

NORTHERN GENEALOGIES IN ‘THE SNOW QUEEN’ AND *FROZEN*

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Abstract

H. C. Andersen’s ‘The Snow Queen’ (1844) and its self-professed adaptation *Frozen* (2013) both maintain a combined focus on origins and development. I approach the two texts as narratives that explain aspects of human life by showing how they came into being – as accounts that, although not primarily historical, are still bound up with genealogical ways of thinking: how, and from what beginnings, do humans and their communities evolve? What happens in the transition from non-existence to being? In both texts, the northern setting is a requisite part of these narratives of development – in the dual sense of growth and emergence. In this article, I describe the interaction between the texts’ genealogical discourses and their northern settings. I also discuss how the two texts reflect and rephrase current and past discourses where northernness is associated with genealogical issues.

Keywords: ‘*The Snow Queen*’; ‘*Sneedronningen*’; H. C. Andersen; *Frozen*; *Genealogy*; *Northernness*; *Arctic literature*

Beginnings

In their final passages, both H. C. Andersen’s ‘The Snow Queen’ (1844) and its self-professed adaptation *Frozen* (2013) turn to face back in time, leading the reader’s or audience’s attention towards their apparently simple beginnings. At the end of the film *Frozen*, Elsa, the queen who has returned from her exile on the North Mountain, uses her special gifts to create winter fun for the citizens of Arendelle, much like she did with her sister Anna in a blissful past (1:31:36). At the end of ‘The Snow Queen’, Gerda and Kai have cracked the Snow Queen’s ‘ice puzzle of the mind’ (7)¹ and are finally home again. The narrator stresses their adulthood but still places them in children’s chairs, piously listening as the Grandmother reads from the Bible. The two texts tell stories about coming of age by placing particular value on the retrograde tendencies in the characters’ growth. Gerda, Kai, Elsa, and Anna can only embark upon adult life after having returned to something ingenuous and originary.

Despite their status as central texts in their respective genres, and despite a growing research interest, few attempts have been made to discuss H. C. Andersen’s fairy tale and The Walt Disney Company’s animated musical adaptation in context. Considering the distance between the two, one might rather see *Frozen* as an appropriation of Andersen’s tale (cf. Schmerheim 2015, 5). Apart from the northern setting, the

¹ When I cite from Maria Tatar’s unpaginated edition of ‘The Snow Queen’ (Andersen 2007[1844]) the numbers in parentheses refer to chapter numbers. In the case of *Frozen*, I use timestamps from the DVD edition (Del Vecho, Buck, and Lee 2014[2013]), occasionally combined with page references to the film’s script (Lee 2013).

similarities are limited. In the ‘The Snow Queen’, the main plot is constructed around Gerda’s quest to find her playmate Kai, who has been abducted after first getting his judgment impaired by splinters from an enchanted, satirically smirking mirror. In *Frozen*, the protagonist Elsa is compelled to hide her magical ability to manipulate snow and ice after a childhood accident involving her little sister Anna. Unable to conceal her powers on the day of her coronation, Elsa is branded as a monster. After a number of hardships, and with the help of her universally affectionate sister, she returns to society with new confidence.

The combined focus on origins and development is maintained throughout both texts. In this article, I view them as narratives ‘that explai[n] an aspect of human life by showing how it came into being’ (Bevir 2008, 263) – as accounts that, although not primarily historical, are still bound up with genealogical ways of thinking: how, and from what beginnings, do humans and their communities evolve? What happens in the transition from non-existence to being? In both texts, the northern setting is a requisite part of implicitly or explicitly formulated narratives about how people and communities develop – in the dual sense of growth and emergence. In this article, I attempt to describe the interaction between the texts’ genealogical discourses and their northern settings. I also discuss how the two texts reflect and rephrase current and past discourses where northerness is associated with genealogical issues.

I use the term genealogy in a way that is only loosely connected to its still ongoing development as a philosophical concept over the last 130 years. My main field of interest is the two texts’ focus on questions of origin, descent, and coming-into-life, seen through the metaphoric lens of hierarchic and horizontal family relationships. Although this use of the term ‘genealogy’ may seem distant from that of, e.g., Michel Foucault, there are some points of contact. To state that *Frozen* and ‘The Snow Queen’ share a (Foucaultian) genealogical focus in the sense that they attempt to expose ‘the contingent and “shameful” origins of cherished ideas and entrenched practices’ (Bevir 2008, 264) is hardly a plausible reading. At the same time, there are connections between the language used in Foucault’s presentation of his methodical approach and the texts’ involvement with genealogical issues – for example in their aesthetically formulated scepticism against the assumption of an ‘existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession’ (Foucault 1984[1971], 78). Through their northern settings, the two texts simultaneously postulate and reject the idea of an inaccessible pole of pure abstraction – both as the origin of human development and as an objective of personal growth.

Landscapes

Although it is never explicitly stated in the film, Arendelle, the fictional kingdom where the action of *Frozen* takes place, is commonly seen as being situated in rural Norway (cf. Macaluso 2016, 79; Crosby 2016, 10). The presence of characteristics that are stereotypically connected with Norway in US-American popular culture supports this assumption. In *Frozen*, these characteristics – fjords, a wooden congregation building, lutefisk, among others – are used emphatically, but not unambiguously. The movie’s setting is simultaneously Norwegian and transnational. Alongside the Norwegian local

colour there are features that insistently point viewers towards other Scandinavian settings: a stereotypically Swedish maypole (12:05), a sauna (Finland), a domesticated reindeer (Sápmi), and geothermal activity that keeps a valley inhabited by trolls green throughout the film (Iceland). Furthermore, the relatively stable nineteenth century temporal setting, signalled, for example, in the costumes, is slightly disrupted by the presence of traits that point towards the Viking age: the runes present in the film, e.g., on the royal couple's cenotaphs (10:28), and the priest's use of Old Norse when addressing the audience during Elsa's coronation (19:33).

In Andersen's tale, we find a similar mix of northern features. At the beginning of the main plot, the reader is placed in a milieu that, to biographically interested critics, recalls the author's childhood home in Odense (Lederer 1986, 9–10). This relatively stable setting forms a contrast to the many stopovers of Gerda's journey. Even the goal of her voyage, the Snow Queen's residence, is presented with remarkable inconsistency. In the tale's fifth story, a reindeer tells Gerda that the Queen has her summer tent in 'Lapland' (in the north of the Scandinavian Peninsula),² but that her main residence is located 'closer to the North Pole, on an island called Spitsbergen'. Apart from the brief and intense encounter with Kai in the abduction scene (2), the Snow Queen always tends to be somewhere else – as when the readers first meet her, seen through the peephole of a frosted-over window (2). When Gerda finds Kai in the Snow Queen's summer residence, she has left for Italy, where she is busy sprinkling snow on the summits of Mount Etna and Vesuvius. The stations of Gerda's journey to Lapland present an assorted mixture of northern features: a Lapp woman who lives in a hovel resembling a Sami *lavvu* and writes a letter on a piece of dried cod, and a Finn woman who reads from a scroll of enchantments written in 'strange letters' – runes, presumably. Even the lighting of the action is kaleidoscopically northern, ranging from a lamp fuelled by cod liver oil (6, trans. altered) to the ubiquitous polar lights.

At the same time, the northerness of *Frozen* and 'The Snow Queen' is not evenly distributed throughout the narratives' places of action. Although their settings are northern *per se*, both texts present worlds that are narratively centred around an extreme of frost. The two texts' constitutive journeys proceed gradually towards these places of thermal extremity. Much like ideas jotted down on a modern-day mind map, the diverse signs of northerness appear to be scattered around the narrative poles associated with Elsa and the Snow Queen. Instead of presenting landscapes with features that are organically connected in terms of temporal succession and causation, *Frozen* and 'The Snow Queen' display them as synthetic conglomerates. The northern worlds that are constructed in the two texts are placed outside the realm of organic createdness.

Creations

'The Snow Queen' and *Frozen* combine a persistent focus on genealogical issues with a northern ambience which is, at the same time, indispensable for their respective plots. The first story of Andersen's fairy tale sets the stage. In a mythological tone that sets it

² The terms Lapp, Lapland, and Finn, employed in Tatar and Allen's translation, reflect Andersen's 19th century usage.

off from the rest of the tale, this story explains how a destructive power comes into the world. The harmful influence originates from a distorting mirror created by ‘the “devil” himself’, a mirror capable of shrinking the ‘image of whatever was good and beautiful down to almost nothing, while anything worthless and ugly was magnified and would look even worse’ (1). When fragments of this mirror infest people’s hearts and eyes, their mindsets change from childish ingenuousness to a worldly and shrewd, satirical attitude reminiscent of the mirror’s own mocking grin. Thus, the fairy tale’s first story, itself not without satirical traits, presents a mythological take on the philosophical question of how Evil entered the world.

The introductory sections of *Frozen* also show how things come about. In the film’s first scene, a group of workers perform the now outmoded task of splitting up ice covering a lake into blocks that are harvested for use in refrigeration. In the scene’s first seconds, ice appears to be a static and lifeless raw material that lends itself brilliantly to the men’s efforts – they are able to abruptly (and unrealistically) saw right through it. This changes towards the end of the first scene. As the ice harvesters sing the line ‘Ice has a magic, can’t be controlled’, an ice floe threateningly overtakes them (2:36). Apparently, this is the lake’s way of reacting against the men’s activities. Its triangular, pointy shape foreshadows the ice barriers that Elsa will create later in the movie (e.g., 27:29). Through the lake’s apparent (and luckily transient) emotional outburst, one of the main themes of *Frozen* is introduced – the interconnectedness of ice and life.

Frozen’s next scene brings a more conspicuous display of lifelike, congealed water. Elsa and Anna magically construct a snowman and play with him as if he were a puppet. Elsa supplies him with a voice (her own) and a name (Olaf), and moves his arms in order to suggest that he wants to hug her little sister. In the next shot, the illusion of autonomous movement is taken further, as Olaf and Anna dance across an ice rink – until it is revealed that Elsa is the one propelling them (4:54). Throughout this scene, Olaf shows no signs of life, unlike his namesake later in the movie, and dissolves into a heap of snow after the plot-changing accident has broken the magic. However, whether or not Olaf is alive is a question of perspectives. To the playing children, he appears to be animated. Although Elsa has not, at this point, created a lifelike being, in this scene one of the film’s central, genealogical aspects – the magical creation of lifelike beings from snow – is palpable.

Frozen features several anthropomorphous characters, but their degree of human likeness tends to fluctuate in the course of the film’s action. The trolls that Anna’s parents consult about her injury are first seen as rocks that tumble down the valley. Seconds later, the rocks literally unfold themselves as being animated and endearing (6:34). Here, *Frozen* plays with the well-known idea that trolls stand in perpetual danger of turning into rocks when exposed to sunlight. Instead of affirming a genealogical myth that has helped explain the human traits of countless rock formations, *Frozen* replaces a narrative of unidirectional development with one where neither of the two states – neither the troll nor the rock that it might turn into – has chronological or ontological priority.

A similar fluctuation between human-like and inorganic states characterizes the snow creatures that Elsa makes. Marshmallow, the snow golem who guards Elsa’s castle,

never fully loses the character of being an inanimate snowman – whose foot can be severed without any risk that film authorities would deem the film unfitting for children (1:11:01). At the same time, he constantly shifts between different degrees of human likeness, and much of his function in the plot is connected with these shifts: Marshmallow is both an inconspicuous mass of snow outside Elsa’s castle (1:09:44) and a bouncer throwing out unwelcome guests with a friendly-unfriendly ‘go away’ (58:27); later, a burst of anger causes him to grow spikes of ice that change his appearance from mildly aggressive to unquestionably horrid. A salient feature of Marshmallow’s fellow snowlem, Olaf, is the modular structure of his body. From the outset of Olaf’s reintroduction (45:23), he is presented more like a construction kit than like an upshot of organic growth. His voice is first heard off-screen. As the voice materializes, the snowman is immediately dismembered. Following a sudden panic attack where Anna kicks his head off, she and Kristoff appear to be playing a game of hot potato with it. Their attempts at reconstructing him end up underlining his modular character, such as when his head is first replaced upside down. Olaf is the outcome of a process of magical, inorganic creation that can either be seen as lacking (because he can still be transformed and is thus not *perfectus*, completed) or as celebrating the idea that creativity is not oriented towards a fixed end result, and embracing the freedom of constant self-transformation.

Relatives

Families are both features and playhouses of genealogies. The only time the audience of *Frozen* sees a human, conjugal family as a group is in a situation of crisis – when the royal couple seek help from the trolls after the ballroom accident. At the scene’s beginning, the family appears to be threatened by a rockslide, drawing tighter together as the boulders approach (6:21). A facet of this imagery returns when the parents’ empty graves are marked with giant bautas (10:27). Unlike the trolls, Elsa’s and Anna’s parents are unable to transform back into life. On the two occasions in *Frozen* where the word is used, ‘family’ denotes less traditional constellations. Kristoff, Anna’s travel companion and love interest, has been adopted by the shape-shifting trolls. Anna’s astonishment when hearing him refer to a group of rocks as family almost causes her to flee, but she quickly accepts the term’s unknown applicability (1:04:25). The word’s multiple uses also come into play – insistently, but at the same time not unequivocally – when the mountain trader Oaken salutes a person of male appearance and four children waving from a sauna nearby with ‘Hi, family’ (37:43). On the other hand, all the children who occupy major roles in the film are orphans. Like the previously mentioned shot where Anna kicks Olaf’s head off, the action at the end of the film’s first scene, where a very young Kristoff is left behind by the ice harvesters, is characterized by a brutality only sufferable because neither victim seems to be upset by it.

In interpretations of *Frozen*, Elsa’s ice creatures are sometimes viewed as her progeny, conceived without the involvement of a male consort (cf. Crosby 2016, 39). Considering Elsa, Olaf, and Marshmallow as a parthenogenically created family may incite contrary readings: either her offspring could be seen as suffering from deficiencies resulting from being created by an evidently cold (or self-sufficient)

mother, or one could consider their distinctive traits as elements in *Frozen*'s frequently acclaimed celebration of diversity. Whichever of these readings one might prefer, a more interesting conclusion might be that in *Frozen*, the idea of family is to some extent dissociated from its double, genealogical context. Previously an exclusive arena for procreation and a self-evident basis for a person's closest relations, the traditional family is now viewed as one possible model among others.

Readers of 'The Snow Queen' have frequently addressed the protagonists' family relations. At the beginning of the tale, Gerda and Kai are neighbours and friends. Although an embryonic love relationship may be discernible for an adult audience, the children are apparently not yet acquainted with such qualities of feeling. The text might also suggest that the children are more than just friends in another sense. The character referred to as Grandmother is introduced in a way that leaves it unclear whose relative she is. This ambiguity is maintained throughout the narrative. One of its effects is the intimation that Gerda and Kai are, in fact, related, perhaps as cousins. At the end of the tale, they have returned home from the polar regions. Although several years appear to have passed, the Grandmother is still alive, taking a role very much like the one she had at the fairy tale's beginning. Gerda and Kai have realized 'that they had turned into grown-ups', but, curiously, still sit at their children's chairs and recite the same hymn verse as at the tale's beginning, 'grown-ups and children at the same time, children at heart' (7). The fact that this ending may seem dissatisfactory for an adult couple has puzzled readers like Alvild Dvergsdal, who concludes that their liaison is 'similar to that of playfellows rather than to an adult relationship between man and woman' (Dvergsdal 1988, 24, my trans.). Although their encounters are frequently styled with palpable, sensual undertones, the text keeps them at a distance that may seem more than chaste. One critic is left with the impression that Andersen's fairy tale 'wants to stir up its readers to the worst kinds of abuse', and that during her journey, Gerda is exposed to a pandemonium of lust and lewdness; at the same time, the tale represses her sexuality in an emphatic manner, leaving the sexual strands of interpretation to the reader' (Christensen 2000, 44, my trans.). The Snow Queen's abduction of Kai is also laden with intimated sexuality. For today's audience, it is hard not to see the icy figure who wraps Kai under her bearskin coat as a Venus in furs *avant la lettre*.

Throughout 'The Snow Queen' the protagonists' feelings of spiritual and friendly love are ostentatiously detached from their adjacent, reproductive counterpart. It is hard to imagine that their relationship could generate any physical offspring. At the same time, Gerda and Kai are placed outside a genealogical context in another sense. Their parents have no role in the tale's action. Apart from the numerous and for the most part problematic mother figures (the Snow Queen herself being one example), their only individually named familial connection is the Grandmother – a term that in Danish can also be used generically, as an affectionate description of any elderly woman (Ordbog over det danske Sprog, 'Bedstemoder'). Although Gerda and Kai are repeatedly (though not unequivocally) presented as children, they are scarcely seen as someone's offspring. Many of the troubles they experience are connected with being placed into constellations that suggest alternatives to a traditional family model. This applies not only to the relationship between Kai and the Snow Queen (where Kai can be seen as

having the double role of son and husband), but also to Gerda's digressions in the garden of an old sorceress who wants to keep her around for company (3), or as a flesh-eating robber-girl's playmate (5). Like in *Frozen*, much of the plot in 'The Snow Queen' can be seen in relation to an underlying conflict between a traditional though already crumbling family ideal, and non-genealogically oriented forms of cohabitation that are at once uncanny and sheltering, inescapable and arbitrary.

Modules

'Love is an open door', the refrain of Anna and Hans's engagement song, diverts attention towards another aspect of the interplay between the northern setting and the genealogical discourse in *Frozen* and 'The Snow Queen'. A central narrative feature of the two texts is the opposition between elements that are discrete and compartmentalized and forces that counteract the tendency towards isolation. Several viewers of *Frozen* have noted that doors form a recurring theme, often with patent figurative meanings (cf. Bunch 2017, 94-96). Heike Steinhoff sees the imagery of doors as part of a subtext connected with non-normative sexuality in *Frozen*, and suggests that Elsa's life behind the closed doors of her parents' castle implies a metaphorical resignation to the 'cultural and parental pressure to hide in the closet' (Steinhoff 2017, 167). The different stages of Elsa's isolation are coloured by the interaction between some of the film's metaphorical and literal strands. After the accident, Elsa's parents both advise her to hide her powers (9:03), and physically isolate her in her chamber. This isolation also applies to Arendelle, at least in the sense that tradesmen from abroad are excluded (cf. 12:34). The connection between these two features of the plot – Elsa's and Arendelle's isolation – is left unexplained, but repeats itself after the mishaps at the coronation party. This time, the film offers an explanation. Whereas Elsa appears to be coping fine in her exile on the North Mountain, her magical ability of turning out coldness is unrestrained and causes the fjord around Arendelle to freeze solid. Little seems to have changed between Elsa's first and second phase of isolation, except that some accents have been set differently. Anna's attempts at contacting her sister is another common trait between the two periods of isolation, and here too, Anna's continuous movement forms a contrast to the sister's static isolation. Elsa's life-worlds are strictly compartmentalized, and a main strand of the plot consists in blurring or transgressing the borders that have been drawn, by herself and others.

'The Snow Queen' shares this focus on compartmentalization. The transitions between the tale's seven stories are also movements between closed-off spaces – most often separated by physical objects. Kai first sees the Snow Queen through the peephole of a window. It is mentioned twice that she takes him through the town gate, and as Gerda starts her quest, the narrator again points out this geographical marker (2; 3). The ensuing stages of her journey are all marked by doors or similar objects. Both the house and the garden of the sorceress in the third story are closed off by doors that Gerda passes through (3). Throughout the tale, this pattern is varied, often in a playful manner – as when Gerda has to knock on the chimney of the Finn woman's house, 'for she did not even have a door' (6). Even the topography of the second story's opening paragraphs, where the idyllic living conditions of Gerda's and Kai's families are

presented, signals a strongly compartmentalized housing situation: the two families live in the garrets of two adjoining buildings. During summer, the apartments are connected by wooden flowerboxes and the children can play relatively freely, but ‘[d]uring the winter months, the fun was over’ (2).

In both texts, a triangle of oppositions is formed between the isolated and compartmentalized spatial conditions, the destructive forces (diabolic satire and physical frost, respectively) that spread like a contagion, and the adolescent heroines’ movements towards the centres of coldness in order to break the isolation and save their loved ones. In one of the fairy tale’s central passages, Kai is sitting inside a castle with ‘more than a hundred rooms’. He broods over a task assigned to him by the Snow Queen, ‘moving sharp, flat pieces of ice and configuring them in all sorts of different ways – just as we arrange and rearrange pieces of wood in those little Chinese puzzles’ (7). The Snow Queen has requested that he form the pieces into the word *Eternity*. Kai’s labour with the brilliant shards is doubly fruitless. From a spatial and aesthetic point of view, the pieces fall into the same category as the inorganic, barren, and compartmentalized conditions that are predominant (and disavowed) elsewhere in ‘The Snow Queen’. Any grouping of these fragments will remain inorganic and aesthetically lifeless. Kai’s manipulation of the ice pieces takes place outside a genealogical context; in this sense, it is just as fundamentally static as Olaf’s permutations.

The modular, inorganic, and non-genealogically oriented construction principles that I have discussed in the foregoing paragraphs are also noticeable as structural elements in the two texts. The concept of aesthetic unity appears to be of little relevance when discussing them, neither as a way of describing the loose relationship between their single components nor as a measure of quality. Recent criticism on ‘The Snow Queen’ does not deny that the tale consists of ‘episodes that jar tonally, seemingly irrelevant motifs, and details which are as charming as they are gratuitous’ (Weitzman 2007, 1107). This applies not only to the individual stories but also to their often rhapsodic internal structure – e.g., the third story, were a sequence of six flowers voice their sometimes perplexing impressions. The sequence of loosely connected segments is likewise a characteristic of *Frozen*’s composition – also in the sense that the film at one point ‘stops being a musical and resolves its remaining issues [...] through narrative action’ (Bunch 2017, 99, referring to 1:08:14). The readers and viewers of both texts may have the impression of watching how different parts of a construction set are being put together before their eyes – unapologetically, one might add, and not without resemblance to the construction principles that form both Olaf and Kai’s tangram game.

Anthropologies

The meta-aesthetical elements in both texts are closely connected to another aspect of their genealogical focus – the interest in what constitutes a human being and how we evolve or change, physically and mentally. In the case of *Frozen*, this aspect has particularly been discussed by viewers concerned with the main characters’ perceived non-conformities – for example, by connecting the lyrics of Elsa’s power ballad ‘Let it Go’ to the coping mechanisms of people with eating disorders, by discussing the sisters’ relationship in the light of (post)feminism and queer theory, or by approaching the skill

of creating snow and ice (or the inaptitude to control this skill) as a disability (Holmes 2015; Rudloff 2016 and Whitfield 2017; Resene 2017). Concerning Elsa's skills, the question of their origin falls at the same time as they are erased from her little sister's memory. The troll who heals Anna asks their father if Elsa was '[b]orn with the powers or cursed' (6:50). From the question's immediate context, it does not become clear why this should be of relevance for the task of curing Anna from her head injury. A possible explanation is that the troll implicitly describes what kind of conditions he is willing to offer treatments for, in the sense that he will not hesitate to reverse Elsa's condition if it is the result of a curse, but cannot (or would refuse to) offer any kind of conversion therapy if it is congenital.

The acknowledgement that the condition that causes Elsa to be seen as a monster in the film's public discourse (28:24) is not something that has to be removed through a healing process is a feature that distinguishes *Frozen* from its alleged model. In 'The Snow Queen', Kai's state of mind as he plays the Queen's game is the result of a process that has gone through several stages. Through what is apparently a coincidence rather than the result of an innate affinity, he has been hit by two fragments of the Devil's magic mirror. In themselves, these fragments only cause him to adopt a lofty and sarcastic tone – in addition, perhaps, to making him susceptible to the Snow Queen's attraction. Gerda's attempt at rescuing Kai is pictured in a way that stresses the exogenous nature of Kai's ailment. When the mirror fragments are physically removed from his heart and eyes, he experiences a near-immediate recovery, as if the fragments were aching teeth (7). In 'The Snow Queen', Kai appears to be flawless as long as no external force exerts its influence on him. This ethical prevalence of innate qualities is a common feature in Andersen's tales. The newly hatched swan in one of his most famous tales is apparently perfect in itself, but misunderstood because it is held up to standards not in accordance with a genealogically fixed potential. In this case, *Frozen*'s stance may seem more in agreement with modern views – but also as concurrent with the adage that people are disturbed not by things themselves, but by the view which they take of them (cf. Epictetus 1959[ca. 100], 487 (= *Enchiridion*, ch. 5)). During the course of the action, multiple encodings of Elsa's abilities are presented. A central twist in the film's plot occurs when her faculties go from being a source of joy to something that needs to be hidden. Considering the citizens of Arendelle's prompt adherence to a foreign dignitary's categorization of her as a 'monster' (28:24), the parents' choice of isolating her may seem understandable. Michelle Resene points out that *Frozen* neither questions nor explains Elsa's powers: 'their origin remains a mystery, but not one that Disney is interested in solving' (Resene 2017, n.p.). To the citizens, Elsa's abilities distance her from being human, but the film's audience is effectively steered towards a genealogical view where all her inborn traits are seen as equally precious and constituting elements of her humanity. If the inhabitants of Arendelle had shared this enlightened view, her problems would have been far less serious – and theirs too.

Personifications

It is a central feature of the genealogical discourses in 'The Snow Queen' and *Frozen* that entities with different degrees of lifelikeness are explicitly or implicitly contrasted

and evaluated against each other. One example is the constantly shifting presence of roses in 'The Snow Queen'. Apart from having a central function as symbols of transcendent love in a repeated quote from a hymn by H. A. Brorson, they occur both as living organisms (sometimes endowed with human voices), in a state resembling subterranean hibernation induced by the spell of a garden sorceress, and as painted decorations on the sorceress's hat (3), the coincidental discovery of which helps Gerda break the magic. In both texts, the juxtaposition of organic and inorganic (but lifelike) entities finds an emblematic representation in the contrast between real-life flowers and ice crystals. The suggestion of an ontological hierarchy consisting of life-forms with varying degrees of distance to the lifelessness of ice crystals is also present in *Frozen*, where the embroidered patterns of 'rosemaling', traditional Norwegian arabesques consisting of stylized flowers and leaves, appear to form a middle ground between organic life and dead, symmetrically shaped matter. The same applies to Arendelle's national symbol, a highly stylized, cinquefoil flower shape. In both texts, Elsa's and Kai's attempts at transcending the accepted notions of what creative processes humans can take part in are placed in landscapes where the borders between life and non-life are already blurred.

Another aspect of the blurring of these borders is the frequent tendency, in both texts, to present situations that bring the human characters' status as human beings into question. This applies, for example, to the relationship between Kristoff and his reindeer Sven. Olaf's constant misnaming of these characters is one of the film's running gags. First-time viewers may assume that Sven has a voice of his own (like his distant predecessor in Andersen's tale), but the conditions are more complicated: it is Kristoff who – perhaps because of prolonged lack of conversation partners – purveys Sven with the faculty of speech. As his adoptive parents put it, the relationship between the animal and his handler is 'outside a few of nature's laws' (1:06:08). Would it be apposite to see this sentence in a genealogical light? We could rather turn our attention towards the likewise anthropomorphic reindeer in 'The Snow Queen'. The fact that the creature with the voice-mimicking name can talk is, of course, a common fairy-tale trait, but Baa emulates his passenger in a surprisingly literate way: when they arrive at the Lapp woman's house, the reindeer starts the conversation, telling his story first 'since he believed it was far more important' (6). Here, too, the tale adds to – and comments on – the conventional anthropomorphism of fairy-tale animals: by connecting the all-too-human vice of self-importance to the reindeer, the tale plays with readers' notions of humanness. Would it also be reasonable to say that these and similar passages suggest a genealogical relationship between animal and human characters? Perhaps not, but at the same time, the texts humorously stress their relatedness.

Evils

With their focus on questions of origin and development, *Frozen* and 'The Snow Queen' place themselves in a historical context where the north has frequently been associated with genealogical narratives. The first story of 'The Snow Queen' is one example. Modern readers might feel that this part of the fairy tale is only vaguely connected with the stories that follow. The idea that the fragments from the Devil's

shattered mirror make Kai an easy victim for the Snow Queen might seem self-evident. The connection between the mirror's satirical attitude and Kai's fascination for the Snow Queen's abstract games might not be so obvious. There is, however, a theological reason for assuming that Kai's first encounter with the Devil's contrivance predisposes him to seek a different and pernicious way of life in the far north. The opinion that the Devil has his abode in the north has been held since the times of the Old Testament. In *Paradise Lost* (1667), John Milton allegorically presents him as a sea monster roaming the Polar regions ('Norway foam') (Milton 2007[1667], 1.201ff.). Among the Bible verses that led to this localization are Isaiah 14:13–14, where Satan states his intention to set his throne on a mountain in the north and 'ascend to the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High' (Coogan 2018, 1000–1001). From an early date, south and north were conceived of as representing spiritual states. This allegorical interpretation is present in Augustine's biblical exegesis:

[T]he Devil and his angels, by turning from the light and warmth of charity, and going over to pride and envy, were benumbed as by an icy hardness. Therefore they are figuratively located in the north. (Augustine 1953[ca. 400], 103–104)

The northern connotations of the Devil's project in the first story of 'The Snow Queen' may give new nuances to the theological subtext of Andersen's tale. In recent criticism, this subtext has primarily been discussed in connection with the tale's seemingly naïve and affirmative reuse of a few lines from an edifying hymn by H. A. Brorson (cf. de Mylius 2000; Yngborn 2010, 163–165). Although knowledge of the time-honoured superstition makes it possible to construct an apparently cogent reading of the first story and its connection to the rest of the plot, one should not underestimate the satirical potential of Andersen's approach to these and other theological issues. Much like in the case of the excerpt from Brorson's hymn which, as it turns out, has been altered in devious ways, it is not easy to determine if this story about an evil's origin is chiefly a popularization or a satire.

Gerda encounters magic at almost every turn of her journey northwards. Considering the theological topic discussed in the previous paragraphs, this suits the locations. The perceived connection between sorcery and the north was apparently a corollary of the Bible's topographical account. In Andersen's tale, the common idea that the Sámi people had a special inclination for witchcraft may have contributed to some of the presence of magic. In *Frozen*, the colonialist implications of this and other cases of popular anthropology are, at least occasionally, questioned. The foreign dignitaries that return to Arendelle after the period of isolation have traits that make them recognizable as French, Spanish, and British, and it is hardly a coincidence that the last of these, Weselton, is both the most meddlesome and the one who first accuses Elsa of sorcery, and thus qualifies her special faculties as being unlawful and frightening. Another point of interference between the theological tradition and the action of *Frozen* becomes visible in the scenes following Elsa's escape. Viewers of *Frozen* often connect the lyrics of her most famous number, 'Let it Go', to expressions of pride in gender identity and

sexual orientation. At the same time, the paradoxical relationship between the lyrics and the filmic action is frequently mentioned: Elsa sings about her freedom but ends up slamming the door of her new-built castle in the face of the spectators, effectively closing herself off (Bunch 2017, 96). Seeing this scene in the light of the theological tradition also opens up a contrary interpretation: the world that Elsa creates for herself shares more than its location at the North Mountain with the Devil's mythical or allegorical residence. Although the song 'Let it Go' famously states that there is 'no right, no wrong, / no rules', the castle she creates for herself emulates the one she has just left, a fact that is underlined by the introductory re-creation of the snowman from her childhood (32:14). Although Elsa's song has been celebrated as a display of self-respect and independence, it also has a more sinister aspect. It not only signals her own, personal breakthrough, but also a time of hardship for the people of Arendelle. Thus, Elsa expresses pride not only in the word's positive meaning, but also in the theological sense of *superbia* – the deadly sin of self-importance or arrogance.

Another aspect that has received relatively little attention is that the film's conclusion also represents a stage in Elsa's own, personal development. She has been through a period of hardship that has forced her to revise the idea of self-sufficiency, both on an emotional and on a practical level. During the time of her exile, Elsa partially lives up to the idea that she is a witch. She lives on a mountain with diabolical connotations (cf. *Magica de Spell's* Mt. Vesuvius), creates lifelike creatures, and causes weather conditions that threaten to destroy Arendelle. Seen in the context of *Frozen's* construction of (and adherence to ideas of) genealogical notions of northerness, one could also point out that Elsa's creativity tends to have a reductive or privative aspect, and that it frequently borrows characteristics from the activity of creating a likeness of God. Another aspect of Elsa's escape is touched upon in the shot where she briefly sees a female citizen of Arendelle and her infant. The film's script states explicitly that Elsa 'backs away from the baby.' (28:01; Script, p. 33). Is it the heteronormative family ideal and its association with a genealogical perspective that makes her draw back in this way? Her reaction against Anna's rushed wedding plans is materially judicious, but at the same time emotionally immoderate (26:57).

Concerning the connections between a Nordic setting, emotional isolation, diabolical undertones, and a redemptive act of love performed by a female, 'The Snow Queen' and *Frozen* use a blend of motifs that has also shown its commercial merits in front of other audiences. One example is Richard Wagner's opera *The Flying Dutchman* (1843), which is set in 'Sandwike', and where the local heroine has the supposedly Norwegian-sounding name Senta. In Wagner's opera, marriage and its outcomes are at the core of the plot. In the first act, the Dutchman mentions his relationship status more than once ('Ah, I have no wife and child, / nothing to bind me to this earth!' (Wagner 2012, 99)), and Senta, whom the Dutchman wants to marry in order to break the spell that keeps him roaming the seas, is frequently referred to as a child ('Kind'). Confined by the hull of his ship and the ocean's vastness, he is only allowed to go ashore once every seven years. Unlike Gerda (who only has to endure an inhospitable climate without shoes and mittens) and Anna (who survives her projected self-sacrifice), Senta lets her life go for

the sake of the Dutchman's liberation and the opera finishes, happily, with their conjunct apotheosis.

Births

Frozen and 'The Snow Queen' combine a northern setting with ontogenetically oriented descriptions of the pathways between childhood and adult life. Both texts also display affinities with a historically significant way of conceptualizing the north as a place of human development – again in the double sense of growth and emergence. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton draws on a phylogenetic view of northerness in the lines describing the Devil's cohorts, which form a 'multitude, like which the populous North / Pour'd never from her frozen loyns [...]' (Milton 2007[1667], 1.351f.). To a modern audience, Milton's comparison may seem paradoxical. The commonplace image of barren northern landscapes does not seem to go well with the idea of fertility second only to the Devil's own productiveness. Milton's contemporary readers would have seen it differently. In the seventeenth century, the notion of the European north as *vagina gentium* ('womb of peoples') was well known. As an anthropological theory stating that humans (or a subgroup of this species) had their origin in the north, the idea was taken seriously until the end of the Second World War (Nagel 1991).

Although Andersen's and the Walt Disney Company's tales apparently stay well away from the brazenly racist, phylogenetic deployment of this idea, found, for example, in Johannes V. Jensen's novel *The Glacier* (1945[1908]), they both allow (and, to some extent, suggest) readings that transcend a purely individualistic, ontogenetic perspective. Both texts invite their audiences to see the protagonists' stories as something more than strictly personal, not least because of the fairy-tale genre's traditional orientation towards collective psychology rather than towards naturalistic portrayal of individual development. Although the notion that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny on a psychological and cultural level – implying, for example, that some cultural expressions are more childlike than others – may seem both antiquated and repulsive today (though it is not without support, for example, in historical linguistics, cf. MacNeilage 2008, 105), this idea might still be subliminally active in expressions of popular culture.

In this context, it is not insignificant that both texts present fictional worlds less technically advanced than those of their audiences. Although it might be both difficult and problematic to attempt to range the stations of Gerda's journey according to degrees of exoticism or magic (cf. Conrad 201, 262), there is little doubt that she is continually moving away from civilization. At the same time, she has begun a spiritual journey where a variety of common fairy-tale traits – among them an indistinct medievalism (castles, a robbers' den, etc.) and colonialist indications of primitiveness (e.g. the Lapp and Finn women's houses) – also reflect her ingenuous states of mind. From the start, *Frozen* appears to use similar techniques to evoke a childlike mindset. The film's action begins with a young boy's attempt at mimicking the archaic practice of collecting ice, performed by men in 'traditional Sami clothing' (Script, 1) singing a faux folk song (Bunch 2017, 93). *Frozen* brings the princesses, whose aristocratic life is evidently too

restrained, back into contact with more ordinary ways of living, and in the last scenes, they are again seen playing together.

From an antiquated, phylogenetical point of view, the north is considered as the place where peoples are born. Would it make sense to say that *Frozen* and ‘The Snow Queen’ tell a similar story, but on a personal, ontogenetic level? The combination of a coming-of-age theme and a northern setting in both texts makes this assumption somewhat appealing. In fact, the denouement of Andersen’s tale is told in a language that could, at many points, also describe a physical delivery. After Gerda manages to make contact with Kai he bursts into tears, and his first impressions of his surroundings read like a dilettante account of the so-called trauma of birth (cf. Rank 1993[1924]). ‘It’s so cold here! And it’s immense and empty too!’. On the first stopover on their way back, Gerda and Kai receive help from a female reindeer that has turned up out of nowhere, with ‘udders full of warm milk for the children. She kissed them on the lips’ (7). For both Kai and Elsa, the most significant aspect of the recovery of their personalities is the return of a childlike way of thought. In Kai’s case, this is said explicitly. He and Gerda are ‘grown-ups and children at the same time, children at heart’. At the end of *Frozen*, Elsa uses her powers in a way that resembles the scene where she and Anna are introduced. For the first time since the film’s beginning, she uses them in order to interact with others in a playful way – and to create joy for people other than herself. In her case, too, the strategies used in order to adapt to the conditions of adult life have been revised through re-acquiring a more youthful mindset.

One of the two texts’ shared graphic features also places Anna’s recovery from being an ice-stature in connection with the idea of the north as a cradle of creation. In the first stories of ‘The Snow Queen’, both the mirror fragments and the Queen are imagined as fluttering through the air – in the latter case as the queen in a bee swarm of snowflakes (1; 2). These and similar flurries are realms of transformation from inorganic matter to (imagined) life, for example, near the end of the sixth story, where Gerda fights an ‘entire regiment of snowflakes [that comes] swirling toward her’ in the shape of hedgehogs, snakes, and cubs. A similar flurry appears when the pieces of Kai’s puzzle game are ‘dancing for joy’ before collapsing on the ground, where they transform into the solution that Kai was not able to find on his own. *Frozen* reuses this imagery by connecting the snow flurry explicitly to Elsa’s creativity. Starting with the ill-fated game with Anna at the film’s beginning (4:23), her lifelike creations typically originate as snowflakes that magically appear between her hands, swirling. Towards the film’s end, as Elsa collapses after having been led to believe that she has caused her sister’s death, the surrounding snow storm changes into a state of near-inertia (1:25:43). The almost photographic immobility continues until the congealed Anna slowly starts recovering her previous colours. The thawing that has started in Anna’s heart spreads across the frozen landscapes, which warm up in a process involving a flurry similar to the one that has accompanied Elsa’s acts of creation (1:28:03). Thus, Anna’s sacrifice and subsequent revival assume the character of a mythical rebirth brought about by Elsa’s creative powers. Through the combination with the fairy-tale trope of the healing of the land (Bunch 2017, 90), this rebirth is not only pictured as occurring on a personal, ontogenetic level. Because of the life-inducing snow flurry’s status as a distinguishing

feature of the northern landscapes, Anna's return to life also inscribes itself in a specifically genealogical discourse of northerness.

Conclusions

In the introduction, I stated as a main field of interest the interaction between features of the two texts' northern settings and their focus on genealogical issues. I also mentioned that the genealogical orientation in these texts seems to imply something different from Foucault's stated objective of exposing the contingent and shameful origins of ideas and social practices that, before a genealogical scrutiny, appear to be self-evident. Although elements of social and ideological critique are not absent in *Frozen* and 'The Snow Queen', this is hardly their primary focus. In both cases, the more crucial concerns seem to be of a commercial nature. Among other things, these commercial concerns may show themselves in the texts' publication dates. The volume where Andersen's tale first appeared was rushed in order to be available before Christmas 1844 (Topsøe-Jensen 1971, 95); *Frozen* had its general theatrical release on November 27, 2013. The audience of these texts are not only readers and spectators, but also, and perhaps not least, consumers who do not only buy movie tickets and books, but also franchise products (Elsa's dress was famously sold out in record time (Bunch 2017, 100)) and children's toys like the ones mentioned or alluded to in 'The Snow Queen'.

It could be seen as a consequence of the texts' primarily commercial orientation that some of the more recognizable features of narratives of origin and coming-into-life are only present in rather faint intimations – hints that are cautiously withdrawn in the concluding scenes, where the main characters return to childlike innocence rather than continuing the path laid out by their pubescent demeanour. Elsa's and Kai's attempts at transcending into more mature and autonomous living conditions end up by being disavowed by the texts' endings, where their northward journeys are turned into retrograde movements. Elsa's pride and Kai's satirical conceit are not, however, only negated by the in this case parallel narrative developments. They also form an opposition to more salient and widespread features of pubescent life – to the feelings of shame or awkwardness that have been associated with this developmental stage since antiquity (Cairns 2002, 103–105). In *Frozen*, the strongest reminiscences of these feelings are – tellingly, I think – associated with one of the musical's choreographic *leitmotifs*. Throughout the film, the characters repeatedly³ almost fall – to the ground after having bumped into each other, into water, into various abysses – but in most cases, and always when the protagonists' wellbeing is at stake, some lucky incident prevents a collapse. That the stumbling persons are, in most cases, rescued in this manner may not only be seen in a theological context, but also in the light of the film's broader presentation of coming-of-age issues. *Frozen* not only takes interest in rescuing its protagonists from the dangers of falling in a physical or moral sense, but also from other experiences of shame and embarrassment commonly associated with puberty. As

³ The useful and interesting TvTropes (www.tvtropes.org) wiki page on *Frozen* mentions twelve occurrences of the 'Arc Symbol' of 'Falling, and catching people' – repeatedly in the scene where Anna and Hans first meet (17:01), but also observable, for example, when she 'turns to inanimate objects to catch [...] including an empty suit of armor' (13:52).

mentioned earlier, the protagonists of ‘The Snow Queen’ also overcome the sexual threats that they are subjected to, and their own relationship fizzles out in a bland exhibition of childish piety.

‘The Snow Queen’ and *Frozen* are texts where the genealogical focus is not only linked to the northern ambience but also coloured by a prudeness that, despite being occasionally challenged, ends up as almost universally triumphant. Thus, both the northern, genealogical perspective and the prude mindset form an opposition to the perhaps more identifiable, but at the same time more shame-laden aspects of the coming-of-age stories that are told. The northern genealogies that are presented in these texts show a particular aptitude for forming parts of this opposition. Instead of picturing genealogies in the light of the gory splendour of sex and childbirth, ‘The Snow Queen’ and *Frozen* nourish and cherish narratives about depersonalized and untainted, spontaneous and crystalline forms of conception and growth. The relationship between these narratives and the potentially shameful and (perhaps not least commercially) threatening aspects that they replace is emulative rather than allegorical. Perhaps this also applies to some of the other, culturally significant narratives where stories of origin are placed in a northern setting – not necessarily because single features of these stories are shameful in themselves, but rather because these two subjects, shame and origin, are not easily distinguished from each other.

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