

Where “the blood boils:” Hans Christian Andersen’s sojourn in Naples

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Article abstract

When in 1834, during his Grand Tour of Europe, Hans Christian Andersen set foot in Naples, he was immediately won over by the exuberant vitality of the Neapolitan people. The Parthenopean city, where he “was exposed to sensuality as a daily temptation” (Rossel, “Hans Christian Andersen” 24 and “Do You Know the Land” 95), also awakened Andersen’s more repressed instincts. From this experience he drew material for his most autobiographical novel, *Improvisatoren* (1835; *The Improvisatore*), whose protagonist tries to and succeeds in resisting the seductions of Neapolitan sensuality. If on the one hand the Danish author underwent the typical experience of the Northern traveller visiting the South and, more specifically, Naples, enjoying its openness and gaiety, on the other hand he never completely abandoned himself to Southern allures, upholding his moral and religious beliefs against a city that continuously attempted to wholly seduce him. The present paper aims to retrace Andersen’s first journey to Naples—where, by the writer’s own account, “the blood boils” (*The Diaries of Hans Christian Andersen* 85)—as a voyage into a tempting sensuality, contextualizing it within the wider context of nineteenth-century travelling experience in the city by Northern travellers.

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FRANCES CLEMENTE

Abstract. When in 1834, during his Grand Tour of Europe, Hans Christian Andersen set foot in Naples, he was immediately won over by the exuberant vitality of the Neapolitan people. The Parthenopean city, where he “was exposed to sensuality as a daily temptation” (Rossel, “Hans Christian Andersen” 24 and “*Do You Know the Land?*” 95), also awakened Andersen’s more repressed instincts. From this experience he drew material for his most autobiographical novel, *Improvisatoren* (1835; *The Improvisatore*), whose protagonist tries to and succeeds in resisting the seductions of Neapolitan sensuality. If on the one hand the Danish author underwent the typical experience of the Northern traveller visiting the South and, more specifically, Naples, enjoying its openness and gaiety, on the other hand he never completely abandoned himself to Southern allures, upholding his moral and religious beliefs against a city that continuously attempted to wholly seduce him. The present paper aims to retrace Andersen’s first journey to Naples—where, by the writer’s own account, “the blood boils” (*The Diaries of Hans Christian Andersen* 85)—as a voyage into a tempting sensuality, contextualizing it within the wider context of nineteenth-century travelling experience in the city by Northern travellers.

Introduction

When Andersen decided to set out on a journey through central and southern Europe in 1833,¹ he was leading a rather wretched life. As he recounts in his

¹ The paper will focus on Andersen’s first trip to Naples (February–March 1835), the one that had the deepest impact upon him (Bloom 138; Tatar 67, note 73) and was part of an “educational journey,” which, as remarked by Niels Kofoed, was the most important in his life (135).

autobiography,² the intellectual milieu of the Danish capital proved to be a hostile and cruel environment. His literary attempts were constantly diminished and even ridiculed, inflicting upon him daily humiliations.³ Moreover, something else appeared to be troubling him at the time, as he admits that “more than one sorrow” oppressed his heart—certain chambers of which he wished to “keep locked” (Andersen, *Annotated* 87). In such a miserable state of affairs, Andersen felt that a prolonged trip around the southern regions of Europe would do him good and function as the “the best school” for his creative work (86). After having obtained a stipend for travelling,⁴ Andersen left Copenhagen praying to God that he could return to Denmark “in a condition to produce works” which would gain him “joy and honour” (87), or else die away from his country.

As soon as he reached Italy, which he would refer to as “the country of my longing” and “the land of my desire,” Andersen was immediately overcome by its warmth and spring-like character: in Italy “All was sunshine—all was spring!” (93, 225). While exploring those happy and sunny regions, his momentaneous serenity was, however, upset by two pieces of news which reached him in Rome: one was that the poem “Agnete og Havmanden” (1834; “Agnete and the Merman”), which he had started in Paris and sent back to Denmark, had been rejected by the critics; the other, that his mother was dead. “I was now quite alone in the world,” he confesses in his autobiography (94). The sojourn in Naples, that city of sun and light-heartedness whose gaiety and harmony had been praised by Goethe on his trip there in 1787, could not have occurred at a more appropriate time. For the Danish author the Parthenopean city acted as a true watershed between a wretched before and a happier after. As pointed out by Sven Hakon Rossel, it was only when he left for Naples that he “was able to forget his woes” (“Hans Christian Andersen” 23 and “*Do You Know the Land*” 84).⁵ And if Andersen was

² I refer to Hans Christian Andersen, *The True Story of My Life*.

³ “All talent was denied to me” (Andersen, *Annotated* 83).

⁴ It is noteworthy that in order to present the petition for the travelling grant, Andersen, unlike other applicants, had to request recommendation letters from the intellectuals he knew and who could act as guarantors of his literary eligibility: “I am, so far as I know, the only Danish poet who was obliged to produce recommendations to prove that he was a poet,” Andersen recalls (*Annotated* 86).

⁵ The same happened when he subsequently returned to Italy: again, “it was only when leaving for Naples that his depressions were overcome” (Rossel, “Hans Christian Andersen” 31).

enthusiastic about Italy in general, “he was in raptures over her by the time he had seen Naples” (Nisbet Bain 121); with its colours and luxuriance, the Southern capital surpassed all that he had ever seen (Grønbech 39). Indeed, the South generally, and Naples in particular, offered a ‘realm of peace and freedom’ to travellers coming from the North (Pemble 193).⁶ But for Andersen freedom and peace did not quite coincide. Thus, some of the happiest moments of his life—which, as he himself acknowledges were the days spent in Naples⁷—corresponded to the ones in which his mind was most troubled. Along with the luxuriance of vegetation, the southern capital brought the pious Andersen to sense the lust of human nature, something he was not prepared to feel and did not want to experience, and against which he fought with all his power.⁸ For this reason, several times did his sojourn in Naples, that “paradise inhabited by devils” (Croce)⁹—the latter being in Andersen’s case the pimps who constantly chased him—, acquires the characteristic of a descent into hell. There he “was exposed to sensuality as a daily temptation” (Rossel, “Hans Christian Andersen” 24 and “*Do You Know the Land?*” 95), a situation which had such an impact upon him that he later translated it into fiction in his novel *Improvisatoren* (1835; *The Improvisatore*), whose protagonist tries to resist the seductions of Neapolitan sensuality. Once in the Parthenopean city Andersen soon comprehended what Goethe had said some decades before with reference to the contrast between the violent eruptions of the Vesuvius and the heavenly nature and weather: Naples was a place trapped between God and Satan.¹⁰

⁶ Although Pemble’s study specifically addresses British travelers, I refer to it since it can indeed be extended to most Northern people visiting the South.

⁷ “My soul is so full of love, I have not been so happy as of this moment!” he wrote to Henriette Wulff in a letter dated 23rd of February, 1834 (Andersen, *H.C. Andersen og Henriette Wulff* 159–62).

⁸ The topic has only been tackled but summarily by Richter, who devoted to the subject a couple of pages in his *Napoli Cosmopolita. Viaggiatori e comunità straniere nell’Ottocento* (“Tentazioni della castità: Hans Christian Andersen” 39–41), and Jensen, who names “Eroticism in Naples” a four-page paragraph of his biography on Andersen (J. Andersen ch. 10).

⁹ I refer to Croce, Benedetto. *Un Paradiso Abitato da Diavoli*. Milano: Adelphi, 2006.

¹⁰ I here refer to the original version of Goethe’s *Italienische Reise* (267), and not to the English translation which renders “Gott und Satan” with “Elysium and Tartarus” (*Goethe’s Travels* 207).

Naples as a travel destination in the first half of the nineteenth century. Andersen's character

Before moving on to the exploration of Andersen's days in Naples, a contextualisation of the role the southern city played in the wider history of travel in the first half of the nineteenth century is necessary, as well as a glance into the author's character and temperament.

As for the first issue, when Andersen visited Naples, the city was experiencing a virtual boom in tourism. The end of the French occupation and the beginning of Ferdinand II's reign, had brought a time of political stability which favoured increasing tourist influx.¹¹ The first half of the nineteenth century saw the transformation of Naples into a foreign capital of great charm (Richter 22), which the travellers began to prefer even to Rome. As Goethe had already noted, compared to "merry and cheerful" Naples, the eternal city appeared as too serious and solemn: if in Rome one could "readily set oneself to study," in Naples "one can do nothing but live. You forget yourself and the world" and are surrounded by "people who think of nothing but enjoying themselves" (*Goethe's Travels* 181, 199). What Naples offered to foreign travellers was a place of freedom, of joyful oblivion, of sensuous bliss. In particular, Naples was the ultimate destination for Northern tourists travelling South and seeking a "blessed escape from a painful state of mind and an oppressive society"; the alluring capital of a South which offered the "possibilities of an existence unencumbered by intellectual burdens and social constraints" (Pemble 192, 149).

To a certain extent, Naples was therapeutic for Northern travellers: its characteristic liveliness and gaiety made them temporarily forget their troubles, while its liberating social customs instantly relaxed—when didn't outright change—their habitual demeanour. As Goethe observed, in Naples more than in other places people showed themselves for who they truly were (*Goethe's Travels* 332). The possibility of a freer life also involved the sexual sphere. Naples was a notorious destination for travellers who wanted to enjoy the pleasures of sexual life without inhibitions and restraints; and even those who did not hold such purpose saw their more instinctual needs being awakened in contact with the city, regardless of their will and original intensions.¹² In their trips to the South, visitors could

¹¹ It is interesting to note that between 1834 and 1835 there is a peak of Danish tourists in Naples until the end of the decade (Richter 22).

¹² As Pemble points out, in the South travelers, especially intellectuals, would "rediscover" their "instinctual humanity" (198).

experience "a liberty to form relationships that was unknown at home, where puritan disapproval and class barriers arrested the natural flow of human affections" (Pemble 200). More specifically, sexual practices, which were despised and prosecuted elsewhere, like homosexuality or even paedophilia, were allowed in Naples, in accordance with the only law the city responded to—pleasure.¹³ August von Platen, who visited the city in 1827, recalls that in Naples love between men was so common that one did not have to worry about rejection, not even of the boldest proposals (Richter 35). If writers like Platen would gladly benefit from such liberties,¹⁴ Andersen was one of those troubled natures who Richter depicts as shutting their eyes and plugging their ears before the Neapolitan's voluptuous sights and whispering pimps (36).

Moving to the Danish author's personality, it is a well-known fact that through his entire life and in compliance with his fervent religious devotion,¹⁵ Andersen endeavoured to be a virtuous and chaste human being. Growing up "pious and superstitious," he "received gladly, both with feeling and understanding, the doctrine, that God is love" and "everything which opposed this—a burning hell" whose "fire" he "could not recognize" (Andersen, *Annotated* 15, 67).¹⁶ Yet, he did recognize that along with his yearning for an uncorrupted soul and an uncorrupted body, stood its counterpart: Andersen confesses in his diaries that he was "morbidly sensitive," and owned a "morbid turn of mind" which attempted to "gain the mastery" of him (77, 111). If on the one hand this morbidity alludes to the "peculiar talent" Andersen possessed, i.e. "that of lingering on the gloomy side of life, of extracting the bitter from it" (124), on the other hand it certainly also refers to his more instinctual drives, the sexual ones, which he felt to be in conflict with his religious commitments; sex with other human beings was a temptation he ought not to succumb to. As Rossel points out, "Andersen lacked neither impulse, desire, nor opportunity for sexual relations" (Introduction XVII); the absence of

¹³ In fact, the near island of Capri was regarded as a "small international homosexual colony" (Pemble 136).

¹⁴ On the individual and sexual freedom enjoyed by Northern writers in Naples see Richter's section "Libertà del Sud: Platen, Waiblinger, Kopisch" (35–39).

¹⁵ By his own account, the history of his life could be summed up in the following sentence: "There is a loving God, who directs all things for the best" (Andersen, *Annotated* 6).

¹⁶ Before acknowledging his artistic drive, he even wished to study theology and become a preacher (*Annotated* 75).

sexual encounters in his life¹⁷ is to be attributed to a voluntary self-restraint which, as we will see in relation to his Neapolitan sojourn, manifested itself as a rather distressing undertaking.¹⁸ No doubt, Andersen's "sexual shyness" (Rossel, "*Do You Know the Land*" 96) and, perhaps, fluid sexuality¹⁹ made his reprehension of, and subsequent abstention from, any sexual activity outside onanism²⁰ all the more troubling and incompatible with his religious and moral views. Moreover, it must be taken into account that Andersen lived in a world when the overall moral standards perfectly matched his own personal beliefs: he was born into a time and a place when "the ideas of hard work and self-discipline inherent to middle-class social mobility" were accompanied by a "repression of sexuality" (Mondschein).

Bearing in mind that Andersen was such a man and Naples such a city, let's now retrace his sojourn there.²¹

Andersen's days in Naples²²

Andersen left Rome after Carnival and arrived in Naples on the 15th of February 1834 with four companions,²³ among whom was his friend the poet Henrik

¹⁷ Although there is no ultimate proof of it, this seems to have been the case (see Bom and Aarenstrup).

¹⁸ In this connection, his admission of "well" understanding "how to torment" himself, could be read as a slip of the tongue—if not a conscious reference—to the sexual repression he imposed upon himself (Andersen, *Annotated* 124).

¹⁹ Keeping a distance from the several theories on Andersen's homosexuality (from Heinrich Detering to Allison Prince) as well as from those insisting on his heterosexuality (Rossel), I support the interpretation of the author's fluid sexuality, both with regards to his sexual and romantic orientation and to his sexual identity (Bom and Aarenstrup identify him as a "spiritually androgynous person").

²⁰ Andersen practiced masturbation as demonstrated by the several marks he left on the papers of his diaries (Rossel, Introduction XVII).

²¹ Andersen's diaries and letters written in Naples will be the main source. With regards to the former's edition I refer to Patricia L. Conroy and Sven Hakon Rossel's English translation (1990) and to the original text edited by Kåre Olsen and Helge Topsøe-Jensen (1971).

²² During his sojourn in Naples, Andersen portrayed the city in several sketches (see Nørregaard-Nielsen and Fino).

²³ A curious fact, as emerges from the Archivio di Stato di Napoli (fasc. 2848), is that he posed as a typograph, claiming to be travelling for professional reasons (Richter 27).

Hertz. The next day he met with the Danish *chargé d'affaires* Frederik Vogt, strolled around the neighbourhood of Chiaia, "where all the best people took their walks," and visited the quay, coming into contact with a world which appeared to his eyes like an amusement park, with "theatre[s], clowns and monkeys, loose women and painted signs" (Andersen, *Diaries* 73). On the same day he saw and felt for the very first time the "supernatural power" (73) of Vesuvius' eruption, a spectacle which he would continually refer to with amazement. Undoubtedly, the sight of Vesuvius played a paramount role in Andersen's Neapolitan sojourn. As Hugus points out, of all of Andersen's experiences on his first trip to Italy, none affected him more than seeing Vesuvius' activity (439); and, as emerges from his diaries, Andersen felt an affinity between the volcanic eruptions of Vesuvius and his "own troubled sensual stirring" (Tatar 67, note 73).²⁴ Coming back to his itinerary, on the 17th of February he moved with his companions to a pension in via Sperensella 70, explored with Vogt and Hertz the lively Toledo Street, payed a visit to his neighbour the Danish diplomat baron Frederik Brockenhuus, and had dinner with Vogt, where he "spoke French with the ladies;" once home he wrote in his diary that he "felt tired, but so inexpressibly happy" (Andersen, *Diaries* 75).

On the 18th the Danish traveller went all the way to the cave of Posillipo, on a long but "divine tour;" only a few days had gone by and he could already hear in Naples "the world's great pulse beat" (75). The following day he had his first encounter with the pimps who, from that moment on, would almost daily pursue him. After having spent the day with the Norwegian businessman and civil servant Haagen Mathiesen, in the evening, at dusk, he was surrounded by a group of pimps who recommended to him a "*bella donna*." When he later left the Carlino Theatre, where some farces in the Neapolitan dialect were being performed (and he could not understand a word of what was being said) he was again chased by a pimp who asked him if he preferred to have "a *ragazza* or a *ragazzo*" (76). What is more, when he got back home the already unsettled Andersen found Hertz's room locked and had to face his "disconcerted" expression when his friend opened the door and said he could not let him in: "God only knows what Hertz was up to," the Danish author recorded in his diary (75). Yet, this was self-evident since, unlike Andersen, Hertz did not refrain from the pimps' proposals.²⁵ That day marked the beginning of Andersen's torment while fighting the bodily instincts

²⁴ On the Vesuvius as a metaphor for Andersen's erotic passion see also Rossel, "*Do You Know the Land*" 94, Præstgaard Andersen 505, Lehmann 110.

²⁵ See Oxenvad 196.

that the sensuous city of Naples had awakened in him and holding out against its alluring offers. The Northern traveller had “pressed his ear to flesh,” (J. Andersen ch. 10) starting to acknowledge the effects that Naples was impressing upon his temperament: “I’ve noticed that the climate is affecting my blood—I felt a raging passion, but resisted,” he noted in his diary (75). Despite the fact that several people advised him to lose his virginity in the South,²⁶ Andersen was eager to keep himself pure and innocent. A counterbalance to his burning feelings came from the soothing sight of the city’s “beautiful sea” and “infinite blue” sky, with respect to which Andersen considered Naples to be “a paradise,” as he wrote down on the 20th of February (76). But, as I have suggested earlier, devils were hidden in this paradise and were ready and keen to torment the pious and shy foreigner.

On the 21st of February, Andersen walked all the way to Portici and at dusk, back in the city, while admiring the violent spectacle of Vesuvius ejecting lava (“like tongues of fire flaring up”), he was again stopped by the pimps, from whom he “had no peace” (78). This time a ten or twelve-year-old boy offered him a “*donna multa bella, eccellenza!*” Andersen reacted to the proposal by getting “really randy, but still resisted the temptation anyway [...] If I’m still innocent when I get back home,”—he resolved rather dramatically—“I’ll stay that way” forever (78). On that night he drank for the first time *Lacrimae Christi*, the famous wine produced on the slopes of Vesuvius—in a letter to his friend Christian Voigt he would refer to it as the best wine on earth—, which would become a constant presence in his Neapolitan sojourn, certainly not aiding him in calming his excited, at time feverish, state (Andersen, *Riborgs Broder* 143–56).²⁷ On the 22nd of February he visited Posillipo, where he saw Virgil’s tomb, and reached the sea of the bay of Pozzuoli, whose “beauty was exceptional,” but where “the sun burned with the heat of summer,” making him feel “very listless” (*Diaries* 79). Indeed, Andersen was not used to the southern sun: while in the North the sun would exercise its power in a gentle manner, in the South its ruthless force would weaken whatever strength and energy people possessed, producing sloth, inebriation, and sensuality (Richter 81). Such was the effect it had on Andersen. Moreover, considering “the sun’s narcotic power” in enhancing “the feeling of liberation” one felt in the Mediterranean (Pemble 196), it is clear that the Neapolitan weather, and the acute

²⁶ See Oxenvad 196.

²⁷ On different occasions Andersen reports the wine going to his head and stirring his blood; during his trip around Capri, Sorrento and the Amalfi coast he went as far as to call it “insidious” (*H.C. Andersens Dagbøger* 344, 352, 341).

perception Andersen had of it, was an additional element of disturbance to his conflicted soul. In the evening, before going to the San Carlo Theatre, Andersen was again "harassed," using his own term, by a boy who wanted him to visit a *donna* and gave him her address, which the Danish author decidedly threw away (*Diaries* 79). The following day, however, the city's temptations intensified, causing Andersen a great inner turmoil. As he walked through "the narrow side streets" of Toledo, Andersen no longer appeared to be able to endure his abstention; he felt his blood "churning" and was overcome by a "huge sensuality" which even led him to question his religious convictions, as suggested by the opening "if" clause: "If it really is a sin to satisfy this powerful urge, then let me fight it. I am still innocent, but my blood is burning. In my dreams I am boiling inside. The south will have its way! I am half sick.—Happy is the man who is married, engaged to be married! Oh, if only I were bound by strong bonds!—But I will, I will fight this weakness!" (80).

The passage is significant because the Danish writer explicitly associates the sinful and lustful temptations he is fighting against with the South, recognizing its dangerous allure. In line with this acknowledgement is Andersen's reference, in a letter to Henriette Wulff dated February 23rd, to the different treatment people received in the South as opposed to the North, with the author's praise of the former context and the identification of his fatherland with the city of Naples, a place where he felt "at home":²⁸

God, how rigidly we are treated in the North! Italy cannot be described! The regions must be seen, the air inhaled, it is like the most blissful kiss! One can go crazy over it. Of all the cities I have now seen, Naples stands at the top [...]. Here, here is my fatherland, for here I feel at home! But in four weeks I will be gone, then my beautiful dream will be over! Then it goes north! [...] No, it's too delightful! My soul is so full of love, I have not been so happy as of this moment! My pain is crushing when I suffer, but my joy is also nameless when I am happy.—The heat of the South is rolling in my blood and yet I must—die in the North! [...] Though God be praised, yet I have felt and seen heaven. [...] (*H.C. Andersen og Henriette Wulff* 159–62)

²⁸ In his autobiography he admitted: "I felt uncomfortable in my native country, yes, almost ill" (Andersen, *Annotated* 123).

As the final phrase suggests, God stands in opposition to heaven—a heaven not devoid of devils and which is represented by Naples. Thus, not only North versus South, but also God (Andersen’s God) versus South.

On the 24th the excursion to Vesuvius took place. Andersen indulged in describing his ascent to the mount at moonlight, offering one of the finest depictions we possess on the subject.²⁹ Although it was no easy task to walk up the mountain, because of the steep slope, the stones rolling down and impeding the way, the fire burning the feet, and the lack of a proper track to follow, the Danish author proved a skilled and fearless climber. Something that stands out in his account is in fact his physical vigour, a vigour which he wished to convey to his travelling companions: while helping his friend Hertz,³⁰ who was having trouble ascending the mount, Andersen “sang loudly to show how little it was tiring” him (Andersen, *Diaries* 82). A “courageous mountaineer” (Rossel, “*Do You Know the Land?*” 92–93), he was full of strength, not a trace of the weakness that had caught him in the streets with the pimps or under the burning sun of Naples in the past days. As Oxenvad comments, “standing up there at the very edge of a most violent volcano in full eruption,” Andersen “was totally ‘groovy’ with enthusiasm, in spite of the physical effort and the dangers involved” (196). Undoubtedly, he had a lot of pent-up energy to burn off. Though the “cone was unclimbable on account of the ‘glowing rocks that were constantly raining,” Andersen was not disappointed by this and descended the mountain with “great fun,” staring at what he defined as the “matchless play of nature” (*Diaries* 83). In reporting the excursion to Christian Voigt, Andersen remarked: “It was a moment in my life I will never forget” (*Riborgs Broder* 143–56).³¹

Sore and exhausted from the ascent of Vesuvius, Andersen spent the following two days, the 25th and 26th of February, paying visits to acquaintances and continuing to explore the lively and picturesque streets of Naples, occupying “the whole afternoon” of the 26th “strolling along Toledo Streets, looking at the

²⁹ Just to quote a brief passage: “The evening was so infinitely beautiful; the sun set like a ball of fire; the sky was a glimmering gold that shaded over into an ether-blue. The sea was like indigo, and the islands were lying like pale blue clouds on it. It was a magic world that had manifested itself” (*Diaries* 82).

³⁰ “Without being a sportsman in the modern sense of this word, Andersen seems to be much more fit for mountaineering than Hertz. [...] Andersen was the good companion to offer Hertz his hand” (Oxenvad 197).

³¹ All translations from this source are my own.

motley crowds and being pursued by pimps" (*Diaries* 85). If he truly wanted to, Andersen could have avoided the pimps, as he knew perfectly well that it was precisely in the side alleys of Toledo that he could find them hiding. Instead, endangering his resolutions to stay chaste and pure, he indulged in those places, revealing his double-faced reaction to the pimps' temptations: fascination and repugnance, curiosity and fear.³² That day, a boy in a white hat who, according to Andersen, kept trying to seduce him, propositioned him offering a "donna multa bella"—a thirteen-year-old who had just "given herself over to carnal pleasure"—, eventually leading him to her house and begging him to take a look at her (*Diaries* 85). In doing so the pimp strongly believed that Andersen would not have been able to resist. Confirming the boy's opinion, Andersen shouted "No! No! No!" and escaped; he later drew in his diary the following conclusions: "Naples is more perilous than Paris, because you freeze there, but here your blood boils. God, lead me to what is best and most sensible. I don't regard this gratification as a sin, but I find it disgusting and dangerous to do it with such creatures, and an unforgivable sin, with an innocent.—I am at the point of saying with Hertz: happy the man who is married and doesn't commit lechery (85)."³³

Andersen explicitly asked for God's assistance, urging Him to lead him to what was best and sensible, since he was no longer capable to do so on his own. The Danish author also took a definite step back from his early convictions—a sign that Neapolitan seductiveness was slowly softening him and, while not succeeding in corrupting his body, it managed however to profane his chaste mind: he had already started to question the sinfulness of sexual fulfilment, and now he clearly believed that he did not regard carnal gratification as a sin, as long as it was not consummated between people of the same sex or with innocent children. As in the previously mentioned passage, Andersen came once more to the conclusion that men who are married are happy since they can satisfy their physical needs within a sacred union (*Diaries* 80).

On the 27th³⁴ Andersen strolled around the Villa Reale, observing the fishermen and admiring their bodies, and went to the Museum to visit the Camera

³² See J. Andersen ch. 10; Richter 41.

³³ As Oxenvad remarks, Hertz's words "fell on deaf ears" (196).

³⁴ As the English translation of Andersen's diaries stops on the 27th of February, I will from here on refer to the original text (*H.C. Andersens Dagbøger 1825–1875*).

Obscene.³⁵ Curiously, Andersen was not at all scandalized by the many phallic reproductions of the God Priapus and the diverse erotic depictions of human and animal figures engaging in the most extravagant sexual acts. As Jens Andersen notes, he appeared to be “morally unperturbed” (J. Andersen ch. 10)—something which can only be explained considering the lifelessness, thus the harmlessness, of what he was staring at. The pimps, unlike the frescoes or the little statues in the Camera Obscure, were alive, hence potentially dangerous; but “from the safe distance of a voyeur” (J. Andersen ch. 10), as Jens Andersen remarks with regard to Andersen’s composition of *Improvisatorenn*, the Danish author could enjoy, without fear, the sensuousness that surrounded him. That safe distance was, however, constantly under threat. On the 28th of February Andersen felt “a terrible heat” flowing into his blood and causing him a headache (*H.C. Andersens* 331). He reported that he was being swept by a passion he had never experienced before. Just like the red lava flowing down Vesuvius, he felt his blood burning, and making his way home he was stopped for the umpteenth time by two men offering him a *donna*. “No, no!” he screamed to them and rushed home where he wet his head and slowly calmed down, deciding that he would not be going out in the evening (331). On the 1st of March he returned to the Museum, where he visited the Greek and Roman section and the Egyptian rooms. He also walked up to the cave of Posillipo with the German painter Wolfgang Ferdinand Flacknecker and paid a visit to the princess Pignatelli. On the 2nd he had dinner with Vogt, drinking expensive Italian and French wines.

On the 3rd Andersen left Naples for a five-day excursion. First, he went to Pompei and Paestum, then sailed around Sorrento and the Amalfi Coast, stopping on the Island of Capri, where he entered the Blue Grotto, by his account an indescribable and fairy-like experience.³⁶ Away from the city and its pimps, Andersen took a chance to cool off his restless and boiling spirit. Once he got back to Naples, however, pimps pursued him again, restoring his state of agitation. On the 10th of March, at night, he was visited by Hertz who made him drink a lot of wine and encouraged him to consider the many women (wives and daughters) whom Andersen could pay for to spend some time together, but Andersen’s

³⁵ To have access to it, he had to ask a special permission to the director of the Museum.

³⁶ Andersen was the first European writer to include the Blue Grotto in a literary work with his *Improvisatorenn* (Rossel, “*Do You Know the Land*” 91). He described the visit in the following terms: “fairy world”; “It was like we were sailing in the ether”; “This calm, this ethereal clarity I cannot describe” (*H.C. Andersens* 343–44).

response was that of a "reluctant man" (*H.C. Andersens* 348). That day, for the first time—as he observed almost with a veil of disappointment—the pimps had left him alone during his strolls through Toledo. On the 11th he attended Gioachino Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* at San Carlo, but he felt ill, his head burning again. On the 12th his sickness continued and he could feel his "boiling blood" and a "fever for passion" assailing him (351). "To quell the evil in the flesh," he went to see Rossini's *Cenerentola* which was being staged at the La Fenice theatre, but the play failed to free him of his misery (351). On the 13th he visited Virgil's tomb and the convent of St. Antonio, still suffering from burning heat in his blood. Strolling in the streets, Andersen was, as usual, pursued by the pimps, one of whom followed him home to show him a divinely beautiful 12-year-old girl: "I thought of her, who doesn't think of me and it tore me apart!" the Danish writer confessed, deciding for the second time not to go out that night (352). On the 14th he set off for a two-day excursion, this time around the bay of Pozzuoli. He walked up the Solfatara, passed through Lake Lucriner and Lake Avernus, rented a boat and rowed to Ischia, stopping off at Cape Mysenum and Procida, where he reproached Zeuthen as he caught him seeking pleasure "sticking his cane into a child's mouth" (357).

On the following days Andersen enjoyed his last walks through the Neapolitan back streets and paid farewell visits to his friends and acquaintances. In a letter to Christian Voigt written on the 18th of March, he reiterated the contrast between the glorious and warm Naples, "a land of blessing" where "everything is song and joy," and the North, "the honest, faithful North, but where it is cold, very cold," expressing his sadness in having to return there: "This is a true fairy world I must leave now! O God, tomorrow it is all over for me. It was a dream, a beautiful dream that I won't dream anymore" (*Riborgs Broder* 143–56). On the 19th, St Joseph's Day, he went to hear mass at the Chapel of San Giuseppe and caught a glance of the King and Queen, who were attending the celebration. Thanking the city and praising the everlasting God for all the glory he allowed his eyes to see and his heart to feel, Andersen waved goodbye to Naples, that "turning point" in his journey; and "with reluctance"—perhaps with some relief—he left for Rome on the 20th (*H.C. Andersens 1825–1875* 362; Rossel, "Hans Christian Andersen" 23 and "*Do You Know the Land*" 98). As Jens Andersen points out, finding himself two months later in safer and cooler Venice, he wrote in his diary: "The Neapolitan passion again boiled in my blood, but there were no tempters here" (J. Andersen ch. 10).

Conclusions

Though Andersen described several times his Neapolitan sojourn as a dream, while he was there his blood was in constant turmoil, the city being an endless temptation. Richter goes as far as to assert that no one has “tormented himself in Naples more than Andersen” (41). The city’s divine beauty won his artistic soul, but it also unlocked the chambers of his heart and body, which he did not wish to confront nor acknowledge. There were to be found “the sensual and sexual aspects of his own nature, aspects that attracted yet frightened him” (J. Andersen ch. 10). Indeed, in the South, artists and intellectuals would rediscover their “instinctual humanity” (Pemble 198). Once there, they could forget the social restrictions learnt in the North and question the control exercised by the Super-ego, surrendering to a sweet and at the same time dangerous self-forgetfulness (Richter 81–82). Many Northern travellers insisted on the feeling of inebriation they experienced in Naples. August von Platen said that he lived in a state of continuous inebriation, exhorting strangers to rejoice in and to be overwhelmed by torments and demons (Richter 35–36); the German poet Wilhelm Waiblinger revealed that he passed his weeks in Naples in a state of inebriation; Goethe related that in the city every one lived “in a sort of intoxicated self-forgetfulness,” admitting that he scarcely recognized himself in Naples (*Goethe’s Travels* 197). The South represented for them the exotic Other (Richter 82) and those more instinctual, often hidden, aspects of human nature. Naples put Andersen in contact with such aspects: the “demons” and “shadows” which haunted him and which he “somehow exorcise[d]” through creative activity, emerged with all their threatening power in the capital of the “indescribably beautiful and dangerous southern Italy” (Cech 41; Rossel, “*Do You Know the Land*” 98). Indeed, Andersen “sought outlets for his repressed sexuality” in his works, through a “complex process of sublimation,” and partly channeled his inhibited sexuality by composing the novel *Improvisatoren* (Zipes 869). In it he restaged, through the protagonist Antonio, his own inner conflict between a resolute innocence³⁷ and the sensual and sexual aspects of his nature, which arose in proximity with the Parthenopean city.³⁸ In Naples Antonio experiences

³⁷ A vital element for both Andersen and his fictional alter ego Antonio (J. Andersen ch. 10).

³⁸ Andersen will regret giving voice to the outbursts of his inner instincts. When the Russian translation of the novel appeared, the thought that *Improvisatoren* had “spread so far, and among so many people” troubled and even terrified him, causing the following rather cryptic consideration: “The noble and the good in us becomes a blessing; but the bad, one’s errors, shoot forth also, and involuntarily the thought forces itself from us: God! Let me never write down a

great inner turmoil due to the temptations of a woman named Santa. Just like his author, Antonio experiences "the almost irresistible stirrings of physical attraction" and yet does not yield "to the temptations of the flesh" (Hugus 449–49).

Just when he is about to "sink in the whirlpool of passion," a "holy image" (a crucifix) falls between Antonio and Santa; this is "not a mere accident," but a reminder for the protagonist to resist the allure of Neapolitan women (*The Improvisatore* 206). *Improvisatoren* is one of those works in which Andersen displays "a barrier," a "resistance to growing up and enjoying the physical side of adult life" reflecting the writer's own frustrated sexuality which the burning city of Naples exasperated (Johansen 215). In fact, it is important to observe that Antonio confirms the key role the city plays in his, as well as Andersen's, turmoil: apart from the image of the boiling lava flowing down the Vesuvius to describe Antonio's inner sexual conflict, with the volcano eventually revealing itself to the protagonist as a symbolic "seething cauldron of pure sensuousness," once the protagonist leaves Naples, "the torments of the flesh gradually subside" and "he no longer agonizes" over his sexual identity (Hugus 443–44). With its inebriating air and its passionate sexual lifestyle, Naples has on Andersen and on his fictional hero the effect of a sort of kryptonite: it weakens them, makes them feverish and, if exposed to it too long, it can lead them to lose consciousness and collapse, but as soon as they get away from it their wellbeing is gradually restored.

So, what kind of traveller is Andersen in the South, and more specifically, in the Neapolitan context? According to Richter, there are two perceptions of the Parthenopean city on the part of nineteenth-century travellers: on the one hand there is Naples as the delighting and paradisiac garden of the Hesperides, with its beautiful landscape and smiling people; on the other hand there is the dark, threatening, even violent side of a South which could not remain hidden to the more sensible spirits (81). Andersen was among such spirits and if he undoubtedly enjoyed the city's more paradisiac aspects, he was greatly affected by its devilish lures, facing what Pemble defines as the "sensual experience of Mediterranean sunlight and Mediterranean life" (148–49). The unbridled, passionate and excitable Neapolitan people (Richter 17) conflicted with his commitment to innocence, exacerbating what was already the "pervasive though hidden obsession" of his sexual

word of which I shall not be able to give an account to thee" (Andersen, *Annotated* 195). On the autobiographical elements in *Improvisatoren* see Hugus, and in particular the section "Mount Vesuvius and Sensuality" (439–44), in which Hugus argues that the outline of the protagonist's trip to the volcano is an expansion of Andersen's diary entry from February 24th, 1834. On the representations of Italy from Andersen's Northern point of view see Carbone 290–311.

frustration (Bloom X). From Oscar Wilde to André Gide, from von Platen to D.H. Lawrence, most of the Northern writers travelling to the South experienced in Naples a liberation and freedom of senses which lead them to joyfully relinquish the repression and imprisonment they felt in their native country. These artists responded to the warmth and sensuousness of the Parthenopean city, allowing it to seduce and overwhelm them. Unlike them, Andersen stands out as one of the few writers who resisted Naples' alluring freedom. Although the struggle he went through to stay pure and chaste did not get any easier with time—in fact it grew worse—, Andersen kept coming back to the city and continued to resist its temptations just as he did on his first trip.³⁹ The Danish author, as he himself reluctantly acknowledged, continued to be a Northern soul: “I, who had fancied that I must be precisely a child of the sun, so firmly did my heart always cling to the south, was forced to acknowledge that the snow of the north was in my body” (*Annotated* 232). In the end, Naples made Andersen's senses quiver, but it did not unleash them (Manghi 202).

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³⁹ “I tried whether the will were not stronger than the Neapolitan heat”—he concealed in his autobiography with regards to his 1842-sojourn in the city—, “but I fell into such a nervous state in consequence, that till the time of my departure I was obliged to lie quietly in my hot room, where the night brought no coolness” (*Annotated* 232).

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