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The Fairy-Tale Form as Confessional Memory: Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling* and the Hus–Luther Metamorphosis

*Pravljичna oblika kot konfesionalni spomin:
Andersenov Grdi raček in preobrazba Hus–Luther*

Abstract: This study argues that the reformational genealogy from Jan Hus to Martin Luther, carried by the goose–swan metaphor, is not merely preserved in narrative form but constituted by it, and that the same form carries a critique of the excluding community. Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling* (1843) and the Hus–Luther tradition instantiate one six-phase sequence: isolation, trial, latent identity, revelation, recognition, retrospective legitimation. The reading rests on a complete inventory of the lexical markers of exclusion in Hersholt's translation. The tale depicts violence, ridicule, and exclusion without sexual content; the epithet occurs in three registers, the protagonist's last. The duck yard is absent from the resolution.

Keywords: Andersen, *The Ugly Duckling*, Max Lüthi, Jan Hus, Martin Luther, goose–swan metaphor, exclusion, institutional response, Reformation memory

Izvleček: Študija zagovarja tezo, da reformacijsko genealogijo od Jana Husa do Martina Lutera, ki jo nosi metafora gos–labod, pripovedna oblika ne le ohranja, temveč jo konstituira, in da ista oblika nosi kritiko izključujoče skupnosti. Andersenov Grdi raček (1843) in tradicija Hus–Luter uresničujeta isto šestfazno zaporedje: izolacija, preizkušnja, latentna identiteta, razodetje, priznanje, retrospektivna legitimacija. Branje temelji na popolnem popisu jezikovnih označevalcev izključitve v Hersholtovem prevodu. Pravljica prikazuje nasilje, posmeh in izključitev brez spolne sestavine; pridevek se pojavlja v treh registrih, protagonistov je zadnji. Dvorišče je v razpletu odsotno.

Ključne besede: Andersen, Grdi raček, Max Lüthi, Jan Hus, Martin Luther, metafora gos–labod, izključitev, institucionalni odziv, reformacijski spomin

Introduction

Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling*, first published in 1843, is among the most widely disseminated European narratives of exclusion. It is often summarized as offering consolation: an ugly creature turns out

to be beautiful, and the reader is invited to wait for their own transformation. But that summary overlooks what the text spends most of its length describing: not beauty, but injury, as presented with a persistence that is easily missed precisely because the tale is so familiar.

This study advances three claims. First, the correspondence between Andersen's tale and the reformational genealogy running from Jan Hus to Martin Luther is structural rather than thematic: both instantiate a sequence whose phases can be specified and checked. Second, that structure is not confessionally specific, since it recurs wherever an excluded party's worth is acknowledged only retrospectively. Third, the structure carries a critique of the community that produces the exclusion – a critique least comfortable for the tradition that adopted the metaphor, because in Andersen, the duck yard is absent from the resolution and is never shown to have learned anything.

The relation asserted is one of literary parallelism in the strict sense: not allusion, borrowing, or influence, but the recurrence of one narrative configuration in two texts that stand in no genetic relation to each other. The term is used throughout in this sense, and section 2.2 specifies the formal criteria by which such a parallelism can be identified and tested. The evidence for the first claim is countable and this quantifiable. In Jean Hersholt's English translation, the protagonist is the object of 13 distinct verb-agent pairs of aggression, distributed across every community he enters – the duck yard, the marsh, the old woman's house, the farmer's household – and including his own mother, brothers, and sisters. The tale does not merely report that he was rejected. It enumerates the forms rejection takes, and it does so before it offers any consolation at all.

The argument proceeds in three stages. First, it establishes what the tale depicts, by inventory. Second, it describes the narrative shape into which the inventoried actions are organized, using Max Lüthi's morphology of the folktale. Third, it shows that the same shape organizes the genealogy that runs from Hus to Luther through the goose-swan metaphor, whose construction Kalivoda, Smrčka and Zilynská (2017) document and whose Carniolan reception Valvasor records.



Two further readings are developed from the same material. A literary reading treats exile and the internalization of an imposed judgment, for which the tale has an established interpretative tradition. A reading of institutional response uses Hans Zollner's (2019) analysis of ecclesial failure as a descriptive vocabulary for the conduct of the excluding community.

Scope and limits of the claim: Three delimitations govern the argument and are stated at the outset, because everything that follows depends on them.

No claim of historical influence is made. There is no evidence that Andersen knew the goose–swan metaphor, and none is offered. The relation asserted is analogical: two narratives instantiate one structure, and the interest lies in the fact of the sharing.

The tale is not treated as a representation of sexual abuse. The aggression on the text depicts is physical, verbal and exclusionary, and the inventory in section 3 documents this exhaustively. Where Zollner's framework is used in section 6, it is applied to the conduct of the community that excludes – misrecognition, absence of accountability, failure to change – and never to the nature or effects of harm suffered by any person. A fairy-tale protagonist is not a victim, and nothing in this comparison measures one kind of suffering against another.

No claim of interpretative exclusivity is made. Biographical, queer, neurodiversity, postcolonial and Marxist readings of the tale exist; several are discussed in section 7, and none are displaced.

1 Method

Three procedures are applied in sequence, each answering to the one before it.

1.1 The inventory of lexical markers of exclusion

The corpus is Andersen's *Den grimme Ælling* in Jean Hersholt's English translation, cited from the Canterbury Classics edition (Andersen 2014). Hersholt's rendering, prepared for *The Complete Andersen* (New York,



1949) and reproduced in later editions and by the H.C. Andersen Centre of the University of Southern Denmark, is widely regarded as the standard English version, and is selected on that basis, as it makes the inventory replicable against a stable and canonical English text.

The object of the inventory is the set of lexical markers of exclusion: the language by which a community marks a member out. Two fields compose it, and they are distinguished because they answer different questions – what is done to him, and what he is called. For the first, every clause in which the protagonist is the grammatical or logical object of an action performed against him was extracted, and the governing verb was recorded with its agent. The unit of count is the verb-agent pair, so the same verb performed by different agents is counted separately; this is more precise than counting verb types, and it makes the distribution of aggression across communities visible. The procedure is exhaustive rather than illustrative. The claim is that these are all such pairs in the corpus, and the result is therefore falsifiable by any reader working from the same text.

A second inventory records evaluative attribution: every predicate applied to the protagonist as a characterization rather than an action, with the speaker in each case. The two fields answer different questions – what is done to him, and what he is called – and the second is registered by speaker because the identity of the attributing voice is itself the finding.

The translation is analyzed as an English text in its own right. The Danish original is not treated here, and section 7 notes what this excludes.

1.2 Structural description

The narrative organization of the inventoried actions is described using Max Lüthi's morphology of the folktale, developed in *Das europäische Volksmärchen* (1947) and available in English as *The European Folktale* (1982). Four instruments are used: one-dimensionality, isolation, abstract style, and the rightness of events.

A clarification is required, because the categories are applied to a use their author did not envisage. Lüthi's terms describe the internal form of the folktale as a genre; applying them to a historiographical genealogy

is an extension made by the present authors, not a procedure warranted by Lüthi. What licenses the extension is that his instruments are formal rather than thematic. Isolation names a structural position, not a subject matter, and can be tested against any narrative in which a protagonist is separated from a community. The extension is therefore offered as an interpretative move to be judged by what it discloses, and the correspondences it yields are set out phase by phase in Table 2 so that each can be assessed on its own.

The consequence of this formal reading should be stated at the outset, since the later sections depend on it. If Lüthi's instruments describe structural positions rather than subject matters, then the configuration they identify is not proper to any institution. It is an archetypal situation: a protagonist separated from a community, subjected to sanction, and recognized only after the fact. A duck yard, a 15th-century council, a household, a family that receives a child not its own, a school, and a professional body – each realizes the same configuration. The ecclesial case examined in section 6 is therefore one institutional realization among others, and the term institutional is used throughout in this broad sense, of which the ecclesial is a species. This permits a fairy tale and a confessional genealogy to be compared without conflating them, and it is why the tale has circulated as it has: readers do not import their situation into it; they recognize the form of their situation already present.

1.3 Interpretative frames

Three frames are then applied to the structure so described.

Kalivoda, Smrčka and Zilynská (2017) supply the documentary record of the goose–swan metaphor's formation, and Valvasor its Carniolan reception; together they ground section 4.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés's chapter on exile and belonging supplies a psychological reading of the tale type and grounds part of section 5. Her chapter requires a caution that governs how she is cited here. The version of the story printed in it is not Andersen's, and she states that she composed it herself as a literary story based on an eccentric version told in Magyar by tellers in her family, and the printed text differs from Hersholt's at



numerous points. Her analysis is therefore an analysis of the tale type as she retells it, not a commentary on Andersen's text, and it is used here only where her claims concern the structure of exile itself rather than the wording of any particular version. Her dating of Andersen's tale to 1845 is not adopted, as the tale was actually published in 1843.

Michael Ferber's (2017) lexicon of literary symbols supplies the conventional values of goose and swan and grounds the opening of section 6. Jack Zipes's (2005) account of Andersen supplies both a warrant for the study's central claim and its principal counter-argument: where Lüthi describes the folktale's form, Zipes describes what that form does socially, treating the genre as an instrument through which a culture transmits and enforces norms. Zollner's (2019) account of ecclesial failure supplies the analytic vocabulary for institutional response and is confined to section 6.

The relation between the frames must be specified, since they belong to different disciplines. They are not combined into a single explanatory theory. Each is applied to the same structural description produced in section 3.2, and each yields a different account of what that structure means: the literary frame asks what the pattern does within the narrative, the historical-religious frame asks how the same pattern operates in confessional memory, and the institutional frame asks what the pattern reveals about communities that misrecognize things. The integration claimed in section 8 is convergence – independent readings meeting on one structure – not the derivation of one frame from another.

2 The tale: what the text depicts and how it is organized

2.1 The lexical markers of exclusion

The lexical markers of exclusion fall into two fields, presented here in turn. The verbs in the first field are not treated as vocabulary items. Each is the narrative's compressed notation for a mode of collective sanction, and the inventory is exhaustive so that the distribution of those modes – across social loci, registers of violence, and phases of the tale – can be read from the text rather than asserted. Table 1 presents the first field in full.



Lexical marker	Agent	Social locus	Mode of sanction	Narrative function	Page
bit (his neck)	a duck	duck yard	corporal marking	inaugurates the sanction; the neck, seat of bearing and voice, is the site chosen	166
needs a good whacking	the duck who bit him	duck yard	violence articulated as principle	converts an act into a norm: the community supplies a doctrine for what it has done	166
pecked	ducks and chickens	duck yard	iterative corporal	collectivizes the sanction; no single antagonist remains identifiable	167
pushed about	ducks and chickens	duck yard	spatial dispossession	denies standing-room; he does not know where he dares stand or walk	167
made fun of	ducks and chickens	duck yard	verbal degradation	completes the triad of body, space and speech	167
bore down upon	the turkey gobbler	duck yard	hierarchic display	rank performs itself; the self-styled emperor enacts status through aggression	167
chased	everyone	totalized	expulsion	the community becomes a single grammatical agent	167
buffeted about	everyone	totalized	undifferentiated corporal sanction	violence without attributable author, hence without possible redress	167
abused	his own brothers and sisters	kinship	intimate sanction	collapses the last refuge; exclusion is total rather than social	167
nipped	the ducks	duck yard; recalled	corporal	enters the protagonist's own catalogue of himself at 170	167, 170
pecked	the hens	duck yard; recalled	corporal	agent distinct from row 3, hence counted separately	167, 170
kicked	the girl who fed them	human, custodial	betrayal of the caretaking function	the hand that feeds the yard also strikes	167, 170



Lexical marker	Agent	Social locus	Mode of sanction	Narrative function	Page
lashed out at (fire tongs)	the farmer's wife	domestic, after rescue	profanation of refuge	the hearth implement becomes a weapon in the house of rescue	170

Table 1: Modes of collective sanction: lexical markers, agents, and narrative function

Four findings follow directly. First, sanction escalates from an attributable act through collectivization to an agent named simply everyone, so that by the middle of the tale the violence has no author and therefore no addressee for appeal. Second, it penetrates kinship: his own brothers and sisters abuse him, and his mother wishes him »miles away« (Andersen 2014, 167), leaving no interior position from which the protagonist might contest the community’s verdict. Third, three of the modes recur on page 170 in the protagonist’s own recollection, marking the moment at which the external catalogue has become his self-description. Fourth, the final mode falls after the rescue, in the one household that acted to preserve him: refuge and assault occupy the same space, foreclosing the consolation that exclusion is merely local.

The inventory contains no verb, and the corpus contains no clause, with sexual content directed against the protagonist. This is recorded as a finding rather than an aside, because it fixes the terms on which the comparison in section 6 should be read.

Ability is available and disregarded. The protagonist’s mother states that he uses his legs nicely and holds himself straight, and that »he swims just as well as the rest, or, I should say, even a little better than they do« (166). His competence is thus established in the text and never contested. The duck yard’s stated ground for rejection is that he is »too big and strange« (166). The exclusion is therefore not represented as a response to incapacity, harm or idleness, but to difference as such.

The tale also records the effect of this on the protagonist. After the hunting dog passes him by without biting, he concludes: »I’m so ugly that the dog won’t even bother to bite me.« (168) An episode of survival is converted



into further evidence of worthlessness, at a moment when the contrary conclusion was equally available. The narrator later states that he was »slighted by every living creature because of his ugliness« (169). The tale marks the reversal precisely: it is broken not by an achievement but by an image, when he beholds his own reflection and sees what he is (170).

The field of attribution: The second inventory records what the protagonist is called rather than what is done to him, and its distribution by speaker is the finding. Table 1b presents it in full.

Register	Source of utterance	Attribution	Page
Characters' reported speech	the duck yard and those he meets	so big and ugly; a frightfully big duckling	166
Characters' reported speech	the ducks	the big, ugly gray one; what an ugly-looking fellow; too big and strange	166
Characters' reported speech	the old duck	he didn't come out so well; a pity you can't hatch him again	166
Characters' reported speech	the barnyard	the laughing stock of the whole barnyard; you ugly thing	167
Characters' reported speech	the wild ducks and ganders	terribly ugly; so ugly that we have taken a fancy to you	167
Characters' reported speech	the hen	such a numbskull; don't be so conceited, child	169
Narratorial discourse	heterodiegetic narrator	the poor duckling; the poor little fellow	167, 168
Narratorial discourse	heterodiegetic narrator	the ugly little duckling; the poor ugly creature	169
Narratorial discourse	heterodiegetic narrator	slighted by every living creature because of his ugliness	169
Interior monologue	the protagonist	that's because I'm so ugly	167
Interior monologue	the protagonist	I'm so ugly that the dog won't even bother to bite me	168
Interior monologue	the protagonist	I, who am so very ugly	170



Register	Source of utterance	Attribution	Page
Direct speech	the protagonist, closing sentence	when I was the ugly duckling	171

Table 1b: The field of evaluative attribution, by register

The attribution occurs in three registers, distinguished by the source of the utterance. In narratological terms the first is the reported speech of the characters, the second the discourse of the heterodiegetic narrator, and the third the protagonist’s interior monologue; the finding concerns which of them carries the epithet, and when. The community attributes with contempt: he is »so big and ugly« and »a frightfully big duckling« (Andersen 2014, 166), »the big, ugly gray one« and »what an ugly-looking fellow« (166), »too big and strange« (166), one who »didn’t come out so well« and of whom »it’s a pity you can’t hatch him again« (166), »the laughing stock of the whole barnyard« (167), »you ugly thing« (167), »terribly ugly« to the wild ducks and ugly enough to be taken »a fancy to« by the ganders (167), and »such a numbskull« to the hen (169).

The narrator attributes with pity: »the poor duckling« repeatedly (167, 168), »the poor little fellow« (168), »the ugly little duckling« (169), and »the poor ugly creature« (169). The last of these is the significant one. Pity and the stigma occupy a single phrase, so the narratorial register does not contest the community’s classification but reproduces it in a softer tone. The narrator nowhere states that the duck yard is mistaken, but instead that its object is pitiable, which concedes the evaluation while mitigating its delivery. Sympathy and contempt are thus distinguished by register and not by judgment, and »poor« is never the community’s word.

The protagonist adopts the attribution last. »That’s because I’m so ugly«, he thinks at 167; »I’m so ugly that the dog won’t even bother to bite me« at 168; »I, who am so very ugly« at 170. The tale’s final sentence retains it: »when I was the ugly duckling« (171). The epithet is therefore still his self-description after the recognition, and the recognition revises his status without revising the term by which he names his earlier self.



Read together, the two inventories yield a finding neither produces alone. The verb field documents what the community does; the attribution field documents that the classification survives in all three registers, including the one that expresses sympathy and the one that belongs to the protagonist himself. Internalization is thereby established by lexical distribution rather than asserted from behavior.

2.2 The narrative sequence

Organized by Lüthi's instruments, the inventoried actions fall into a six-phase sequence. That sequence constitutes the basis of the literary parallelism argued for here: initial isolation, trial through suffering, latent identity, revelation, public recognition, and retrospective legitimation.

Isolation, in Lüthi's account, is constitutive rather than circumstantial. It is not the accident that interrupts the story but the condition that starts it; the protagonist cannot discover what he is while surrounded by those who define him by what he is not.

Trial follows the same logic. The 13 verb-agent pairs of Table 1, and the winter that follows them, are not moral tests that earn a reward. Suffering is a structural necessity in Lüthi's schema: it establishes the conditions under which identity can appear. The protagonist does not become a swan through suffering; he discovers what he already was.

Latent identity is textually withheld. No narratorial statement discloses the protagonist's nature before page 170, and the only competing identification the tale offers is the community's error, »It's a turkey egg« (165). The reader occupies the duck yard's epistemic position for the whole of the tale's length, which is why the revelation reads as disclosure rather than as confirmation.

Revelation changes nothing about him: it changes what can be seen, and by whom. The formulation is explicit – »Being born in a duck yard does not matter, if only you are hatched from a swan's egg« (170).



Recognition is performed by observers, not achieved by the protagonist: »The new one is the most handsome of all« (170), and »The old swans bowed in his honor« (170). What alters is the perception of the observers.

Retrospective legitimation closes the arc. He is »quite glad that he had come through so much trouble and misfortune« (170); he thinks about »how he had been persecuted and scorned« (170); and the final sentence measures happiness against the period of exclusion, »when I was the ugly duckling« (171). Meaning arrives after the fact and reinterprets suffering that carried no such meaning while it was occurring.

Lüthi's rightness of events names the principle at work. He argues that a concept of the folktale in which »good« is practically a synonym for »just« is too narrow, since the genre is concerned with far more comprehensive matters than the satisfaction of a naive sense of justice (Lüthi 1982, 89). Adventures, tasks, dangers, failure and success, special abilities and their absence are important for their own sake and not only as a means of showing the workings of justice; what holds the tale's world together, in his formulation, »is not the 'justice of events,' but the rightness of events in general« (89). He supports this by an argument from economy: if the folktale existed to display the justice of things, its finely tuned system of order would be wasted effort, since the quasi-realistic story portrays such justice by simpler means and more convincingly. The tale's coherence therefore lies in structural order rather than in the reward of merit – which is precisely what the Hus–Luther genealogy requires of it, since that genealogy does not weigh a wrong against a redress but reads a continuity.

3 Reformation memory: the construction of the goose–swan figure

The goose–swan metaphor has shaped Protestant historiography for five centuries, and its formation can be traced in stages.

Hus mentioned the baked goose in several letters, first in Bohemia in 1412 and later in the Constance prison on St Martin's Day in 1414, joking on his own account that he – the goose – had not been baked yet; the Czech for goose is *husa* (Kalivoda, Smrčka and Zilynská 2017, 74). Luther elaborated



this joke into prophetic symbolism, saying that Hus wrote from prison that he would be baked like a goose, but that a 100 years later a swan would rise up like a phoenix and the swan's singing would have to be tolerated. This version first appeared in *Auf das vermeinte kaiserlich Edikt ausgangen* (1531), where Luther narrated it as a prophecy about himself. The symbols were used by Johann Bugenhagen in his speech at Luther's funeral, after which the prophecy became famous and was repeated in both German and Bohemian environments (Kalivoda, Smrčka and Zilynská 2017, 74).

A second legend attaches to the same figure and runs in the opposite direction. Friedrich the Wise was said to have dreamed, the night before the theses were published, of a monk writing on a church door with a goose feather so long that it reached Rome and touched the pope's tiara, which almost fell; asked why the feather was so hard, the answer came that it was from a 100-year-old Bohemian goose. This version was slightly mocking and aimed against Luther, and another version was subsequently created which interpreted the dream as a prophecy about Luther's performance (Kalivoda, Smrčka and Zilynská 2017, 74).

Taken together, the two legends show the mechanism with unusual clarity. The same figure served derision and legitimation, and the legitimating version was manufactured afterwards. What the record documents is therefore not the transmission of a fact but the construction of a continuity: an allusion reworked into a prophecy, and the role of prophet assigned to Hus after his death. The duckling did not become a swan; he found that he had always been one. Luther did not become the swan; he declared that Hus had announced his coming.

The figure then passed into the apparatus of scholarship and into the visual environment. The 1563 Nuremberg Postil was introduced by a text speaking of Hus, who stoked the fire; Erasmus, who lit it; and Luther, who carried the light, and also of a goose and a swan (Kalivoda, Smrčka and Zilynská 2017, 87); the goose became a fixed attribute of the reformation portrait of Hus, at his feet beside the book, an iconography that persisted into the 19th and 20th centuries (105); and the pairing appears in the Choltice stucco reliefs of 1684–85 and in figure sculptures from the turn of the 18th century in Lutheran churches in East Frisia, showing Luther with a swan and Hus with a goose.



It also reached Carniola. Valvasor reports that more than a 100 years after Hus, Luther began to cry out on certain points as the Czech goose had done before him, glossing the name: »*zakaj hus pomeni gos*«, »for *hus* means goose«. At Worms, he reports, those who advised Luther against appearing recalled Hus's case and warned that they might likewise throw the swan into the fire and roast him as they had earlier the Czech goose, adding a second gloss: »*zakaj luth po češko pomeni Laboda*«, »for *luth* in Czech means swan« (Valvasor 2009–2013, 1155–1158).

The second gloss is philologically false, since the Czech for swan is *labuť*, as the title of the Tábor catalogue itself confirms; Luther carries no Czech meaning, and the etymology is manufactured on the model of the first. Its falsity is the point, however, and the pairing is not sustained by the languages it invokes but by the symmetry it produces, and Valvasor's text shows the symmetry being supplied – the second term generated to complete a figure the first had opened.

The pyre and the goose fuse early in the iconography. The Guldenmundt woodcut of 1546(?) shows Jan Hus with a goose in flames and with a swan (Kalivoda, Smrčka and Zilynská 2017, 75), giving pictorial form to what Hus had written as a conditional: the goose that was not yet roasted is shown roasting. The image completes the joke as Luther's reading of 1531 completed the allusion, and the same conversion of the provisional into the accomplished operates in both. The figure remains inscribed at the principal sites of Hus's commemoration, in the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague and at the Hus House and Museum in Constance, where both a goose and swan appear on the walls, and the memorial at the place of the burning of 1415 stands in Constance itself (Kovačič 2025, 8:30). The iconography documented for the 16th to 18th centuries is thus still in place at the locations that carry the memory.

A methodological caution attaches to the passage. Valvasor writes in 1689, more than a century and a half after the imperial Diet of Worms. His account does not date that assembly, and the year is supplied here from the standard chronology; what his text attests is that Luther's advisers were said to have invoked the goose and the swan on that occasion. This is evidence of how the episode was narrated in the late 17th century, not of what was said in the room. Read as reception rather than as record, it is more



useful to the present argument than a contemporary attestation would be: it shows the configuration already governing the way the Reformation was reported in the Slovenian lands.

A structurally similar retrospection governs the reading of the two covenants as one history, in which the earlier is understood as ripening toward the later rather than standing as a separate account, and in which meaning is disclosed progressively instead of being given at the outset (Skralovnik 2021, 131–132). The claim is not that the reformational genealogy borrows this pattern from scriptural hermeneutics, but that both exhibit it.

Table 2 sets the six phases against the documented moments of the tradition. It thereby states the parallelism phase by phase, so that each correspondence can be assessed and, where it fails, rejected.

Phase	<i>The Ugly Duckling</i> (Andersen 2014)	Jan Hus	Martin Luther
Isolation	rejection on the grounds of difference; kinship included (166–167)	condemned and executed at Constance, 1415	condemned at Worms, 1521
Trial	the 13 verb–agent pairs of Table 1 (166–167, 170); the winter (169)	imprisonment and trial, 1414–1415	threat of execution, 1517–1521
Latent identity	textually withheld until 170; the only identification offered is the community's error (165)	the goose remark in letters, Bohemia 1412 and Constance prison, St Martin's Day 1414 (Kalivoda, Smrčka and Zilynská 2017, 74)	reads himself as the announced swan, 1531
Revelation	reflexive and unmediated: the reflection in the stream (170)	displaced: unrealised in his lifetime, performed for him in 1531 when the remark is read as prophecy (74)	self-disclosure by appropriation: the act disclosing Hus establishes Luther



Phase	<i>The Ugly Duckling</i> (Andersen 2014)	Jan Hus	Martin Luther
Recognition	the verdict of the observers (170)	posthumous rehabilitation	Bugenhagen at the funeral, 22 February 1546 (74)
Retrospective legitimation	meaning constituted after the fact (170–171)	suffering acquires prophetic significance it did not carry when undergone	continuity constructed backwards, from 1531 and 1546 toward 1415

The dates for the historical events in the second and third columns – the trial and execution of Hus (1414–1415), and Luther’s condemnation at the imperial diet at Worms (1521) – follow the standard chronology and are not drawn from the sources cited in this study, which document the metaphor rather than the proceedings. Cells carrying page references are anchored to those sources.

Table 2: Structural correspondences: the six-phase configuration

Three asymmetries become visible only once the phases are anchored, and the second is the most consequential.

The latent identity phase is empty in Andersen and disputed in the genealogy. In the tale nothing marks the protagonist as a swan until the revelation; in the tradition the goose remark exists, and the question is what it meant, which is the space in which the 1531 reading operates.

The revelation phase diverges structurally. In Andersen it is reflexive and unmediated: the protagonist bows his head »to wait for death« and instead »beheld his own image« (Andersen 2014, 170), with no interpreter between him and the disclosure, and in the absence of the excluding community. In the genealogy the phase is displaced. The only element attributable to Hus is the remark of 1412 and 1414; the reading that converts it into prophecy is Luther’s, made in 1531, more than a century after Hus’s death. Hus does not see himself; he is seen, by a successor with an interest in the seeing. Three consequences follow. The phase is realized by proxy, so that the genealogy requires two figures where the tale completes itself in one. The proxy is not disinterested, since the act that discloses Hus’s identity is the same act that establishes Luther’s. And the displacement explains why the metaphor took the form of a pair rather than a single figure: goose and swan are not two images of one destiny but two positions in a



structure that needs both, one to be misrecognized and another to perform the recognition and thereby claim the succession.

Recognition, in both cases, is an act of observers rather than of the recognized, and in both cases the observers are not the parties who excluded him. This is the textual basis of the institutional argument in section 6.

What the comparison adds to the historical record is a specification of its form. The Hus-Luther genealogy is generally discussed as a matter of confessional self-understanding. Table 2 shows that its temporal logic – identity present from the start, disclosed late, suffering legitimated afterwards – is also the temporal logic of a narrative genre, and that the genealogy is therefore not only remembered in narrative form but shaped by one. The metaphor does not merely illustrate a continuity that historians could establish independently; it produces the continuity by supplying the shape in which the events become legible as a sequence.

4 Exile and internalized worthlessness: the literary reading

Reading the tale as an account of exile and its psychological cost is established in scholarship rather than new to this study (Gambos 2004), and the present analysis contributes to that tradition the textual specificity documented in section 3.1.

Estés treats the tale type as a narrative of the exile whose worth is misrecognized by the community into which they are born. Four of her claims bear on the findings above and are used here at the level of the tale type rather than as commentary on Andersen's wording.

Exile is structural, not incidental. The creatures of the village pronounce the duckling unacceptable; he is not ugly in reality, but he does not match the others, and his siblings and community torment him with the intention of driving him away (Estés 2008, 170–171). This corresponds to the distribution documented in Table 1, including the family, and to the stated ground of rejection on page 166 of the tale: difference rather than deficiency.



The imposed judgment is internalized. Early exile begins through no fault of the exile's own and is exacerbated by misunderstanding, by the cruelty of ignorance or by intentional meanness; the basic self is wounded early, and the child comes to believe that the negative images reflected back by family and culture are not only true but free of bias, opinion and preference (Estés 2008, 171). This is precisely the operation the tale records on page 168, where survival is read as confirmation of ugliness. What Estés supplies is the name for a mechanism the tale enacts without commentary.

Recognition precedes self-recognition. At the end of the tale the swans recognize the duckling as one of their own before he does (Estés 2008, 189). The observation is exact for Andersen as well: the swans sweep toward him while he is still bowing his head to await death, and the reflection follows.

The harm is cumulative rather than episodic. Estés characterizes the protagonist's passage as lonely, cold, frozen, harassed, chased, shot at, given up on and unnourished (2008, 188), and describes him as having been tortured without mercy (187). This is a fair summary of the inventory in Table 1, and it is worth noting that a reader working independently, and from a different version of the story, arrives at the same characterization of what the narrative contains.

A fifth claim of Estés qualifies the argument rather than supporting it, and is included for that reason. She warns that survivorship, retained past its usefulness, becomes a limitation: an identity founded solely on the injuries of the worst period inhibits further development, and the movement from surviving to thriving requires releasing the survivor as a name for oneself (Estés 2008, 194–195). This bears directly on the sixth phase of Table 2. Retrospective legitimation confers meaning on suffering, but it can also fix a community or a person in the posture of the vindicated victim. The reformatory use of the goose–swan figure is open to exactly this objection, and section 8 returns to it.

Two conclusions follow. The pattern that Protestant memory used to legitimate itself is not the property of that memory; it is a general grammar of recognition after exclusion, describable independently of any confessional content. At the same time, a tale ordinarily read as consolation



for children describes, with some precision, how an imposed judgment becomes the subject's own instrument of self-interpretation, and how late its correction comes.

5 The institutional reading

Ferber records that the goose carries associations of foolishness – »goose« means »fool« or »silly one« in several modern languages – alongside a countervailing tradition of the goose as vigilant guard, from the geese of the Capitol to Chaucer's »waker goos«, and that the proverb »all his geese are swans«, attested since at least the 17th century, means that a man »sees his things or deeds as greater than they are« (Ferber 2017, 92). The two birds were paired long before the Reformation, as a commonplace of poetic modesty in which one contrasted one's own song to another's as a goose's song beside a swan's (224). The opposition was thus already a hierarchy of voices, and Luther's formulation – that the swan's singing would have to be tolerated – inverts the modesty topos into a claim of unsilenceable succession.

Andersen inverts the proverb rather than the topos. The error the proverb names is overvaluation by an interested party; the duck yard commits the opposite error, looking at a swan and seeing something defective. What both errors share is that the fault lies with the judge and not with the bird, and section 3.1 established that the misjudgment occurs in the presence of contrary evidence, since the protagonist's superior swimming is stated in the text and disregarded.

The conduct of that community can be described in five moves. The first four have analogues in Zollner's (2019) account of ecclesial failure, offered as descriptive parallels in the conduct of communities rather than as claims about equivalent harms. Zollner's vocabulary is drawn from one institutional setting, and the argument of section 2.2 applies: the ecclesial case is a species of the institutional, not its whole extension. His categories are therefore used here as the most fully articulated description available of a failure to recognize, not because the pattern is proper to churches.



Misrecognition comes first. The duck yard applies its own norms to a creature who does not meet them, never asking what he is and registering only what he is not. Zollner (2019, 695) identifies among the factors in ecclesial failure a variety of intra-ecclesial interpretations of the act itself – inconsistent frameworks under which the same conduct is understood in incompatible ways.

Exclusion follows, and is not experienced by the community as a loss. The duck yard attends to its norms rather than to what has left it. Zollner (2019, 695.697) describes the corresponding tendency to focus on the cleric offender rather than on the child.

Accountability is never taken. Nobody apologizes, nobody searches, nothing is revised. Zollner (2019, 699–701) treats the analogous phenomenon under the heading of cheap forgiveness: reconciliation detached from reparation and from acknowledgment of the harm caused.

The harm is not perceived. The duck yard does not register that its treatment nearly killed the protagonist, which corresponds to what Zollner (2019, 702) calls an underestimation of the power and subtlety of evil.

The fifth move has no analogue because it is a fact of Andersen's text rather than an interpretation imposed on it, and it is the sharpest result of this reading. Transformation fails. The duck yard does not appear in the resolution. Swans recognize the protagonist, children admire him, the old swans bow in his honor; the community that produced the 13 verb-agent pairs of Table 1 is absent from the end of its own story, unreformed and unaware. It is recalled by the protagonist on page 170, and by no one else. The tale offers the excluding community neither punishment nor repentance, but something colder: irrelevance to the outcome.

One qualification is owed here, and it narrows the finding rather than softening it. The duck yard's absence does not leave the protagonist unjudged. Zipes observes that the swan measures himself by the values and aesthetics set by the »royal« swans and by the proper well-behaved children in the beautiful garden, and that the swans and the garden are placed in opposition to the ducks and the hen yard; in appealing to the »noble« sentiments of a refined audience, Andersen reflected »a distinct



class bias if not classical racist tendencies» (Zipes 2005, 70). The resolution therefore substitutes one tribunal for another. Evaluation is not suspended; it is transferred to judges whose verdict is favorable, and the protagonist accepts their standard as readily as he had accepted the duck yard's.

The consequence for the present argument is precise. What the tale exposes is the failure of a particular community to recognize, not the practice of evaluation as such; the reader's satisfaction at the ending is thus satisfaction at a change of judges rather than at the end of judgment. The institutional critique holds – the excluding community is neither reformed nor present, and its failure is neither punished nor acknowledged – but it is a critique of one institution mounted from the standpoint of another. Applied to the confessional case, this is a sobering result: a tradition that reads itself as the swan is not thereby freed from the practice that condemned Hus, but only relocated to the side that acquits.

One objection to this reading cannot be deferred, since it bears on the thesis rather than beside it. The swan's-egg line asserts that essence precedes circumstance. Read theologically it secures the claim that truth is not created by recognition; read socially it underwrites the view that worth is inborn, and hence that those without it are correctly placed. Zipes states the point in Andersen directly: the transformation »can also be considered as a revelation of the duckling's true inner being that reinforced Andersen's essentialist thinking« (Zipes 2005, 39). On his account the tale is »pure wish fulfilment«, celebrating the rise of a humble person to great heights while conveying Andersen's »secret disdain for the masses and his longing to be accepted by court society«, so that the swan's growth and flight »become an apology for Andersen's elitist thinking« (Zipes 2005, 39). Read with the biographical evidence discussed in section 7, the force of the objection increases: the swan's egg is not an abstract proposition about essence but the author's habitual account of himself, transposed into narrative.

Two things may be said in reply, and neither disposes of the objection. The first is textual: the tale stages neither the duck yard's conversion nor its punishment, so whatever accommodation the ending performs, it performs without rehabilitating the community that produced the 13 verb-agent pairs of Table 1. The second is that an accommodationist ending



and an institutional critique are simultaneous rather than competing readings of one form, and Zipes holds both: the tale, he grants, has positive psychological features, so that the transformation may be read as »the confirmation of dreams experienced by numerous children, regardless of class« (2005, 39). That a single configuration sustains both the confirmation of the excluded and the vindication of hierarchy is not a defect of the analysis but its principal result. The structure legitimates, but what it legitimates depends on who tells it.

Institutional misrecognition is not confined to persons. A comparable pattern has been documented in curriculum policy, where a canonical testimony of a child victim was removed from Slovenian language syllabi while responsibility for the removal passed between the bodies that made it (Blažić 2022).

For an ecumenical reading this is where the comparison turns back on the tradition that supplied it. The Protestant use of the goose–swan figure celebrates vindication: the goose is burned, the swan arises, truth prevails against those who denied it. The narrative form from which that figure draws its power, read to its end, records something the figure omits – that the community which failed to recognize the swan is not present when recognition occurs, and is not shown to have changed.

6 Limitations, context, and alternative readings

6.1 Limitations of the evidence

The study analyses Hersholt's English translation and does not treat Andersen's Danish text. The corpus choice follows scholarly convention, since Hersholt's is the standard English rendering and the international discussion of Andersen proceeds largely in English; what remains translation-dependent is the enumeration. Both the selection of verbs and the choice of epithet are the translator's decisions, and an inventory of *Den grimme Ælling* might yield a different count, distribution, or set of registers. Replication against the Danish text is therefore the obvious next step and would test the findings rather than extend them; comparison across

translations would establish whether the density documented here is a feature of the tale or of its English transmission.

The comparison with the Hus-Luther tradition is analogical throughout: no claim of influence is made, and none could be supported on the available evidence. The configuration described in section 2.2 is tested against only two realizations, one literary and one confessional, both European and both within a Christian frame of reference. Whether the same six phases organize institutional misrecognition beyond that frame is an open question, and one the archetypal claim makes worth asking rather than assumes.

Two frames are used at a level narrower than their authors'. Zollner's categories describe ecclesial conduct and are applied here only to institutional conduct within section 6, never to the experience of any person. Estés' frame is used at the level of the tale type, for the reason given in section 2.3.

6.2 The national-Romantic context

Andersen wrote inside the Danish national-Romantic project rather than beside it. Korsgaard records that after 1800 philologists, poets, literati, historians and folklore-collectors took a leading role in Danish public affairs, and that Herder's influence on Laurids Engelstoft placed the people's linguistic memories – ballads, fairy tales, myths and legends – at the center of national upbringing; Christian Molbech's premise was that language reflects the inner life of a nation and that literature must therefore express it, and Bernhard Severin Ingemann defined national literature as written documentation of the people's specific spirit (Korsgaard 2022). Andersen is named among the writers who, with Oehlenschläger and Ingemann, contributed popular songs extolling the people, the fatherland and the mother-tongue.

A tale published in 1843 was thus produced within a culture that read the fairy tale as the people's memory and as a bearer of collective identity. This does not alter the structural argument advanced here, but it bears on reception: a period disposed to treat such narratives as carriers of collective identity is also disposed to receive them as this study finds confessional memory receiving the goose-swan figure.



6.3 Alternative readings

The biographical reading is the one most often attached to this tale, and it should be recorded accurately. The claim that Andersen was of royal descent, advanced most fully by Jørgensen (1987), is not open but refuted: Christian VIII was not in Denmark when Andersen was conceived, and on the evening of 2 April 1805 the young countess appeared with her father at a concert in Odense (Andersen 2005, 356–357). Jens Andersen's verdict is unambiguous: Andersen was not the son of a king but the son of a proletarian (357–358).

What survives of the biographical reading is more interesting than the claim it displaces, and it bears on the objection answered in section 6. The changeling was Andersen's own account of himself, offered as a child to a schoolfellow, claiming that he was secretly of very high birth (Andersen 2005, 357), and concealed paternity runs as a red thread through the works from the earliest writings onward (355–356). Hersholt, whose translation supplies the corpus of this study, titled his introduction to *The Complete Andersen* »Denmark's Ugly Duckling«, so the biographical reading is internal to the edition analyzed here rather than a modern imposition.

The autobiography belongs to this layer rather than beside it, and its status must be stated when it is used. Andersen records reading *The Ugly Duckling* aloud at the palace at Potsdam, seated at the table of the King and Queen of Prussia, in the place where Oehlenschläger had sat (Andersen 2008, 109). This documents neither the tale nor its structure. It documents what Andersen chose to have known about himself, in a book prepared for publication and, as Jens Andersen shows, carefully managed throughout. Read as self-presentation it bears on the objection answered in section 6, since the accommodation at issue there is precisely a longing for acceptance by court society; read as testimony about the text it would prove nothing, and is not so used here.

A reader may therefore take the tale as Andersen's own story and read its arc as personal growth through suffering issuing in transformation. Both poles are documented above. At the first, the protagonist adopts the community's classification in his own voice, »I, who am so very ugly«



(Andersen 2014, 170), and recites, as he resolves to approach the swans, the same sanctions inventoried in Table 1, judging death among them preferable to their continuation. At the second, he »beheld his own image« (170) with no interpreter present, and what he sees there is a swan. Such a reading is not displaced by the analysis offered here. It is one realization of the configuration set out in section 2.2, with the author himself in the protagonist's position, and it marks the point at which the psychological literature would enter. Herman's stage model of recovery (2015) has been applied to biblical narrative by Claassens (2016), and Poljak Lukek and Valenta (2024) examine post-traumatic growth in its religious and spiritual dimension. What such accounts state discursively, the tale states in images, and it is legible on both levels at once: literally, as the sequence documented in section 3.1, and metaphorically, as the figure of an identity present before it is perceived. Where a reader may see spiritual transformation, the text records a change in what can be seen and by whom, not a change in what the protagonist is. This study adopts neither the biographical nor the trauma-hermeneutic framework, although either could yield a relevant interpretation, since the frames applied here are limited to those specified in section 2.3; both connections are recorded as directions for further work.

Queer and neurodiversity readings would treat the protagonist's difference as constitutive rather than incidental, and would press on the resolution's requirement that he prove to have belonged to a recognized category after all. Postcolonial and Marxist readings would attend to the duck yard's hierarchy – the Spanish blood, the red rag denoting distinction (Andersen 2014, 166) – which the present analysis notes without pursuing. None of these is displaced by the argument advanced here.

A further line of inquiry, outside the scope of this study, concerns the visual traditions: the goose–swan iconography of the Reformation and the illustration history of Andersen's tale each render the same structure in pictorial terms, and their comparison would test whether the configuration described here operates beyond verbal narrative.



Conclusion

A complete inventory of the lexical markers of exclusion in Hersholt's translation of *The Ugly Duckling* establishes the tale's evidential base. Its first field yields 13 verb-agent pairs of collective sanction, distributed across every community the protagonist enters, including his family. Its second field shows the evaluative epithet operating in three registers – the community's contempt, the narrator's pity, and finally the protagonist's own self-description, retained in the tale's last sentence. Ability is present in the text and passed over; what the community acts upon is difference. Organized by Lüthi's instruments, these actions form a six-phase sequence that also organizes the reformational genealogy running from Hus to Luther through the goose-swan metaphor.

Three conclusions follow. Reformational memory is structured by a narrative form whose rules can be specified, and the Hus-Luther genealogy is an instance of that form rather than an anecdote within it; the metaphor supplies the shape in which the events become legible as a continuity, and the documentary record – from the letters of 1412 and 1414 through the 1531 reworking, the funeral of 1546, the editorial framing of 1563, and the Carniolan reception of 1689 with its manufactured etymology – shows that shape being constructed rather than transmitted. The same form describes exile and the internalization of an imposed judgment, which accounts for the tale's persistence across readerships and confessional boundaries. And the same form carries an institutional critique: a community that mistakes swans for geese exhibits a failure that later admiration does not repair, since in Andersen the duck yard is absent from the recognition its own conduct made necessary – though that recognition is performed by a second hierarchy rather than in the absence of hierarchy, so the critique reaches one institution and not the practice of evaluation itself.

A final qualification belongs to the argument rather than after it. Retrospective legitimation is not a neutral good. It confers meaning on suffering, but it can also fix a community in the posture of the vindicated, and the confession that remembers itself as the swan risks precisely the over-identification with injury that section 5 noted. Ecumenical dialogue has an interest in both halves of this result. The narratives by which confessions remember their vindication are built from a form that also records



what those confessions did not see – and that warns against remaining, indefinitely, the one who was wronged.

Statement on the use of generative artificial intelligence and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, in August and September 2026, the authors used the tool Claude (Anthropic) for language editing and proofreading of the English text, for checking quotations and bibliographic references against their sources, for converting the citations to the TEOF style, and for the structural organization of the text. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article.

Language editing

In accordance with the journal's guidelines, the text will be proofread before publication by a native speaker of English.



Data Availability Statement

As this study is based on a theoretical approach, no new research data were generated or analyzed.

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