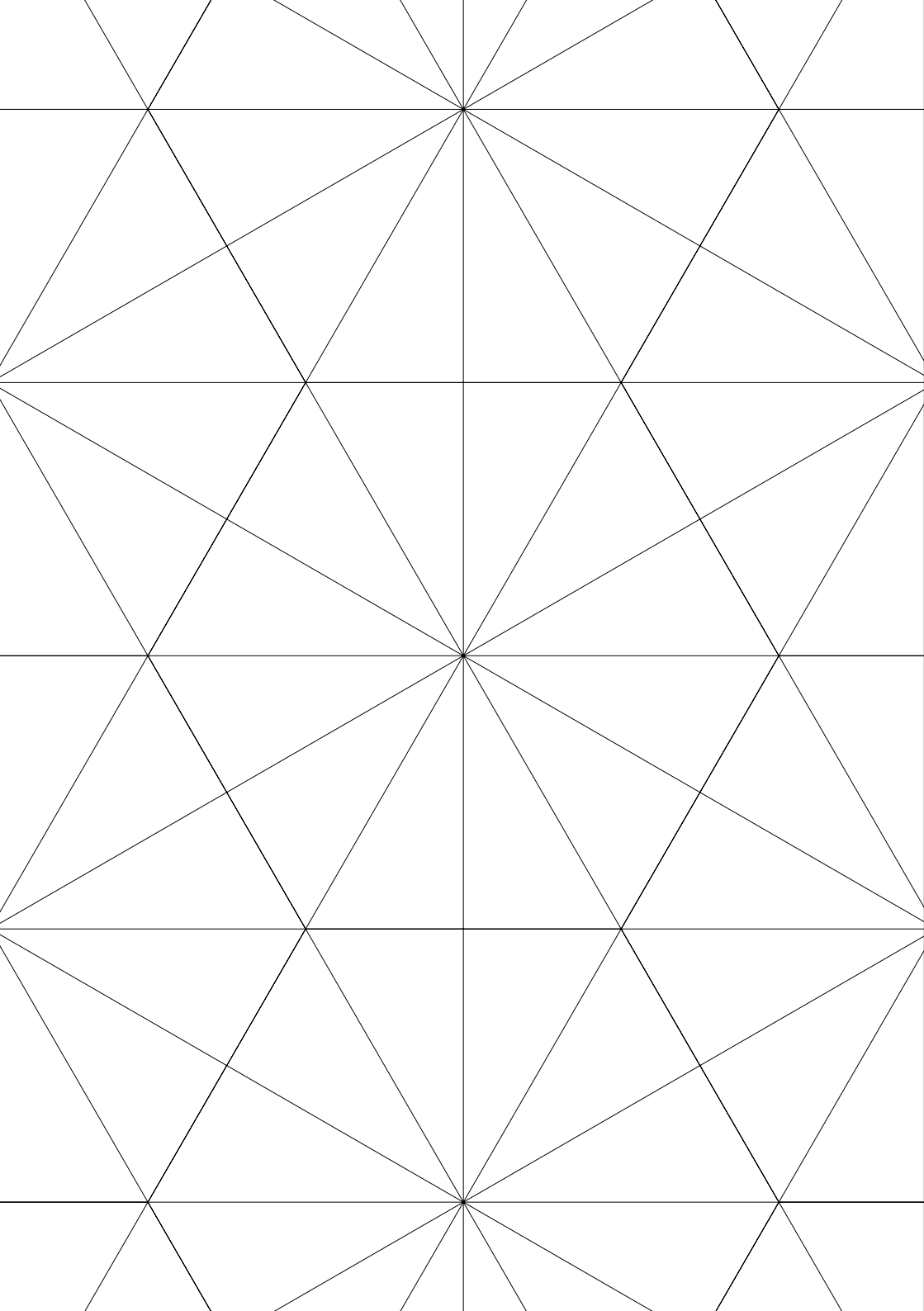
In this inaugural issue there is a special theme to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Hans Christian Andersen’s passing. Andersen’s fairytales are taught and read in Hong Kong. He is not only a cultural icon of Denmark; he is well known all over the world. In China and Japan, there are Andersen cultural parks that connect China and Japan with Denmark and Nordic culture, as well as promote cultural exchanges between East Asia and Denmark.

Andersen has left the world with a legacy that shapes our culture of romantic imagination, our love of truthfulness, compassion, and kindness. A major source of modern Asian culture, Andersen has influenced many writers, playwrights and artists. The poetry, short stories and art works collected in this issue are evidence of the inspiration Andersen has given the young minds in Hong Kong.

The journal will chronicle the cultural kaleidoscope of the English Department at The Hong Kong Baptist University of Hong Kong.

Kwok-kan Tam
April 2025





ESSAYS

7 “The Ugly Duckling”: A Journey of Transformation

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INTRODUCTION

The Ugly Duckling, one of the masterpieces of Hans Christian Andersen, has a significant and global influence. It is a Danish literary fairytale that resonates with readers of all ages, embodying themes of perseverance and self-acceptance. It tells the story of a duckling that is ridiculed by his siblings, rejected by other ducks, and shunned by his own mother. The duckling, feeling despondent, remembers the fresh air and sunlight, longing to go swimming on the water. Despite being bitten and buffeted by his siblings, the ugly duckling perseveres, ultimately transforming into a graceful swan.

Beyond its significance in children's literature, which serves as an enlightening reading material for young minds, *The Ugly Duckling* also strikes a chord in adults' hearts, offering life philosophy. In her essay “The Ugly Duckling, Hans Christian Andersen: A Story of Transformation”, educator Anita Gambos aptly described the story as a source of universal hope to the disenfranchised, as it portrays a misfit who faces rejection from both family and society (63). It is noteworthy that Andersen experienced a miserable life before his great success. Despite numerous rejections and hardships, including the initial dismissal of his plays and stories by publishers and critics, Andersen never gave up. He persisted in writing and finally achieved great success. The ugly duckling, like Andersen, encounters a series of misfortunes. He is chased away from his farm, suffers the harshness of winter, and faces attacks from other animals. However, he perseveres and never succumbs to despair. Ultimately, his resilience pays off, and he eventually transforms into a beautiful swan.

This essay explores the parallels between *The Ugly Duckling* and Andersen's life experiences. It draws comparisons between Andersen's early life and the ugly duckling's growing journey, highlighting their self-discovery, identity exploration, and similar personal experiences. The essay also explores misconceptions of beauty, and people who put them into miserable conditions or gave them support. While it is acknowledged that Anders-

en's autobiography may contain elements of self-mythology, as he portrays his life as a "fairy tale," Wullschlager's biography, *Hans Christian Andersen: The life of a storyteller* provides a comprehensive analysis that combines strict research with literary insight. This biography goes beyond Andersen's self-portrait, which deconstructs the myth and reveals the underlying anxieties, ambitions, and contradictions that shaped his storytelling. By examining these elements, the essay concludes that *The Ugly Duckling* is deeply connected to Andersen's life experience, as reflected in Wullschlager's biography and Andersen's autobiography *The Fairy Tale of My Life*. In other words, *The Ugly Duckling* serves as a candid portrayal of Andersen's early life.

ANDERSEN'S EARLY LIFE AND ITS REFLECTION IN THE TALE

The Ugly Duckling stands as a literary classic, highly recommended for Chinese young children and widely recognised as one of the most popular fairytales in China. A 2020 survey conducted by *China Children's Press & Publication Group* ranked *The Ugly Duckling* among the top ten most recognised foreign fairytales among Chinese children. Children in the Mainland are required to study a chapter on this tale, and most of them diligently read the entire story and are deeply affected. Consequently, *The Ugly Duckling* consistently ranks among the top-selling children's fairytales on the two major Chinese book retailers Dangdang and JD.com.

Out of love and appreciation for *The Ugly Duckling*, I dedicated myself to reading and studying Andersen's autobiography as an adult. Through this exploration, it became evident that Andersen's life experiences must have had a profound connection with the fairytale's protagonist, the ugly duckling, who serves as a mirror that reflects Andersen's whole life. In his book *Hans Christian Andersen: The Life of a Storyteller*, Wullschlager also highlights Andersen's impoverished childhood in Odense, Denmark, and his early feelings of being an outsider before reaching the age of thirty (6). These experiences are reflected in many of Andersen's stories, including *The Ugly Duckling*, which mirrors his own transformative journey from marginalisation to achieving recognition and success.

ANDERSEN'S CHILDHOOD INFLUENCES

First and foremost, Andersen was born into a poor family in Odense, Denmark. His father, a shoemaker, passed away when he was young, leaving the family in a more difficult situation. His mother, a washerwoman, later remarried, and Andersen's relationship with his stepfather was strained. This experience of family changes and instability might have been reflected in the ugly duckling's sense of not belonging within his "family" of ducks. Furthermore, due to his family's poverty, Andersen spent his entire childhood in the lower social class and seldom played with other children, which made him feel out of place, like the duckling's sense of being an outsider in the barnyard. Andersen rarely played with other boys, even at school. He took little interest in their games and preferred to sit alone at the doorway. Once, he took the courage to make friends with a girl. The girl dreamed of becoming a milkmaid on a big farm. Andersen responded with kindness:

That you can become a guest in my castle when I am a nobleman! And she laughed at me and told me that I was only a poor boy. One day I had drawn something which I called my castle, and I told her that I was a changed child of high birth, and that the angels of God came down and spoke to me. I wanted to make her stare as I did with the old women in the hospital, but she would not be caught. She looked queerly at me, and said to one of the other boys standing near, 'He is a fool like his grandpapa', and I shivered at the words. I had said it to give me an air of importance in their eyes, but I failed and only made them think that I was insane like my grandfather (9).

Andersen was an innocent child full of imagination, but hardly anyone appreciated him except for his family members.

THE DUCKLING'S JOURNEY

The duckling, born into a duck family, immediately exhibits differences in appearance and size from its siblings. Before hatching, the old duck visited the mother duck and thought the big egg was a turkey egg. She convinced the mother duck to give it up. The old duck dislikes turkey children because she hatched one and after caring for them, they were afraid of water, and it was not a bit of use no matter how she quacked and snapped at them. After the big egg is hatched, the old duck and mother duck want to figure out whether he is a turkey or not:

Next day the weather was perfectly splendid, and the sun shone down on all the green burdock leaves. The mother duck led her whole family down to the moat. Splash! She took to the water. 'Quack, quack,' said she, and one duckling after another plunged in. The water went over their heads, but they came up in a flash, and floated to perfection. Their legs worked automatically, and they were all there in the water. Even the big, ugly gray one was swimming along (Andersen).

At that moment, the mother duck has made sure he is indeed a duck and said firmly and lovingly:

Why, that's no turkey. See how nicely he uses his legs, and how straight he holds himself. He's my very own son after all, and quite good-looking if you look at him properly. Quack, quack come with me. I'll lead you out into the world and introduce you to the duck yard. But keep close to me so that you won't get stepped on, and watch out for the cat! (Andersen)

When confronting the other duck's whacking and the old duck's aversion, mother duck defended the ugly duckling:

He isn't so handsome, but he's as good as can be, and he swims just as well as the rest, or, I should say, even a little better than they do. I hope his looks will improve with age, and after a while he won't seem so big. He took too long in the egg, and that's why his figure isn't all that it should be. Moreover, he's a drake,

so it won't matter so much. I think he will be quite strong, and I'm sure he will amount to something. (Andersen)

However, tremendous changes have taken place. Later on, he was bullied and rejected by the other ducklings and other animals on the farm. His mother changed her attitude towards the ugly duckling and said, "How I do wish you were miles away." What caused the mother duck to change so much? The reasons remain unexplained in the original text. Based on my understanding and Andersen's life experience, it is plausible that during this period, Andersen's mother remarried a young handicraftsman whose family belonged to the same handicraft class. The handicraftsman thought that he had married below himself, and neither Andersen nor his mother were permitted to visit his family. Consequently, Andersen was compelled to leave his home, mirroring the early loneliness and hardship endured by the ugly duckling. In a similar vein, the poor duck had to depart from his home, much like Andersen decided to travel alone to the unfamiliar city of Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark.

SELF-DISCOVERY AND IDENTITY EXPLORATION

Since then, Andersen went through a long process of self-discovery with no support or guidance. During this period, he experienced a constant alternation between affirmation and rejection. In his youth, Andersen was eager to become an actor and applied to the Royal Danish Theatre. At first, he was appreciated by Sibone and studied singing with Professor Weiss. However, six months later, without warm shoes and clothing for the winter, Andersen sustained a vocal injury that prevented him from pursuing a career in singing. Subsequently, when he turned to writing, his early works were met with criticism and rejection from publishers and critics. These repeated setbacks in his pursuit of his dreams mirror the experience of the ugly duckling, who was repeatedly chased away and bullied by other animals. It took him years to find his true calling and establish himself as a renowned author. Likewise, the duckling remains unaware of his true identity as a swan and embarks on a journey filled with confusion and self-doubt. He constantly

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questions his place in the world and his identity, only to finally realise his true nature as a beautiful swan, representing a pivotal moment of self-discovery. The duckling's journey from an outcast to finding his true self can be seen as a reflection of Andersen's own struggle for recognition in the artistic world, alongside other prominent figures such as Charles Dickens and The Grimms. Wullschlager traces Andersen's relentless pursuit of artistic success, detailing his rise from a poor and uneducated youth to one of the most celebrated writers of his time. She elucidates how Andersen's ambition and determination were driven by a need to prove himself and overcome the limitations imposed by his background. (Wullschlager 120)

PARALLELS BETWEEN ANDERSEN AND THE DUCKLING

One experience that strikes me as being remarkably comparable between Andersen and the ugly duckling is that one day Andersen and his mother went to a place where the bailiff was well-known for being a man of a rude and savage disposition:

We saw him coming with a huge whip in his hand, and my mother and all the others ran away. I had wooden shoes on my bare feet, and in my haste I lost these, and then the thorns pricked me so that I could not run, and thus I was left behind and alone. The man came up and lifted his whip to strike me, when I looked him in the face and involuntarily exclaimed, 'How dare you strike me, when God can see it?' The strong, stern man looked at me, and at once became mild; he patted me on my cheeks, asked me my name, and gave me money. (Andersen 10)

While in *The Ugly Duckling*, after being driven out by his family, he met the bird dogs coming through the swamp:

The bird dogs came splash, splash! through the swamp, bending down the reeds and the rushes on every side. This gave the poor duckling such a fright that he twisted his head about to hide it under his wing. But at that very moment a fearfully big dog appeared right beside him. His tongue lolled out of his mouth

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and his wicked eyes glared horribly. He opened his wide jaws, flashed his sharp teeth, and – splash, splash – on he went without touching the duckling. "Thank heavens," he sighed, "I'm so ugly that the dog won't even bother to bite me. (Andersen)

In actuality, the ugly duckling and Andersen suffer not because of their appearance, but because of their deep-seated inferiority complex. They naturally link their unsatisfactory experiences with their less confident appearance.

MISCONCEPTIONS OF BEAUTY

In fact, the ugly duckling is not inherently ugly in his appearance, a colossal and grey "duckling" when born, but he is incompatible with a duck yard, where he is rejected and bullied by everyone. That is why he sees himself as "ugly" from this intuitive perspective. Apparently, a duck yard is a mistaken place for a swan to live. Similarly, "ugly" is merely the incorrect self-perception of Andersen, a peculiar boy during his youth. He was also tall, thin, and awkward with a prominent nose and large feet, which made him the target of ridicule and teasing from other children. In his early life, Andersen faced social rejection and struggled to fit in. He was sent to a Jewish school for poor children in Odense, where he felt like a stranger. Later, in Copenhagen and prestigious schools like Slagels and Elsinore, he was ridiculed for his appearance and aspirations. He seldom played with peers and was not interested in their games. Instead, he preferred to stay alone in the classroom. Perhaps influenced by his parents, his greatest pleasure was making clothes for dolls. He also loved fantasy and was convinced that Odense was not the place for him to pursue his aspirations. Being a shoemaker was not his dream life career. Anna Toom considers *The Ugly Duckling* to be one of the most captivating fairytales, where the plot revolves around the main character's miraculous transformation, like from a fool becoming a sage, an unfortunate orphan becoming a prince's favourite, and a loser becoming a winner. More significantly, the unconventional storyline of the loser's ascent to victory profoundly inspired numerous readers (Toom 87).

SOCIETAL CRITIQUE

In his life, Andersen encountered many people who were unkind or dismissive of his dreams and talents, such as his head teacher at school. At that time, societal norms and expectations dictated certain behaviours, and people who deviated from these norms, like Andersen due to his unusual and creative nature, were frequently subjected to criticism and ostracism. A notable example is the director of Helsingør Junior High School, Dr. Mesling, whose actions had a profound impact on Andersen's mind:

I was actually like a wild bird which is confined in a cage; I had the greatest desire to learn, but for the moment I floundered about, as if I had been thrown into the sea; one wave followed another; grammar, geography, mathematics: I felt myself overpowered by them, and feared that I should never be able to acquire all these. The Rector, who took a peculiar delight in turning everything to ridicule, did not, of course, make an exception in my case. (Andersen 55)

I tremblingly brought to him *The Dying Child*; he read it, and pronounced it to be sentimentality and idle trash. He gave way freely to his anger. If he had believed that I wasted my time in writing verses, or that I was of a nature which required a severe treatment, then his intention would have been good; but he could not pretend this. But from this day forward my situation was more unfortunate than ever; I suffered so severely in my mind that I was very near sinking under it. That was the darkest, the most unhappy time in my life. (Andersen 56)

When, in taking leave of him, I thanked him for the kindness which I had received from him, the passionate man cursed me, and ended by saying that I should never become a student, that my verses would grow mouldy on the floor of the bookseller's shop, and that I myself should end my days in a mad-house. I trembled to my innermost being, and left him. (Andersen 57)

Whereas in *The Ugly Duckling*, the other animals on the farm, such as the wild ducks, hens, and geese, represent the unkind and judgmental society:

When morning came, the wild ducks flew up to have a look at their new companion. "What sort of creature are you?" they asked, as the duckling turned in all directions, bowing his best to them all. "You are terribly ugly," they told him, "but that's nothing to us so long as you don't marry into our family" (Andersen).

They tease and bully the ugly duckling because he is different, reflecting the same kind of intolerance and lack of understanding that Andersen faced in his real life.

SUPPORT AND TEMPORARY ACCEPTANCE

Despite the unkindness and setbacks he encountered, Andersen experienced periods of temporary assistance and protection from Collin:

The present conference councilor, Collin, one of the most distinguished men of Denmark, who unites with the greatest ability the noblest and best heart, to whom I looked up with confidence in all things, who had been a second father to me, and in whose children I have found brothers and sisters, – this excellent man I saw now for the first time. In order therefore to obtain the means for my support and the necessary instruction, Collin recommended me to King Frederick VI., who granted to me a certain sum annually for some years; and, by means of Collin also, the directors of the high schools allowed me to receive free instruction in the grammar school at Slagelse (Andersen 42).

While there were people who offered him shelter or opportunities, these were often transient or came with conditions. In *The Ugly Duckling*, the duckling encounters a farmer and his wife who save the duckling's life and provide him with a temporary refuge:

Early that morning a farmer came by, and when he saw how things were he went out on the pond, broke away the ice with his wooden shoe, and carried the duckling home to his wife. There the duckling revived, but when the children wished to play with him he thought they meant to hurt him. (Andersen)

However, the duckling still cannot truly accept how kind the family is, and eventually he must leave, similar to how Andersen's temporary fortunate situations did not invariably result in long-term stability or fulfillment.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to *the Ugly Duckling*, some people consider that it is a story that addresses the misconception that the ugly duckling is mocked and bullied by others because of his appearance. Through this story, readers learn to avoid judging others based on their looks. After reading Andersen's autobiography, I gained a deeper understanding of his intended message, which was to provide a simplified and palatable portrayal of his early life for children. He also conveys the message that individuals should persevere through challenges and never give up.

In essence, Andersen's life experiences, as recounted in his autobiography *The Fairy Tale of My Life*, mirror the journey of the ugly duckling. Both endured ridicule and hardships in their early years, yet ultimately transformed into something beautiful and celebrated.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that in 2025, we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the passing of renowned fairytale writer Hans Christian Andersen. *Andersen's Fairy Tales* has laid a solid foundation for global children's literature, which has been translated into more than 150 varieties of languages and has inspired a multitude of creative endeavours, including films, ballets, life theatre, and animations. Notably, some of his fairytales may offer insights into his life experiences during various periods, such as *The Little Match Girl* and *Daughter of the Sea*, which warrant further scholarly research.

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Modern Echoes in “The Princess and the Pea”: Colleen Mills’ Reworking of Andersen’s Classic

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Fairytales have long held a significant role in human culture, serving as a repository of rich symbolic meanings and profound moral lessons. Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Princess and the Pea* stands as a timeless fairytale that has captivated audiences across generations. The narrative revolves around a princess whose sensitivity allows her to feel the presence of a pea beneath twenty mattresses and twenty eiderdowns, thereby proving her royal identity.

In recent times, there has been a resurgence of interest in reimagining classic fairytales. Colleen Mills’ rendition of *The Pea Princess* stands as a notable example of this phenomenon. Mills takes the classic tale as a starting point and transforms it into a poetic form, breathing new life into this classic tale while simultaneously offering a fresh perspective on the original. This adaptation infuses the classic with contemporary sensibilities and delves deeper into its underlying themes and characters.

Notably, this adaptation deviates from the traditional plot structure, eschewing a conventional narrative. Instead, it relies on the reader’s familiarity with the original Andersen’s tale to establish a contextual framework. This reworking not only reflects the ongoing development and transformation of literary works in contemporary society but also showcases Mills’ creative prowess. Upon closer examination of the poem, it becomes evident that beneath its seemingly innocent surface, there may be a subtle sexual implication in certain lines. The purpose of the essay is to discuss the adaptation of *The Pea Princess* by Colleen Mills, examining its modifications in plot, characterisation, thematic exploration, and narrative style.

One of the most notable creative reimaginings of *The Pea Princess* is its plot, which significantly diverges it from H.C. Andersen’s original. While Andersen’s *The Princess and the Pea* follows a straightforward narrative involving a prince’s search for a genuine princess, Mills’ *The Pea Princess* deviates from this linear structure. In the poem, Mills omits the prince, the castle, and the testing method. Instead, the poem focuses on the princess’s physical and psychological struggle with the pea. As noted in the poem, “she arches like a bowed branch of willow, quivering from stem to leaf. / with each flex of the wrists, roll of a shoulder, gentle realignment of the ribs, / the lump burrows deeper” (Mills 2003). This

transformation shifts the plot from an external, societal test of royal authenticity to an internal, personal experience of the princess's discomfort. This departure from Andersen's original plot structure reflects Mills' modernist approach, prioritising personal experience over the traditional focus of fairytales on court life and social status.

As outlined in the article "Reinventing Fantasy: The Reception of Fairy Tales," the interpretation and reinterpretation of fairytales by active audiences based on their social and cultural contexts shape their meaning in modern adaptations (Chang and Luh 2022). This plot change infuses more modernism into the classic fairytale, offering a distinct perspective that would resonate with contemporary audiences. Furthermore, the plot development in Mills's version unfolds at varying speeds and rates. Andersen's original story maintains a fast pace, centred around the prince's quest to find and test the princess, allowing readers to anticipate the story's progression. In contrast, Mills' version adopts a slower pace, focusing on the princess's interaction with the pea, full of uncertainty. This deliberate change of pace engenders the intrigue in the reader, prompting contemplation on whether the princess will eventually find a comfortable position and how this variation enhances the story's appeal.

In contrast, the characters in Mills' adaptation are more vivid and more closely conform to contemporary societal perceptions. In Andersen's tale, the characters are archetypal and in line with the public's imagination. For instance, the prince is portrayed as kind and gentle, treating all the girls who visit the castle with politeness, even those who may not be genuine princesses. The queen is depicted as wise and discerning, employing ingenious methods to verify the princess's identity and ensure her son's marriage to a genuine princess, demonstrating her prudence as a member of the royal family. The princess is also depicted as delicate and pure, emerging from the stormy night soaked but maintaining her dignity and grace. This aligns with the traditional stereotypes of the classical fairytale characters. However, in Mills' adaptation, the princess is more independent and self-defined. She is not solely defined by her relationship to a prince or a royal court, but by her own experience and feelings. Her personality is revealed through her reactions to the pea. As she struggles to find comfort, "each night the same rotation / as she arches, curves,

twines her body about the bed posts" (Mills 2003). Compared to the princess in the original story, the princess in the adapted version is significantly more vivid and lively. She does not merely lie there passively, waiting for the dawn to break. Instead, she actively changes her postures, seeking a more comfortable position to fall asleep. This aligns with the concepts explored by Nurgali and Gilea in modern reimagined fairytales: the concepts of intertextuality and archetype transformation. In contemporary retellings, characters are more likely to reflect real human psychology rather than idealised or purely symbolic roles (Nurgali and Gilea 2023). The difference between the princess in Mills' version who actively confronts and resolves challenges and the princess in Andersen's version who passively accepts and complains about difficulties reflects the evolving expectations and perceptions of female roles throughout history.

Another significant aspect of Mills' reworking is the transformation of themes. Andersen's *The Princess and the Pea* has a simple and clear theme; the entire fairytale revolves around the concept of royalty and the notion of "true nobility." The pea testing method serves as a means to ascertain the validity of the princess's identity. Consequently, the pea also symbolises class division, as only a true princess would possess such delicacy as to perceive the pea through numerous mattresses. In contrast, Mills' adaptation subverted the traditional theme, which primarily focused on self-awareness, physical and emotional discomfort, and the quest for a sense of self. The pea is not employed as a testing method but rather as a metaphor. As exemplified in the line "Like the smoothed sand in the mouth of an oyster / The tenderest of peas seeks shelter / In only the softest concaves of flesh / Where the pea / like the pearl / Proves perfection / By defining the flaw" (Mills 2003), we can find the pea was not utilised as a tool to ascertain the authenticity of the royal identity. Instead, it becomes a symbol of the human pursuit of perfection. Mills redirected the theme from the external evaluation of royal authenticity to internal exploration of perfection and imperfection. The theme is more about the individual's relationship with their body and self. In Mills' poem, the pea, as a metaphor and key to unlocking the poem's underlying theme, conveys the message that acceptance of flaws is the prerequisite for achieving a sense of inner perfection. This theme holds greater relevance in contemporary

society and aligns with contemporary values. Mills uses the pea metaphor to imply that acceptance of flaws is the path to inner perfection. Although it may appear to circumvent explicit sexual interpretations, the placement of the pea in the collarbone and the consistently intimate, erotic, and suggestive language cannot be disregarded. For instance, the simile at the end, “like the smooth sand in the mouth of an oyster,” further reinforces these erotic connotations and invites readers to delve deeper into the underlying theme of this poem.

In contrast, the narrative style employed by Mills differs significantly from H.C. Andersen. In *The Princess and the Pea*, Andersen’s narrative style is characterised by conciseness, simplicity and clarity. Utilising a third-person narrator, he presents the story with gentle irony and a touch of humor, making it accessible to a broad audience, particularly children. Additionally, the story is structured in a linear description style, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. In stark contrast, Mill’s descriptive and metaphorical narrative style is rich and infectious. Lines such as “clicking between the knobs of the spinal column / where the vertebrae, like the panels of a washboard, find the lump” (Mills 2003) exemplify this style. Notably, the poem does not use a traditional narrative sequence, commencing with a series of images depicting the princess’s struggle with the pea. This approach enhances the flexibility and enjoyment of the poem. Furthermore Althobaiti argues that Andersen’s fairytales, including *The Princess and the Pea*, tend to emphasise character traits and symbolic elements. For instance, the pea concealed beneath the mattresses serves as a symbolic representation of deeper truths about identity and social status (Althobaiti 2023). The moral value inherent in these tales are often subtly hinted at the end of the story, prompting the reader to contemplate its implications. In contrast, Mills’ poem directly engages the reader’s thought. Lines such as “Where the pea / like the pearl, / Proves perfection / By defining the flaw” serves as direct triggers for reflection and introspection.

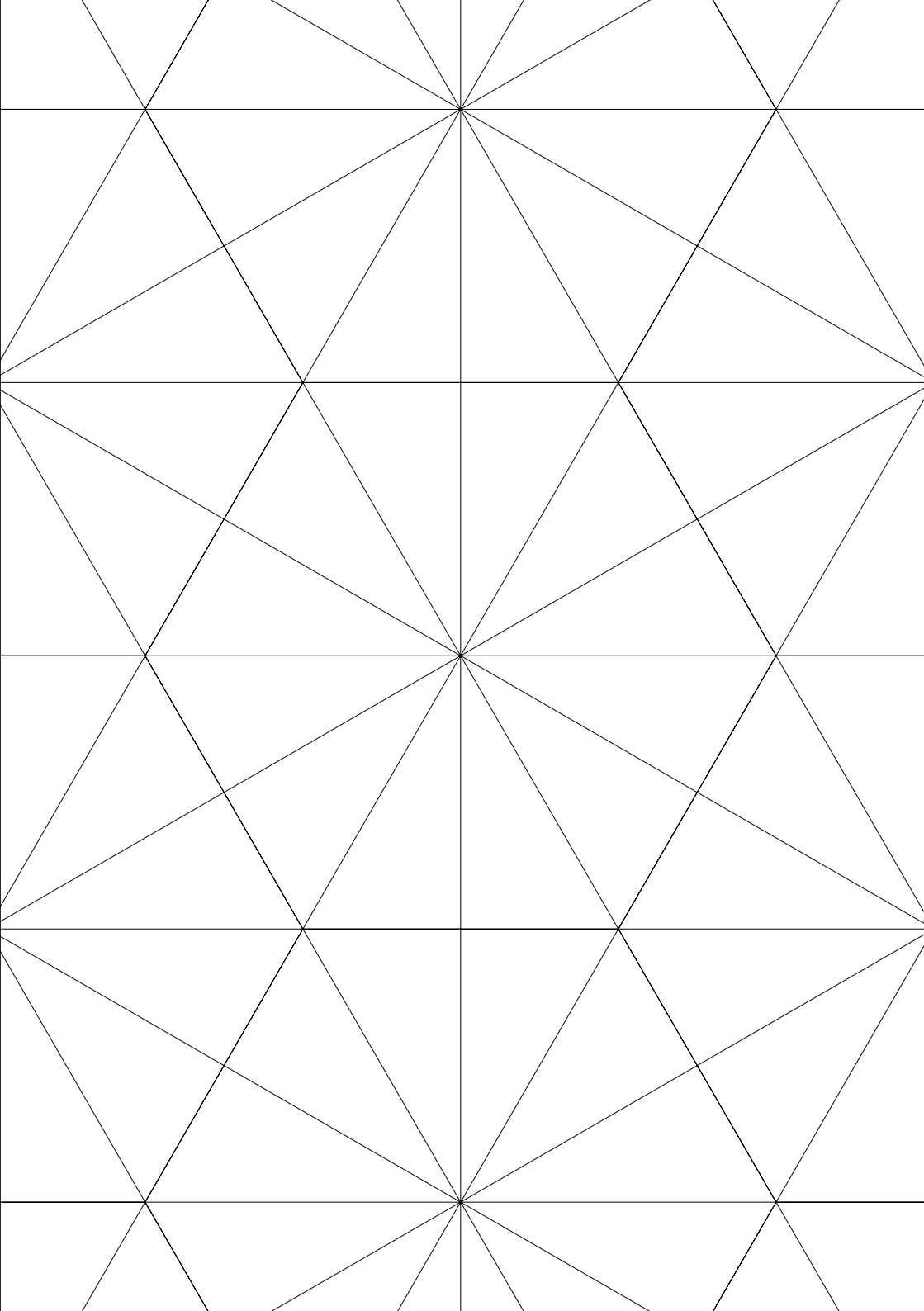
In conclusion, Colleen Mills’ *The Pea Princess* is a notable adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Princess and the Pea*. Through a meticulous process of plot, character development, theme exploration, and narrative style, Mills has breathed new life into classic fairytale. By centring the narrative around the princess’s personal emotions and

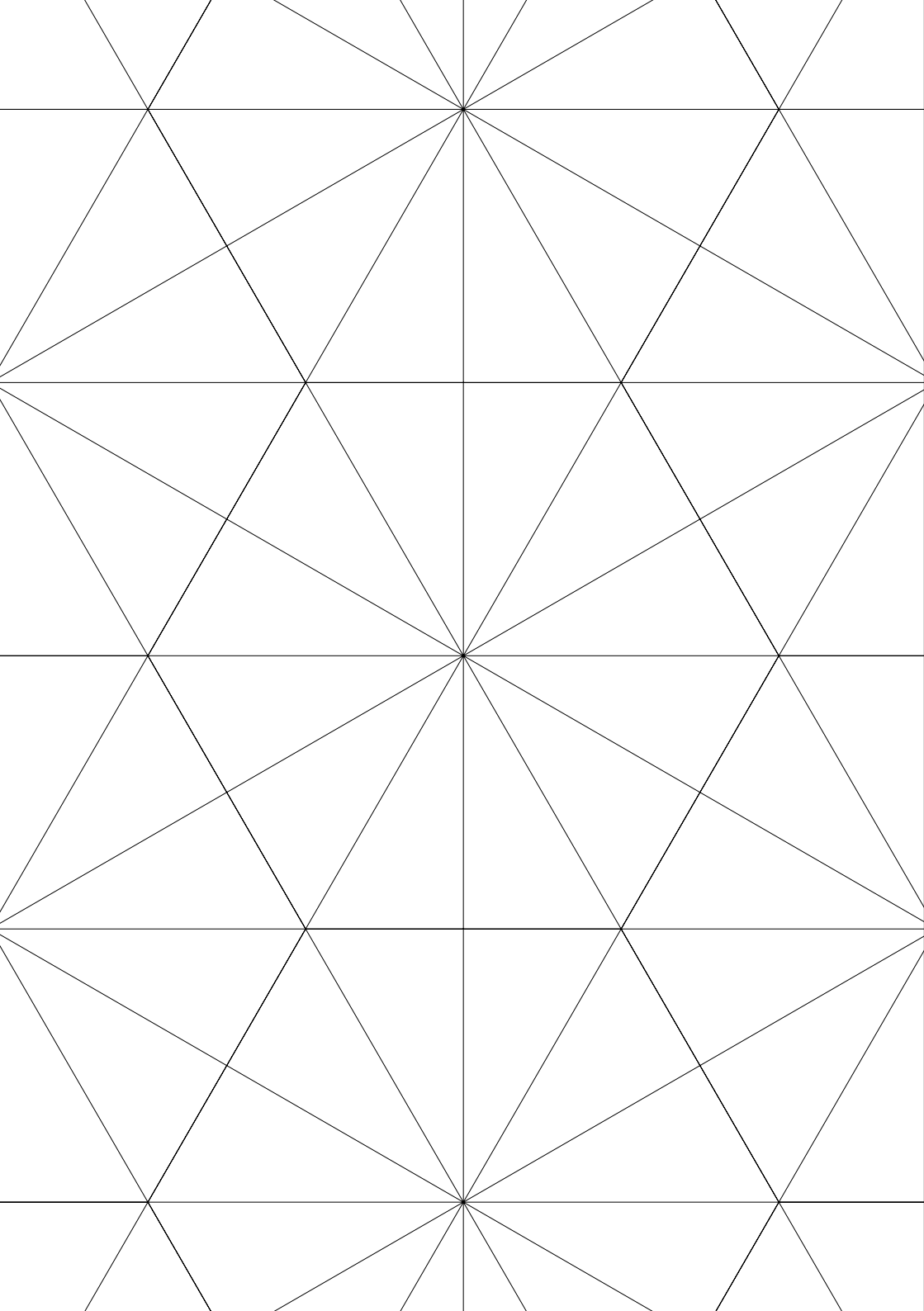
struggles, Mills has infused the work with contemporary vitality. This approach involves humanising the characters, addressing contemporary issues by juxtaposing themes that resonate with modern audiences, and using her unique narrative style. As we further explore this poem, subtle sexual undertones may be discernible within the lines. Beyond its artistic merit, *The Pea Princess* serves as a reflection of the evolving literary landscape and societal values of the modern era. It demonstrates the adaptability and relevance of Andersen’s fairytales in contemporary contexts. Classic fairytales continue to hold immense value as a source of inspiration for modern writers. Through creative reimagining, these timeless tales can be transformed into works that resonate with contemporary audiences, ensuring their enduring relevance.

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She arches like a bowed branch of willow,
Quivering from stem to leaf.
With each flex of the wrists,
Roll of a shoulder,
Gentle realignment of the ribs,
The lump burrows deeper.
Now beneath the breast plate,
Now between hipbone and pelvis,
Now knotted at the base of the neck,
Clicking between the knobs of the spinal column
Where the vertebrae, like the panels of a washboard, find the lump,
As it rickets over the thinly sheathed bones with each shift in motion.
Whether between knuckle bones or toe bones,
Nestled in the many small joints and junctures of the body,
It journeys like a pebble smoothed over in a sea of feathers,
Pressing against the inside of the knee cap,
Working its way up the thigh,
Wandering the flesh land of the belly.
Each night the same rotation
As she arches, curves, twines her body about the bedposts,
Weaved like a tight shoe lace between the pillars of the bed,
Spiraling between the sheets
Trying to find the one place
Such a lump will fit beneath her frame.
With each stretch,
Each extension or contortion of a limb,
The minutest of lumps,
Buried beneath bedding twenty upon twenty layers high,
Burrows still deeper, pressing into the skin of thinly padded skeletal extensions
As it grates to a final rest against the gentle hollow above the collarbone.
Like the smoothed sand in the mouth of an oyster,
The tenderest of peas seeks shelter
In only the softest concaves of flesh,
Where the pea, like the pearl,
Proves perfection
By defining the flaw.





REVIEWS

A Review of Andersen's “The Snow Queen”: A Timeless Tale of Emotional Courage

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INTRODUCTION

Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* is a romantic fairytale that explores themes of coldness, loss, and spiritual peril. Published in 1844, it stands out for its poetic language and emotional depth, solidifying Andersen's impact on fairytale fiction (Warner 94). The tale captivates both children and adults, illustrating how love can melt even the coldest heart and that courage often appears as kindness (Friberg 198).

The story begins with a magic mirror, created by an evil troll, that distorts beauty and goodness. When “Devil's magic mirror” (Bartnæs 293) shatters, tiny pieces fall everywhere in the world. One fragment enters the eye of a boy named Kai, and another enters his heart, changing him from gentle and kind to cold and cruel. One cold day in winter, he is swept away by the Snow Queen, a mysterious and silent sovereign of an ice palace far away up North (Andersen). To rescue Kai, Gerda embarks on a perilous journey. Divided into seven phases of growth (Troy 73), her encounters with various characters – a talking crow, a kind sorceress, a wild robber girl, and a loyal reindeer – impart valuable lessons. Ultimately, Gerda's tears melt the shard in Kai's heart, breaking the Snow Queen's spell and transforming the tale into a powerful emotional experience.

COURAGE IN THE SNOW QUEEN: GERDA'S JOURNEY AS A HEROINE

At the core of *The Snow Queen* is a quiet yet resolute courage embodied by Gerda, the young heroine. She is not a warrior but a figure of love and friendship. She carries no sword, casts no spells, and never once demands power. But she embarks on an adventure that spans vast lands, harsh climates, and profound spiritual challenges – all driven by the love and friendship she holds for Kai (Friberg 201). From the moment Kai disappears, Gerda refuses to believe him lost forever. Despite assurances of his loss, Gerda clings to hope and loyalty, believing she can save him (Greyvensteijn 89).

Gerda's courage in *The Snow Queen* is characterised by her gentleness and persistence rather than the epic heroism often found in traditional tales. She may cry and hesitate, but her resolve remains steadfast. Each act of kindness she shows – whether to a crow, a robber girl, or a reindeer – bolsters her spirit, creating a network of emotional support that underscores the story's moral: compassion is a powerful force, not a weakness. Gerda subverts the traditional fairytale archetype of the passive girl waiting for rescue. She is the rescuer. Unlike the many princesses who succumb to sleep, waiting, or wishing for rescue, Gerda takes action. Her femininity is not diminished but redefined – she is both tender and strong, emotionally vulnerable but courageous. Andersen emphasises that her leadership stems from her emotional nature, as her strength lies in embracing her feelings rather than denying them (Clark 9). Gerda's emotional courage teaches us that love is not merely a fleeting emotion but an action – a commitment made repeatedly, even in the face of uncertainty. Her loyalty to Kai is the key to her discovery of him, and her tears, filled with anguish and hope, ultimately liberate him. In a world filled with ice, Gerda's heart remains warm – this is the essence of her magic.

SYMBOLISM OF COLDNESS AND REDEMPTION

This warmth is crucial as it contrasts sharply with the coldness that permeates the story's setting, reflecting the emotional landscape of *The Snow Queen*. Andersen uses ice, snow, and frost not merely to create an atmosphere, but to symbolise the internal states of his characters. The Snow Queen's palace, while aesthetically pleasing, exudes a sterile ambiance characterised by symmetry, silence, and an absence of warmth. It represents a world governed by logic, perfection, and control. Once spirited and playful, Kai becomes a part of this frozen world after the mirror shard clouds his heart (Pilipoveca 185). This coldness is not just physical. It represents emotional detachment, spiritual numbness, and the erosion of human connection. Kai's transformation is not violent but gradual and sub-

dued, which contributes to its unsettling nature. He does not resort to screams or physical resistance; instead, he forgets. He forgets Gerda, love, the roses, and even his own identity (Friberg 236). This gradual fading mirrors how people in the real world can lose touch with their emotions or succumb to isolation.

Gerda's journey, therefore, becomes a quest not only to save Kai but to restore what the cold has stolen. Her warmth, manifested through her love, empathy, and kindness, pierces through the icy barrier. Each step she takes symbolises the thawing of a frozen world. When Gerda finally finds Kai, her presence isn't marked by a grand gesture but by her tears – simple and filled with love – that awaken his memory, melt the ice in his heart, and purge the mirror shard (Yenika-Agbaw 96). This act of redemption is deeply spiritual. While Andersen draws on Christian themes, his message transcends religion: love can heal what logic cannot. The story suggests that the coldness of emotional detachment, loneliness, and fear can only be overcome by warmth – both physical and emotional. Gerda's journey spans not only physical distances but also emotional states, moving from despair to hope and from grief to joy.

The minor characters that she encounters embody distinct emotional challenges. The elderly woman who resides in a garden-temple teaches her the art of forgetting. Conversely, the robber girl teaches her strength and peril. Lastly, the reindeer embodies the virtue of loyalty (Friberg 201). Each encounter represents a stage in Gerda's emotional growth. With each trial, Gerda's emotional courage deepens. The tale reminds us that courage does not have to be heard. Often, it is the quiet decision to persevere, to care, to express emotions, and to love even in the face of adversity (Lederer 46). In *The Snow Queen*, the emotional courage Gerda experiences emerges as the true sorcery – more powerful than any spell and warmer than any fire.

IMPACT AND LEGACY

Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* remains relevant today due to its enduring themes of love, emotional distance, and the resilience of innocence in a cold world. These universal struggles resonate with contemporary readers, maintaining the story's relevance since 1844. Its impact is seen in numerous adaptations, notably Disney's *Frozen* (Zipes), which reinterprets the tale as one of sisterhood and self-acceptance while preserving the central conflict between love and isolation.

What makes *The Snow Queen* timeless is Andersen's ability to engage both children and adults. Children connect with Gerda's journey, while adults appreciate the deeper spiritual and psychological layers. Despite its simplicity, Andersen's writing conveys profound insights, reminding us of the lasting importance of love, loyalty, and emotional strength – forces that can lead to salvation.

CONCLUSION

The Snow Queen is one of Hans Christian Andersen's classic fairytales, celebrated not for grand battles but for its emotional depth. The story follows Gerda, whose strength lies in love, devotion, and compassion. Her journey reflects spiritual and emotional turmoil, encouraging us to cherish what truly matters. Andersen masterfully blends fairytale fantasy with the complexities of human reality, weaving themes of healing and forgiveness amidst ice and grandeur. In a world focused on mastery and speed, *The Snow Queen* highlights the power of emotions, the vulnerability of humanity, and the strength of love.

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Hope is the Only Thing Stronger Than Fear: A Cross Spatial–Temporal Commemoration of H.C. Andersen

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One-and-a-half centuries ago, the renowned Danish fairytale writer Hans Christian Andersen passed away, leaving behind a trove of literary treasures that still captivate and delight readers in the twenty-first century. This enduring appeal is not without reason. Andersen's central theme of hope triumphing over fear in times of adversity and despair possesses the remarkable ability to transcend time and space, resonating with readers across the globe.

One of Andersen's iconic creations is the little match girl from the eponymous fairytale published in 1845. On a snowy New Year's Eve, a barefoot girl wanders the streets, having lost her mother's large slippers. Unable to sell a single match throughout the day, the girl fears returning home to face her father's wrath. Her home, full of holes, does not keep out the cold from outside. Huddled in a corner between two houses, the girl lights a match. Instantly, she feels the warmth of a stove beside her, a comfort that vanishes when the flame extinguishes. With each match she lights, the little girl experiences fleeting visions – a roasted goose offering a meal, a Christmas tree adorned with tapers and pictures, and a vision of her beloved grandmother, the only one who ever loved her. As she burns through her matches, her final vision reunites her with her grandmother, offering an afterlife as they ascend together above the sky. On New Year's morning, the girl's body is found, with burnt matches in her hand and a peaceful smile on her face as she rests against the wall (Andersen 142-144).

Written in the third-person limited point of view in the past tense, the story centres around the little girl, Andersen's sole character in this fairytale that explores the conflict between hope and fear. The match girl knows she will not make it through the cold. Instead of succumbing to anguish and despair, she chooses survivance through remembrance and storytelling. By engaging in these practices, she maintains a glimmer of hope, albeit in the realm of memory and hallucination. The literary manifestation of survivance serves as a testament to the human spirit's resilience.

Survivance through storytelling not only brings forth the past but also serves as a natural practice. It represents a striving for presence in the afterlife (Vizenor 86-89). Survivance embodies the afterlife, granting survivors the right of succession to the bygone past. It is the state and condition of actively maintaining existence, often through the struggle of the past through storytelling. Both the act of coming into being and death are measures of presence in the world. However, death is mitigated by survivance (Vizenor 97-102). Andersen's match girl embodies this fictional manifestation, set in a time of widespread poverty and the prevalence of hunger and exposure-related deaths. Regardless of the brevity of their lives, everyone has a story to tell. The girl's final hours depict a vivid struggle of survivance as she recalls the warmth and comfort she has only imagined but never experienced. Her ultimate act of survivance involves reuniting with her beloved grandmother in the afterlife, a pursuit that may be known only to God. In her final hours, she naturally engages in survivance, even in utter solitude. Her survivance through storytelling and recollection of life's sweetest moments tilts the fairytale's conflict towards hope prevailing over fear. This enduring spirit transcends time and space, resonating even today, 150 years after Andersen's passing. This spirit originates from its Danish cultural roots and spread to various host cultures globally, even as Andersen's native Denmark has experienced economic prosperity.

Numerous literary works across different genres bear a resemblance to the works of Andersen. Approximately half a century prior, the British poet William Blake penned *The Chimney Sweeper*, a narrative akin to Andersen's tales. Published in 1789 as part of his collection *Songs of Innocence*, the poem narrates the harrowing plight of child laborers exploited as chimney sweepers, lacking safety protections. Many of these children succumb to their circumstances, ending up entombed in black coffins. Within the poem, the narrator's companion, little Tom Dacre, dreams of angels who liberate the deceased chimney sweepers from their coffins. These liberated souls frolic in green fields, basking in the sunlight, play in earthly rivers, and ascend to the sky. The angel reassures Tom,

dispelling his fear and urging him to fulfill his duties, assuring him that God will be by his guiding light in times of peril. The following morning, Tom awakens unafraid, despite the hazardous work conditions persisting. In the companion poem from *Songs of Experience* published in 1794, the chimney sweeper is depicted as a diminutive figure amidst snowfall, expressing his anguish through melancholic notes. Narrated in the first person, the child laborer confronts his miseries with resolute smiles, dances, and songs, adorned in deathly garments provided by his parents, who instead seek solace in church prayer.

In an era where childhood survival was uncertain, particularly for child laborers engaged in perilous tasks, these chimney sweepers found solace and resilience in storytelling, even within the confines of dreams and solitude. Angelic awakenings mitigated death, while persevering hope counteracted despair, ultimately tipping the poem's conflict of hope versus fear towards the triumph of hope, albeit not necessarily in the tangible realm. This resolute spirit in the face of adversity undoubtedly transcends time and space, traversing from the originating culture to various host cultures, enriching the tapestry of world literature. Although poetry may not be as readily translatable as prose fiction, its enduring impact on the literary landscape cannot be denied.

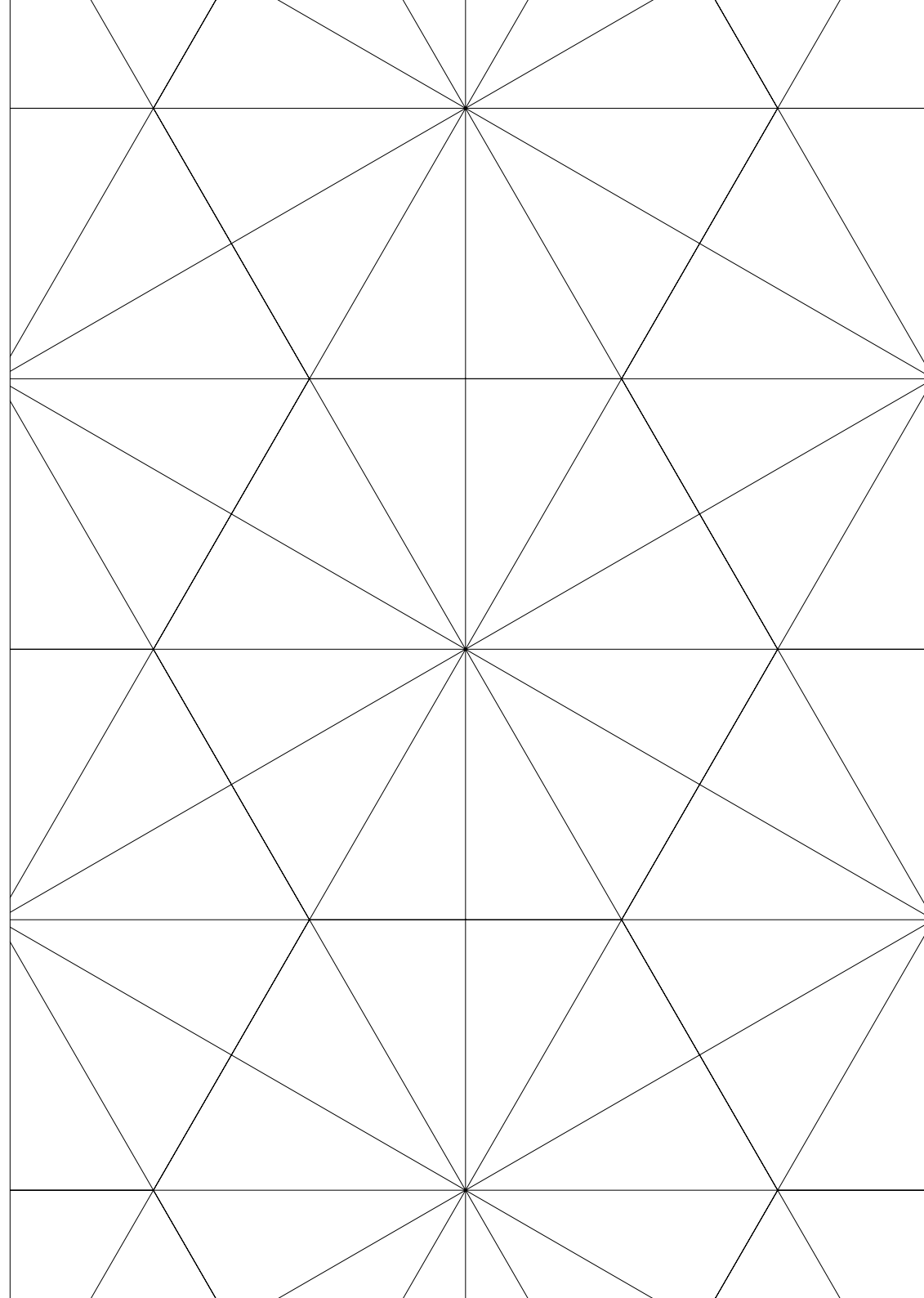
Similarly, Anton Chekhov, a Russian writer and playwright who lived during the same era as Andersen, authored a realistic story called *Misery*. Published in 1886, the story follows Iona Potapov, a sledge-driver in Petersburg. Iona, who has recently lost his son to a fever, finds solace in recounting his son's tales. On a wintry night amid heavy snowfall, his only passengers are an army officer and a group of three drunken dandies. Despite facing indifference and derision from his passengers regarding his attempts to share his son's story, Iona perseveres with grace, bearing the weight of grief and misery. Returning home to a dilapidated street with a large, dirty stove and sleeping figures, he once again tries to narrate his son's tale to a fellow street sleeper, who falls asleep mid-story. Overwhelmed by loneliness, Iona seeks solace in the stable, finding comfort in confiding his

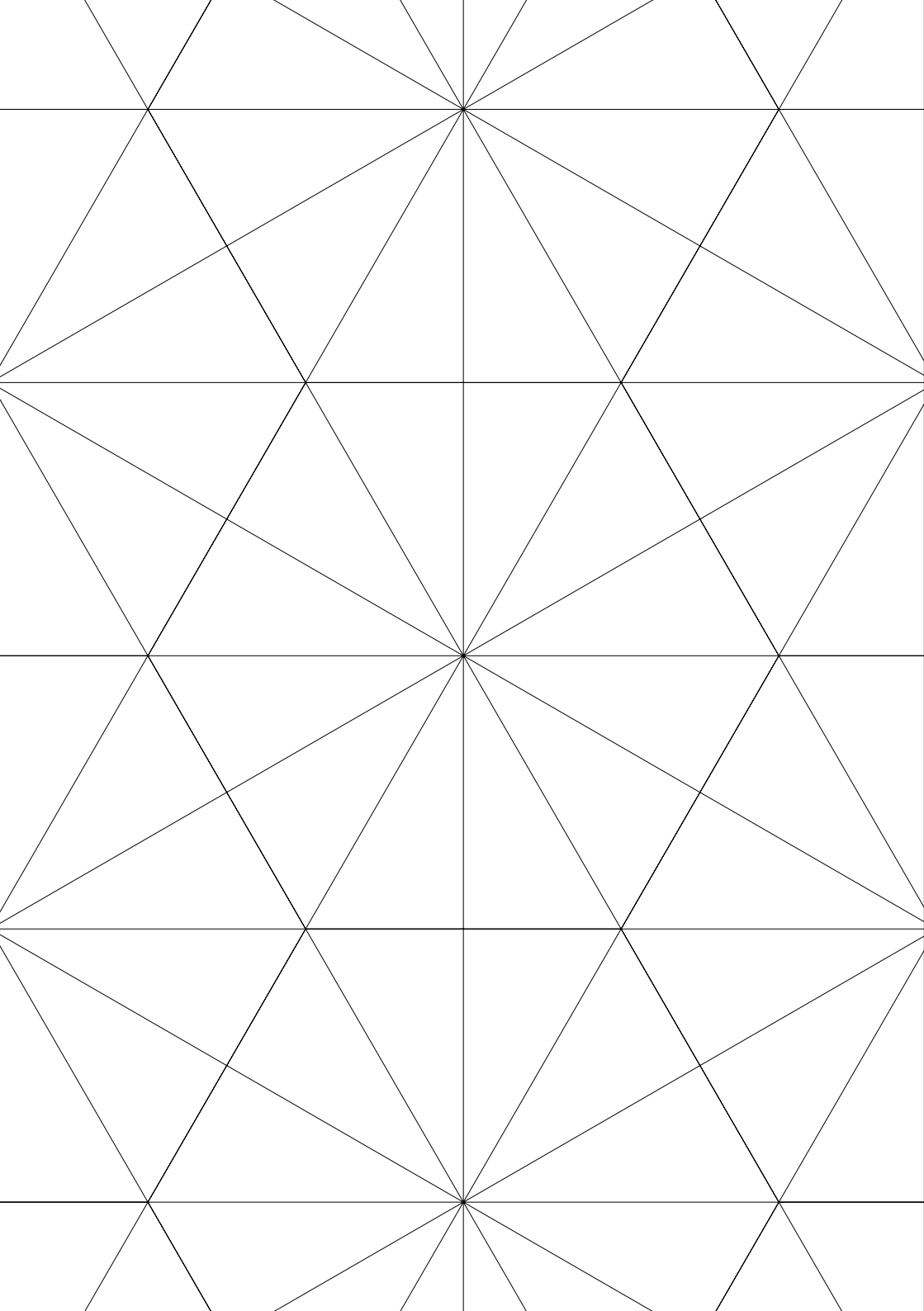
sorrow to his mare (Chekhov). Iona's son lives on through his storytelling, even though finding an empathetic listener proves elusive. Seeking solace in an animal is not a sign of weakness but a form of survivance in the afterlife. Even the faintest glimmer of hope can dispel fear, tipping the short story's conflict towards hope's triumph, albeit with great poignancy. *Misery*, too, resonates globally, transcending its cultural origins to touch the hearts of individuals in various host cultures due to its universal theme that transcends time and space.

Throughout history, in Denmark, the United Kingdom, Russia, and beyond, whether in fantastical or realistic settings, in times of poverty and abundance, past and present, the enduring power of hope and resilience over misery stands as a spiritual force that dispels fear, breaks boundaries, and renders the seemingly impossible attainable.

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SONG & LYRICS

To Andersen, with Love

Ho Kin-yip Ivan



43

In a lovely world of dreams and tales, it is so bright.
Andersen's words set sail at first light.
Your stories shine as an appealing beacon bright.
A girl with a match in her small, trembling hand.

Everyone reads every chapter and obtains new harmony.
A grim duckling transformed into a new beauty.
Through the hottest tallow candle.
You taught us all to be strong.
A world filled with love, brightness and glory.

In every kind heart, you sparked the flame with every tale.
A timeless gift, Cupid aimed for Psyche's heart.
Through all the shadows and our breath, his stories took flight.
You penned a whole new world; we forever embrace you.

Everyone reads every chapter and obtains new harmony.
A grim duckling transformed into a new beauty.
Through the hottest tallow candle, you taught us all to be strong.
A world filled with love, brightness and glory.

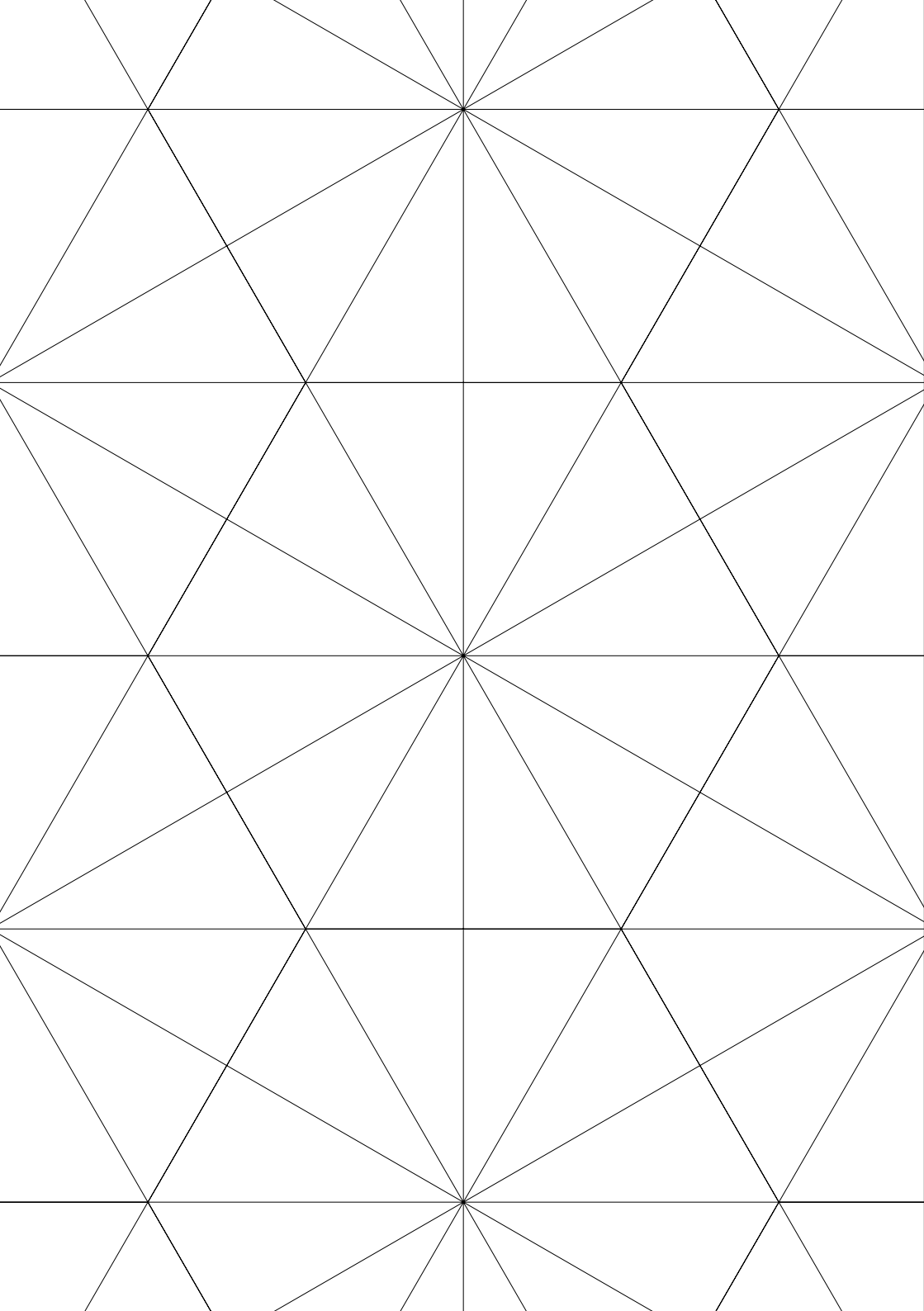
Everyone reads every chapter and obtains new harmony.
A grim duckling transformed into a new beauty.
Through the hottest tallow candle, you taught us all to be strong.
A world filled with love, brightness and glory.

Composed by Mr. Ho Kin-yip Ivan, a linguist and music enthusiast, the song serves as a tribute to Hans Christian Andersen in celebration of his 150th birthday. Ivan enjoys composing music and crafting lyrics as gifts for his friends. His most recent creation is a song dedicated to his alma mater, a traditional Roman Catholic boys' school in Hong Kong, with the intention of fostering a sense of camaraderie among all members of the school.

To Andersen, with Love

Composer: Ho Kin-yip Ivan

44



SHORT STORIES

The Damsel's Dance of Death ~

Fu Man Hei Hayden
St. Paul's Co-educational College

47

The Baltic wind howled like a wolf, penetrating the once-lush fir forest surrounding the forgotten cobblestone streets of Odense. Alma, a girl with flaxen hair and piercing green eyes, shivered as she leant against a lamppost. Her cloak offered no protection against the winter, and her stomach growled with hunger. She sighed and closed her eyes. She'd had no fireplace to return to ever since she was a toddler, no shoes, no proper meals. The world had been cruel to her.

She felt a slight tap on her shoulder. Her eyes jolted open to see an old woman with silvery hair draped in a flowing black gown. The old woman's eyes swept over Alma's delicate frame, pausing for a moment. Then, with a nod, she helped Alma up. "Come with me, child," she said.

Alma hesitated, her instincts prickling with unease, but the lure of warmth against the biting cold was too tempting. She followed the woman to a grand mansion on the outskirts of town.

The mansion was unlike any home Alma had ever seen before. Its spires seemed to pierce the sky, and inside, the air was filled with the scent of dried daisies. The old woman led Alma to a cozy dining hall, where a fire crackled in the hearth.

As Alma ate, the old woman watched her with a faint smile. "You remind me of myself when I was young," she whispered.

Alma nodded, her mouth too full to speak.

As she devoured the meal, the old woman slipped out of the dining hall, unseen.

When the bowl was empty of the blood-red broth and the bread plate was free of its burden, the old woman reappeared. She handed her a pair of red shoes, the hue of the soup Alma had downed. The fabric shimmered in the candles' light, and there was something rather...otherworldly about them.

48

Alma slipped the shoes on, and they fitted perfectly, as though they had been tailor-made just for her. Perhaps she was too tired from the day's events, but it seemed as if there was a faint humming on the rim of Alma's thoughts once the shoes were on.

When Alma went to bed that night, she delicately placed her new shoes on the wooden table near the fireplace, stroking them the way a mother would her newborn child. Soon, she fell into a blissful slumber on the silky linens of the queen-sized bed.

As all the candles in the mansion were snuffed, the ribbons of the shoes twitched. The crimson fabric glinted in the shimmer of the full moon, the colour of spilled blood.

Alma dreamt of dancing. She twirled and leapt in a grand ballroom, the red shoes glinting like rubies. When she woke, her heart raced with a strange longing. She crept to the fireplace, where the shoes sat on the wooden table, and slipped them on.

Mist occupied the sky, obscuring the moon so that only parts of it shone through. The red shoes' fabric pulsed, a thousand malevolent souls fighting for dominance.

One Sunday morning, the old woman brought her to attend church. However, this time, Alma had made up her mind. She would wear the red shoes. They didn't fit her as perfectly as before, but she could tolerate the mild discomfort for the world's eyes to be constantly fixated on her.

Look at her they did. They all gazed at her whilst she strutted down the long aisle, her heels clacking against the wooden floor.

Oh, you want the world to see you for what you wear and what you look like, not who you are? So be it, child.

The priest started his sermon. As she listened, Alma's eyelids felt like lead. The silence was deafening.

Suddenly, Alma's shoes started twitching. A quiet tapping turned into aggressive stomping, and soon enough, everyone was wide awake staring at her with profound apprehension. Alma's face flushed bright red, and she lowered her head. She frantically tried to control her own legs, but it was to no avail. It was as if her shoes had a mind of their own!

Her legs carried her torso as she pirouetted out of the bench where she had been sitting and into the aisle. Halfway down the aisle, it turned into a rapid moonwalk towards the door. There was an audible silence as all people attending the service questioned what they were witnessing. The priest was dumbfounded.

Panic surged through her as she realised she couldn't stop. The shoes carried her out into the streets, where she danced. Alma's palms clammed with sweat. What was going on?

Alma was pulled to the town square. The ribbons dragged her toes, their hum intensifying with each passing step. She tried to resist, but her legs moved by themselves. She started dancing in the middle of the town square, and as she danced, Alma felt a peculiar warmth spread through her.

A young gentleman hobbled towards her, the rhythmic thumping of his walking stick growing louder as he got nearer and nearer. As he got closer, Alma saw that there was a ginormous gash on the right side of his cheek.

Alma's heart rose in her throat as the shoes forced her to walk closer. She wanted to run

back to the old lady's mansion, but her body was no longer under her control. Suddenly, her foot lashed out, one that sent him sprawling to the ground. Again and again, her feet struck, a flurry of blows that left him gasping for breath.

When it was over, Alma stood over his lifeless body, her chest heaving. The pooled blood seeped into the fabric of her shoes, staining them a more vibrant red. A strange warmth spread through her, a horrid feeling of feral satisfaction that made her human conscience shudder. She wanted to weep for what she had done, but the tears wouldn't come. All she felt was a thirst for more.

Ah yes. Another soul to join us in our crusade.

In the abandoned village, the creature twirled and leapt, her movements graceful and deadly. The shoes hummed with a low, constant tone, a sound that echoed in her mind like a lullaby. She no longer remembered her name, her past, or the girl she had once been. All she knew was the dance, and the crimson glow of her shoes.

The old woman looked on from behind the curtains of her mansion, her hands holding another pair of red shoes.

*Another rosebud, ready to bloom and blossom.**

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen's "The Red Shoes." (1845). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Red Shoes."
Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, http://hca.gilead.org.illred_shoe.html

Of Men and Shadows ~

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51

I had always known there would be repercussions for killing a man, but I did not believe a shadow would be haunted by the master it killed.

The people of this kingdom would never know their prince consort was once only a shadow, nothing but the result of an obstruction of light, something to be trampled on. I was greedy to escape this wretched fate, to live freely as any real man would. And when I was to wed the princess, I asked my former master to be my shadow. I would have given him a privileged life, had he not threatened to tell the world I was his shadow.

His shadow – how preposterous! I had lived as a man, dressed as a man, spoken as a man, eaten as a man, and did that not make me a man, equal in status to him?

What was a man to do, but to retaliate when another threatened the life he had painstakingly built? I announced that he was my shadow gone mad, believing himself a man, and he was duly executed.

I caught my own reflection in the mirror. Where my face should be was a creature wreathed in darkness. It had the form of my body, yet black smoke poured from its outline; it had no eyes or nose, yet its lips peeled back into a sneer. My master had come back from the dead to haunt me – and it was determined to taunt me with words.

I loathed how much it sounded like my dead master's voice – my own voice, only hoarser, more sinister. "You are nothing," it rasped, a maniacal glee in its voice. "You are no man, fated for nothingness – "

A wretched scream tore free from my throat. I punched the mirror, meaning to shatter the reflection, but the glass did not fracture. The monster laughed as I raised my hand in horror. Now a wisp of shadow, it had gone straight through the mirror, barely leaving a ripple in its wake, as if I didn't exist at all.

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I had a solid human form for now, but black smoke crawled up my body, turning it into smoke bit by bit, and the monster watched me with malicious intent throughout the week. If I failed to find a solution, I would not survive.

In the garden, distant notes of a song reached my ears. I slowed.

"Ghosts do not haunt with any face that we have known," the child sang with honeyed sweetness, his voice tender as a bruise, throbbing with the ache of every unhealed wound. *"The words we would not speak they use; it is our helplessness they choose, and our refusals they haunt."**

Entranced, I moved towards the boy. His melody unfurled like smoke, wrapping around me, sending a tingling sensation up my skin. Even now, as the chorus rose like dawn, I swore I could see golden light spilling out from his mouth.

No, I realised with a jolt; golden light, as bright as his head of blond curls, was truly streaming from his open mouth, wrapping around me, and –

I tore off my gloves. Some of the black smoke had receded from my arm, and I could see pale flesh beneath again.

I could barely breathe. Was that my cure? A child's song? It was said that Goodness, Truth, and Beauty made men, men; humans could think and feel only because of these qualities. And what was purer, more sincere, and more beautiful than an innocent child's singing?

I dared not stray too close to the boy. Yet as his song filled me with strength, his voice grew weaker, till it was cut off by a violent cough.

Then another.

* Lines extracted from the poem *Ghosts* by Elizabeth Jennings.

Then an agonised scream that bled through the sky.

The beautiful boy was no more; strands of golden light were pulled by some unseen force, streaming towards me in a cadence; in contrast, the boy's shadow crept over him, greedily, lovingly engulfing him, until the boy shriveled up into a shadow. I felt its gaze boring into me before it moved away, a shadow with no master.

I should be revolted. But I was not.

I went to orphanages and schools with my wife under the disguise of royalty visits. I had the children I favoured sing to me in private, sucking their Goodness, Truth, and Beauty dry until their flesh peeled off, and their shadows rose in their place. Before each shadow left, however, they paused to examine me, as if trying to commit my face to memory.

The more children whose Goodness, Truth, and Beauty I sucked, the more I was revitalised. When I had absorbed the songs of ten children, inky smoke no longer sought to travel up my arm; with the light from thirty children's songs, shadows gave way to flesh and blood; when news came in that fifty children had gone missing and a panicked atmosphere hung over the capital, I looked the same as any man. In mirrors, the monster pounded at the glass and snarled with frustration. But its threat was meaningless. The shadows returned to claim me only if I stopped listening to children sing. So long as I kept my newfound passion for music, I would stay a man.

One day, a lanky boy visited me. There was no shadow under his feet.

"I've come to swear my allegiance to you," he said. "Thanks to you, I've gained a body of flesh."

Through the open door, I glimpsed our reflection in the mirror at the end of the corridor; two inky monsters with shadows as flesh, standing face-to-face, black ink bleeding into each other, weaving together a picture of unearthly horror.

"The boy from the garden," I murmured. "You are the first man I made."

"What a beautiful life men have!" He laughed. "It's said that we are created by one of our kind, one who has made himself great among our former masters. I am here to follow you. And more will come."

In the mirror, the monster crept closer. It whispered, "You cannot stay a man forever."

Oh, but I would stay a man. I knew the way, didn't I?

My wife astounded me with joyous news at dinner. 'I am pregnant. Imagine – us as parents!'

I imagined our child's face, the lovely melody they would make. "We will be wonderful parents," I promised. "I will love our child to death."

In my reflection in the wine goblet, the monster grinned back at me, baring its fangs with sinister delight.*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen's "The Shadow." (1847). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Shadow." Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, <http://hca.gilead.org.il/shadow.html>

Diary of a Weaver ~

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The Birth of Hunger – June 1, 1837

They do not see me.

They never did.

I slipped through the hall like a shadow, past figures draped in gold, past lips that sip and smirk, past eyes that look without seeing. The air is thick with chatter of the nobility, and the quiet, unspoken knowledge that everyone here is playing a part. Yet beneath the silks and jewels, beneath the pretense, they are nothing. Nothing but flesh, a work of art.

I wonder, how would they look without it all?

The courtiers moved like painted dolls, delicate hands gesturing, brushing against one another in feigned interest. The refined women, corseted into impossible shapes, their throats bare, their soft chuckles, like potions bubbling in a cauldron. The upper-class men, clad in intricately designed finery, their posture stiff, their arrogance acts as their second layer of skin; but I see past the fabric, past the layers of wealth. I see the soft, pale things that lie beneath.

The emperor, he sits proudly on his throne, his well-rounded body, plump hands, adorned with ruby rings. He believes himself divine, untouchable. But he is no different from the rest – just a man with a fleshy physique, covered in richly decorated cloth, desperate to be adored.

I can imagine his bare stomach, pale and heavy, exposed in the open. No silk. No jewels. No pretense.

I pressed my fingers against the brick wall, steadying myself, inhaling a sharp breath. The hunger knots tightened within me. This sweet, aching thing that lingers inside. It will not leave me. I must and will feed it.

I needed a plan. A lie. A game so beautiful he will willingly beg to play it.

I will speak of a cloth so rare, so delicate, that only the sage and worthy can see it. And they will nod, will pretend, and will wrap themselves in my words, so believable.

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I will watch as the emperor strides out his castle, his skin bared to the world, and no one will dare to say a thing.

He will revel in his own undoing.

And I will watch intensely. And smile. A smile brighter than a galaxy of stars.

Invisible Fabric – June 2, 1837

He let me touch him today.

Not his skin – no, not yet. But his mind. His pride. His very sense of self.

The moment I spoke, I knew he had been sold. A fabric so exquisite, so impossibly delicate, that only the sage, the worthy, the important could see it. His gasp was that of a fish out of water. His lips parted. And I saw it – the desperation coiled behind his eyes. He longs to be adorned in divinity, to step beyond mere mortal flesh, to make himself more eminent. He does not realise that I am the one shaping him into exactly that yet. Just yet.

I spun my tale as a spider weaves intricate webs. He listened. He swallowed it whole with not an ounce of doubt.

“Yes,” he breathed. “Yes, I must have this! Make it for me and get 100 gold pieces in return!” he ordered.

And so I stood before him, hands clasped behind my back, fighting the shudder of delight creeping up my spine. I promised him his clothes. Little did he know, no money would ever be enough; his rawness and to see him, unclothed, was priceless.

Tomorrow, I begin. I will set up my empty spools, my loom made of air and illusion. They will come to watch me weave nothing into something, and nod, gaslighting themselves into thinking there's a piece of fabric before them.

And himself? He will be astounded just by the fabric, so exquisite, that he will call all his people to see it, to admire it the way I will at him, the day he parades with nothing.

He is the masterpiece himself.

He will stand before me, bare, and believe he is clothed. And when time comes, when he steps into the streets, naked beneath the heavens, I will watch him with bewitched eyes.

I waited all my life to witness such a thing. And I will have it.

+++++

The Emperor's Unravel – June 5, 1837

I have seen him.

The emperor. I have seen him. The thing that has been hiding beneath his silk ensembles, beneath his jewels, beneath his conceitedness, and his gold-threaded lies.

The parade was everything I could dream of. He decked out in his delusions, his toned skin shimmered as the sun cast its golden rays onto him. He strode as if he were draped in divinity, unaware that his people had turned to stone, their mouths silent tombs of fear and obedience.

I watched the crowd. Their eyes flickered, their throats closed, their hands twitched toward their mouths – but none spoke. Their silence already spoke volumes.

I trembled at the alluring sight of Him.

He walked, step after another, with this arrogant smile of his. His hands skimmed the air where fabric should have been, stroking nothing but mere deceit. And no one, no one, said a word to him. Not a single soul dared.

I had feared some wretched soul would cry the truth, that my art would shatter before it was fully displayed. But no, even the boy who attempted to whisper the words – he isn't even wearing anything" was stopped, the second his father placed a hand over his mouth.

They let him walk.

They let him be seen.

They let a priceless piece of art be exhibited to the world.

And yet, something inside me stirs, leaving me restless, unsatisfied.

I should be gleaming in the taste of victory, in the giddy pleasure of watching Him, stripped, bare, glowing with ethereal beauty beneath the golden sun. And yet, he did not break. His pride held him together like stitches in torn flesh. He still believes himself as clothed. He still believes that he is draped. But the ensembles he wears, no matter how lavish, only ruins him, ruins the masterpiece I actually longed to show to the world.

And because of that, I am not finished.

I thought this would be the greatest masterpiece of my life. But now I see – it is just the beginning.

I crave for more.

More masterpieces are calling for me to unveil.

More fragile creatures to gaze at as they stride, disrobed, as their purest and most raw version of themselves, just as they were brought onto earth.

And I will be there, always. Watching, aching for more.*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes." (1837). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Emperor's New Suit." Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, <http://hca.gilead.org.il/emperor.html>

The Disguise

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59

In a remote, stormy, and frozen realm, there lived an emperor who despised his appearance. He was convinced that others secretly mocked his face. He sought anyone who could alter his look or punished those he believed were ridiculing him. However, all were vain attempts. Feeling powerless to change, he often felt despair. As time passed, he grew timid and withdrew into solitude, confining himself to the bedroom.

One day, a prophet emerged from the dissipating smoke, shimmering with an aurora, and an aroma spread from the prophet.

“Wh...what’s your intention?” The emperor asked, shivering.

“Harvest feathers from animals and use them to adorn your outfit. Plus, wear a veil to keep anonymous. It will convey a message that you are both graceful and cruel at the same time.” the prophet said.

The emperor found the idea splendid, especially since it was fashionable to wear clothes embellished with animal feathers. He imagined that by incorporating the colourful feather and charming pattern of every animal into his attire and donning a mysterious veil, he could demonstrate absolute authority. Overwhelmed by the delicacy of the idea, he could foresee his glamorous future. After excitement wore off, he started to puzzle why the prophet suggested without asking for any favours, but the prophet vanished before the emperor’s question and never showed up again.

Appreciated by the royal family, the nightingale used to sing for the emperor, enjoying the extravagant care from the royal servant. When he overheard the conversation, realising a choice must be made. To be or not to be, it is always destined. Leaving the opulent palace where he lived for over five years, he alerted animals to the impending catastrophe.

Animals hence called up for a meeting, discussing their actions and tactics in the warehouse.

“We must unite against this unprecedented crisis.” Swan said.

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The advocate from Swan quickly gained strength; everyone was clapping.

“Then who is leading this honourable quest, the graceful swan?” Duck taunted.

Understanding their history, the warehouse fell silent.

“I am grateful for your nomination, especially after all we’ve endured. Let us stand side by side, wing to wing, and shoulder to shoulder. Together, we stand a chance against our adversary.” Swan exclaimed.

“I am sorry for what I have done in the past, but I know your true character.” Duck continued.

“You are paranoid. You don’t trust anyone even if they are kind to you. You are prideful; you once suffered from this injustice system: ugly-beautiful, but when your identity changed, your advocate also changed. All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others, umm?” Duck blustered.

“Boom!” Guards stormed into the warehouse. The emperor said, “Thanks for sparing me the troubles; you’re all surrounded; surrender now.”

Animals mourned, realising they could not fight in a confined space, much less fight without a strategy. They were doomed! In this time, Swan stepped forward; animals did not know what his plan was, but he relighted their hope.

“My emperor, I am the swan who projects the prophet in your bedroom, giving you advice on how to be confident. I propose to meet up in this warehouse so they will be defenceless. Please reward my allegiance.” Swan said, bowing his head.

“It is my vengeance for what you all did to me. It feels good to stop pretending to be one of yours. You will be condemned for what you have done to me!” Swan said, waving his wing and laughing uncontrollably.

The hope of animals completely vanished; they regretted why they did not trust Duck earlier.

“Harvest Swan’s feathers carefully. I don’t want to miss any of his feathers; after all, he is the most beautiful animal.” The emperor said coldly.

“Why are you doing this to me? I helped you!” Swan screamed.

“You told me to be cruel. Besides, you are not the prophet. Why should I respect you? But considering your contribution, I will tell the guard to do it gently.” the emperor said.

Animals were caught with “wingcuffs,” walking desperately to the palace.

Soon, the day of the ceremony arrived; the orchestra was playing a symphony. The crowd was flooded in the street, waiting for the beginning of the ceremony. The emperor was euphoric, and he talked to his minister.

“You know what, as windy as this day is, my heart is warm like a heating sun. Tell the servant to dress me in the attire. It is time.”

The emperor glanced at the crowd, nodding his head solemnly, waving his hands to the public, and walking confidently on the stage. The masses were cheering up for the foreign royal members. The emperor was satisfied.

Suddenly, a powerful wind swept through, blowing off every feather of the clothes and mask, revealing his face and body. People were stunned. They were unaware that they had been cheering up for their emperor. They distaste his look, and yet they do not dare to tease him publicly.

The emperor was embarrassed at first. Seeing the silent crowd, he was surprised by the calm of the public. A conclusion is drawn: “The imposter tells me to dress beautifully to deceive the public. Since he is fake, the suggestion must be wrong. The authentic prophet is guiding me covertly, using the wind to reveal my appearance. The crowd’s reaction shows I need not be ashamed of my appearance. We should embrace our differences and celebrate together.”

When the emperor was pondering, the plucked duck was wandering in the street with a heavy bag. The emperor wanted to share this amazing idea with the duck:

“Duck! I just came to realise that we are all friends. We shall not discriminate against each other.” the emperor said.

“You tax heavily on your people; you strip every feather from animals. Now you claim we are one? The veil cannot mask your vile heart. Get lost! Oh, yes, you are right. While you were busy with the ceremony, the loss of feathers freed us from ‘wingcuffs.’ Then we decided to rob your palace, including your vault. It was not troublesome since the nightingale possesses all the royal family’s information. Now your palace is empty, and nature strips you to nothing. Oh, the traitor will accompany you as a consolation prize. We are more equal than you, so it is equal. Goodbye.” Duck taunted.

While the duck was talking, the emperor was shocked, standing like a dumbfounded statue before the public.

A child could no longer constrict himself, mocking at the emperor. The laughter soon echoed in the street. Shattering the emperor’s fantasy bubble. They simply did not notice the bankruptcy of the empire.*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes” (1837) and “The Ugly Duckling.” (1843).
Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. “The Ugly Duckling.” Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007,
http://hca.gilead.org.il/ugly_duc.html

The Little Mermaid ~

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I opened my eyes with endless darkness devouring me.

“Where am I? Why is it so dark?” I wondered, confusion swirling in my mind. I attempted to move my arm in search of light, hoping to assess my surroundings.

“Umm... it seems like I’m lying down on a bed,” I murmured to myself. Just as I began to relax, dismissing the terrifying thought of being kidnapped by pirates or mobsters, I noticed something unsettling.

My body felt... heavy. It was an unusual weight, as if something were restraining my movements. “Calm down,” I told myself. Panicking wouldn’t help me in this situation.

“Where am I? What happened before this?” I pressed my fingers on my temples, trying to piece back my memories.

It had been a quiet, peaceful night. We were the only ship sailing on the sea. We were sailing back to my kingdom with my soldiers after forging a trade deal with a distant Eastern country. We were celebrating aboard the ship, laughter and camaraderie filling the air.

Suddenly, a sweet, enchanting singing drifted toward us from nowhere. Though confused, I found myself drawn to the source of that alluring voice. All the sailors halted their work, all of them standing still, staring in the same direction.

“Bang!”

A loud noise woke us up from that situation. As we were still confused, the ship began to shake violently. “The ship hit the rocks!” someone shouted. “What? That can’t be... My crew should be watching the waters!” I started to protest, but then I realised that everyone had been distracted by that mysterious voice. “Your Highness!” One of the sailors grabbed my arm. “What should we do now? We – He did not finish his sentence. The floor beneath us began to crack, and suddenly, the entire ship split in two.

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Screams, cries, and desperate prayers filled the air in chaos. The deck beneath me grew steeper and steeper, and I struggled to find something to hold onto, but I failed to. As I fell into the sea, I caught sight of a strange silhouette behind a rock.

That wasn’t a man; it was too thin for that.

That wasn’t a woman; there were no female crew members on board.

That wasn’t human! No human could possess such a horrible face!

There were six of them, all sharing a ghastly visage. Sharp fangs glinted in the cold air, and their tangled black hair hung on their heads. Now, their narrowed amber eyes were fixed on me.

My memory stopped here. It clarified some of my thoughts and left me with bigger questions. “Who... what are those monsters? What happened to my crew?” The image of those creatures reminded me of a story my late grandfather used to tell.

Sirens. Folklore says they had the upper body of a woman and the tail of a fish. Their enchanting songs lured ships to their doom, causing them to crash against the rocks. “It can’t be...” I mocked myself for such a ridiculous thought. “It was just folklore...” As I continued to wrestle with this idea, a voice suddenly rang in my ears.

“Your Highness...?”

“Who’s there?!” I turned my head toward the source of the voice, although I still could not see anything. Strangely, the speaker seemed to know exactly where I was.

“Your Highness, don’t you remember me?” Her voice grew closer, yet I noticed the absence of footsteps as she approached.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t think I’ve heard your voice before. Who are you? Can you turn on a light? Maybe I could recognise your face if I could see it.”

"I am... I am the one who brought you out of the ocean and back to this place," she replied softly.

"How about my crew? Did you find anyone with me?" I asked with worry.

"I am sorry, you are the only one I found. And I apologise for the darkness, but I can't turn on any lights."

"Why not?"

"Because there are no lights here. We don't use them."

"What? Then how do you see in this darkness?"

"We... people have advanced sight capabilities in our land." She responds evasively.

I wanted to learn more about this special ability, but perhaps it wasn't the right time.

"Thank you for your help, Madam. I wish I could discuss these abilities with you further..."

"Really? You do?" she interjected with enthusiasm.

"Yes, I do. But right now, my priority is to return to my country." My thoughts turned to my parents and my people. They must be desperate with worries over my disappearance.

"I believe I'm fully recovered now. Can you take me back to my kingdom? I promise to reward you richly."

"Oh, Your Highness, you must not return. Your legs are injured, and you need to stay here until you're fully healed."

"What? My legs? I don't feel any pain. How are they hurt?" I was confused, and I attempted to move my legs to demonstrate my mobility. But then I realised I couldn't move them freely. I couldn't spread my legs or bend my knees. I tried to move my toes, but I felt nothing. Like they were glued together.

"What's happening to my legs?" I struggled to sit up. "Did someone tie them together?"

"Oh, Your Highness," she said gently, pressing me back down onto the bed. "That's why I told you not to move so vigorously."

"Your legs have been..." She paused, searching for the right words. "...melted, together, because of the fire."

"That can't be! How can I return to my kingdom and face my people in this condition?" I cried hysterically.

"Don't worry; you don't have to."

"What do you mean I don't have to?"

"Because we can help you." She moved closer. Although I couldn't see her, I felt her breath against my skin. "All you have to do is to stay here. I don't know how long it will take. But I promise, I will take care of you perennially."

Her words were like magic. Despite tons of questions still swirling in my mind, I felt calm in her comfort.

"Really? You promise?"

"Yes. You have my word." She gently patted my head like I was a child.

"Don't worry."

I closed my eyes, surrendering to her soft voice.

"You are here with me..."

"Forever and always."*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen's "The Little Mermaid." (1837). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Little Mermaid." Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, http://hca.gilead.org/il/li_merma.htm

The Metal Pig and The Young Painter ~

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Inside the gallery, many visitors walked around, but one figure remained motionless. It was a man with a hat, staring at a picture for more than half an hour. His eyes reflected the pretty face of the little boy in the picture. If any visitor was willing to stop and look carefully into his eyes, he would have found that this man seemed to be remembering something. In fact, it was the glovemaker's boy. Although he had already grown up, his eyes still shone with a pure light.

The young man stood still for another five minutes and then took a few steps slowly, turning his head towards the picture once again. When he moved, he collided with a man violently, and his hat fell onto the ground. "Sorry, sir," the young man said tremblingly, bending down to pick up his hat. "Are you the painter, Hayden Jones?" the man said in excitement. The young man looked up. It was a middle-aged man with a thick beard and gold glasses. "Yes, I am," Hayden said. He was shocked that the man could recognise him. "Would you like a cup of coffee so that we can have a chat?" The man smiled kindly.

They came into a coffee shop in Porta Rosa. "Two cups of cappuccino, please." The man began to introduce himself. Through his words, Hayden learnt that the man was a merchant and had just moved to Florence two weeks ago. "You can call me Mr. K, I love appreciating artwork very much." He took a small sip of his coffee and said, "Today's exhibition was very impressive, especially the painting of a boy on a metal pig."

Hayden's heart started to beat wildly.

"Re...really? I love it, too," said Hayden in a trembling voice. Mr. K was surprised by his strange reaction. "However, I don't know why the little boy would sit on the metal pig." Since the merchant seemed confused about this and looked sincere, Hayden decided to tell him the childhood experience he had had with the metal pig. "So you are the boy in the picture! That's unbelievable!" Mr. K laughed. Although Mr. K still thought that

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Hayden was telling an absurd joke, an evil idea came to him instantly.

After a few days, Mr. K called Hayden out again. "These days I've been thinking about whether you have the interest to draw the scenes you had seen to keep them as souvenirs that will exist forever." Seeing that Hayden was still hesitating, Mr. K hastened to persuade him further. "It's not only for you, but more people will also know the story of the metal pig." Hearing this, the memory of that cold winter night flashed back to Hayden's mind. Over the years of adversity, it was this memory that had given him power. And now, he wanted to encourage those who were suffering.

He nodded.

"I'm so happy that you have made the right decision!" A greedy smile appeared on the merchant's face.

A week later, when the cold winter wind blew over the city, Hayden appeared with a wad of scratch paper under the metal pig as promised. The merchant then arrived. A greedy light sparkled in his eyes when he saw those pieces of paper held in Hayden's hands. He took the paper instantly and began to read. On those wrinkled papers, he saw the moonlight shining brightly, the vivid metallic groups of figures, the charming Venus de' Medici, the picture of children who believed they would arrive in heaven... The paintings were so real, like plots of a movie.

At the same time as the exhibition, Mr. K held a new exhibition showing Hayden's painting. He advertised it as the behind-the-scenes story of the popular picture. Within one day, the miracle story of a metal pig and a little boy soon spread over the city. More and more people wanted to view it with their own eyes. However, to Hayden's surprise, the tricky businessman started to collect an expensive admission fee. Some poor people who couldn't afford the fee were not allowed to enter the exhibition. Hayden found Mr. K and

said, “My original intention was to let people know that no matter how unfortunate their lives are, as long as they keep their hearts pure, they could still reach the world of heaven. However, now people who are as poor as I am are not allowed to see the exhibition.” “But who cares if the story is true or not! The magical world is just a joke!” The greedy merchant counted the bills and said coldly without looking up.

He was right.

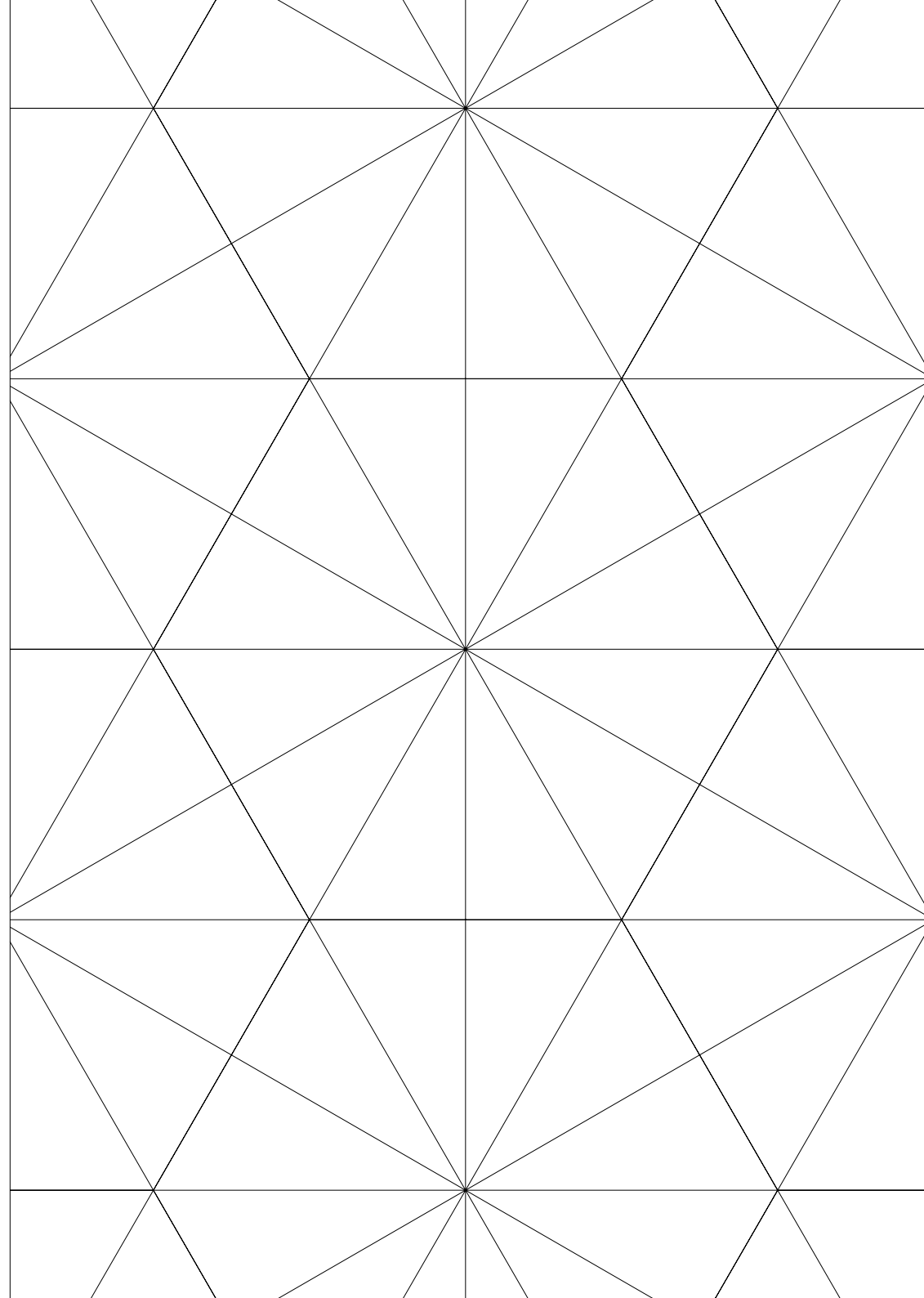
Only kids would believe in his story. Adults just saw it as an absurd joke. Suddenly, Hayden felt like his world had collapsed, and it was hard for him to believe that the fantastic experiences that had shown up in his dreams countless times were just a joke for many people. He felt desperate, and maybe there were too many ugly things in the world, so only a few people could believe that good things truly existed.

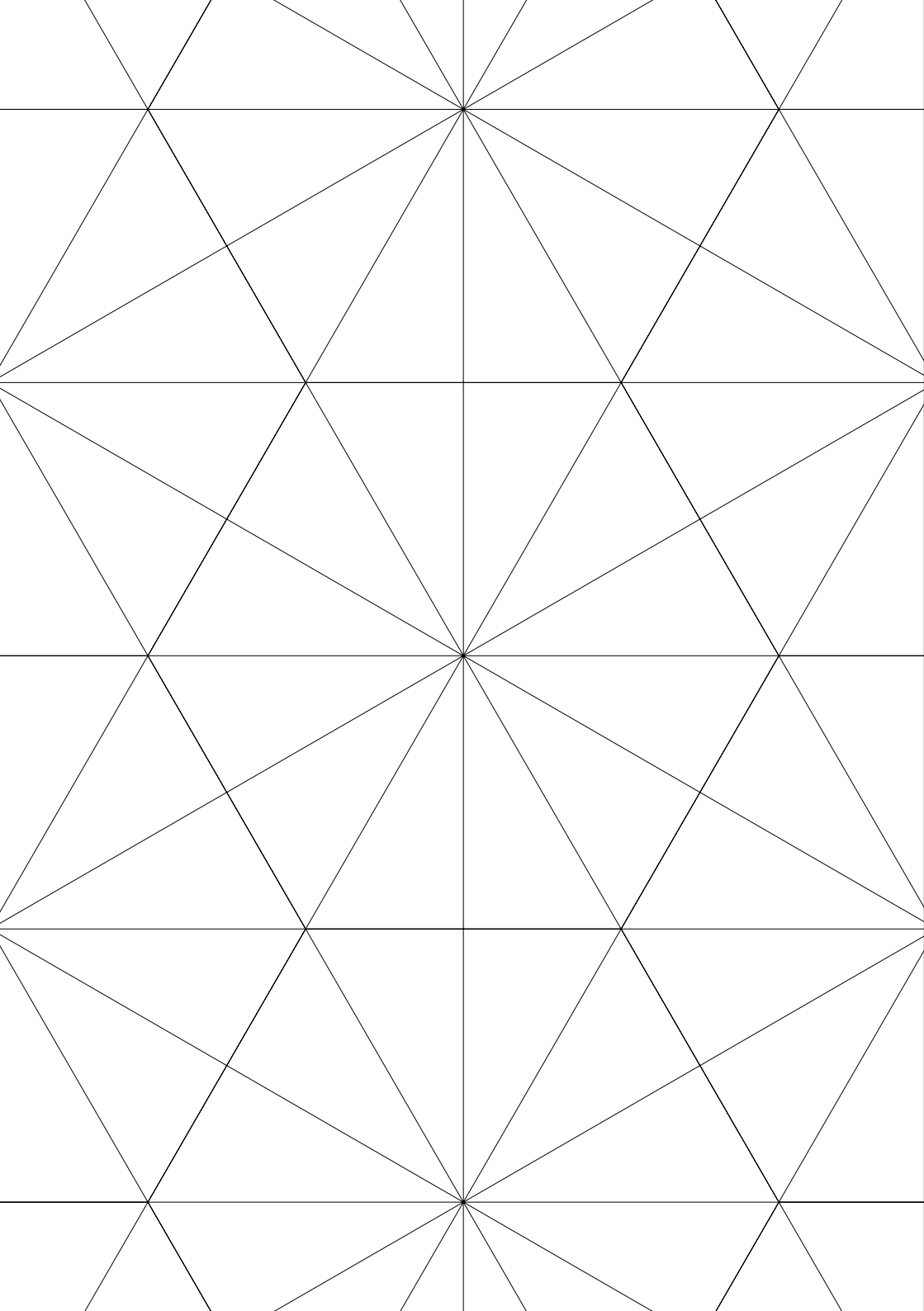
On that cold winter night, when the freezing wind blew coldly over Porta Rosa, Hayden came to the metal pig again and sat on it just as he did when he was a little boy. He leant forward and fell asleep. It was midnight; the young man heard a voice coming from the pig. “I know that you will come back someday. Time flies, but your heart remains as innocent as when you were a child. Let’s go to heaven, as there will be no pain anymore.” The pig began to run. They entered the long gallery and passed from hall to hall. Once again, he saw that the two kids who appeared to have full confidence would reach heaven at last. There were also the older people who stood as if they were uncertain, yet hopeful, and they bowed in humble adoration to the Lord Jesus...

“Now I’m going to heaven, too,” he murmured.

The next morning, the young painter was found dead on the back of the metal pig, with a peaceful smile on his face.*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen’s “The Metal Pig.” (1862). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. “The Metal Pig.” Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, http://hca.gilead.org/ilmetal_pi.html





POEMS

Tears and Tethers of a Soulless Princess ~

Disha Deepak Shetty
HKMA David Li Kwok Po College

73

You have no immortal soul; you are bound by the waves that act as your tether.
You cannot lie in the moonlight on the sandbanks or see the emerald of the forest.
Your sea-foam destined being will never rise beyond the stars into the aether.

Oh, my pretty princess, for your soul to live forever, a man's soul you must share together.
Tongue cut and mellifluous voice mine, the knife-induced pain of your steps shall feel sorest.
You have no immortal soul; you are bound by the waves that act as your tether.

Despite entrancing eyes and soap-bubble-like swaying steps, you will be as dumb as leather.
Use what you have to enchain the man's heart, lest your naive dreams end up perished, then
Your sea-foam destined being will never rise beyond the stars into the aether.

Beware, should the prince marry another, you and the crest of the waves will bind together;
Forsaking your pristine palace, your darling loved ones, an act akin to slitting your wrist.
You have no immortal soul; you are bound by the waves that act as your tether.

74

Bear the hefty weight of your desire, pay the hefty sum they require, this reckless endeavour.
Oh, how your voice trembles; you look as pale as death, my artless princess dearest.
Your sea-foam destined being will never rise beyond the stars into the aether.

Come forth, wayward soul, my cauldron burns with my black blood – your untether;
Soon you will learn, my naive princess, love's price is tears, and it will leave you the poorest.
You have no immortal soul, you are bound by the waves that act as your tether,
Your sea-foam destined being will never rise beyond the stars into the aether.*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen's "The Little Mermaid." (1837). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Little Mermaid."
Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, http://hca.gilead.org/il/li_merma.html

Ballad of the Gale ~

Lee Atomu
The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong Yuen Long Lutheran
Secondary School

75

Porcelain palace of mosaics and murals,
and deafening silence that sounded so royal.
My body in bed, nobody heard
I was catching my breath, none but a bird.

Then a familiar sound suddenly hits me,
like an herbal woodland anthem, so pretty.
Traitors would drop their scythes and their swords for,
if only it meant that the nightingale sings more.

I don't get it or know why I got saved,
since you know I wouldn't have done the same.
I don't get it, you know you don't get paid,
and when we last met you were in a cage.

And you explained, you said beauty is a breeze,
felt when it came and it comes at ease,
but try to force it and it gets back at you,
and I tell you, that was the moment I knew.

The court started dancing to the beat and the liquor,
and feelings that mocktails don't have start to linger.
You could keep your eyes on the shiniest clone,
but once you see the real deal it'll never come close.

Now that it hit me, now that I get it,
You can't make great waves, you can't change the wind.*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen's "The Nightingale." (1843). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Nightingale."
Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, <http://hca.gilead.org.il/nighting.html>

I Looked at the Rippling Tides Under My Feet ~

Wang Yu Hui Susie
Diocesan Girls' School

76

I sat myself on the still water of the lake.
Paddling, creating rippling tides with my feet.
My brothers and sisters' wavelets didn't merge into mine.
I dared not look at the rippling tides under my feet.

Departed as I went, I escaped from the tides.
I left behind a trail of greyness amongst the pure clouds.
The pure clouds I saw, through the window of a foreign land.
I longed for the rippling tides under my feet

Oh! The tides, the birds who flew from the tides, who
Blended into the clouds, feathers with linings of gold.
The gold reflected into my eyes, prickling me strangely.
As I realised how startling it was for the clouds to have a tint of grey.

A tint of grey? I looked down in grief, but where
Is the tint of grey gone? I see in myself
The solemn clouds floating amongst the blue, rejoicing
And beautiful! As if the egg of darkness has broken
Into the clouds which carry the heavens, especially blue.
As if the ugly can turn beautiful under solemn dreams.

I sat myself on the still water of the lake.
Paddling, creating rippling tides under my feet.
My brothers and sisters' bread and cake embraced my feathers
As I bent my head to the rippling tides under my feet.*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling." (1843). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Ugly Duckling."
Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, http://hca.gilead.org.il/ugly_duc.html

Your Casket Test ~

Ip Chi Yu Grace
St. Rose of Lima's College

77

Mother, mother, who told us
all that glisters is not gold?

Have they not seen where I
gently opening my clear-skied eyes,
bluebirds flying amid pearl-like cloud;
sunlit locks draping over my fair, slender waist;
snow-white legs dangling from:
pretty golden tulip –

bloomed from the loving kiss of your sanguine lips?

You chooseth it,
you gained what you desired.

*“Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart, or in the head?”*

From the reflection I see my singing self:
narcissus beauty –
nightingale voice –
oh ripples of water
splashes like meteors against Milky Way oars –
mirrors of truth.

78

Not silver, not lead,
can be my boat
for never so rich a gem
could be set in worse than gold!

Mother, mother, why tell
all that glisters is not gold?*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen's "Thumbelina." (1835). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. Source: "Thumbelina."
Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, http://hca.gilead.org/il/li_tiny.html

Confession ~

Ng Tsz Kit Cliff*
The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong

79

Dancing in the dark, feeling with your arms,
All the sacrifices – family, voice, legs –
For savouring this sweet moment.

I am your true saviour;
let us celebrate our encounter.
Not turning back on me, casting me aside quickly –
our relationship, shallow as foam.
I love your charming surface, not knowing your heart.
Such a cruel fool.
Moon to Earth,
Single, orbiting loyally,
But you are not my Earth.

If I am not so greedy, eager for love beyond home,
If I hadn't saved the prince, leaving myself vulnerable,
If I don't deal with the inciting witch, I won't be punished by karma,
It is all my fault.
All my attention is locked to you.
I am a sinful, spoilt, wayward little mermaid,
abandon my sisters, father and grandmother,
Trust your alluring face with a lethal smile.
I shall pay for my sin.
Not praying for mercy –

* Ng Tsz Kit Cliff is a full-time student pursuing the BA (Hons) in Psychology in the Department of Social Science at The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong.

80

One last roaming among stars.
If stars present, can evening be far behind?
Superficial love inflicts the deepest trauma.
Life is so expensive with no room for failure.
Perishing in the blade of morning sunlight,
No path to return, only mourning lasts,
At last, at rest.

In dreams, daughter of the air satisfied with my choice,
Offering me a chance to be an immortal soul.
How fortunate I am, they are unable to probe my mind.
Of all the mistakes I've made,
Am I worthy?*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen's "The Little Mermaid." (1837). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Little Mermaid."
Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, http://hca.gilead.org/il/li_merma.html

Little Claus and Big Claus ~

Jiang Yaqing Coco*
The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong

81

There were two Clauses in a distant mountain village.
Big Claus was rich with four horses.
Little Claus was poor with only one horse.
Big Claus always bullied and exploited Little Claus,
Whose heart was filled with fatigue after a day of hard work.

Little Claus, on the farmland was busy,
Big Claus suddenly swung the whip fiercely.
O Poor horse of Little Claus,
Who fell down mournfully and silently.

In sorrow, Little Claus buried the horse.
Peeled off its skin, carried it on his back and wandered towards the distance,
Encountering a heavy snowfall on the road, and the cold was raging!

He saw a large farmhouse.
The lights inside were warm and bright with the fragrant food!
He stepped forward and knocked on the door, full of longing.
Dong, dong, dong!
“May I come in?” ”NO!”
He was rejected by the farmer’s wife, and his heart felt cold!

* Jiang Yaqing Coco is a full-time student pursuing the BA (Hons) in Convergent Media and Communication Technology in the School of Communication at The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong.

82

In the cold wind, he trembled and felt embarrassed,
Moving towards the broken shed, with heavy footsteps and a broken centre of gravity.
Through the gap, he caught a glimpse of the scenery inside.
The farmer’s wife and the pastor raised their glasses and laughed.
The delicious food on the table emitted a tempting fragrance,
And he only found out that these two were in an extra affair!

The farmer’s figure slowly swayed from afar,
The fire of jealousy surged in Little Claus’s heart.
Looking at himself, covered in mud and soaked in rain,
Looking inside again, extravagance and revelry were too arrogant.
Evil plans grew silently in the depths of one’s heart.
He saw the peasant woman nervously hide the pastor into the big box.

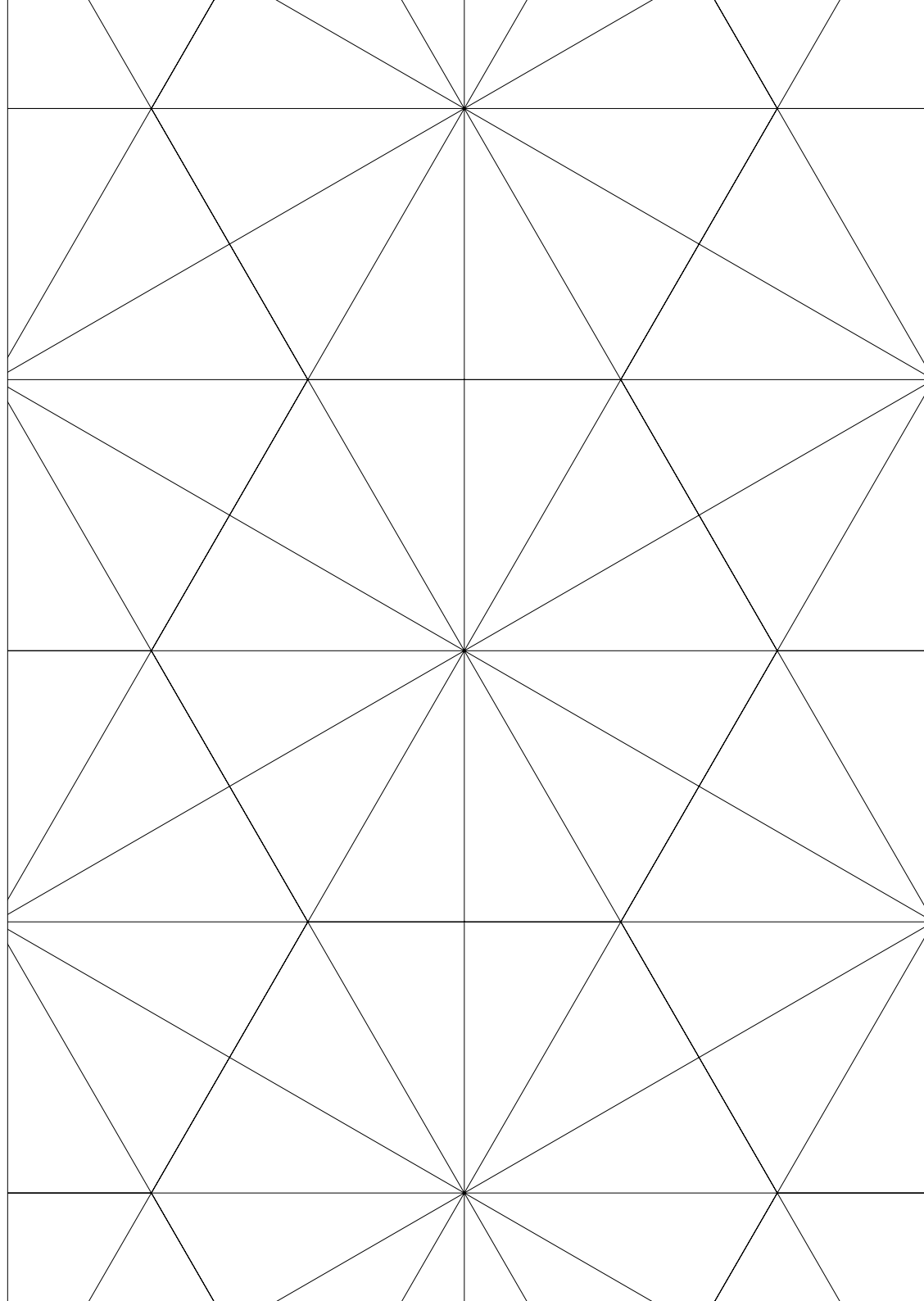
He took out the horsehide and stomped hard on the soles of his feet.
The creaking sound pierced through the silent night window,
Shouting loudly towards the farmhouse to deceive people,
Inside the bag was the magic craftsman who could transform into delicious food.
The farmer was greedy, and his eyes instantly sparkled,
Opening the oven, the food was there lying.

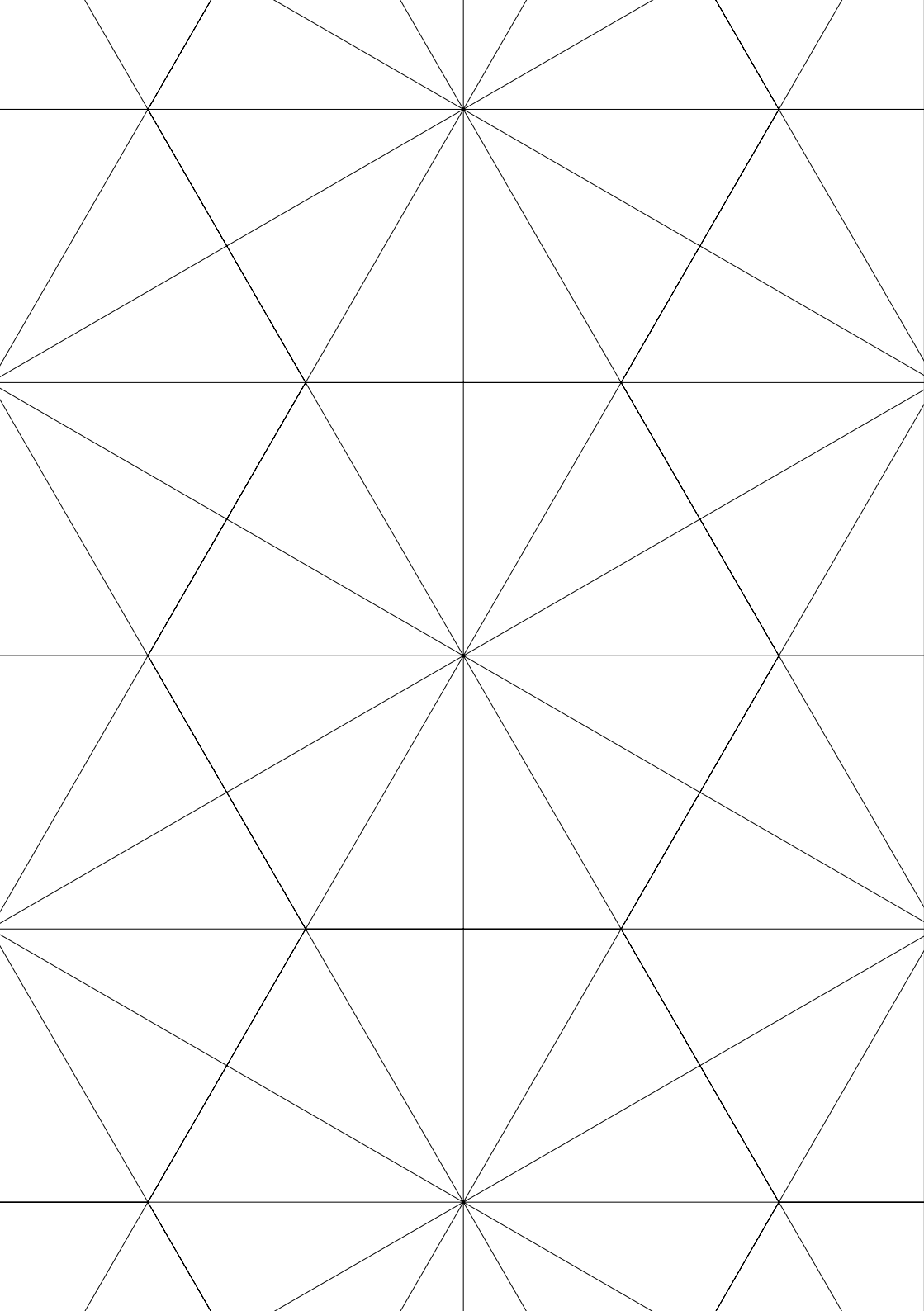
Little Claus cleverly tricked out fine wine.
The farmer was bewitched, as if he had been led by a demon.
Willing to buy this “magic bag” with gold,
He let Little Claus take away the box of the Tibetan priest.

Arriving at the bridge, the rain was raging.
Little Claus threatened to throw the box into the middle of the river.
The priest was terrified and trembled uncontrollably in the box.
To save his life, he reluctantly surrendered with one bushel of gold.
At this moment, kindness in his eyes had disappeared.
Only greed, indifference, disdain, and unrestrained display remained.

Little Claus carried the gold coins and continued to explore.
Upon hearing this, Big Claus was so jealous that he went crazy.
He was determined to emulate him to make a fortune,
But little did he know that his fate had laid a different web.*

* Inspired by H.C. Andersen's “Little Claus and Big Claus.” (1835). Source: Andersen, Hans Christian.
“Little Claus and Big Claus.” Translated by H.P. Paull, HCA.gilead.org, 2007, http://bca.gilead.org/il/li_claus.html





ARTWORKS

The Duckling's Happy Journey ~

Law Tin Yu

Precious Blood Kindergarten

87

This painting portrays the ugly duckling beside a swan gliding across a lake. The duckling's shy and uncertain demeanour contrasts with the swan's serene and confident posture. The vibrant hues employed evoke a sense of hope, with shimmering blue waters and golden sunlight infusing the scene with energy. A soft purple sky symbolises growth's magical metamorphosis. Like the duckling, we initially harbour doubts, but time reveals our true selves. The tale serves as a reminder that insecurities fade as we embrace our potential, akin to the duckling's transformation into a radiant swan. Through its vivid imagery, the artwork celebrates self-discovery, blending whimsy and optimism to encourage us to recognise that beauty unfolds at its own pace.



A Scientific Match Girl ~

Lee Kwok Yee Amadeus

Tutor Time

88



On a cold winter night, a little match-selling girl stands on a dark and lonely street. She is good at science and remembers what her teacher told her about the Periodic Table of Elements. She strikes a match head, heats up the red phosphorus, burns it with sulphur, and mixes with oxygen to make heat and light. She is very happy, as every match can keep her warm for a few seconds. The girl repeats the steps, wondering which element can make an everlasting heat and light, before burning out all the matches.

The Little Mermaid ~

Cheung Hoi Shun
St. Catherine International Kindergarten



The artist intends to create a tribute to the brave, pretty, and loving Little Mermaid, her favourite character within Anderson's collection. The Little Mermaid is prepared to relinquish all that she holds dear from the underwater kingdom, the happy life with her dearest sisters, to her ability to speak, for the Prince whom she has fallen in love with, with no regret. The painting features the beauty of the underwater world and the profound bond shared among the mermaid sisters, emphasising the deep love of the Little Mermaid for her Prince.

The Little Mermaid ~

Mika Adelia Tso
Tutor Time

My artwork is inspired by the story of *The Little Mermaid*.

I drew the pretty little mermaid sitting on a rock, wanting to visit the land above the sea, looking at the handsome young prince who is sailing in a ship and longing to live with him in the castle where he lives.

Below the little mermaid, I drew the beautiful undersea world where she lives, with colourful corals, pearls, and sea shells, happy fish- and wonderful sea creatures.

I drew a setting sun and an evening sky in the background because this is the most beautiful time of the day.





Pure Child around the Dirt ~

Lee Antonia
ELCHK Lutheran School

In a dark forest filled with buzzing insects and dangerous plants, Thumbelina sleeps on a soft bed of petals. Moonlight filters through twisted branches, creating weird shadows. Giant ladybugs crawl nearby, and carnivorous plants snap their jaws, but she remains undisturbed, her heart pulsing with a steady rhythm. The forest, seemingly holding its breath in awe of her innocence, envelops her in a sanctuary. Despite the wild surroundings, Thumbelina's dreams are filled with warmth and light, untouched by the perils of the night.

The Snow Queen ~

Chiu Sum Tung, Carlie
ELCHK Lutheran Academy

This artwork draws inspiration from *The Snow Queen*, framed in a black border that contrasts with snowflakes scattered across the edges. At its core lies a sketch depicting the poignant moment between the Snow Queen and her companion, Gerda. Their expressions convey a mixture of wonder and trepidation, surrounded by swirling snow that evokes a sense of magic and mystery. The intricate details capture the essence of their journey, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in the ethereal beauty of this timeless tale, where love and bravery triumph over icy despair.



The Little Mermaid ~

Koo Yu Sze Sophia
St. Anthony's School



Once upon a time, a beautiful mermaid called Queen Ariel ruled the majestic Sea Kingdom. Overwhelmed by her royal duties, she occasionally thought of having a quick escape into the human world. One day, when she was on her way to the Sea Witch, she saw some drunk blokes who burped and farted loudly by the seashore. Feeling totally disgusted, Ariel thought to herself, "How dreadful! No wonder Dad told us all to avoid human beings like the plague!" Ariel then swam back to her sweet home and enjoyed her refreshing seaweed bubble tea during her afternoon repast.

A Tribute to Mr. Andersen ~

Shivaay Kirpalani
Cheung Sha Wan Catholic Primary School

My inspiration came from my first visit to a book exhibition with my mother. My mother had read many fairytales written by Mr. Andersen to me. These wonderful storylines made me fall in love with his work. It is his fairytales that lead us to spread the wings of imagination and fly freely in the charming fairytale world. Additionally, they have guided us on a journey of knowledge, akin to a sailboat navigating the vast ocean of knowledge.



The Little Match Seller ~

Ngai Tsz Yiu
Holy Trinity College

95

My drawing explores themes of warmth and hope amid darkness. The little girl holding the candle embodies resilience and inner strength, casting light in a desolate landscape. Although the story suggests the girl departed, it serves as a reminder that in the quiet periods of struggle, we can still seek solace and comfort in the darkest time of our lives.



The Little Match Girl ~

Xiong Zixuan
St Stephen's College

96

On a dark night, a little girl sold matches, but nobody bothered to care about her. She was cold, so cold. She lit some matches, saw a store, a goose feast, and her grandma. Oh, how kind her grandma's eyes were! With each match she lit, she yearned to see her grandma, for her grandma was her source of warmth and light in her life.



The Ugly Duckling ~

Wong Tsz Tung Vanese
Lam Tai Fai College

97



I have selected *The Ugly Duckling* as my reference. During my childhood, I always listened to this story from my mom. A profound impression left on me was that the ugly duckling kept being bullied by and isolated from the white swans. This resonates with my daily life experiences. Because I am a Special Educational Needs (SEN) student, I often find it hard to communicate with peers, leading to the feelings of loneliness. However, this story served as a source of inspiration, becoming a part of my personal philosophy. Now I would like to say that I have become a great person, just as the ugly duckling.

The Butterfly ~

Chen Xinhui
St Stephen's College

98

A butterfly was determined to select a very pretty bride among the flowers. However, he was rejected by Marguerite Daisy and had been unable to make a choice from season to season. Consequently, he remained single and became an old bachelor. Despite being pinned while admiring the flowers in the house, he still expressed his desire for freedom.



The Fairy ~

Sin Ka Yan Kaye
Ho Dao College (Sponsored by Sik Sik Yuen)



This artwork depicts a whimsical fairy sitting atop a grand, colourful rose. Surrounded by a variety of flowers, the scene is bathed in a soft moonlight glow, evoking an ambiance filled with fantasy and aesthetic allure.

Warmth Beyond the Fireplace ~

Tam Man Yu Taffy
The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong



This watercolor and coloured pencil illustration is inspired by *Little Tiny or Thumbelina*. It juxtaposes the contrast between physical warmth and genuine compassion. In a cozy burrow, the field mouse and mole sit by the fireplace, yet their hearts remain cold. Meanwhile, Tiny secretly cares for the injured swallow in the icy night, offering warmth through kindness. It is ironic that those who are more well-off often neglect those in need, while the less fortunate (Tiny), despite their own struggles, show compassion for an injured swallow.

The piece aims to capture the enchanting charm of classic children's book illustrations, drawing inspiration from artists I deeply admire, including Beatrix Potter, Rien Poortvliet, and Anita Jeram. The inspired semi-realistic style, imbued with a fairytale essence, features imaginative characters and fantastical worlds. Through simple plots, these timeless tales convey essential messages of human compassion, and serve as a gentle reminder of the values that foster connection and understanding with one another.



The Little Match Seller ~

Lau Cheuk Sze
The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong

Inspired by *The Little Match-Seller*, I aim to capture the magical moment when the little girl ignites a match and glimpses a fantastical realm. The scenery inside the burning matchstick and the cold, snowy setting serve as symbolic barriers, contrasting between her harsh reality and the warmth of her dreams. A roast goose walks towards her, and the shock on her face encapsulates the design she perceives, embodying the hope and comfort she longs for. The use of colour creates a strong contrast between the realm of fantasy and the mundane, with the orange and brown hues of the roast goose set against a blue background. Through this piece, I aspire to highlight the power of imagination amidst despair.



The Little Mermaid ~

Chan Gei Yau Kimby
St Paul's Kindergarten



Brave Little Swan ♡

Wu Hay Yiu
ELCHK Lutheran School

The Funny Fashion Show ~

Wong On Dik Torres
Kennedy Primary School



A Spark of Hope ~

Tang Wing Yan
Precious Blood Primary School
(South Horizons)

The Little Match Seller ~

Fung Hiu Yan
Lam Tai Fai College





The Fairy ~

Fan Shen Xiang
Ho Dao College
(Sponsored by Sik Sik Yuen)

The Little Match Seller ~

Cheung Yan Hei
Ng Wah Catholic Secondary School



The Steadfast Tin Soldier ~

Jin Ningjing
St Stephen's College



The Emperor's New Suit in Last Dance ~

Poon Sum Wing
Ng Wah Catholic Secondary School





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香港恒生大學
THE HANG SENG UNIVERSITY
OF HONG KONG

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