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Miluše Juříčková über

**Helena Březinová: Slavíci, mořské víly a bolavé zuby. Pohádky
H. Ch. Andersena mezi romantismem a modernitou.
Nightingales, Mermaids and Toothaches: Andersen's Fairy Tales
between Romanticism and Modernity**

Host: Brno 2018, ISBN 978-80-7577-612-9

Presenting Hans Christian Andersen is in many ways a recurrent act – both in European and in world-wide measure. But in the context of Czech literature Helena Březinová comes with the first monography about a classic author read in 160 languages. In the Czech language, too, of course, first time published in 1851, since then remaining a part of our cultural awareness and literature tradition.

With the undertitle Březinová signalizes that her study has been inspired by the most outstanding literary scientists of the last decades in Denmark and Germany. But in fact on her literature list we can find also sociologists, such as Habermas, and philosophers such as Nietzsche and Adorno, not to speak about Søren Kierkegaard, the latter being functionally incorporated in the substance of Březinová's analysis.

Helena Březinová's project is certainly not to re-analyze and re-interpret whole Andersen's work, especially not in the combination with biographical aspects. Her focus is directed towards several fairytale texts that show in a significant way the essential ambiguity of the texts regardless if it is a canonic or an almost unknown fairytale. With a distinctive eloquence Březinová follows up Andersen's focus on language and on genre. Andersen's choice of the fairytale genre provides here a clear evidence of the Danish author's effort to reach a whole community of readers and listeners, by no means just for children. Andersen is a typical storyteller (according to Walter Benjamin's

terminology in contrast to narrator) with ultimately connective appeal of the fairytale. But according to Březinová his „dialogues“ present actually a completely loss of confidence in the basic communicative power of language, among others through their absurdity. Březinová shows that these breakdowns are a mirror of a much greater miscommunication – between the artist and his audience. She points out that the pessimism according to communication is not only a personal feeling or failing of biographical Andersen, but an essential part of his artistic modus in the parables: The protagonist in *The Little Mermaid* has literally lost her tongue because it was cut out and the tin soldier's silence denotes a tragic existential isolation. The father of modern existentialism, Andersen's contemporary and compatriot Søren Kierkegaard, is presented here as author's critical. Fairytales as genre was written in the transition period in Western literature. In fact Andersen plays with the folklore tradition yet deals with individuals as we know them from modern fiction. Therefore Březinová's reading analysis allows confrontation also with Franz Kafka's short stories, because she argues that Kafka and Andersen often use a parabolic structure but both totally disappoint reader's expectations in the genre perspective.

Besides the narratological point of view Březinová's essay has a very relevant translation part. In my opinion it is to regret that Březinová does not give more space to this

issue and to the reception history. But the message is clear: The most texts being sold under the commercial remark H.Ch.Andersen are not translations, but retelling or adaptation, often directly against the meaning and spirit of Andersen's text – omitting storyteller's comments, or changing the end passages (The Emperor's new clothes).

Helena Březinová, teacher and researcher at the Charles university in Prague, is active also as a translator of Scandinavian literature (e. g. works by Peter Høeg, Marie Naja Aidt and Helle Helle) These skills are surprisingly enough present also in this study. As a special bonus Březinová brings up a new translation of three Andersen's fairy tales, two of them being printed in Czech for the first time. Another enrichment of the book are fairy tales illustrations from various periods inclusive Andersen's own picture from the Czech city Collin/Kolín during his journey in 1834. Last but not least a comprehensive English summary about the particular chapters of the study (22 pages out of 300) opens the book for international academic field.

Language and style in Březinová's book is rather unusual in the Central European context of literature science, her modus is more of the Anglo-Saxon type. She subverses the common expectation upon an academic text, her tone is personally towards the reader, but her argumentation strong scholarly and factual. Sentences like „fairy tales we have read together until now...“ (pohádky, které jsme společně četli), „his might not seem interesting enough for us...“ (to by nás však nemuselo zajímat) or „have something in your finger“ (mít něco v malíku) document what I mean: Březinová is witty and at the same time inventive in her discipline. She transposes the scientific relevant questions in a new, open dimension. As Březinová self says due to the Czech audience of Andersen she really felt she had to be entertaining and humorous in the formulations, but in spite of the borderline she is walking on, both her concept and her frame is clear scientific. Tension between form and content, this duality as Březinová characterizes Andersen's tales, is in effect also grounded in her own essay.

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