DANISH COGNITIVE CARTOGRAPHIES OF SPACE AND TASTE: HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN'S TRAVELS IN LATIN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES[1]

Virginia Magdalena FAZAKAS PETRICĂ
Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest

Abstract: *The article examines Hans Christian Andersen's cognitive cartographies of space and taste in some Latin European countries (Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Wallachia), drawing upon spatial and food studies. An enthusiastic traveller, Andersen perceived voyages as visceral experiences, indispensable for his life and creation. The writer was attracted constantly to dynamic and solar lands, such as Italy and Spain, and his senses were fascinated not only by the spectacular landscapes, but also by the picturesque and effervescent cityscapes, with a large variety of centres of socialization, such as cafés and food markets. The analysis aims to identify the characteristics of the Danish traveller's mental gustatory and spatial maps, to point out the factors that shape their specificity, and to verify whether there any similarities among his cognitive cartographies of space and taste.*

Keywords: *cognitive cartographies of space and taste; Andersen; literary sensitivity; multisensory mapping*

Trying to embed spatial sequences in words, travel writers process them through the filter of their own emotions, prejudices, likes, and dislikes. Travel accounts represent cognitive maps, which configure—as Denis Cosgrove points out—a "material or immaterial, actual or desired," "experienced, remembered or projected" world (2). Travellers' narratives circumscribe a specific actualization of the encountered space and of the connected landmarks. The concept of space is understood in the view of Michel de Certeau's theory, according to which space (*espace*) is made up of the "interactions of mobile elements," while place (*lieu*) infers stability (117). The analysis aims to answer several questions: what are the characteristics of Andersen's cognitive cartographies of space and taste and what are the factors that shape their specificity? Are there any similarities among his cognitive cartographies of space and taste in the above-mentioned Latin Countries?

An ardent voyageur, Hans Christian Andersen experienced travelling as a visceral adventure, indissolubly connected to his life and work. In his travelogues,

[1] The research was carried out under the auspices of Eugen Lozovan Foundation, which offered me the possibility to study in Copenhagen University Library and in the Royal Danish Library for one week, and thus the access to primary and secondary sources regarding Andersen's voyages. The warm support of Professor Erling Strudsholm is highly acknowledged. The entire experience in Copenhagen favoured a comprehensive approach of Andersen's travel accounts and a better understanding of his social, cultural and professional background, as well as of the Danish space, so often invoked during the writer's travels.

BDD-A31952 © 2020 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:16 UTC)

he often confessed his insatiable attempt to map new horizons and incorporate them into his inner self: "I cannot do anything else than pack whole towns, mountains, and seas into my mind; always taking in, always stowing away" (*A Poet's Bazaar* 295). Travelling appears to be his source of vital and creative energy. As Sven Hakon Rossel points out, "in all, Andersen went abroad 30 times between 1831 and 1873" and "with the exception of Iceland, Ireland, Finland, Poland and Russia, he visited all the countries of Europe" (1). Out of all his spatial trajectories, those in some Latin Countries are particularly detailed in his travel accounts. He dedicated comprehensive accounts to Italy, Spain, Portugal, and France, attracted by their mild climate and by their rich culture. The current paper focuses on the cartographies of space and taste in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Wallachia. France was not particularly detailed in this analysis, as Andersen seems more interested in mapping the cultural and social aspects of this country and less the spatial and gustatory ones.

Andersen's literary sensitivity shapes his perception of space. His travel accounts reverberate the beauty of the landscape into picturesque, sensorial cartographies, abounding with a multitude of adjectives: "A piece of Alpine land, a majestic snow-clad mountain, towered before us; the rising sun cast suddenly its brilliant rays upon the white snow, the hill-top looked like red-hot iron, and the whole mountain became, as it were, a mass of flame" (4 *In Spain*…). The encounter with the Spanish territories is filtered through metaphorical lenses and he borrows poetic, narrative and theatrical devices, in order to convey the memories of his journeys. The peculiarities of the specific temporal and spatial decoupage—a piece of Alpine land at sunrise—are amplified in order to design *la mise en scène*: "It was a peerless view—it was an introductory scene, in colors, to the Spanish drama which was now commencing for us" (*In Spain*… 4). As Sven Hakon Rossel emphasizes, Andersen generally manifests the tendency to use multisensory approaches: "the visual sensations and sensory impressions were employed everywhere in his work" (2). Not only visual, but also olfactive and gustatory aspects are included, especially when describing the fertility of the land: "The whole plain about Valencia was fragrant and beautiful with groves of lemon and apple-trees; crowded vineyards too, with rich bunches of grapes, flourished here in the warm, ruddy earth" (*The Story of My Life* 478). The adjective "warm" completes the synesthetic cartography with tactile sensations, and a paradigm of exoticism and Edenic tranquillity is created.

Andersen's gaze lingers not only upon the lonely landscapes, but also upon the crowded cityscapes. In Medina, for instance, he depicts the vivid atmosphere of a festival in a plethora of details: "Picturesque dresses, good-looking people we saw; the females gayly laughing and chatting; the men, in many-colored mantas, riding on mules, and smoking their paper cigars, which they well knew themselves how to roll up" (*In Spain*… 7). The variety of provided information renders the dynamism of the scene. He also applies a cinematic approach, as if an invisible camera gradually narrows the perspective from general to particular aspects. This technique is used for the famous *La Rambla* promenade, the centripetal area of touristic and social life in Barcelona: "There were people from the town and people from the country, hurrying along; clerks and shopkeepers' assistants"; "Handsome, glittering cafés stood

BDD-A31952 © 2020 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:16 UTC)

invitingly there, and the tables outside of them were already all filled" (*In Spain*… 11). Andersen balances the lively view of the street hustle which reunites a diversity of people with the static description of cafés or shops: "wooden booths with oranges, pumpkins, and melons, projected a little farther out on the foot-paths" (11 *In Spain*…). Such places seem to be islands which create their own dynamics and orientate the trajectories of space, attracting the passers-by.

The animation in the street continues inside the cafés and the shops. The traveller expresses his admiration for the elegance of these centres of socialization: "the shops were brilliantly lighted, all was bustle and life" (*In Spain*… 10). Andersen particularly emphasizes the sumptuous coffeeshops: "In no country have I seen such splendid cafés as in Spain—cafés so beautifully and tastefully decorated" (*In Spain*… 15). He praises characteristics such as the good illumination, the artistic decoration with paintings and mirrors, the facilities (billiard-rooms), and the fact that they usually include a garden with fountains. The margins between indoor and outdoor become, thus, volatile: "the Rambla became more and more thronged; the excessively long street became transformed into a crowded festival saloon" (*In Spain*… 15). The Danish writer seems especially attracted to eclectic spaces, which reunite a diversity of people and things. His decoupage of space often includes details about the wide range of shops or boots in the Spanish streets. He registers cinematically the mixture of goods, from the embroidered articles to the piles of herbs, vegetables and fruits "especially gigantic onions and grass-green melons" (*In Spain*… 33). The list of items is always detailed with specific adjectives, which add nuances to the whole picture.

An example of such a picturesque mapping is the representation of "a bazaar for butchers, fishermen and fruiterers" near Alameda. The first scene is like a classic still life with hung hares: "On the wall hung bloody hares and rabbits, with meat in larger and smaller pieces." Then, the perspective shifts to the fishermen's hall with "fish and aquatic animals of all colours, forms, and sizes; among them eels, and clumsy, ill-shaped dark fishes" (*In Spain*… 42). The characteristic of Andersen's mapping is the narrowing view, which starts from the general and gradually focalizes the image on details, which are often poetic and intriguing. The visual hyperbole is often accompanied by personification: "colossal onions and grapes hung round the pillars and seemed to spring out of the dry wood" (*In Spain*… 42). Andersen's cartographies of space and taste are charged with literary sensitivity. The emphasis is on visual, but often auditive and gustatory shades complete the dynamics of the place.

Andersen records the "constant buzz of voices" in the bazaar (*In Spain*… 42), "the barking concert" of the dogs (*In Spain*… 31), the loud chat of the people in the street, as well as the specific musical accents of guitar, tambourine, mandolin, or castanets. The multisensory shades of his cartographies include also taste references. The Danish traveller is not the type of gourmand, eager to describe the daily menu or to become enthusiastic at the sight of exquisite dishes. However, he registers occasionally taste aspects and the memory of a good meal, as integrative parts of connection with the local spatiality. The act of eating or drinking is usually

BDD-A31952 © 2020 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:16 UTC)

associated with relaxation and with a break in the agitation of the travel: "We drank our chocolate in the open street" while waiting for the custom formalities; at the railway station "was a very good restaurant, kept by a Frenchman"; at the hotel he enjoys "an abundant and excellent repast" (*In Spain*… 5, 39, 14). The references to food involve the use of the first-person plural personal pronoun, which indicate the share of food with the travel companions: "a good supper awaiting us" (*In Spain*… 10); "baskets full of small common snails, of the kind that the previous day we had had in our soup" (*In Spain*… 33). As Kerner and Chou point out, "commensality is the essence of food" (1). Andersen enjoys the company of the others and the memories of some shared meals are vividly described.

Taste representation in his travel accounts has poetic dimensions, as it is transfigured from a mundane activity into a special experience by the means of comparisons, metaphors, and hyperbolic constructions: "the dishes were good, the grapes were as large as plums and delicious in taste, the melons melted in the mouth like snow, the wine was strong and exhilarating, and the weather warm enough to bake us" (*In Spain*… 31). Andersen does not describe the ingredients and does not provide many details about the dishes, but only generally indicates the main courses and uses adjectives to indicate their taste: "We got, in abundance, roasted peacocks and quails, splendid fruit, and good wine" (*In Spain*… 53). Sometimes he expresses his discontent about certain food, but without complaining excessively. In Italy, for instance, he points out their attempt to improve a lame dinner: "We got soup to which we gave a taste by putting in much salt, pepper, and cheese; we also got some boiled, and then some small fried fish, each as large as a finger. The wine was sour as vinegar, the grapes mouldy, and the bread as hard as a stone" (*A Poet's Bazaar* 67). In Spain, he registers the unpleasant snails: "we found the table groaning under a load of viands. Among these were snail-soup. There were several plates with snails, like our small ones, in their shells; it was these especially that in the brownish soup were so repulsive to the appetite; then followed cuttle-fish steeped in oil; but there were also many excellent dishes, fit to eat" (*In Spain*… 31). He is not a picky or exigent eater, as he enjoys the rest of the dishes, and his appetite and general impressions are not affected by the disgust aroused by a particular meal.

Hans Christian Andersen often recreates the whole spatial and temporal context of a delightful meal, integrated synaesthetically in a particular atmosphere. For example, he rememorates a dinner at a hotel in Madrid: "A fire blazed in the fire-place; good viands and good wine were set before us; the beds were excellent; our sleep sound, without dreams" (*In Spain*… 186). The whole passage seems to be the setting of a story, or the stage directions for a theatre play. The author's literary background and sensitivity favour such nostalgic associations: some "splendid fruits—firm juicy muscatel grapes, and sparkling wine, genuine Alicante" invoke a Spanish summer night (*In Spain*… 42). Sometimes, he becomes enthusiastic not only about the quality of dinner, but also about its low price, as it happens at an inn in Wallachia: "The viands were excellent, as was all beside, and—as we learned the day after—so incredibly cheap that none of us had ever before experienced a like tenderness to our pockets" (*A Poet's Bazaar* 270). Taste also acts as memory trigger

BDD-A31952 © 2020 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:16 UTC)

and recalls the far-away homeland: "the taste of rye-bread in the genuine Tokay reminded me of the land of rye, the distant Denmark" (277). The local Wallachian rye bread flavour functions as a Proustian madeleine which reactivates hidden emotions. As Jennifer A. Jordan points out, "taste is a complicated thing, a mixture of the biology and chemistry of our taste buds and particular foods, but shaped by habit, memory, and culture" (216). The taste of rye invokes in this case a whole well-known world for Andersen, which encompasses his social and ethnic roots.

The Danish traveller's cartographies of taste and space are influenced not only by his literary sensitivity, but also by his cultural background. He often inserts in his gustatory or spatial representations mythical or artistic references. For instance, a stripe of the Italian landscapes is compared with the legendary Hanging Gardens of Babylon: "As we arrive outside the gates of Bologna, it appears as if the road passed over the ruined terraces of an immense garden, like those which, history tells us, a Semiramis constructed" (*A Poet's Bazaar* 46). The hilly green sights of Sintra in Portugal are labelled "the new paradise," according to a quote from Byron (*In Spain*… 278), while the navigation on the Black Sea is associated with the story of the Argonauts (*A Poet's Bazaar* 268). These references configure the idea of exotic, magic lands, suspended from the common time into a mythic duration. As Paul Binding suggests, the effect of Andersen's travelogues is often a "hypnotic prose" (190). His travel texts borrow the sensitivity and the stylistic devices from the literary works.

Andersen tries to configure his cartographies of taste without being too much influenced by other travellers' opinions. He often confesses that the encountered reality is above the expectations created by his predecessors. He enjoys the Spanish food, for example, despite the contrary judgements expressed by others: "The breakfast table groaned under the weight of the viands which loaded it; roasted and boiled meat, and fish—a capital breakfast—and this in Spain, where we had been told that there was nothing to be got to eat! Magnificent fruits, excellent wine" (*In Spain*… 6). The gap between the perceived, conceived, and lived-in space—according to Lefebvre's taxonomy (38–9)—appears to be quite high. The traveller has the same experience in Lisbon. The conceived space, shaped by the views of other people, has negative connotations, while the perceived and the lived-in space are circumscribed to a paradigm of picturesque: "After all the descriptions I had read of Lisbon, I knew that I had formed a certain impression of this city, but how different it appeared before me in reality,—how light, how handsome!" (*In Spain*… 246). The author does not see dirty streets full of "thrown out carcases," "wild dogs," and "pitiful figures from the African settlements," but clean streets, lovely decorated houses, a beautiful public promenade, where "music is heard, and from the blossoming trees is shed a fragrance almost too strong; it is as if one stood in a spice shop or a confectionery, just when vanilla ices were prepared and presented" (*In Spain*… 246). The lived-in space is depicted with synesthetic harmonies, and the author configures a multisensory mapping, which tries to reveal the vivacity of the city.

BDD-A31952 © 2020 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:16 UTC)

The author is attracted constantly to the dynamic and solar Latin Countries and he enjoys revisiting them, especially Italy and Spain. Andersen's cognitive cartographies of these countries appear to be similar because the cityscapes are full of life and commotion, while the landscapes are particularly picturesque, and connote a paradigm of fertility, beauty, and vital exuberance. The meals, accompanied by good wine and a richness of fruits, and savoured in the company of friends, function as memory landmarks, and the act of eating and drinking—associated with the idea of leisure time and socialization—becomes an important part of the connection with the local spatiality. The Danish writer's mapping of space and taste bears the imprint of his professional and cultural background. They are infused with a plethora of stylistic devices, such as comparisons, personifications hyperbolic constructions, as well as a multitude of adjectives, which often induce the idea of a well-established *mise en scène.* The focus on static images alternates with the cinematic approach, especially in the case of eclectic spaces, such as a promenade place, a market or a bazaar. A characteristic of his spatial and gustatory representations is the use of the narrowing view, which starts from the general and gradually focalizes certain intriguing details. His taste cartographies register special experiences, circumscribed synaesthetically to a particular atmosphere. Another factor that shapes the specificity of Andersen's cognitive mapping of space and taste is the insertion of mythical or artistic references, which emphasize the exoticism of the lands. Even if sometimes the conceived space, woven by the views of other people, has negative connotations, the perceived and the lived-in space are picturesque and welcoming. Andersen's multisensory cognitive cartographies of space and taste are filtered through metaphorical lenses and often appear as lyrical or dramatic insertions which reverberate his travel enthusiasm.

Works Cited

Andersen, Hans Christian. *In Spain and a Visit to Portugal*. New York: Hurd and Houghton; Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1870.

———. *The Story of My Life.* Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company; Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1871.

———. *A Poet's Bazaar: Pictures of Travel in Germany, Italy, Greece, and the Orient.* New York: Hurd and Houghton; Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1871.

Binding, Paul. *Hans Christian Andersen: European Witness*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014.

Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984.

Cosgrove, Denis. "Introduction: Mapping Meaning." *Mappings*. Ed. Denis Cosgrove. London: Reaktion Books, 1999.

Jordan, Jennifer A. *Edible Memory: The Lure of Heirloom Tomatoes and Other Forgotten Foods.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

BDD-A31952 © 2020 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:16 UTC)

Kerner, Susanne and Cynthia Chou. “Introduction.” *Commensality: From Everyday Food to Feast*. Ed. Susanne Kerner, Cynthia Chou, Morten Warmind. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015.1–12.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space.* Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Rossel, Sven Hakon. *“Do you Know the Land, Where the Lemon Trees Bloom?” Hans Christian Andersen and Italy*. Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2009.

BDD-A31952 © 2020 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:16 UTC)