

# Aurorae Borealis Studia Classica

Vol. VIII

*Sneedronningen* (1844 / 1849)

written by Hans Christian Andersen  
illustrated by Thomas Vilhelm Pedersen

digitized by UiT, with a biographical introduction  
and summary of contents by Franziska Runge

*Aurorae Borealis Studia Classica* (Classic Studies of the Northern Lights) is [a series](#) of digitized books, with biographical introductions and content summaries, edited by Per Pippin Aspaas and published by [Septentrio Academic Publishing](#), University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway (UiT). The books as such are already in the public domain; all further content is open-access except when stated otherwise. Contact: [per.pippin.aspaas@uit.no](mailto:per.pippin.aspaas@uit.no).

The eighth volume in the series derives from an MA course in Scandinavian literature entitled ‘Dem Polarlicht auf der Spur. Wissenschaftshistorische und kulturwissenschaftliche Erkundigungen’, given by Marie-Theres Federhofer at Humboldt University Berlin in 2019. Course participants wrote content summaries of selected texts as part of their exam, some of which were selected for the *Aurorae Borealis Studia Classica* series. The first student text edited and adapted for publication in the series is by Franziska Runge. She has written about one of the most cherished fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen, *Sneedronningen* (The Snow Queen), first published in 1844 and then reissued with illustrations by Thomas Vilhelm Pedersen in 1849. As demonstrated in Runge’s introduction, Andersen was well aware of the theories of electromagnetism promoted by the physicist Ørsted at precisely this time. Although a Romantic author, Andersen not only endows the aurora with a symbolic role in the narrative, he also alludes to contemporary scientific debates regarding the properties and origin of the phenomenon.

I would like to thank Marie-Theres Federhofer for the idea of including works of fiction in the series and Kira Moss for pointing to *Sneedronningen* as a potential text for inclusion. Technical support from the digitisation team at the University Library UiT – Hana Kekić and Haarek Helberg in particular – is gratefully acknowledged.

- The editor

Item digitized for this volume:

Copy of *Eventyr* by H. C. Andersen, illustrated by Th. V. Pedersen, published in Copenhagen, December 1849 (official year of printing: 1850), digitized by Uppsala University Library through the [eBooks on Demand](#) service. Optical character recognition by Haarek Helberg and Hana Kekić, UiT. See e-book: [Entire book](#) or [Sneedronningen only](#)

# HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

## (1805–1875)

### Biographical Introduction

by Franziska Runge

One of the best-known Danish authors from the period known as Romanticism, Hans Christian Andersen was born on 2 April 1805 in Odense, Denmark. Only about 5000 people lived in Odense at that time, although it was the second largest town in Denmark. Andersen's father, Hans Andersen, a shoemaker, was 25 years old and his mother, Anne Marie Andersdatter, was 40 years old when Hans Christian was born. His family did not have much money and lived quite poorly: They had just one room for three people, which included beds for the family and the father's workshop. The father died when Hans Christian was only eleven years old. In 1819, at the age of fourteen, Hans Christian left Odense to settle in Copenhagen. There, he first served as a choirboy at the Royal Theatre before receiving financial support from the theatre director to enrol at the Latin school of Slagelse.

Andersen wrote travelogues, novels, and fairy tales. Financial problems and a lack of self-consciousness characterize his early writings during the first half of the 1830s. His success started with his first novel *Improvisatoren* (The Improvisatore), published in Denmark and Germany in 1835. The outcome of an educational journey through Germany, Italy, France, and Switzerland, the novel was particularly successful in Germany. Even though *Improvisatoren* is a novel, it has certain fairy tale-like features. Andersen initially continued to write fairy tales to earn money, not to gain acknowledgement as a serious author. Although fairy tales were very popular during Andersen's lifetime, he wrote in a more colloquial and less literary style than most other authors during this period.

Today, Andersen is primarily remembered as an author of children's books. However, especially in the original Danish, his writings display a subtle irony that makes him a very interesting author even for adults. Andersen's books are imaginative and easy to understand, which is why children love them. At the same time, there is a deeper meaning in his writings that appeals to adults as well. The ability to address both audiences at the same time is an important reason behind his success. It is, however, a difficult task to do justice to Andersen's

irony when translating him into other languages. Only Danish speakers can fully appreciate the breadth of all the nuances in his content and language.

Andersen had a special style of writing, and his fairy tales have a very personal background. When viewed against his own biography, his writings are quite special. A complicated childhood, tough years in Copenhagen and at Latin schools, a difficult start as an author, and the strong determination to pursue success turned Andersen into such a unique author. During his lifetime, Andersen made thirty voyages abroad – to Germany, Italy, England, Spain, Portugal, and the Ottoman Empire. In the beginning, these voyages were typical Romantic educational journeys, or ‘grand tours’. But later, he travelled for professional reasons, for example, to promote his work or do research for new writings. His voyages were no doubt a great inspirational source.

Andersen acquired considerable fame during his own lifetime, and his writings were published in many languages. He died a celebrity in Østerbro, just outside Copenhagen, on 4 August 1875.



Portrait of Hans Christian Andersen  
made by Christian Albrecht Jensen in 1836.  
Public domain.

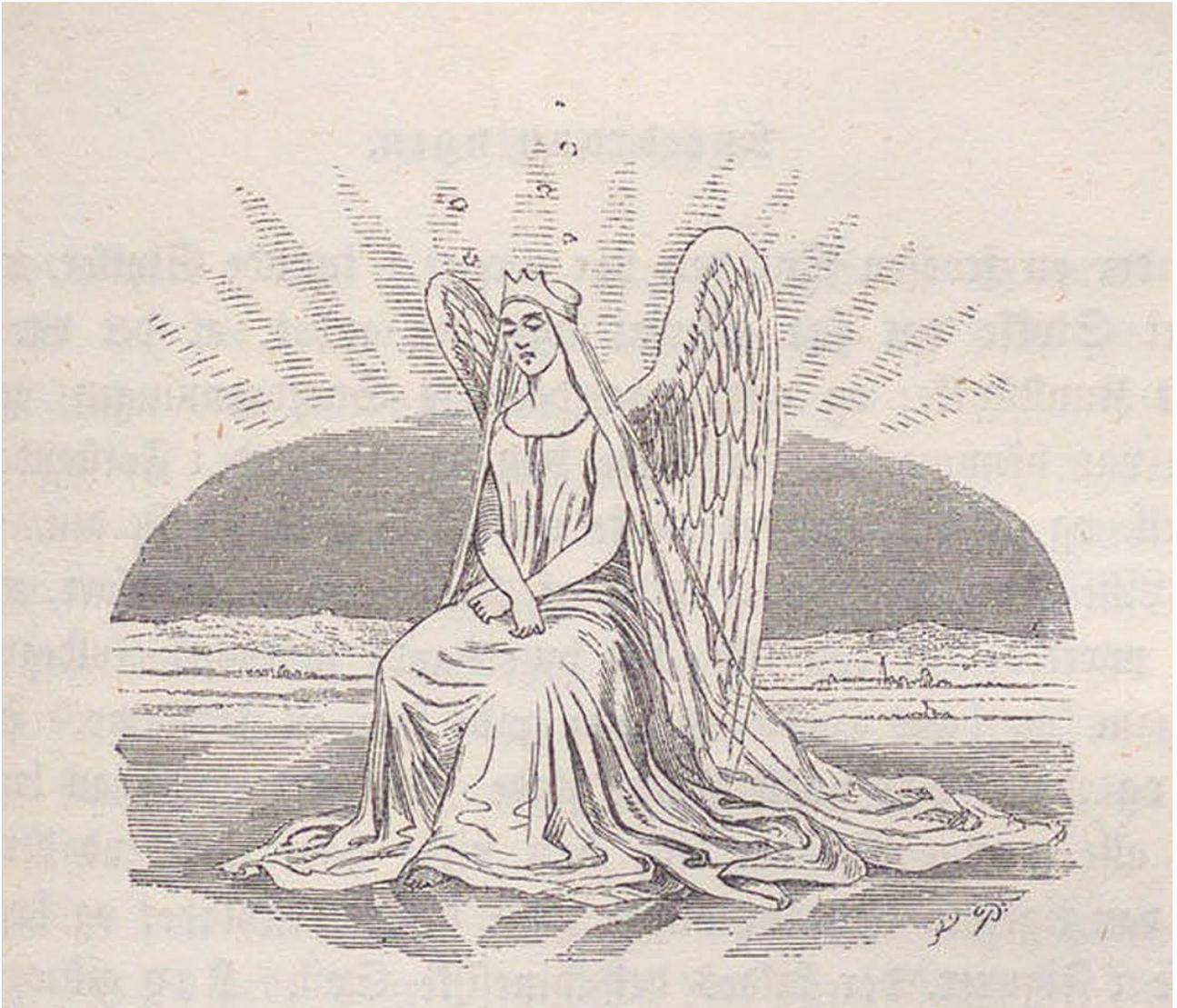
# THOMAS VILHELM PEDERSEN'S ILLUSTRATIONS

by Franziska Runge

Thomas Vilhelm Pedersen (usually known as Vilhelm Pedersen, 1820–1859) was the first official illustrator of Andersen's stories. He did the artwork for the first Danish illustrated publication of *Sneedronningen*. Pedersen was born in in Karlslundegaard, near Køge. He was the youngest of six children and his father died when he was just one year old. This early loss parallels Andersen's own biography. After a fire in their home, the Pedersen family moved to Copenhagen, where Thomas Vilhelm's talent for drawing first became evident. However, he decided to begin a career as a marine officer when he was fourteen years old. Christian VIII, King of Denmark 1839–1848, later released Thomas Vilhelm from his army duties for four years with full pay so that he could improve his drawing skills. He took lessons from the Danish painter Wilhelm Marstrand (1810–1873) and enrolled at the Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi (Royal Danish Academy of Arts) in 1843, where he studied until 1846.

In December 1848 the Leipzig publisher Carl B. Lorck published the collected works of Andersen with 112 new illustrations by Pedersen. (Andersen liked Pedersen's style so much that he sent Lorck samples of Pedersen's work.) In December 1849 the first illustrated Danish edition of Andersen's *Eventyr* (Fairytale, official year of publication: 1850) was published. This edition of *Eventyr*, containing *Sneedronningen* along with Pedersen's drawings, sold very well and the drawings soon acquired iconic status.

Pedersen did more than 200 illustrations. His work is renowned for its very sensitive style. Pedersen's drawings are not theatrical and often quite witty. He utilized his talent to create a Romantic natural atmosphere in his work and made beautiful drawings of female characters of a seemingly supernatural nature. In Pedersen's image of the Snow Queen, for example, she looks like an angel with large white wings. She is seated, with her lower arms crossed, looking down. Her small crown and floor-length veil create a sacred ambience, likening her to the Holy Mary. The aurora borealis can be seen around the Snow Queen's head, resembling a halo or something that illuminates her. It is not obvious from the drawing that these beams illustrate the aurora borealis, but it becomes clear in the context of Andersen's writing.



Thomas Vilhelm Pedersen's illustration of the Snow Queen as published in *Eventyr* (December 1849). Public domain.

# SNEEDRONNINGEN

## Interpretation and Summary of Contents by Franziska Runge

*Sneedronningen* (also known as *Snedronningen* in modern spelling) is a fairy tale that was initially released on 21 December 1844 in the collection *Nye Eventyr. Første Bind. Anden Samling* (New Fairy Tales. First Volume. Second Collection, official publication year: 1845). Andersen began writing the fairy tale on 5 December 1844; the story was published just sixteen days later. *Sneedronningen* is one of Andersen's longest fairy tales. It is a complex narrative, written in his typical style: intelligent, emotional, satirical, dramatic, and with a sharp sense of humour. References to pagination below follow the 1849 edition of *Eventyr*, namely the first edition that includes Pedersen's illustrations.

The 'First Story' (pp. 52–53) functions as a prologue. The 'Second Story' (pp. 54–60) introduces the two poor children, Gerda and Kay, and their living conditions. It also contains the first mention of the Snow Queen (p. 56). She visits Kay one winter and the next winter she takes Kay with her sleigh. The nature theme is very present in this chapter.

The 'Third Story' (pp. 61–69) and 'Fourth Story' (pp. 70–78) narrate Gerda's search for Kay. Through various adventures and delays, she finally breaks free from a witch's spell and encounters a prince and princess that pity her and provide her with a golden wagon and servants for the continuation of her search. The 'Fifth Story' (pp. 79–84) starts out with bandits robbing Gerda and her servants in the woods. Gerda tells the little robber girl about her search for Kay. The wood pigeons listen to Gerda's story and inform her that they have seen Kay in the company of the Snow Queen. The pigeons assume that they have gone to Lapland. The robber girl owns a reindeer that knows a great deal about the Snow Queen: It tells Gerda that the Snow Queen's castle is in Spitsbergen. The robber girl decides to help Gerda and gives her the reindeer as a gift. The reindeer happily runs towards the Snow Queen's empire and then the first red northern lights appear. The reindeer is very happy to see them and runs faster and faster until they reach Lapland.

The 'Sixth Story' (pp. 85–88) tells about how Gerda and the reindeer visit a *Lappekone* (Sámi woman) in Lapland and how she directs them to a *Finnekone* in Finnmarken (a woman in Finnmark). On the way there, the northern lights appear again, with a bluish colour. From the

*Finnekone*, who turns out to be versed in magic and with precious knowledge of the Snow Queen, the reindeer takes Gerda further in the direction of the Snow Queen's castle. Above Gerda shine the northern lights. The Snow Queen's advance guard, made of a regiment of snowflakes in various ugly shapes, stand in front of Gerda. She says the Lord's Prayer and her breath takes the shape of angels, who destroy the Snow Queen's advance guard, so she can proceed.

The 'Seventh Story' (pp. 89–94) describes what the Snow Queen's castle looks like and how Gerda frees Kay from the castle, and their journey back home. The castle has more than a hundred halls and the aurora borealis shines up above. They meet the reindeer, the woman from Finnmark, the Sámi woman, and, finally, the little robber girl. Gerda and Kay return to their hometown, where they realize that they have become adults. But although they have grown up, they are still children at heart, listening to their grandmother's stories exactly as they did in their childhood.

### **Motifs in *Sneedronningen***

There are certain motifs that appear frequently in Andersen's writings. One of them is the description of nature – Anderson was passionate about nature in general, but especially flora. He collected flowers during his voyages and pressed them to preserve their beauty. Andersen often uses the flora motif in *Sneedronningen*. Roses are the main flowers in this fairy tale and the first mentioned in *Sneedronningen*. There are also roses connecting Gerda's and Kay's homes, in the form of an arch. Furthermore, Andersen includes a modified psalm of the 1732 hymn *Den yndigste Rose er funden* (Now Found is the Fairest of Roses) by the Danish poet Hans Adolph Brorson. Andersen used this psalm,

Roserne vokser i dale,  
der får vi barn Jesus i tale!

(Where roses bloom so sweetly in the vale,  
There shall you find the Christ Child, without fail!)

three times in *Sneedronningen*: in the 'Second Story' before Kay gets a splinter in his eye, in the 'Seventh Story', where the psalm is used as a sign that Kay remembers Gerda, and the third time in the last story, just as Gerda and Kay return home and understand the psalm's meaning. Andersen's use of a psalm in combination with the flora motif leads to another motif: a religious one. Not only is the Christ Child mentioned in the psalm, the narrative includes several other religious motifs. The moment the splinters puncture Kay's heart and eye, the church bell strikes five o'clock. When Gerda and Kay return home, they hear the church bells ringing. God and angels are also a motif in *Sneedronningen*. The trolls want to fly to God and

the angels in order to make fun of them. Furthermore, Andersen describes the beautiful sunshine in summer as ‘Guds klare solskin’ (the Lord’s bright sunshine). Gerda says the Lord’s Prayer and her breath takes the shape of little angels.

In his fairy tales as a whole, Andersen often depicts children or elderly people, and even when he does not state exactly how old a character is, it feels like they are either old or very young. An example of this is the woman from Finnmark: Andersen does not describe her as an old lady, but all the details he reveals about her create the impression that she is old and wise. Another example is the princess and the prince in the Fourth Story. The prince is described as young and handsome and the princess as clever and unmarried; in a fairy tale context this means that she has not fully matured.

Another theme is that of empathy for people who are deprived or struggling through hard times. Gerda and Kay, as well as the Sámi woman and the woman from Finnmark, all live in impoverished conditions. However, Andersen avoids describing these people in a negative way. He displays empathy toward them, perhaps because of his own childhood deprivation. In fact, Andersen ascribes positive attributes to them: They are friendly, helpful, religious, and use their magical skills for good rather than evil. That Andersen ascribes such attributes to people of a marginalized group is noteworthy. Another characteristic theme of Andersen is visible in this fairy tale: He tries to avoid overly abstract phrases by attaching tangible descriptions to abstract ideas. A good example is the following quote on page 90: ‘kan Du udfinde mig den Figur, saa skal Du være Din egen Herre, og jeg forærer Dig hele Verden og et Par nye Skøiter’ (‘The Snow Queen had told Kay he must find out, if he was to become his own master and have the whole world and a new pair of skates’).<sup>1</sup> Another interesting point is that there is no border between the natural and the supernatural world in *Sneedronningen*. The grandmother, for example, represents the natural world, but she knows all the tales about the Snow Queen, who represents the supernatural world. Another example of the fusion of the natural and the supernatural world are the singing flowers of an old fairy’s garden in the ‘Third Story’.

### **The Aurora Borealis in *Sneedronningen***

Northern lights are mentioned five times in *Sneedronningen*. Although they are not the main theme of this fairy tale, they represent the only natural phenomenon, aside from the roses, that are mentioned more than once. There are blue and red northern lights in *Sneedronningen*. During the first occurrence, the aurora borealis is described as something that has already existed for a long time: “‘Det er mine gamle Nordlys” sagde Rensdyret [...]’ (p. 84) (“They are my old northern lights”, said the reindeer’).

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<sup>1</sup> English translation taken from *Stories from Hans Andersen with Illustrations by Edmund Dulac*, New York 1911, p. 73.

The appearance of the aurora borealis shows that the characters have reached the Far North, respectively Lapland or Finnmark. The first northern lights in *Sneedronningen* are red. It is possible that Andersen alludes to the fact that the red aurora borealis is usually seen at more southern latitudes. This means that Gerda and the reindeer still have a long way left to the Snow Queen. The second time the northern lights are mentioned, they are blue. Bluish northern lights are very uncommon and rare.

The aurora is introduced with the onomatopoeia ‘Fut! fut!’ on page 84 in the Danish version, without any previous mention of the phenomenon. This causes an effect that the reader first *hears* the aurora borealis by reading the onomatopoeia before having a visual impression of the aurora borealis through an imagistic description (p. 84): ‘Det var ligesom om den [Himmelen] nyste rødt.’ (literally, ‘it was as if the sky sneezed red’). Andersen solves this climax by explaining to the reader that these were northern lights. Also, the second time Andersen mentions the aurora borealis in *Sneedronningen*, on page 86 in the Danish version, he again accentuates the phenomenon with the onomatopoeia ‘Fut! fut!’ This expression is uncommon and in the context of the aurora, appears to only be found in *Sneedronningen*.<sup>2</sup>

Auroral noise has long been disputed. Is there auroral sound? If so, what does it sound like? These discussions have existed since at least the sixteenth century and were very present during Andersen’s lifetime. The first written report on auroral sound dates back to 423 BC China.

The Norwegian astronomer and mathematician Christopher Hansteen (1784–1873) had no doubt that auroral sound existed. He commented that usually only people in the North could hear them. People who saw the northern lights further south could not hear auroral sound because they were too far away from the source of the lights and the noise they make are too soft to be heard from a distance, according to Hansteen. The Danish astrophysicist Sophus Tromholt (1851–1896) was also very interested in the sound of the aurora borealis. He wrote many articles for *Naturen*, the oldest popular scientific journal in Norway, where he discussed the sound of the aurora borealis.

The acoustician Unto Laine (1947–) from Aalto University in Finland has conducted acoustic research on the aurora borealis for approximately two decades. In an article from 2016, he concludes that the northern lights sometimes produce some noise that sounds like applause or

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<sup>2</sup> The onomatopoeia varies in different translations. In the 1848 German version, the translator remains faithful to the Danish original and writes ‘Fut! fut!’ (Hans Christian Andersen, *Gesammelte Werke. Gesammelte Märchen*, Leipzig 1848, p. 92). In the English translation by Jean Hersholt, the aurora borealis sounds like ‘ker-shew, ker-shew!’ while a more recent English adaption by Mitchell Perkins renders the sound as ‘Ddsa! Ddsa!’: H.C. Andersen: ‘The Snow Queen’, *The Complete Andersen* (trans. Jean Hersholt), New York, 1949. <https://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheSnowQueen.html>, accessed 10.12.2019; Mitchell Perkins, *The Snow Queen: Adventure in the Frozen Kingdom*, Michigan, 2017. The translator of the 1911 edition omits the first ‘Fut Fut’ but translates the second one as ‘Flicker, flicker’ (*Stories from Hans Andersen with Illustrations by Edmund Dulac*, London 1911, pp. 57–58).

hand clapping. He also says that the source of the sound is located very close to the ground, at an altitude of about 70 meters, and that you can only hear it at a distance of 80–100 km away.

It is noteworthy that Andersen was a close associate of an important Danish natural scientist in the field of electromagnetism, Hans Christian Ørsted (1777–1851). Ørsted was very interested in research on the aurora borealis and presented a paper called ‘Bemærkninger over Nordlysets Theorie’ at the Royal Danish Society of Science in 1826. A frequent guest at Ørsted’s house, Andersen was always up-to-date about scientific developments. He demonstrates his scientific knowledge in small, but interesting details – for example his references to the aurora borealis in *Sneedronningen* or the accurate application of acoustic knowledge in another story, *Klokken* (The Bell, in [Eventyr](#), pp. 449–452).

Even in the fairy tale *Lykkens kalosker* (The Galoshes of Fortune, in [Eventyr](#), pp. 249–290) from 1838, Andersen made reference to the aurora borealis. The Councillor of Justice wears the galoshes of fortune and time travels to the Middle Ages. A landlady shows the Councillor of Justice a woodcut print of the aurora borealis phenomenon as seen from Cologne. The protagonist from nineteenth-century Denmark then explains the scientific background of the aurora borealis to an audience set in medieval Copenhagen. This is notable because of the merging of the supernatural world (time travel) with the natural world (scientific explanation of the aurora borealis). Andersen’s ability to explain the mysterious natural phenomenon is also used to show the Councillor of Justice’s extensive knowledge.

Finally, in letters to his friends, Andersen sometimes mentions the aurora borealis. He tends to do so in a religious context, where the aurora borealis is described as capturing the spiritual atmosphere.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Search for ‘nordlys’ in the web service of The Hans Christian Andersen Centre in Odense, <https://andersen.sdu.dk> (10 December 2019).

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