HUMANETTEN

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INNEHÅLL:

Samtliga artiklar har genomgått refereegranskning

Om HumaNetten

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Redaktören har ordet

Fantastik och populärkultur är de två besläktade teman som återfinns i *HumaNettens* vårnummer. Varje tema omfattar sex bidrag, denna gång på engelska, vilka presenteras i större detalj i separata förord. Tommy Gustafsson och Mariah Larsson, bägge medarbetare vid Linnéuniversitetets institution för Film och Litteratur, är gästredaktörer för temat om populärkultur, mediaengagemang och demokrati. De förklarar här hur populärkultur under en stor del av 1900-talet kom att ses i negativa termer, men sedan slutet av samma sekler kommit att ses betydligt mer positivt. Studiet finner nya utmaningar med de digitala sociala medierna och detta tema tittar specifikt på kopplingar mellan populärkultur och media. Även fantasy torde ofta ha setts med mindre positiva ögon av litteraturvetare och kulturpersonligheter fram till ganska modern tid. Med det enorma genomslaget för författare som Tolkien och Rowling och alla fantasy-produkter inom filmer, TV-serier, spel och så vidare, tas även denna genre på allt större allvar, som påpekas av Anna Höglund (institutionen för Film och Litteratur) och Hans Hägerdal (Institutionen för Kulturvetenskaper), gästredaktörerna för fantastiktemat. De bidrag som inkluderats i detta tema spänner inte bara över konventionell fantasylitteratur utan även ämnen som spökturism och TV-mediet.

För redaktionens räkning
Hans Hägerdal

Introduction: Popular Culture, Media Engagement, and Democracy

Guest editors: Tommy Gustafsson and Mariah Larsson

This special issue on "Popular Culture, Media Engagement, and Democracy" is the result of research coordinated from the Center for Popular Culture Studies (PoCuS) at Linnaeus University. PoCuS is a new and growing research environment, started by Tommy Gustafsson and Mariah Larsson in 2020, which aims to bring together scholars from across disciplines and faculties with a focus on popular culture in order to promote research, education, and collaboration with society.

Popular culture and modern liberal democracy developed together during the 20th century, and the connections between the two are manifold. Most obvious among them are perhaps those actors who have become politicians, such as the U.S President Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) and the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (2019–). There are, however, several other examples of such connections, including the film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) leading to the resurrection of Ku Klux Klan in the USA, and the effects of Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson dancing with the cow Doris in the children's television show *Abrakadabra* in 2001. Besides its great economic, cultural, technological, and industrial impact on society in the 20th and 21st centuries, popular culture has also exerted an impact – both imagined and actual – on peoples' experiences, understandings, and engagement of society, citizenship, and the world.

Many of the ideas about popular culture up to this point have been shaped by the dynamics of the 20th century. During this time, a negative understanding of mass culture, mass media, and mass entertainment was born out of a need to understand the rise of fascism in the decades leading up to the Second World War. A more positive reinterpretation of popular culture placing emphasis on active consumers only took hold in the late 20th century. Since the 1980s, popular culture has expanded in reach and diversity due to technological and demographic changes. Today, social media is an integral part of popular culture, and with it, a much larger possibility of permutations and transformations, quotation and references, fragmentation, disinformation, and propaganda has developed. As digital technologies and internet algorithms change the conditions of popular culture consumption and engagement, we need better to understand not only *how* people engage with popular culture but also *why* they do so, and why such engagement can take different social, political, and activist expressions. Although there is no lack of research on popular culture and democracy, the great majority of this emanates from the Social Sciences, which historically has been characterized

by a programmatic and deterministic view of popular culture as an undemocratic phenomenon hindering social change and intellectual emancipation. The critical theory of the Frankfurt School still looms large over Social Sciences' approaches to popular culture in ways that all but foreclose social critique within popular culture (Bottomore 2003).

Consequently, in this special issue, the contributing scholars explore various connections between popular culture and democracy with a special focus on how the engagement with popular culture phenomena has, in different ways and with different outcomes, led to acts of democratic participation where popular culture is employed in order to affect society and its citizens. Popular culture can therefore function as a common frame of reference within certain consumer groups, bringing with it a surplus significance into political, activist, or proto-political discourse (Dahlgren 2009). This surplus significance has been understood as something which happens at the point of the consumer (e.g. Fiske, 1987; Fiske 2010; Jenkins et al 2020). However, without the polysemic qualities of popular culture products, such use of them in public or social media discourse would not be possible. Popular culture is often – although not always – transformable as well as permutable and its meanings can shift and be used differently in different contexts for different purposes.

This overall approach places this special issue close to the field of Cultural Studies but unlike, for instance, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies or the "Birmingham School", this special issue aims to shift the primary focus from simple understandings of popular culture as something representational that reflects or influences societies or as a passive object to be interpreted and used differently by different active consumers to instead the interactive and transformative aspects of media engagement with popular culture and how this relates to the very idea of democracy.

In all of the articles in this special issue, focus is on what happens when a popular culture phenomenon reaches an audience, be it the powerful imagery of *Stranger Things* utilized by young climate activists on TikTok (Happer and Åberg); the conflicts arising around the rock group Rammstein's use of German history (Zander); reactions to MTV music videos in the 1980s engaging in current sexual politics (Johansson); the shifting understandings of "based on a true story" in a true crime television series about the murder of Swedish prime minister Olof Palme (Gustafsson); local patriotism reciprocated in the gritty yet poetic rendering of a city in *Thin Blue Line* (Larsson); or Cold War politics shaping the perception of *Rocky IV* (Nowell).

Although these articles share the interest in how media engagement happens, they also focus on why it happens – what is it about these television series, music videos, and films that elicits such a response? If media engagement, as Dahlgren and Hill have conceptualized the term, is "a process whereby we develop relationships with media that are not solely about consumption and economic value, but that also enable us to participate in

politics, to recognize the social and cultural, as well as economic, values of media in our lived experiences" (2020, p 3), where do these social and cultural values originate? Is it all "in the eye of the beholder", that is, up to the active and creative consumer, or does the material itself hold qualities which create possibilities for engagement, and how open, varied, and perhaps even conflicting can these possibilities be?

What all articles in this special issue point to, is the complexity of readings of popular culture phenomena. Although the specific case studies in the articles have been selected with an eye to the responses they have elicited, they still illustrate a variety of popular culture products that are not monolithic but highly diverse and allow both for insular subcultures or fandoms and for extremely varied political interpretations.

The articles can be divided into two groups based on their types of readings. In the first group, the approaches focus on media engagement, where the content of the popular culture products is communicated with some sort of message to intended audiences but where these messages are reshaped, misunderstood, or even denounced in the encounter with their different audiences. *Stranger Things*, the subject of Happer and Åberg's article, is not in any obvious way about climate change, yet young climate activists make use of the allegorical potentials of the narrative to read monsters as the threat of climate change while at the same time employing the powerful common frame of reference that the popularity of the series ensures. The controversies surrounding the group Rammstein's explicit allusions to German history, described in Zander's article, are dependent on the videos' ambiguous treatment of history, violence, and sexuality. These Rammstein videos thus become critical conveyors of a German past at the same time as the provocative content often is misinterpreted as a pretext for fascist ideology. Closely related to this misreading of popular culture is the American parents' lobbying organization PMRC's activities as they tried to ban popular music and music videos during the 1980s. PMRC can be understood as "moral entrepreneurs" in a moral panic, but they also (perhaps inadvertently) took popular music and its music video content very seriously in a way that was not entirely misguided. As Johansson demonstrates in his article, this became a double-sided media engagement where, on the one hand, the many music videos that aired on MTV during 1980s contained complex, radical, and positive messages about sexuality, gender, and sexual health. On the other hand, detractors such as PMRC, construed the content of the same music videos as damaging evidence against the artists, claiming that their songs caused immorality, and even death, among its viewers.

The second approach towards popular culture and democracy in this special issue is through reception. Reception of popular culture is, of course, another form of media engagement but with an approach where the reactions, feedback, and consequences usually are connected to certain audiences that in different ways interact with and interpret the popular culture products. In

this case, the common denominator is that the reception is conducted by professional reviewers and critics who have aesthetic and/or ideological assessments on their agenda. They thus participate in a democratic exchange in the public sphere that includes both the popular culture products assessed as well as the intended audiences to these products, and how they ought to think about them. In Gustafsson's article on the Netflix mini-series *The Unlikely Murderer* (*Den osannolike mördaren*, 2021), this latter approach becomes apparent as critics used their platform to warn audiences about the danger to democracy that the based-on-a-true-story concept could entail, which in turn risked obscuring and undermining the perception of historical accuracy. At the same time, the article demonstrates that the perception of historical accuracy is not solely based on the content, but also on who interprets that content, and with which previous knowledge this assessment is made. Similalrly, in a study of the reception of *Thin Blue Line* (*Tunna blå linjen*, 2021–), Larsson demonstrates that the geographical location of the reviewer has a decisive impact on the assessment – both culturally and politically – of the series' narrative content but foremost of the *mise-en-scène* that highlighted the city of Malmö. A vital part of the self-perception of Malmö is that its identity is diverse and multi-ethnic, a kind of melting pot that distinguishes the city from the rest of Sweden, often viewed from outside as a bad example. Therefore, the audiovisual representation of Malmö could be interpreted as a democratization. This is matched by the local reception of *Thin Blue Line* where Malmö is perceived to be misunderstood by the rest of the country, and even the world. Lastly, Nowell revisits the Cold War of the 1980s, with a focus on the so-called Cold War Cinema of Hollywood that scholars have tended to distill to a nationalist American project that projected hyper-patriotism and Anti-Sovietism, supposedly reflecting conservative values of American filmmakers, politicians, and audiences. However, with an in-depth analysis of the contemporary reception of *Rocky IV* (1985), Nowell can demonstrate that the Cold War Cinema of Hollywood provoked wholesale critical revulsion by American reviewers, who thereby misinterpreted the film's more complex meanings, since films like these were thought to jeopardize the newly started reconciliation process between the two superpowers of the era, USA and the Soviet Union. In this way, the reception pf *Rocky IV* could be interpreted as a democratic participation or intervention for world peace.

Together these six articles demonstrate that popular culture has a decisive impact on the notion of democracy, not least through different types of media engagement where a variety of consumers, audiences, and critics have interacted with the popular culture products. By shifting away from an understanding of popular culture as merely reflecting or influencing societies and instead focusing on the polysemic qualities of popular culture and the interactive and transformative aspects of media engagement, these articles can

contribute to a wider understanding of popular culture in general and how popular culture relates to the very idea of democracy in particular.

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Stranger Things on TikTok: Young People, Climate Change and Upside Down Political Communication

Catherine Happer and Anders Åberg

In November 2021, people from all over the globe came together in the Scottish city of Glasgow for the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) to discuss the most important issue of our era. As an international event with real political significance, the world's professional media descended on the city, devoting hours of coverage to progress on the delegates' negotiations and analysis of the commitments being made through the usual journalistic norm of elevating the primary definers of politicians, business groups and other official speakers (Painter et al., 2018). A highlight was the arrival of former US president Barack Obama and the tone was one of serious dialogue and decision-making amongst those in power. Meanwhile, activists, campaigners and NGOs came together as a community digitally and physically, in parks, streets and on social media, to march, protest and mobilise to demand urgent and meaningful action on climate. Here it was the arrival of youth climate activist, Greta Thunberg, who began her school strike for the climate in 2018 and persuaded millions of young people to follow her, which drew the most attention. The tone, as represented in part by the visuals of the banners and placards, was one of colour, creativity and fun dominated by young people.

In spite of the shared orientation, it became possible to identify two distinct events – the official COP and the unofficial COP or what is sometimes referred to as "the people's COP" – which can be mapped onto two very different media cultures with different modes of communication and ways of doing "politics" (Hautea et al., 2021; Molder et al., 2021). This article examines the way in which young people draw on the resources provided by popular culture to engage in an alternative form of political communications via the social media ecosystems within which they are embedded (Inthorn et al., 2012). It takes as the foundation research which shows that the majority of young people suffer from some form of "climate anxiety", a response that is rooted in a belief that governments can't be trusted to act to save the planet, and a growing disconnect from official decision-makers and a mainstream media which is aligned with them (Happer and Philo, 2016; Hickman et al., 2021). This is then not simply a question of the affordances offered by digital technologies (what we might call the supply side) but a problem with what is offered in the mainstream of media and politics (the demand side).

As a result, we argue, young people construct and embrace their own communications communities organised around trust and belief in alternative

forms of informational content and which construct action on climate change as the central issue on which to build collective solidarity and public consensus. We draw on the concept of the "civic imagination" to refer to the way in which social media users draw on the symbolic resources from popular culture to imagine alternative futures (Jenkins et al., 2016). These often highly personalised narratives allow for expressions of climate fear, anxiety and frustration and offer a novel alternative to conventional political communications which, as we will show, may be a more effective way to build common cause amongst young people.

Science fiction has been identified in particular as providing the resources through which potential futures might be imagined (Jenkins, 2017). With climate change necessarily a phenomenon characterised by its relationship to the future, texts which focus on the issue offer particular opportunities for giving life to the imagination outside of the limits of the present (Yusoff and Gabrys, 2011). Although set in the 1980s, the Netflix flagship series, *Stranger Things*, centres questions of generational conflict with young people leading the battle against the threat of a dystopian future, and therefore its role in young climate activism in social media is a case in point. Through an analysis of the series, we explore the way TikTok users select, appropriate and rework its language, imagery, motifs and themes to offer an illustration of how climate impacts, and the urgency and barriers to action are being constructed away from conventional political reporting.

Trust, information and decentred media cultures

The media model of the 20th century was one of communications from the few to the many, with broadcast media, and particularly television, central to the facilitation of the public sphere (Happer et al., 2018). There was a social contract between media and their audiences which was based on trust in the journalistic norm of "objectivity" to represent what was going on in the world (Schudson, 1978; Deuze, 2005). This involved a leap of faith in that most people would never directly experience what was represented in these accounts and there were limited alternatives to the version of events which was on offer (Möllering, 2001). Political communications within this model were oriented to the issues prioritised by political speakers and other elite groups (and away from those which were marginalised) and the norms and practices of professional journalism involving everyday routines in the collection of evidence and sourcing (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). Whilst of course political activities organised away from this mainstream media culture, the aim most often was to penetrate it on the assumption that was the only way change might occur.

The affordances delivered by digital technologies, and in particular, those of Web 2.0 which allow for the peer-to-peer model of communications underpinning social media platforms, have delivered radical change in the way in which people access information and engage with political issues.

There is no consensus on how we might understand these changes (Edgerly and Thorson, 2020), however one thing that is not in question is that the social contract between journalists and audiences to produce *the* trusted version of events – as the "core communicative institution of democracy" which facilitates the political engagement of its citizens – is fundamentally challenged (Kriess, 2017). This does though affect different groups to different degrees.

Young people as a group are particularly affected; as digital natives, they tend to begin their news trajectories with a platform notification, a news aggregate or a friend post and rarely go directly to established media outlets' own websites (Newman et al., 2023). Increasingly research has found that many young people construct their media ecologies around particular topics of interest avoiding traditional news reporting altogether, which should be seen in the context of an overwhelming choice of content and lack of trust in the media environment overall (Edgerly, 2017). But these engagement patterns also correlate with low levels of trust in conventional politics and in particular in public institutions and a tendency to invest in alternative often interpersonal sources of information (Edgerly 2017; Chevalier, 2019; Dardelli, 2021). As noted, we cannot separate these demand side questions from those of supply: for young people, their migration to these decentred cultures where alternatives to the mainstream are offered is perhaps not surprising as on the issues which they care about most and impact them directly such as climate and access to housing, political decision-making to varying degrees across Western democracies has not served their interests (Kelly and Pike, 2016; Happer, 2024).

There are competing ways of understanding what constitutes doing politics, and what makes a good citizen, though there is a continuing tendency, as noted, to found these on perceptions of a public sphere with a consensual orientation point rooted in conventional assumptions of quality of information and evidence (Kriess 2017) – which misinformation, disinformation and "fake news" circulating in social media cultures are often understood as opposing and disrupting (BBC Online, 2023). But if we take a fundamental principle of citizenship as having an informed engagement in "politics" understood as necessarily involving a contestation of power and the aim to redirect outcomes in society which affect how we live (Nash, 2001; Inthorn, 2012), we can look at the work of those in these decentred social media cultures as illustrative of doing politics differently as well as redefining what political communications look like and how they might achieve change. Here we are going to look specifically at the climate change social media ecosystem with committed activists at the centre but travelling much further than that to mobilise around the issue (Hopke and Hestres, 2018).

An interesting place to start is the quality of information. If we look at mainstream media coverage historically, the pattern is one of uncertainty and scepticism of robust scientific evidence (Boykoff, 2011), which in part

reflects the tendency to follow the elite speakers who collectively have lacked the political will to take decisive action. In this, the alternative stream of information offered by the climate social media ecosystem is closer to traditional journalistic practice in that it is broadly founded on the premise that the science from credible organisations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is settled (albeit there is also a culture of scepticism which operates on the opposite and this may be one of the issues with the loss of a recognisable communicative core). However, in terms of the ways in which the political message is conveyed more generally, in this ecosystem, we move further and further away from the conventions of news and political reporting.

Popular culture and the youth climate social media ecosystem

As youth have come to dominate the online climate movement, it has been increasingly located in the cultural space they inhabit with highly visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok being prominent which promote influencers or celebrities from popular culture formats over politicians or journalists (Hautea et al., 2021; Molder et al., 2021). TikTok enables the customisation of short-form video content, which is informal, meme-based and transient and very distinct from the sombre analysis of professional media to more emotive, entertaining, impressionistic way of planting the message. Hautea et al. (2021: 12) describe how this works:

> [I]ndividual TikToks become vehicles for personal narratives, which are then connected through features such as hashtags and viral sounds. [ ] TikTok creators connect disparate ideas through memetic themes while maintaining individualistic identities, sustain message persistence in cyberspace without explicit tethering to on-the-ground events, deploy humor and juxtaposition to disrupt dominant climate discourses.

This is one of the platforms which facilitated Greta Thunberg to grow her following, and where a TikTok short of her dancing to a now iconic pop song by Rick Astley is a valid form of political expression.

This illustration again emphasises the importance of the popular culture contexts which young people inhabit. Here we want to draw on the concept of the "civic imagination" as one in which media users imagine alternative worlds to critique current social and political realities drawing on the symbolic resources from popular culture – which speak to them and also speak to their peers – in order to drive change in society (Jenkins et al., 2016). Engagement which may drive political action is produced through a collective investment in and recognition of the artefacts, the stories, the visuals, and the references from popular culture which help to construct a sense of shared objectives (Literat et al., 2021). This may be particularly important for those who may be entering the world of "politics" for the first time, and for those

who are removed from conventional news environments (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2016).

Climate fiction (also known as "cli fi") as a narrative mode could arguably be viewed as a genre; nevertheless, certain literary scholars contend that it is more appropriately classified as a subgenre of science fiction (Milner and Burgmann, 2018). Its essence lies in addressing climate change and the potential dystopian consequences thereof. Works in the cli-fi genre typically narrate stories explicitly focused on anthropogenic climate change, either realistically or symbolically by connecting climate change and its repercussions to some form of human agency or error (c.f. Schneider-Mayerson 2018).

While *Stranger Things*, as we will discuss, does not fit neatly into this (sub) genre – in that its focus is not climate change – the narrative and symbolic elements provide communicative tools which young people have taken up to make sense of and respond to the threat climate poses. Through an exploratory qualitative analysis of TikTok videos, based on a small sample, we have identified three themes which act as visual and narrative connectives between the series and climate change. These videos were collected initially via the hashtags and keywords #climatechange and #strangerthings, with later additions as the analysis progressed (eg #vecna and #upsidedown) via the in-built search function which delivers results organised according to a range of factors including relevance to the search terms and engagement. Relevance is based on video captions, text, and hashtags[1]. For each combination of hashtags the top 20 videos were assessed and the most relevant four or five from each list analysed in depth which amounted to a total of approximately 50 videos. All examples have been reworded and/or generalised in order to protect intellectual copyright and anonymity of content producers. Due to season 4 being the latest to be released at the time of the analysis, of July to August 2023, there is a particular emphasis on this season which aired in 2022.

The three themes are: the Upside Down as an allegory of climate change, generational conflict and the trust deficit, and time running out to act. The imagery, text and audio from the series act as connectives which allow young people to produce a more developed articulation of their perceptions, fears and conflicts than the visual short form that the TikTok platform enables, and which speaks to others immersed in the same global popular culture.

Stranger Things

The Netflix series *Stranger Things* – cited as one of the platform's flagship programmes – was first released in 2016 and almost immediately moved into the centre of the global popular culture, with particular appeal to young people who are at the centre of its story and worldview. As of November 5, 2023,

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[1] https://www.tiktok.com/creators/creator-portal/en-us/how-tiktok-works/search/

season four is the second most popular Netflix-series to date, with 147,700,000 viewings, according to Netflix's own statistics.

Stranger Things tells the story of a small group of pre-teen – at the start of the narrative in 1983 – boys and eventually girls, lovingly and to some degree of complexity portrayed as nerds. They are bullied by the tougher kids, and they are ardent Dungeons & Dragons enthusiasts. The series is famous and much commented on for its nostalgic flair for the culture and aesthetics of the United States of the 1980s. The creators, The Duffer Brothers, Matt and Ross, work systematically with borrowings, references and allusions to the popular culture of the 1980s and with the cultural memory of the political climate of the time. There are several allusions to the contradictions and debates of the Reagan era in American political history, as well as clear thematic and iconographic parallels with, especially, several of Stephen Spielberg's productions. Perhaps the most obvious are the ties to *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), where a group of children take care of and protect a creature from outer space from an adult world that is perceived as incomprehensible and threatening, not least from scientists and representatives of the military-industrial complex, who want to investigate and exploit the alien life form. In *Stranger Things*, the counterpart to E.T. is the girl Eleven. She has telekinetic powers and has escaped from a research facility in the children's hometown of Hawkins.

This research facility is officially operated by the United States Department of Energy, but clandestinely, a mysterious organization led by Dr. Martin Brenner conducts experiments with the aim of developing paranormal abilities in a group of children. Inadvertently, the facility has opened a portal in its basement to a dark and dangerous parallel world or dimension, which we come to know as the Upside Down. The first season revolves around the inexplicable disappearance of one of the children, Will Byers. It is revealed that he has ended up in the Upside Down and is unable to escape. His friends, along with Eleven and a few older children, form a small group of pre-teen-investigators who aim to find him.

Season one concludes with the group rescuing Will from the Upside Down, and Eleven defeating the season's main monster, the Demogorgon. The subsequent seasons trace the group's transition from 12-year-olds to teenagers, placing a stronger emphasis on romantic subplots. However, the foundational elements established in the first season are still present: the threat from dark forces in the hostile world of the Upside Down, the struggle against mysterious organizations and external powers seeking to weaponize telekinetic children, and generational conflict with young people saving the day. In the spirit of hyper-intertextuality characteristic of the series, the rendition of the Upside Down and its "Boss" monsters are systematically associated with the lore of Dungeons & Dragons. Following the tradition of the adolescent sleuth narrative, the young detectives solve mysteries and risk their lives to protect the world, particularly Hawkins, ultimately facing the

risk of being consumed and destroyed by the destructive forces within the Upside Down (Leigh Sandford 2020, 2–7).

As noted, it is far from self-evident to consider *Stranger Things* as climate fiction – it does not neatly align with this generic framework largely because it is not directly concerned with climate change at all. The series unfolds during a time when other catastrophic scenarios were more pressing: the Cold War's threat of nuclear war and megadeath, as well as the risk of infiltration by foreign powers. Nevertheless, there are certain aspects of *Stranger Things* that render it relevant in today's climate crisis-oriented context and readable as a parable of the climate crisis, and which as we will argue young people on TikTok draw on to articulate their own climate sentiments.

The Upside Down as an allegory of climate change

The menace in *Stranger Things* emanates from the Upside Down, gradually introduced during the first half of the series' inaugural season. The Upside Down is portrayed as a kind of parallel dimension. When the protagonists of the series enter the Upside Down by passing through one of the portals that open between the two dimensions, they find themselves in a dark, negative version of Hawkins, uninhabited, and uninhabitable, by humans. Environments and structures remain the same, but in the Upside Down, the air is filled with particles resembling snow or perhaps ash from a fire. The trees in the Upside Down lack leaves, and the ground, buildings and structures are covered with roots that sometimes appear more like tentacles. The *mise-en-scène* is dominated by cool gray and blue tones, occasionally shifting, especially in season four, to warm orange tones that emphasize the Upside Down's resemblance to depictions of hell as a hot, burning place. The sky is covered with turbulent clouds that emit flashes of lightning. Often wet and slippery, the ground features pools of viscous liquid reminding of tar.

Several scholars have highlighted and commented on the connection between the Upside Down and ecological and environmental issues, thereby linking it to the climate crisis in a more developed way. Meeker and Szabari (2018, unpaginated) argue that *Stranger Things* is an example of plant horror. In this context, they point out, for instance, that the Demogorgon has a "face" that is a monstrous, flower-like orifice that opens to devour its victims. They emphasize that: "The lingering vegetal presence in the series draws the past closer to our own, more ecologically-focused moment." Building on a critique of the media portrayal of Greta Thunberg as a (white) saviour bravely advocating for the climate against a reluctant and capitalist-driven adult world, McCain and Torres (2023, 1644 and 1646) assert that climate activism historically performed by indigenous people or people of colour lack a similar media representation. They argue that even if *Stranger Things* may not unequivocally be described as an ecological narrative, parallels exist between this media portrayal and the series' depiction of Eleven, whom they suggest can be read as a Gaia figure, a deity personifying Earth.

Multiple elements in the depiction of the Upside Down can support such an allegorical reading of this domain as an image of the climate threat – and a dystopian future of how earth might look – and a form of nature's revenge against humanity, which has essentially caused its own downfall. Towards the end of season four, it becomes evident that the antagonist Vecna was, in fact, one of the telekinetic children, Henry Creel, code-named 001 and experimented on by Dr. Brenner in the early days of the Hawkins laboratory. It is also revealed that Eleven, in a telekinetic showdown, sent Henry to another dimension, possibly created in that very moment. In this dimension, Henry, it seems, constructed the negative version of Hawkins that we have come to know as the Upside Down. Later, in the beginning of the narrative in season one, Eleven accidentally opened a portal to this dimension in a powerful outburst of telekinetic energy. So, it's Dr. Brenner and his employers who set in motion the events that, by the end of season four, have reached a point of catastrophe.

In the final scene of season four, the season finale's ultimate battle between Eleven and her friends and Vecna is over. It is a moment of joy and relief after the intense drama. Suddenly, the sky darkens, and the main characters witness the air being filled with the characteristic particles previously seen only in the Upside Down. They move in the direction from which the particles seem to be coming and arrive at a beautiful summer meadow full of vibrant and colourful wildflowers. Midway across the meadow, they discover that it has turned gray, desiccated, and covered in a mold-like substance. As they gaze over a valley, they see massive fault lines where fire and smoke emerge. The barrier against the Upside Down has collapsed, and the world is threatened with destruction.

These themes and imagery offer much for TikTok users to work with and, on the platform, we see connectives being made between the Upside Down and the monsters within, and real climate impacts, such as extreme weather events in order to mobilise around a fear of the kind of future these impacts might deliver. Videos attach the hashtag #climate change to visual reportage of storms, tornadoes, forest fires and flooding, or more explicit video titles such as "the upside down is real", or "as hot as the upside down". TikTok users colourise and add dramatic music to photos of intense orange and yellow skies, what look like uninhabitable landscapes with trees and plants wilting (almost like tentacles) or ice melting and gathering dark clouds – and cut them through with scenes from the series – to visually connect climate change with its dystopian message. The sense of uncertainty and fear of an unknown future are realised through captions such as "spring in December! The birds and flowers are confused!" and "it's snowing in LA #strangerthings". A motif which appeared across the videos sampled was the explicit reference to the monsters of the Upside Down as representing climate change, as an embodiment of threat to humanity's future shown in titles such as "Vecna is climate change". In particular Vecna, also the name of a fictional character

from Dungeons & Dragons, is associated with the bringing of heatwaves perhaps in reflection of his demonic, red appearance and location in the Upside Down.

Generational conflict and lack of trust in adult decision-makers

A recurring theme in *Stranger Things* is the struggle of the young protagonists against an uncomprehending and at times hostile adult world. This is primarily highlighted in the everyday portrayal of the group's relationship with their parents and other adults throughout the series. In the first scene of the first season, the core of the group – Mike Wheeler, Will Byers, Dustin Henderson and Lucas Sinclair – is gathered in Mike's basement playing Dungeons & Dragons. They are abruptly interrupted by Mike's mother, who insists they stop because it's late. This moment does not depict a direct conflict but rather a generation gap. In the eyes of the parents, dedicating so much time to a fantasy board game is incomprehensible. The group's interest in the world of Dungeons & Dragons serves to illustrate and emphasize the idea that children and adults inhabit different realms, struggling to understand and connect across the boundaries of these worlds. As Meeker and Szabari puts it: "The Duffer Brothers' portrayal of Hawkins also emphasizes, in a highly Spielbergian mode, the experience of children who are profoundly and, in a sense, irretrievably alienated from their parents, whose bourgeois domesticity covers over pervasive trauma." (2018, unpaginated).

However, as the story unfolds, these worlds will collide and intersect, with children and adults gaining a better understanding of each other, and the children's strength and agency becoming evident to the adults. This is an aspect of the generic patterning of *Stranger Things*. For another element linking the series to the 1980s is its adherence to certain genre conventions. The show exemplifies the dramatic (and psychological) structure characteristic of the family film genre, as it evolved during the 1980s and early 1990s in the United States (Allen 1999, 113–116). The family film was commercially significant during that period and shares similarities with the story worlds of successful novelist Stephen King (e.g., *It*, 1986). The flaunting of these generic affinities in *Stranger Things* can be interpreted as yet another nostalgic nod to the cultural and media climate of the 1980s.

A more antagonistic and destructive relationship between children and adults is simultaneously portrayed, especially in the relationship between Eleven and Dr. Brenner, who oversees the telekinesis experiments in Hawkins. Initially presented as a paternal figure to the children at the facility, it becomes increasingly clear throughout the series that Brenner perceives his relationship with Eleven as a father-daughter bond. However, as he keeps Eleven captive, constantly pushes her, torments her, and subjects her to punishment, the relationship appears distorted on multiple levels. Other adult antagonists represent authorities, possibly the military, and foreign powers

(such as the Soviet Union). The precise nature of the organizations, interests, or forces these characters represent is often somewhat unclear. So, even though there are adults in the story who are on the children's side, notably Will's mother, Joyce Byers, and Sheriff Jim Hopper – who also plays the role of Eleven's more supportive stand-in father, the mirror opposite of Dr. Brenner – generational conflict remains a fundamental aspect of the narrative.

This pattern is reaffirmed in the opening of season four in the first scene at the Wheeler family's home. Similar to the very first scene at the Wheelers' in the series' beginning, the conflict revolves around Dungeons & Dragons. Mike is now fourteen years old and a member of the Hellfire Club, a role-playing group with a specific focus on Dungeons & Dragons, that is set to meet in the evening. His father, portrayed in the series as the epitome of conservative and somewhat disconnected adult masculinity, comments on the activity: "Why don't you just call it the high-school drop-out club?" and then turns to his wife, saying, "Remind me, when do they become reasonable human beings again?" This serves as a reminder of the constant but low-key alienation characterizing the relationship between generations.

Stranger Things, like many texts in popular culture, is shaped according to more or less vague but recognizable psychoanalytic patterns (c.f. Lu, Kaluzeviciute, and Sharp). At the centre of the entire drama is a subtly incestuous struggle between "daughter"/"sister," "son"/"brother," and "father" (or, indeed, "Papa"). When Dr. Brenner unexpectedly reappears in season four – presumed to be dead – he approaches the terrified Eleven with the words: "Let us work together again, daughter and Papa." It turns out that this generational conflict and twisted family romance serve as the primary driving force of the narrative and the very origin of the Upside Down itself. Henry/Vecna holds Dr. Brenner responsible for the entire catastrophic sequence of events that, in the season's conclusion, risks leading to the world's, or at least humanity's, demise. When Dr. Brenner dies, Eleven appears to share her "brother's" perspective. In any case, she denies him the reconciling words he asks for in his final moments.

In their analysis of a sample of popular climate change-hashtagged TikTok videos, Hautea et al. (2021) found a tendency to portray younger and future generations with a sense of responsibility, understanding and concern in contrast to older generations as either ignorant and indifferent or actively destructive. We can root this most recent iteration of generational conflict in the social media communications of Greta Thunberg, who, originally appearing in pigtails with homemade banners carrying out her own school strike, may have visually embodied ideas of childhood innocence but through her political action showed her assertiveness and resistance to an inactive adult world (Happer, 2019).

This TikTok sample indicates the connections between *Stranger Things*, climate change generational conflict (sometimes referred to as GenZ versus boomers) and/or corrupt or ineffectual decision-makers are made in a range

of direct and indirect ways For example, the scene in which Vecna, himself originally a victim of the corrupt adult world, describes the ”poisoning” of our world with ”unnatural structures” is hashtagged with #climatechange and #pollution whilst still and moving images of the teenage characters resisting are tagged with #savetheearth #climatechange. Meanwhile other users voice their personalised frustration with inaction on climate and failed leadership in talking head videos cut to music and imagery from the series. Across the wider sample, the theme of generational conflict is communicated through the positioning of youth as the saviours of the climate emergency – #savetheday #savetheearth #genz – alongside dismissive or hostile captioning and disruptive editing of 'boomers' speaking, including politicians and well-known climate sceptics. This small-scale analysis also suggested that these ideas and themes may be connected with questions of distrust in mainstream media and public institutions more widely, something which may not be surprising as research has shown that consumers of alternative digital media often turn to them as correctives of what they see in the former (Reiter and Matthes, 2023; Happer, 2024).

Time is running out

In the fourth season of *Stranger Things*, there are (of course) several elements that connect it to the horror tradition. Consistent with the series' predominant intertextual strategies, these often involve references to texts and phenomena that were prominent during the first half of the 1980s. The Creel family's house serves as a haunted house of a similar type as those featured in the popular films *The Amityville Horror* (1979), *Amityville II: The Possession* (1982), and *Amityville 3-D* (1983). Another example is Victor Creel, Henry's father, who, in his older age, is portrayed by actor Robert Englund, best known for his role as Freddy Krueger in The *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise, whose first part was released in 1984.

However, a significant motif appears to be directly drawn from an earlier source. In the opening of the fourth season, some children are brutally murdered. Eddie Munson, the young protagonists' Dungeons & Dragons mentor and leader of the Hellfire Club, is unjustly suspected of the murders. The young detectives gather to solve the mystery and clear their friend of suspicion. What the audience knows, and the group soon begins to suspect is that Vecna is responsible for the killings. The murders follow a specific pattern after Vecna infiltrates the young victims' subconscious. The crucial moment involves them hearing and seeing a grandfather clock ominously striking; a while after this sighting, they encounter Vecna, who kills them. The use of the grandfather clock is most likely derived from Edgar Allan Poe's short story ”Masque of the Red Death,” (1842) where a clock serves a similar foreboding function. The clock's design bears a striking resemblance to Harry Clarke's classic illustration of the story from 1913, which also

depicts a figure representing death that bears a strong visual resemblance to Vecna.

The first visual appearance of the grandfather clock shows it embedded in a tree, linking it to the notion of a menacing and vengeful nature that the entire Upside Down can be said to represent in the series. The clock can also be decoded as a variant of the Doomsday Clock, devised by a group of scientists in 1947 to illustrate the risk of humanity causing a global catastrophe, particularly in response to the nuclear threat. When the Doomsday Clock was moved to its shortest time to date before Doomsday in January 2020, one minute and 40 seconds, it was emphasized that climate change had worsened the situation (AP/ABC, 2020) (Subsequently, the clock has been moved forward an additional 10 seconds in 2023, primarily due to the war in Ukraine). Based on similar principles, the Climate Clock, set up in Union Square in New York in 2020, is counting down to its own doomsday acting as a visual reminder of how close the earth is getting to climate catastrophe.

The clock motif reaches its climax after one of the young protagonists, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, witnesses and hears the grandfather clock. Through their investigation, the group has realized that Max is now in the same situation as the previously murdered youths. She is aware that her time is measured and prepares for the worst. At the end of episode four, Max goes to her brother Billy's grave, ready to face Vecna. While her body enters a trance-like state at the grave, she is transported to The Upside Down. Mike's older sister Nancy and her friend Robin have visited Victor Creel at a mental institution and concluded that music can serve as a kind of lifeline for those ensnared by Vecna. Following a lengthy scene where Max confronts Vecna at what appears to be the core of The Upside Down, her friends manage to find a cassette tape with Max's favourite song. They put headphones on her and insert the cassette into an iconic Sony Walkman. As Max hears the notes of Kate Bush's "Running Up that Hill (A Deal with God)," Vecna loses his grip on her, and a portal opens to the graveyard where her anxious friends are calling. Max escapes and successfully returns through the portal. Thus, the song is connected to the clock motif, serving as a kind of soundtrack of hope, an opportunity to escape the inevitability of the ticking clock.

The motif of the clock ticking and time running out hashtagged with #climatechange and #strangerthings4 was also present in TikTok videos in the sample drawing out the theme of saving the planet as a race against time. In a number of videos within the wider sample, the Climate Clock in New York is used to visualise how close the earth is getting to climate catastrophe and is typically hashtagged with #timeisrunningout, #strangerthings and #vecna. Audio from the series of the clock chiming is added to build a sense of the threat of time hurtling on – such as in one video entitled "Counting down the time to save the earth" and another which features a full screen digital clock marking the time, the level of warming and volume of carbon emitted in tonnes as they move forward and grow in parallel with the rhythm

of the clock. Similarly, "Running Up that Hill (A Deal with God)" has become a viral sound meme across social media and combined with the hashtags above is used to symbolise the struggle with climate change as a race to beat opposing forces. In a typical example of a video tagged as "fighting climate", we see Max racing away from Vecna again here understood as the embodiment of climate change towards a caption of 'Kate Bush' as representing "decarbonisation" , "green transport" and "global cooling". Across these examples, we can see the way in which the young users of TikTok draw on an assumed pop culture literacy to communicate their political arguments with a sense of urgency – perhaps most explicitly done in one video which opens with a still image of one of the lead actors combined with audio of fast-paced clock beats captioned "I'm quitting" and then cuts abruptly to an explainer about climate change with the words "see, I got your attention".

Conclusion: The End (?)

Life in the Upside Down is untenable. It is an environment that, in a very literal sense, is hostile, teeming with creatures that attack and consume humans. In the fourth season, it is clarified that this environment is a human creation – given the fictional premises, such as the existence of telekinesis – and that the entire Upside Down is a kind of extension or manifestation of a vengeful entity, Vecna, who was once human and, in Oedipal rage, seeks to destroy his father, his sister, and all of humanity. By placing this mythologically tinged conflict in the context of the Reagan era's neoliberal transformation of American society, that period's overarching fears about uncontrollable social changes and the threat of annihilation through a nuclear holocaust are projected onto the current moment's urgent climate crisis (cf. Ní Fahlinn 2022, 204f). Through the conventions of the horror genre, the threat is visualized as simultaneously overwhelming and abject, in deep connection with the primal fears and emotional reactions latent in the human psyche, traditionally addressed in the genre.

This renders *Stranger Things* a text that, in the guise of nostalgic genre fiction, can provide tools for young people today to articulate understandable climate anxiety and to mobilise sentiment around the urgency of the action to be taken. This should be seen in the context of a decline in trust in official decision-makers and young people's orientation away from traditional news sources (Newman et al, 2023). New, highly visual social media such as TikTok, which focus on the production of personalised videos composed of the resources on offer in the wider culture, allow young people to draw on their civic imagination to imagine alternative futures. Here we identified three themes in the series which are particularly fruitful for young climate TikTokers: the Upside Down as an allegory of the climate threat, generational conflict and lack of trust in adult decision-making and time running out – which allowed them to construct oppositional futures – one where the world

is increasingly destroyed, and one where young people come in to the save the day (and defeat the corrupt adults responsible for the destruction). As the video is shared, users are brought into a community which organises around both a love of the series and the vision of social change it is drawn on to create. In this, in spite of some of the very negative visions of (future) threat, the civic imagination retains its inherently positive function, putting patterns of meaning and symbolism in this deeply nostalgic narrative with a dystopian twist to work to try to change the world (Jenkins et.al. 2016, 5).

As such, where professional media messaging about climate impacts are politician-led, remote and unrelatable, these young climate communicators tether this global issue to their own anxiety, anger and frustrations and crucially their own agency and capacity to drive change. If researchers working in the field of climate communications have consistently argued positive affective messages – avoiding evocations of fear and alarm – are most effective in fostering engagement (Moser and Dilling, 2007), young people are instead drawing on these emotions in order to get their social media peers to care enough to do something. This is a whole new way of doing politics and communicating political messaging in which climate change is made up of a series of personal narratives that speak to the collective cause. In this way, social media users follow one of their key influences, Greta Thunberg, who personalised the concerns of the world and made them her own.

The degree to which such communications actually deliver change is of course open to debate. As Hautea et al. acknowledge, political change of the sort needed is going to be more difficult to deliver when communications take place in a "cyberspace without explicit tethering to on-the-ground events" (Hautea et al., 2021). There is not a clear sense that young people know what to do next and the distance from conventional politics may also be a barrier here. Research indicates that they do have higher levels of concern, sense of threat and emotional response to the issue but the way in which that translates into climate or environmental action is still unclear (Hickman et al., 2021).

Facing the imminent fifth and concluding season, the Upside Down threatens to invade, take over, and devastate life as we know it. Something in the tone of the series makes it likely that Mike, Dustin, Will, Lucas, Max, and Eleven will succeed in overcoming this threat. The evidence here suggests that young climate activists, and their followers, will continue to draw inspiration from these kinds of texts, which we can only hope translates into positive action in the pursuit of a sustainable future of which they imagine themselves as guardians.

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Left, Right or Wrong? Rammstein Playing with Symbols of Sex, Violence and Dictatorship as a Test of Democracy

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At the end of the Second World War, Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper predicted one of democratic society's biggest challenges ahead: the paradox of tolerance. The main problem was how to deal with those who peddle intolerant opinions in otherwise tolerant democracies. As Popper saw it, such a situation was unsustainable in the long run (Popper 2012: 581). Indeed, in an increasingly digitalized and polarized world, his warning, although very much a product of discussions in the 1940s, have become more and more tangible. Although far-right parties are not an immediate threat to democracies, intractable divergences between continuous demands for a far-reaching freedom of speech and calls for control over contents or banning criticism of religion, characterizes the present. A dilemma is that is it not enough with consensus among the like-minded to protect democracies. As political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt emphasize, a functioning society requires coalitions that bridge differences between adversaries (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018: 218–219).

Such considerations are by no means relevant only for party politics and ways of governing. While politics increasingly tends to be professional and the parties smaller, many discussions of what the characteristic of democracy is in the 21st century are pursued in different cultural contexts, not least in popular culture and popular music. In many ways the questions are similar, but some are more specific such as: What to do if sound and vision seem to go in different directions or when symbols create reversed meanings? And what if the meaning is, or seems to be, a tribute to intolerant rulers or ideologies? In this article, these questions will be addressed by an analysis of Rammstein, an industrial metal band formed in Berlin in 1994 that first became known as a part of *Neue Deutsche Härte* (New German Hardness), and their song and accompanying video "Deutschland" from 2019.

From early on, Rammstein's spectacular stage performances, characterized above all by all kinds of pyrotechnic elements, paved the way for a broad success, not least in Germany. To this day, explosions and stunning effects on stage is the band's main trademark, characterized as a "hellish version of Cirque du Soleil soundtracked by an industrial stomp" (Young 2015). This "industrial stomp" or "Shock'n'Roll" is a mixture of the dark-voiced Till Lindemann, "heavy motors" guitar-playing from Richard Kruspe and Paul Landers, a driving rhythm section with bass and drums, signed Oliver Riedel and Christoph Schneider, and Christian "Flake" Lorenz

techno-inspired performance on keyboards (for an exhaustive description of the Rammstein sound, see Wicke 2023: 14–19). Despite, or thanks to, recurrent discussions on how the six members – who all grew up in GDR, the German Democratic Republic that was a part of the Soviet dominated Communist Eastern Europe – have described and related to, for instance, nudity, hetero and homosexuality, pornography, BDSM, violence, and Nazi aesthetics in lyrics, images, and performances, Rammstein has become the best-selling German band ever. Their records have sold in more than 20 million copies in Germany alone. In addition to a large fan base around the world, their influence can be felt in countless features on YouTube, where, for example, children's and adult choirs take on their songs in new versions, as well as folk musicians who have replaced the band's leaden sound with banjo, balalaika, and bass tuba. The many easy and easily digestible cover versions do not exclude the fact that the members of Rammstein are at the same time some of the most controversial musicians in Germany and therefore characterized as representatives of provocations as an art form (Bagińska 2022: 55–56).

Against this background, Sophia Deboick, historian and an influential writer on popular culture, has claimed that "Rammstein are not the ambassadors modern Germany wanted, but they are the ambassadors it got […] despite a constant courting of controversy" (Deboick 2022). Like her, Paul Hockenos, a journalist who is based in Berlin and New York as well as author of several books, including *Berlin Calling: A Story of Anarchy, Music, the Wall, and the Birth of the New Berlin* (2017), tried to figure out the success of Rammstein against the backdrop of a long line of provocations and scandals, including the recent allegations directed towards the band's singer and frontman Till Lindemann (Hockenos 2023). The background to his article was as follows. After a few concerts during their European tour 2023, charges of sexual assault and violence were posed against Lindemann. Several young women claimed that they had been offered booze and drugs at pre- and post-gig parties, in some cases including coerced sex with the singer. In the end, Lindemann was acquitted, but the fact that he in 2013 had written of similar situations in the poetry collection *In Stillen Nächten* (*On Quiet Nights*, 2015) added fuel to the fire and became somewhat of a "no-smoke-without-fire"-scenario.

On one hand, some scholars have emphasized that the band members of Rammstein through the years have tried to avoid, between the lines, reinforced "male displays of masculinity and heterosexual prowess". Instead, they recurrently "transgress and challenge dominant norms and perceptions of gender and sexuality" (Savigny & Sleight 2019: 51). One the other hand, there have been numerous accusations of Rammstein as a band personifying brutality, violence, and anti-intellectualism (Fuchs-Gamböck 2023: 72–76). It was along the latter line of arguing that Hockenos understood the situation. The accusations aimed against Lindemann were a logical continuation of

Rammstein's "offensive misogyny" and "toxic masculinity", also to be found in right-wing chauvinism and German far-right populism. However, in the end, Hockenos had difficulties to solve the equation. The band members have time after time claimed that they indeed have been and still are leftists (Hockenos 2023; about Rammstein's denial of the charges of being a right-wing band and/or their leftist preferences, see Gabriella 1998; Lornsen 2007; Burns 2008; Twark 2015; Twiby 2019).

Totalitarian Symbols and Popular Music – Some Examples

When it comes to popular culture in general and rock and pop music specifically, controversy and contradictions have often been intentional, used to shock and surprise both those who already are fans and those who tend to be horrified. For instance, the American rock band Kiss, with original members of Jewish origin, used SS runes instead of S:s when writing the band's name. The members of D.A.F. (Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft) mixed synthesizers, a catchy dance beat and provocative stanzas like "Tanz den Mussolini / Tanz den Adolf Hitler" in "Der Mussolini" (1981), to criticize the regimes of the two totalitarian dictators. True, a few bands did cross the line in the late 1970s and early 1980s with Sex Pistols "Belsen was a gas" as the probably most infamous example. In most other cases, as Joy Division's decision to name themselves after a part of the concentration camp that hosted sex slaves, Nick Lowe's and Elvis Costello's songs referring to Hitler in the titles or even Sid Vicious' Swastika t-shirt, were not in the slightest tributes of the Nazi regime. That they rather should be seen as the opposite becomes clear considering that American and British artists on the punk and new waves scenes, with a few exceptions, were in synch with the growing interest in the Holocaust at the time. In general, none of them gave voice to antisemitism or other forms of racism, which instead was voiced in the neo-Nazi skinhead so-called Oi Bands at the time and by some metal and hip-hop artists of later dates (Gilroy 1987: 122–130; Savage 1991: 108, 135, 249; Stratton 2005: 79–105; Robbins 2022).

Although there is a fairly common agreement on how to understand the use of Nazi symbols in the punk scene, the interpretations vary in connection to the Slovenian avant-garde band Laibach. It was formed in 1980. Soon thereafter, Laibach was labelled as "fascist" by the Communist regime due to the band members military clothing and use of totalitarian slogans during interviews. After a few years as dissidents, the band became more and more accepted in Yugoslavia, a parallel process to the international breakthrough. They have continued to dress in military uniforms, which is one of the reasons that their critique of totalitarianism has been labelled as "calculated ambivalent" (Poschardt 1999). In combination with other controversial aspects, as the two concerts they performed 2015 in North Korea, heated debates have raged at uneven intervals about Laibach as a totalitarian and/or

fascist group. The ambiguous and congenial answer from the band has been: "We are fascists as much as Hitler was a painter" (Turner 2014).

The *Enfants Terribles* of Contemporary Germany

Similarities between Laibach and Rammstein have frequently been pointed out, often with the addition that they also differ according to the formula "Rammstein are Laibach for adolescents and Laibach are Rammstein for grown-ups" (Lukes: 53). Ever since the early days of Rammstein, conflicting reactions like those regarding Laibach have been heard. One obvious reason is that the members of the band, like many others in the rock'n'roll industry, have not been strangers to highlighting violence and sex. Their fascination with fire and destruction is already evident in the name. When the band took shape, it was soon to be called Ramstein-Flugschau, referring to the crash that occurred during an air show in August 1988 at the West German airbase Ramstein. Three Italian show planes collided mid-air and crashed in flames. One of them exploded in the crowd. In total, the accident claimed 70 lives, while nearly 350 people were seriously injured. Choosing a name after the Ramstein accident was unsurprisingly controversial. When the band won a competition for amateur musicians, the connection was downplayed, which was facilitated by the extra "m" in the band's name.

A band that covers topics such as, among others, necrophilia, pedophilia, cannibalism, and incest, often from the perspective of the perpetrator, will not undoubtedly generate strong feelings (Wicke 2023: 14). Around the turn of the millennium, Rammstein was repeatedly into a little hot water, not least because of how they portrayed bondage in lyrics and on stage. The cover of the album *Sehnsucht* (1997) effectively set the tone since the band members were photographed with different kinds of gags used in sexual bondage and BDSM roleplay. "Bestrafe mich" (Punish Me) was a kind of illustration in words of the photos, and "Bück Dich" (Bend Over) even more so, including the chorus: "Bück dich befehl ich dir / wende dein Anlitz ab von mir / dein Gesicht ist mir egal / bück dick" ("Bend down, I command you / turn your face away from me / your face means nothing to me / bend down"). In an analysis of a live performance of "Bück Dich", Agnieszka Bagińska repeatedly comes back to the description "interacting with the audience" and "taboo/controversy", the latter varied in different acts of faked sexual situations between the band members and with Lindemann in a leading position (Bagińska 2022: 223–237). Close to the end of a concert in Worcester, Massachusetts in June 1999, the band played "Bück Dich". In a performance described as "graphic pageantry of BDSM", Lindemann simulated that he sodomized keyboardist Lorenz, who crawled on the stage floor tied to a leash. Although they had their clothes on, the spectacle, complete with a dominant Lindemann who during the song takes out a phallus from his trousers and thereafter squirts liquid over Lorenz, led the local police to take the two band members into custody. Thereafter, they were charged

with "lewd and lascivious behaviour". After a night in jail and a small fine amount, Lindemann and Lorenzs were free to go (Daly 2022).

At a quick glance, it may look like the arrests of Lindemann and Lorenz mostly were a matter of violation of "good taste" and a reaction to how "wholesome entertainment" should be performed. However, below the surface dwells a more problematic matter. Those who see *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (Don Edsmonds, 1974) and several other films of a similar kind, soon finds out that Nazisploitation is a phenomenon based on decadence, pulp, sexual deviance, and hardcore BDSM (Fuchs 2012: 279–294). Also, very reputable film directors such as Ingmar Bergman have from the 1970s and onwards broken "many of the previously-held taboos about the representation of the Nazi period, not least by acknowledging the ambiguous fascination of fascism" by including, for instance, "spectacle, glamour and erotic perversion" in their works (Elsaesser 2008: 167). The members of Rammstein have followed in their footsteps and acted out varieties of Nazisploitation in their lyrics, on stage, and in videos.

More directly visible links between aesthetics connected to Nazism, either as a historic reality or how it has been perceived in popular culture, came to the fore in connection with two of Rammstein's videos. They became the subject of vehement criticism, mainly because they were visually linked in various ways to National Socialism and its propaganda and aesthetics. At the same time, the lyrics in "Links 2, 3, 4", one of the tracks of the album *Mutter* (2000), alluded to Bertold Brecht's and Hanns Eisler's revolutionary song "Einheitsfrontlied" (United Front Song), written for the Communist Party in 1934 and popularized in the GDR by Eisler, combined with the lines "Sie wollen mein Herz am rechten Fleck / Doch seh ich dann nach unten weg / Dann schlägt es links" ("they want my heart on the right, but when I look down, it beats on the left"). However, the leftist references seemed to evaporate when they were combined with the animated images in the video for the anthemic and march inspired "Links 2, 3, 4". In it, an anthill symbolizes mass society and the mobilizing power of propaganda. Several of the scenes alluded to *Triumph of the Will* (1935), Leni Riefenstahl's controversial depiction of the Nazi party days in Nuremberg in 1934, although with an ironic twist (Kopanski 2022: 288–363; Wicke 2023: 19–21).

The uproar was even greater two years before, in connection with the video to "Stripped" and the ideological collision between representations and symbols from radical left and far-right, respectively. Depeche Mode, the British electronic band, recorded "Stripped" for their album *Black Celebration* (1986). The appearance of red stars, cogs, mallets, and a muscular Stakhanovite worker atop a mountain on early album covers, at a time when the Cold War was very much present, resulted in some reviewers labelling the four man band as Marxists while others paved the way for an ironic reading: "It wasn't quite Test Dept. or Laibach, but it was of the same root ethos" (Smith 2017). The video for Rammstein's cover version of the

song did not invite contradictory interpretations since it mostly consisted of sequences from *Olympia*, Riefenstahl's documentary from 1938 about the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. The criticism aimed against Rammstein was extensive in Germany. It did not help that the band members pointed out that although the footage was taken from Riefenstahl's film, the message of their video, shot 60 years later, was radically different from the original. The video for "Stripped" was not intended as a provocation but as a thought-provoking one, Rammstein's defense read. The sextet argued that several of the aesthetic ideals that had characterized Nazi cultural policy lived on in modern popular culture, but without causing any protests. The many outraged reactions their videos provoked demonstrated, if nothing else, the difficulties in criticizing and condemning aesthetics by using them (Poschardt 1999; Weinstein 2008: 130–147; Fuchs-Gamböck 2023: 77–85).

A Video Exposé of German History

A common theme in the reactions to Rammstein is their so-called "German-ness", sometimes labelled "teutonisch". On the surface, this theme is connected to hypermasculinity, militarism, nationalism, and the recurrent accusations of fascistic aesthetics and return to "the Teutonic spirit" of warrior symbolism from Roman times to the present, summed up in the statement that they make music "to invade Poland by" (Cummings 1998; for an in-depth discussion of the meanings of "teutonic", see Kopanski 2022: 290–291). Members of the band have emphasized that many of their fans do not understand German, which increases the importance of the visual aspects in videos and stage performances. The same conclusion has been drawn by some of those who have analyzed their music and live shows (Young 1998; Poschardt 1999; Robinson 2013: 30–51).

As the American journalist and writer Claire Berlinski has highlighted, there is more to the German influences than meets the eye. Beside the rather obvious inspiration from their 19th century world famous compatriot Richard Wagner's strive for a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total artwork in theatrical but very modern, pyrotechnical special effects version, she points out inspiration from other classical composers as Carl Orff and Franz Schubert. The traces from the 1920s are also there to be found, especially with reference to the *neue sachlickeit* (New Objectivity), and the paintings of disabled soldiers by Otto Dix. At the same time, Rammstein has recurrently used symbols from Nordic and German mythology in similar ways as the National Socialists did in the 1930s and 1940s with the effect that a song like "Reise, Reise" (Voyage, Voyage) alludes to the Middle High German "Risen, Risen" (Wake Up), which in turn bear a resemblance to the SA song "Deutschland Erwacht" (Germany Awaken). Furthermore, their songs

> with sado-masochistic sexual themes, such as *Mein Teil* (My Part) – a homage to
> the German cannibal Armin Miewes, who in 2002 shared a final meal with his

> willing victim of the man's severed, flambeed organ – would not have been out of place in Julius Streicher's Der Sturmer, a newspaper even many Nazis found excessive in its pornographic obsessions and sensationalism (Berlinski 2005).

Journalist Ulf Poschardt and popular music scholar and musicologist Jan Peter Herbst are among those who have emphasized that Rammstein also is closely connected to a Germany still dealing with the reunification in October 1990 and the difficulties of adjustment for those who used to live in a Communist society to Western, capitalistic values. Herbst suggests that the members of Rammstein have, while still using provocations, humor, contrasts, recontextualizations and ambiguities, tried in later years to "improve the history of their country in foreign perception and to help the Germans to make peace with their nation's past" (Herbst 2021: 56).

The difficulties to succeed with the latter became obvious in connection to the release of the self-titled album released in March 2019. On home turf, the videos of "Radio" and "Deutschland" became widely debated. The environments in which the former video takes place recall the Weimar Period, the 1930s and 1940s of Nazism and the post-war decades of East German communism. Both the lyrics and the image sequences comment on the restrictions that surrounded radio broadcasts in both the Third Reich and the GDR. The music that Rammstein stands for, and which can be played on today's music channels in the Western world without restrictions, becomes in the imagery a revolutionary force that, for unknown reasons, mainly affects women.

However, this video was a gentle western breeze compared to "Deutschland", directed by the graphic artist and director Eric Remberg, better known by the stage name Specter Berlin. For just over nine minutes, Rammstein contributes a kind of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, meaning "coming to terms with the past", via a recurring feature of scenes in red, yellow, and black, the colors of the German flag, in the shape of an exposé of (a selective selection of) German history, where all scenes are tied together by a red laser beam that also appears in the video for "Adieu", with Specter Berlin, once again, as director, from the album *Zeit* (2022).

To the tune of Jóhann Jóhannsson's "The Beast", taken from the soundtrack to *Sicario* (2015), the video opens in 16 A.D. in the Teutoburg Forest, where seven years earlier the Romans suffered a decisive defeat against Germanic tribes. As the ancient historian Martin M. Winkler has pointed out in *Arminius the liberator: Myth and ideology* (2016), the renewed interest in this battle in the 19th and early 20th centuries helped to strengthen and consolidate German nationalism. The Germanic leader Arminius became the main character in all kinds of heroic stories and the subject of romantic historical paintings and huge monuments. He was also used by – in turn – the propagandists of the German imperial era, Nazism and East German communism.

However, Rammstein does not join the chorus of praise. As the soundtrack transitions into "Deutschland", it becomes clear that the Teutoburg Forest is just one of many places in German history marked by dark, destructive forces or ambivalence, including a heavy-handed arrival of Christianity, and the brutal German inquisition, including burning women alleged to be witches. A recurrent person is Germania, the personification of Germany, in the guise of the black actor Ruby Commey who appears in various settings. She is particularly striking as a regent in golden armor on a battlefield with fallen knights, portrayed with clear inspiration from John Boorman's film *Excalibur* from 1981.

Other stops on the dizzying and sometimes macabre journey are a distant future, drawn with inspiration from the *Alien* films, as well as the Middle Ages, partly illustrated with the help of voracious monks during the plague and references to the legend of the Ratcatcher of Hamelin. In addition, allusions are made to 19th-century monuments such as the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and Walhalla in Regensburg, Bavaria.

However, the focus of the video is on the 20th century. Much attention is paid to the Weimar Republic, from its turbulent beginnings in the shadow of the end of the First World War and attempts at revolution via hyperinflation to decadent entertainment. Another scene highlights the terrorists in the Rote Arme Fraktion (RAF). Yet another one show how Lindemann, dressed as East German communist leader Erich Honecker, re-enact the so-called "socialist fraternal kiss" with the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. The band members are also portrayed in Honecker's office alongside Sigmund Jähn, the cosmonaut celebrated in East German propaganda who participated in the Soviet space program (Anderson 2020: 146–167).

The Everlasting Holocaust

The release of the video "Deutschland" was preceded by a YouTube teaser on March 27, 2019. The thirty-six-second clip consisted of four of the band's members, dressed as concentration camp prisoners. The trailer ended with the Rammstein logo supplemented by "Deutschland" in Fraktur font and the information that the complete video would be released the following day. The long version included book burnings, cooperation between state and church during the Third Reich, the 1937 downfall of the zeppelin Hindenburg and the submarine warfare of the Second World War. The incomparably most discussed sequence was the abovementioned, taking place in what resembles the Peenemünde rocket base. Four of Rammstein's members play concentration camp prisoners awaiting execution, surrounded by caricatured, sadistic SS soldiers, while V2 rockets are fired in the background. Like the plot of a revenge movie, they finally manage to reverse the roles and execute their tormentors.

In a wide-ranging debate about Rammstein's video that took place in German media, including leading dailies and magazines such as *Süddeutscher*

Zeitung, *Stern* and *Die Welt*, both pros and cons were distributed. Most of the discussion revolved around the representation of the Holocaust, ranging from accusations of it being "far-right clickbait" to praises of it as an exceptional example of anti-fascist art (Braun 2019). A few historians, politicians and representatives of Jewish organizations called the element that referred to the Holocaust tasteless, trivializing, and repulsive, concluding that Rammstein had crossed the line. Iris Rosenberg, a representative of Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust archive and research center, spoke in more cautious terms. It would be unfortunate, she believed, if works of art were condemned solely because there were references to the Holocaust in them, regardless of whether they are provocative or not. Others praised the video. Authors like Sonja Zekri and Felix Stephan believed that Rammstein had never succeeded so well in uniting all the qualities that they developed into theirs during a more than twenty-year long career. On top of that, Rammstein managed to put their finger on several bone of contentions in a long-standing German history of displacement. The video was, they summarized, great art (Braun 2019; Twiby 2019; Kopalski 2021: 148–150).

The Polish-born and well-known journalist Henryk M. Broder, the son of Holocaust survivors, agreed with the praise. Rarely have so many sore points been activated at once, he concluded. That the video is provocative was not a disadvantage. On the contrary, Broder continued, that is what allows it to work in the service of enlightenment and illustrate the German predicament of always having to remind ourselves of a history that can never be anything other than problematic (Broder 2019).

Till Lindemann probably agreed with Broder. In "Deutschland" he formulated it as wanting to love his native country at the same time as he wants to condemn it. His heart is on fire, but the breath of the nation is cold. Its love is both a curse and a blessing, which is why Lindemann cannot reciprocate her love. The motto of the national anthem "Deutschland über alles", in the song changed to "Deutschland über allen", is deeply problematic. It is this attitude that can explain why German development has repeatedly gone in the wrong direction. The dilemma is, he summed up, that Germany is a young nation with an old history.

As we have seen, this interpretation was not apparent to many in the German debate, most likely because of Rammstein's controversial reputation. Others could however discover the "anti-patriotic" meaning of "Deutschland", including their effort to, with the help of an obvious and conscious historical anachronism, highlight the marginalized German history by making an Afro-German woman the driving force of it through the centuries (Twiby 2019; Lawes 2020). Bearing this in mind it could be wise to remind oneself of Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of Rammstein. As he saw it, the members of the band did *not*

> adopt "totalitarian rituals", with their costumes and shouting. In fact, they imitate
> fascism in the most extreme, fanatical way possible. But that makes you realize

how ridiculous and absurd it all is. Basically they are doing the same thing as what Charlie Chaplin does with Adolf Hitler in *The Great Dictator*. They make fun of fascism. If you are afraid that not everyone will see this, you are seriously underestimating the "ordinary man" (Žižek 2024).

The Rammstein Test of Democracy

In principle, though, the division is seldom as clear-cut or absolute as Žižek suggests. Let us return to the concert in Worcester, Massachusetts in June 1999. It had not only a noticeable impact upon how Rammstein was perceived in the US. It also meant a feeling of disillusionment among the band members. Growing up in the GDR, United States were among those who opposed the Communist system as the aspirational alternative. However, the "Land of the Free" turned out, as the members of Rammstein experienced the situation, to be intolerant and close-minded, at least in Massachusetts. Hardly surprising, the lyric that the US "ist wunderbar" in "Amerika", a song from the album *Reise, Reise* (2004), is deeply ironic, clarified in the chorus "This is not a love song".

Related to how liberty and freedom have been perceived, Rammstein probably assumed that there ought to be no obstacles; on the stage they should be free to do what they wanted to do in the name of artistic expression. The other side of the coin, which also is a part of the democratic tradition, is to protect citizens from a diversity of manifestations that could be or indeed are offensive or harmful.

Regarding history, yet another layer is added since we could claim that there is a benefit of hindsight. However, how to relate to the past, especially such a difficult one as the Nazi era, is a question with no clear answers. Unarguably, Rammstein has not always managed to do justice to history by using symbols from the past, as in "Stripped". With "Deutschland", the ambition was higher, and the result became debatable in a way that forced adversaries to reason about not only Nazism as a thing of the past, but as a troublesome legacy that still must be dealt with. In other words, Rammstein contributed to clarify that dictatorships like the Nazi one are of relevance for democracies today, whether we like it or not. To have such a discussion is truly a test of democracy.

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"The Show Must go On": 1980s Music Videos, Moral Panics, and AIDS

Linus Johansson

The 1980s was a time of flourishing popular music as well as sizable profits for the cultural industries in Western Europe and USA. It hosted adolescents wearing puffy pants and shoulder pads, listening to portable cassette players, and casually watching MTV, but the period's legacy is somewhat obscured in clouds of hairspray and shimmering pastel colours. Nonetheless, despite shallow fads, famous artists would occasionally address political issues such as The Cold War, apartheid in South Africa, or famine in Ethiopia. This was done through arguments and charity, but foremost by musical means, including videos with social messages. When objecting against the nuclear arms race, protesting constitutional racism, or raising funds for charity, sympathies were easily won. However, when popular musicians used sexual references, controversies arose. While some artists engaged in humanitarianism, others caused moral panics, and some did both.

During the mid-1980s, public debates about sex and youth cultures were highly polemic, either emphasising freedom of expression and the democratic right to information or calling for censorship and legal retribution. Conservative organisations such as the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC), initiated trials against a selection of artists, claiming their songs caused immorality, and even death, among its adolescent listeners. The debates hardened during the AIDS-crisis, and homosexual men were particularly shamed. However, several popular artists publicly questioned such allegations. They took part in the democratic process by participation in debates, television appearances, and by arranging music festivals. Moreover, they produced music videos, which allowed them to reach out to audiences in ways that their opponents could not.

The aim of this article is to analyse this clash as part of a participatory democracy, where both sides used different resources and approaches to push their respective perspectives through, and where the music video became a crucial means for political activism. In order to follow this development, this article will address four overlapping historical phases from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, when relationships between music videos, sexuality, and moral panics were particularly tense and always transforming, in Western Europe and USA. First, a historical introduction provides examples of genderbending music videos from before the outbreak of moral panics (1978–1984). Selected examples show a variety of contemporary genres, but apart from being popular, the videos have been selected because of sexual themes in lyrics and as portrayed in the videos. The second phase involves the early

history of MTV, the formation of the PMRC (1981–1985), and an example of a banned video. Regarding the third phase, the broader debates about AIDS (1984–1987) are analysed in terms of moral panics, contrasted by a charity video celebrating sexual diversity. Lastly, the article draws attention to changes in debates, and the de-escalation of the AIDS-crisis (1988–1992). A video with educational aims illustrates this, the final phase of this history.

As a multimodal expression, music videos belong to three domains of meaning: words, music, and images (Burns 2019: 184). The singer is usually the main character (Goodwin 1992: 77f), integrating lyrics into melodies, and expressing moods such as joy, sadness, aggression, or eroticism. The voice is an instrument, found in different settings. Some play guitars, some synthesizers. Some use live drummers, some use drum machines, and so on. More than pointing out patterns and subjects, the aim is to display diversity. 1980s music videos have been described in terms of an abandonment of narrative (Goodwin 1992: 143), but in these analyses, they are instead seen as compiled of multiple, or parallel stories. Visual narratives such as the use of live images, retelling the lyrics, creating parallel stories, et cetera, are explained step by step, through close analyses of the videos. (Burns & Hawkins, 2019, Osborn 2021, and Abbott 2022). Analyses of individual videos mostly reflect my own interpretations, although references to other literature on the subjects occur. My understanding of the period is above all informed by historians such as Gaar (2002), Nekola (2013), Sanneh (2022), and Weeks (2018). Accounts for moral panics are mainly based on Gustafsson & Arnberg (2013), using Cohen (1972). In combining these approaches, the article aims to explain how music videos from the period 1978–1992 both caused moral panics about sex and questioned conservative values. The first phase of this historical process involves music videos from the late 1970s towards the mid-1980s.

Genderbending Music Videos: 1978–1984

The term "music video" was hardly used prior to MTV, but due to the channel's instant success it soon became common (Tannenbaum & Marks 2011: xxxviii). Sex has many visual features, and videos challenged moral boundaries in more ways than songs alone could. This phase follows chronological examples belonging to popular genres such as disco, new wave, synth pop, and glam metal. The first video played on MTV was, fittingly, The Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star" (1979). It was not a disco song, but it had a steady dance-beat, hi-tech sounds, and a sing-along chorus. The video displayed mediating technologies of its time, such as the radio, television, and tape recorders, but also sophisticated machinery such as computers, synthesizers, and transparent tubes transporting women in science fiction-styled outfits. It applied visual effects including colour filters and multilayered imagery. Although not outspoken about sexuality, the glamorous outfits and male falsetto singing exhibited genderbending features.

Among the more obviously genderbending videos of the time were Sylvester's "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" (1978), Village People's "Go West" (1979), and David Bowie's "Boys Keep Swinging" (1979). The so-called "Queen of Disco", Sylvester was openly gay, as were most members of Village People, (Sanneh 2022: 330) whereas Bowie was bisexual (Sanneh 2022: 57; Whiteley 2013: 253). Sylvester's video mainly took place on a glamorous dance floor, with lots of disco balls and himself singing falsetto in in various outfits, including a glittery dress. With its call-and-response vocals, Village People used a live performance narrative (Osborn 2021: 65), in a television studio, in front of an audience. The rock-oriented sound of Bowie's "Boys Keep Swinging" did not reveal much influence from disco, but the video did. Most of the narrative was based on a simulated performance (Osborn 2021: 66), in other words, recorded in a studio without an audience. Bowie wore a simple, elegant suit, dancing confidently on a small stage. His gaze met the viewer's as he sang about the wonders of being a "boy". He looked and sounded like a man, but the video was rather "a mockery of male bonding" (Reynolds & Press, 1995: 18).

In 1979, disco suffered a backlash. At the baseball promotion event Disco Demolition Night, which had strong connections to the "Disco Sucks"-movement, albums were publicly destroyed, similarly to a book burning (Sanneh 2022: 326). This did not stop Diana Ross from recording the joyous disco song "I'm Coming Out" (1980). Like the expression "to go west", used by Village People, "to come out" commonly refers to revealing one's homosexuality. This was not necessarily the intended message (for all listeners), but Ross knew about her gay fans and had likely heard the expression (Sanneh 2022:107). There was no official video at the time, though a live recording in Central Park in New York was made as late as in 1983, although not in a television studio but on an open-air concert stage. She wore a purple, glittery dress and her excited voice inspired to showing the world you are more than they assume. On MTV, many early music videos showed inspiration from the late 1970s, including dresses, sexual themes, innuendos et cetera, but there were few controversies around these videos (Castanger 1999: 184). Objectification of women became more common during the 1980s, and so did moral debates on the issue. Artists' genderbending attributes did not necessarily decrease but changed over time. The following four examples represent popular genres and sexual themes from 1981 to 1984.

In 1981, new wave was mainly seen as a form of rock, perhaps closest to punk and glam rock. But the genre also took influence from disco, and in turn inspired early synth-pop. Duran Duran's "Girls on Film" was a hit song, but the original video was too sexually objectifying for MTV, and an alternative version was made. Both were based on a simulated performance narrative, including a stage, a photo studio, and female models. In the original version, the stage turned into a catwalk, eventually expanding into a massage parlour. The editing was simple and plain, and not processed with advanced video

technology. It featured lightly dressed women, one of whom was a model, and another a nurse in a short dress, filmed from a naughty worm's-eye view. Nonetheless, one of these women was a champion sumo wrestler, and one a cowgirl, riding a man with a horse mask. Despite objectification, all these women eventually demonstrated greater strength than the men in their company. In the censored version, however, most women were models, dancers, or musicians. Apart from a few short extra narratives, focus was on female faces and postures, and much effort had been put on editing and video effects.

Objectification was not always and only a display for the heterosexual male gaze, with half-naked girls dancing among phallic symbols et cetera. African American duo The Weather Girls, formerly backing vocalists for Sylvester, turned perspectives around in "It's Raining Men" (1982). As they hosted a news broadcast on television, men were indeed falling from the skies outside, with umbrellas, hats, trench coats, and tight underwear. They were objectified in ways that could have attracted both heterosexual women and homosexual men, but they played an active part in the narrative. The song showed influence from disco, but also featured powerful, gospel styled vocals. Fittingly, the words "Hallelujah" and "God bless" occurred, complemented by sexual innuendos, such as to go out into the rain to get "absolutely soaking wet". A few minutes in, the men danced almost naked around a heart shaped bed. Enjoying the performance, the Weather Girls themselves lied on the bed, shown from a bird's eye view.

Lacking a chorus, Eurythmics' "Sweet Dreams" (1983) repeated one verse, a wordless bridge, a middle eight, and a solo. The "clinical coolness" (Rodger 2004:19) of a monotonous, single phrase synth bass line and a drum machine strictly following the pulse, kept the song together. Androgynous singer Annie Lennox assumed the character of a dreadful world leader, wearing a suit, short, red hair, colourful make-up, and gloves. Like a dominatrix (Reynolds, Simon & Press 1995: 295; Rodger 2004: 17), she wielded a cane in phallic gestures, as if it were a baton. Advanced technology such as space rockets, television screens, and computers appeared in multilayered colour-filtered imagery throughout the video. In contrast, there were sensual close-ups of Lennox's closed eyes and moving lips. She sung about people who want to use or abuse, while others want to be used or abused. Her voice was sad and worried, and the sadomasochistic innuendos were alternated by stricken, wordless calls (ad lib-singing). Lennox's voice intensified as she switched from "head" to "chest" voice, when returning to the same note (Rodger 2004:20). Diverging from the lyrics, the video's extra narratives (Osborn 2021: 68) included farm life, meditation in front of gold records, and passing a river.

Presumably in conflict with most examples so far, 1980s heavy metal has been described as "the opposite of androgynous pop" (Horrocks 1994: 155), but also, as in itself, androgynous (Walser 1993: 12). Heavy metal was not a

new genre, and the androgyny in mid-decade glam metal bands had more in common with earlier metal genres than with contemporary pop. Denim and studded leather supported a macho image, while long hair and make-up looked feminine. Van Halen's "Hot for Teacher" (1984) was playful towards masculine ideals and desires, but it also objectified women. The main characters were the confused nerd Waldo, some cool, teenage versions of the bandmembers, and teachers in bikinis, wearing beauty pageant ribbons while dancing on pupils' desks much like strippers. Singer David Lee Roth displayed genderbending features such as extravagant dance moves, feminine postures, flamboyant vocals, and a both muscular and androgynous stage persona (c.f. Walser 1993: 45f; 129; Whitley 2013: 257). The video primarily followed the lyrics and hosted two explicit narratives (Osborn 2021: 68). One was set in a school bus and one in a classroom. There was also an embedded narrative with no connections to the lyrics (Abbot 2022: 248). Although the song lacks obvious musical similarities with disco, this narrative took place on a dancefloor with a disco ball, where band members performed a less than well-rehearsed variety act.

In summary, this phase started with the genderbending late 1970s and was followed by sexual objectification during the early 1980s. Disco had had strong influences on songs and videos up to the turn of the decade, but gradually lost it. New genres emerged and with them, new ways of expressing sexuality.

From MTV to the PMRC: 1981–1985

The second phase of this history began in August 1981, when MTV premiered. Initially, the channel mostly played videos and featured only a few hosted shows (McGrath 1996: 5). However, during a decade of great success, it launched news broadcasts, genre-specific shows, and their own video awards.[1] Music videos would not have had its success without it, but the channel's position regarding democratic rights is problematic. MTV made it easier for the industry to target specific groups of listeners, but also mediated political commentary. And while it supported humanitarianism, it promoted objectification of women. Daytime videos on heavy airplay (Goodwin 1992: 12; 80) featured lyrical innuendos, sexy voices, and to some extent erotic imagery, but were not verbally or visually explicit. Provocative videos were shown late at night, and offensive ones were seldom played at all. As sexuality became a more common theme, family-, school-, and religious communities pointed out depraved songs (Chastagner 1999: 180f; Gaar 2002: 352; Nekola 2013: 421) and held artists responsible for premarital sex, sexually

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[1] Goodwin (1992: 143) summarises the schedule for "a typical day in March 1991", including VJ sessions, themed or genre-specific shows, news, hitlists, field reports, et cetera. McGrath (1996) explains MTV programming such as Club MTV (pg 168f), 120 Minutes and Dial MTV (pg 147), and Yo! MTV Raps (pg 173). Some of these shows, and a few more, are discussed by Sanneh (2022: 33f).

transmitted infections, abortions, homosexuality (Nekola 2019f; Brackett 2018: 285), promiscuity, perversion, sadomasochism, and necrophilia (Walser 1993: 154f).

Although MTV was not infused with moral panics, it banned Queen's music video "I Want to Break Free" (1984) (Desler 2013: 395). Unlike the original version of "Girls on Film", there was nothing sexually objectifying in it, apart from singer Freddie Mercury's hairy torso in an extra narrative. Sentimental lyrics about a painful breakup, over a riff-based 12-bar dance groove, was hardly provocative either. In the main embedded narrative, however, band members were dressed in drag, as characters from the long-running British television drama *Coronation Street* (1960–). This was too much for conservatives but appealed to crossdressers among Queen's fans (c. f. McLeod 2001: 200). Wearing his moustache and arm hair, while also wearing makeup, a short latex skirt, pink earrings, a tight, pink, sleeveless top, and pushing a vacuum-cleaner, Mercury was the most genderbending character in the video. Guitarist Brian May, in hair rollers and a dressing gown, sipping of a cup of tea, portrayed a charming lady, while bassist John Deacon was a grumpy old woman who wore a hat indoors while reading a magazine. The one who most imitated a woman, in this case a cute little girl, was Roger Taylor in a school-uniform, a curly blond wig, and a hair clip. As drummers are commonly thought to be overtly masculine, this was most unexpected. But he reminded the viewer of his position in the band by tapping his foot to the beat. Starting with the band name, genderbending was far from new in Queen's image and one of their albums is titled "Innuendo" (1991). However, they were also known for complex musical arrangements and virtuoso performances, celebrating both rock and classical music, including opera, such as in "Bohemian Rhapsody" (1975) (McLeod 2001: 194). Nonetheless, "I Want to Break Free" was a simple pop song with a humorous video, which conservatives did not find amusing at all.

In 1985, the PMRC was formed by the "Washington Wives", mainly spouses of highly ranked American politicians, led by Al Gore's wife, Tipper Gore, and James A. Baker III's wife, Susan Baker (Chastagner 1999: 181f). PMRC wrote letters to legislators and gave interviews in the media, describing youth music as among other things "pornographic" (Brackett 2018: 285; Nekola 2013: 419f; Tannenbaum & Marks 2011: 278). On their list of "The Filthy Fifteen", artists with "the worst" songs were prosecuted. The list included four categories, including violence (13,3%), drugs (13,3%), the occult (13,3%), and sex (60%). The trials were largely unsuccessful but led to an agreement by which the industry started to use a warning label with: "Parental Advisory / Explicit Content" (Brackett 2018: 289). However, as moral panics faded during the 1990s, these warning labels came to be seen a mark of authenticity and used in marketing (Castagner 1999: 189).

The PMRC's outspoken ambition was to inform and protect the public, but some of the accused artists had the same ambition. The will to replace fear

with knowledge was expressed by among others Madonna, who emphasised a need for sexual education for adolescents (Gaar 2002: 353f), and by Cyndi Lauper, who featured in the charity project USA for Africa the same year. Their EP "We are the World" was a project of participatory democracy, supporting starving Ethiopian children. It was released in March 1985, three months after Band Aid's "Do They Know it's Christmas", and two months before the PMRC was formed. In July, the Live AID concerts raised both money and consciousness (Gaar 2002: 350). Furthermore, it coincided with the growing AIDS-crisis.

Moral Panics and the AIDS-Crisis: 1984–1987

Around 1980, the as-of-yet unknown virus HIV began a fast-growing pandemic (Sörberg 2008: 155), first discovered among the gay population where it had devastating effects. The third phase of my study begins in the mid-1980s, when HIV and AIDS had become a symbolic matter (Weeks 2018: 317), labelled a "gay disease" (Björklund & Larsson 2018: 1) or a "gay plague" (Weeks 2018: 323).[2] As the culture wars continued (Nekola 2013: 407f), conservatives found support in biblical hermeneutics (ibid: 411) and "the official attitudes towards homosexuality hardened significantly" (Weeks 2018: 321). Due to the stigma associated with HIV, moral panics made it difficult, even dangerous, for homosexual men to get tested. The disease had originated in Sub-Saharan Africa, where it had already caused enormous suffering due to global injustices, unequal power, and economic troubles (Björklund & Larsson 2018: 1). Eventually, the worst consequences affected the "oppressed, marginalized, disenfranchised, or poor" (ibid: 5). When the virus spread among heterosexuals in the West (Weeks: 323), injecting drug users quickly became the largest group (Sherman 2007: 193), in turn seen as "deserving" the disease (Gaar 2002: 353f).

Although political tensions were high, artists' reactions to the AIDS-crisis could be peaceful and subtle. Despite not directly referencing AIDS, Dionne & Friends' version of "That's What Friends Are For" (1985) (originally by Rod Stewart in 1982) collected money to support both public awareness and clinical studies (Gaar 2002: 356; Attinello 2013: 223). Dionne Warwick's mixed gender, cross-racial super group featured Stevie Wonder, Gladys Knight, and Elton John (Sanneh 2022: 114). The performance was overwhelmingly merry, cozy, and serene. Taking place in a recording studio, the video was not particularly provocative, although it featured a gay white man kissing a straight black woman on the cheek (Sanneh 2022: 124).

The mid-1980s was clearly a time of moral panics. Cohen's (1972) model of this phenomenon illustrates how self-proclaimed experts identified a

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[2] In Sweden, for example, people with HIV were obliged by law to inform any potential sex partner about their HIV status, and many meeting locations for homosexual men, such as sauna clubs, were closed (Björklund & Larsson 2018: 3f).

supposed threat, appointed misusers, selected victims, and identified offenders referred to as "Folk Devils". It also explains the calls for legal action, reliance on hearsay, and focus on symptoms rather than on causes (Gustafsson & Arnberg 2013: 20f). While some emphasised the need for medical treatments, others suggested that AIDS helped society by eradicating unwed mothers, prostitutes, and other people in need (Sherman 2007: 190f). Debates "dramatised and illuminated in an unprecedented way all the contradictory tendencies of the decade" (Weeks 2018: 322). Gustafsson & Arnberg's (2013: 20f) adaptation of Cohens model applies to these events in several ways. First, moral entrepreneurs with access to mass-media and public debates declared themselves experts. Second, cultural expressions that were expected to corrupt young listeners gave them the image of the misusers, and innocent sufferers of HIV, such as children, were simply victims. Third, Folk Devils were appointed, such as artists who made sexually provocative music videos or worked against moral panics, or homosexual men who were blamed for the HIV pandemic. Duran Duran and Queen both experienced censorship, although their videos were much different in terms of their sexual themes. Furthermore, Queen played an important part as moral panics about AIDS entered its final phase.

Education, Charity, and the Death of a Star: 1988–1992

Dionne & Friends were early to promote education and clinical studies, but more followed, and debates changed towards the end of the decade.[3] In 1988, the American Health Resources and Services Administration received funding for support of children infected by HIV. In 1990, the charity television special Red Hot & Blue featured video performances of Cole Porter songs by among others Sinéad O'Connor, Annie Lennox, Debbie Harry, and Iggy Pop. A compilation album and a few singles were released. In 1991, Ann and Nancy Willson, with Paula Abdul and Pat Benetar, recorded a song for children with HIV, which economically supported The Paediatric AIDS Foundation (Gaar 2002: 356).

The same year, in "Let's Talk About Sex", female African American hip hop trio Salt-N-Pepa addressed free speech about sexual issues. In proclaiming open-mindedness, they were "positively peddling youth counsellors" (Reynolds & Press 1995: 300). The simulated performance video was provocative, and considering their gender and ethnicity, daring. It was introduced by talk about how embarrassing the topic is, but most of it

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[3] In 1988, Danish singers Sanne Salomonsen and Thomas Helmig collaborated with the song "Den jeg elsker, elsker jeg" ("The One I Love, I Love"), a cheerful dance track which recommended monogamy and mutual trust. In some embedded narratives, the video featured nudity, including a male couple standing close enough for their penises to almost touch. Like with Duran Duran's "Girls on Film", a censored version was made. The lyrics did not mention HIV, but profits supported education and research administered by Danish AIDS-fondet.

featured them self-confidently rapping and dancing. A few young men on a suburban parking lot joined in the chorus. Like "It's Raining Men", the video mainly took place at a broadcast station. It included a conflicting narrative (Osborn 2021: 69) in which a show host tied to a chair had his mouth gagged, with the word "censored" written on the tape. A few minutes in, a standing human skeleton, also with its mouth taped over, wore a red, triangular warning sign with the word "AIDS" on it. There were no such references in the lyrics.

Despite Salt-N-Pepa's reminder, the new decade seemed open for new perspectives. But in November, Freddie Mercury passed away, which had dramatic aftermaths. He had been openly bisexual, but his HIV status remained unconfirmed until just days before his death. Queen's penultimate video, "The Show Must Go On", was released posthumously. It consisted entirely of embedded narratives, collected from some twenty previous videos, including above mentioned "I Want to Break Free", but also "Bohemian Rhapsody" (1975), "Under Pressure", (with David Bowie) (1981), "Who Wants to Live Forever?" (1986), "The Invisible Man" (1989), and "I'm Going Slightly Mad" (1991). Multiple stories take place in various environments and settings, showing enormous audiences, blissful moments backstage, weird costumes, various video effects, and a naughty camera angle or two.

Mercury's demise induced a collective response, which indicated that moral panics towards these music videos were failing their cause. In April 1992, after just five months, The Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert was held at the Wembley Stadium in London, with an audience of over 70.000. It featured several above-mentioned artists, but also George Michael, U2, and Axl Rose, with Liza Minelli performing the most fitting grand finale, "We Are the Champions". A caring speech to the audience, and to youth at large, was given by Elizabeth Taylor. Profits supported the Mercury Phoenix Trust, which is still active.

Concluding Thoughts

To summarise, my account for these four historical phases addresses different aspects of a democratic process, in which artists, the media, and moral entrepreneurs played the main parts. First, sexual themes and genderbending was common in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but always transforming. Second, MTV played an important part in the dissemination of sometimes provocative music videos, which led to moral panics on behalf of the PMRC. Third, the AIDS-crisis was blamed on, among others, gay men, drug users, and prostitutes, while artists were organizing to support clinical studies and public education. And fourth, a need for free speech was expressed, a great star fell, and a tribute to him implied that the moral panic about AIDS was reaching its end.

Returning to Cohen's model, moral panics started with excessive accounts of a perceived threat, in this case blaming artists for moral decay, and gay

men for AIDS. Moral entrepreneurs demanded retribution such as the PMRC trials, and various legal restrictions. Such interventions were characterised by accusations, demands of disproportional measures, and exaggerated examples (Gustafsson & Arnberg 2013: 21). Conservatives put blame on Folk Devils for luring youth and spreading HIV, while artists strived for solutions. These culture wars were based on participatory democracy on both sides, although using different resources. More than gaining attention in the media, conservatives wrote letters and prosecuted artists, while artists used music videos, most of which appeared on MTV. It is notable that explicit references to HIV almost never occurred, although artists were open about their political causes. Despite reacting against moral panics, these videos were not provocative, and thus, conservatives could not call for censorship.

Artists found various ways of using music videos belonging to different genres and carrying many messages. They were based on visual narratives showing common objects as well as innovative technologies, exploiting clichés and sexual imagery while spreading messages of social concern, using old subjects and new video effects, and telling multiple stories in ways that letters, public statements, and legal charges never could. In democratic participation, artists explored new ways to express sexuality, communicate political ideas, and help victims of disasters and crises. And as the show went on, times changed.

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Based on a True Story: Historical Accuracy and Democracy in *The Unlikely Murderer* (2021)

Tommy Gustafsson

On June 10, 2020, the biggest police investigation in Swedish history was closed. For 34 years, the unsolved murder of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme had consistently been headlining news. A series of suspects and various theories about the murder had nurtured Swedish public imagination, not least through popular culture, thus making the assassination of the Prime minister a part of Swedish historical consciousness. However, when the prosecutor in charge of the investigation, Krister Petersson, announced the closing of the case at a highly publicized press conference, he pointed out a man called Stig Engström as the prime suspect in the murder, although at the same time stating that the evidence would have been too weak for a trial (Thornéus and Rapp 2020). Engström, who had died twenty years earlier, had become infamous in the investigation and in media as "Skandiamannen" (The Skandia Man), as he had claimed to be an eyewitness to the assassination in 1986. Over the years his inconsistent stories and whereabouts on the murder night turned into theories that he, in fact, could have been the murderer (Palmeutredningen – polisens arbete).

Not long thereafter, in December 2020, Netflix announced that they would produce a television miniseries about Engström, boldly proclaiming in the press release that he "was named as the likely perpetrator of the murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme, [and] managed to elude justice right up to his death through a combination of audacity, luck and police sloppiness". In addition, the press release posed insinuating questions like, "how could the police let him get away, even though they were always on his trail?"[1] (Press release 2020) to raise interest for the production, placing it in the crime/police procedure genre.

The announcement immediately sparked a debate about popular culture's reliability, centered on concepts such as historical accuracy and based-on-a-true-story. Journalist Kristina Hultman criticized Netflix's decision to produce the series and claimed that the trend to openly fictionalize reality started in the 2010s, thus pushing the boundaries further and further for what is possible to do in the "drama factory". Hultman firmly interpreted this change as an attack on democracy, claiming that the great liberties that producers took with the past "rais[ed] concerns that fiction is increasingly beginning to function as a weapon" aimed at citizens who are not able to

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[1] All translations from Swedish to English is by the author.

defend themselves as "[their] understanding of the past (and thus of the present) can be manipulated" (Hultman 2020a).

This overall feeling that something had changed is shared by several critics, among them British historian Antony Beevor, who assert that we, as a society, have entered "a post-literate world, where the moving image is king" and where the based-on-a-true-story concept has increased in scope and throughout all media in the last decade, and that this is a "market-driven attempt to satisfy the modern desire in a fast-moving world to learn and be entertained at the same time" (Dyer et al 2015).

While it is hardly surprising that audiences want to be entertained, the question is what happens when entertainment is combined with a didactical perspective that in different ways aim to tell the truth or to present historical facts in engaging ways? What does the concept "based-on-a-true-story" entail, and how does this concept interact with the notion of historical accuracy? And could the use of reality and the past in popular culture really pose a threat to democracy?

The aim of the article is to discuss how popular culture can or cannot affect democracy, with a focus on how the perception of historical accuracy has been influenced by the concept of based-on-a-true-story and thus popular culture's changed role in contemporary society. Of particular interest here is a focus on the national/transnational components in the perception of historical accuracy. This could be described as a process whereby media, in this case television, is not only about consumption and economic value, but also about participation in a democratic dialogue that recognizes cultural, social, and national values of media pertaining to audiences' lived experiences and memories as well as the production realities of the television producers (Dahlgren and Hill 2023: 3).

To achieve this, I will focus on the debates and reviews rather than on analyses of an audiovisual text. Here one recent example will be discussed and analyzed: the Netflix produced and distributed television miniseries *Den osannolike mördaren* (*The Unlikely Murderer*, 2021). *The Unlikely Murderer* becomes an interesting object of study because the mini-series is a Swedish production about a very Swedish subject – the assassination of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986 – but since the series was distributed internationally, this creates room for a discussion of the national component from an inside perspective (the national reception) as well as from an outside perspective (the international reception), connected to the perception of historical accuracy, the concept of based-on-a-true-story, and the possible impact on democracy.

Historical Accuracy and the Concept of Based on a True Story

Historical accuracy and based-on-a-true-story are two related concepts. You could claim that historical accuracy is the main perspective taken by critics,

or the audience at large, while based-on-a-true-story is the perspective of the producers who use this as a signal to highlight and market their products *as something that actually has happened* to satisfy an increased demand. This of course implies that the book, the film, or the television series are in some sense in fact true, and by extension historically accurate. However, with an increased production of based-on-a-true-story fictions, the perception of historical accuracy has changed, mainly depending on two interrelated factors.

The first is connected to changes in the global media market as Web 2.0 was developed around the turn of the last Millenium. Although prominent pay television channels like HBO had previously competed against broadcast television in USA and against public television in Europe, the formation and transformation into what are now numerous streaming services or subscriber-funded-video-on-demand (SVOD) with national as well as global reach changed the rules for television fiction in several decisive ways. Media scholar Amanda D. Lotz points to the fact that SVOD's like Netflix and Disney+ are not dependent on ratings as the commercial networks have been since their inception. This means that mainstream productions have gone from "the least objectionable" to "anything goes" in order to satisfy certain segments of the subscriber base instead of trying to satisfy the (potentially) whole audience (Lotz 2022: 37–39). Essentially, the autonomy from ratings has provided SVOD producers with an artistic freedom that have steered productions into what many scholars have deemed to be a "Golden Age of television", characterized by more graphic dramas, complex narratives, and bigger budgets (Weeks 2022: 3–6). Two other decisive effects of the move from dramas that must be "loved by all" to dramas that can be "loved by some", is that the differentiation of representation have been allowed to blossom (Lotz 2022: 37–38). That is, when it is no longer necessary to fill all four quadrants (male/female, young/old) of network television, the scope of representations have increased, and with this also former niche perspectives based on, for instance, sexualities and ethnicities. Similarly, this niche perspective is applicable to the differentiation of the national origin of the product, and by extension the stories deriving from different national canons when producing audiovisual history.

For instance, Netflix has approximately 240 million subscribers, is available in 190 countries, and has produced content in 41 countries (Lotz 2022: 165), and it could be argued that the whole field of audiovisual history therefore is up in flux and thus fragmentized via SVODs like Netflix. Even so, just between 2015 and 2020, the percentage for US produced commissions has decreased from 80 to 50 percent on Netflix, thus leaving greater room for national none-US productions (Lotz 2022: 93). However, these national Netflix-productions are similarly affected by the outlined changes and although these national productions of audiovisual history, such as *The Unlikely Murderer*, is based on specific national canons, they are often

conveyed from a perspective that leave room for a differentiation of representations, not least vis-à-vis the national component. Likewise, it could be argued that national public service productions, like for example those produced by Swedish Public Television (SVT), equally have been affected by the changes that the "Golden Age" has contributed to.

The fragmentation of audiovisual history has affected the concept of historical accuracy and the concept of based-on-a-true-story. Historical accuracy, above all substantiated using expensive *mise-en-scène*, serves as a currency for audiovisual history that authenticates the historical content as well as the stories told. Hence, historical accuracy is audiences' (and critics') first encounter with the history portrayed, which means that audiences and critics can embrace, or choose to turn a blind eye, to alternative perspectives in television productions based on that currency. Based-on-a-true-story, on the other hand – the producers' calling card to attract audiences – have traditionally built its appeal on stories that mainly have referred to historically unknown people (true crime, sports, exceptional events). However, today the based-on-a-true-story concept is increasingly used to tell stories about known historical events and historically significant persons, but from a novel perspective, thus contributing to the fragmentation of, foremost, nation-based historiography.

A case in point is the Swedish-Danish big budget film *Hammarskjöld* (2023), a biopic about Dag Hammarskjöld, a Swedish diplomat most notable for serving as Secretary-General of the United Nations between 1953 and 1961. With emphasis on a portrayal of Hammarskjöld as a man who struggled with his sexuality, the film blend thriller elements with laconic historical information that leave audiences in the lurch. As one Swedish reviewer clarifies, "despite the elaborate script, politics in real life is rarely as clear as it is in fiction, and it usually takes a great deal of general education or mere pre-understanding to be able to absorb that information fully" (Hedlin 2023).

The second factor is harder to define but could be connected to the fear that Hultman and Beevor expressed. That is, a changed perception of historical accuracy insofar that there is a tendency that audiences do not really care if all historical facts are correct, or in the right place, just as long as they can experience history. Then again, the seemingly indifferent reception and attitude towards facts could largely depend on historical ignorance among general audiences, which in the last twenty years or so has gotten used to anachronistic treatments of history for commercial and entertainment purposes, something that came to prominence with historical films like *A Knight's Tale* (2001) and *Marie Antoinette* (2006), both becoming infamous for their conspicuous use of anachronistic elements such as modern rock music on the soundtrack. Although *A Knight's Tale* was criticized for this "misuse" of the past, some reviewers interpreted the film in line with a democratization of history where the historical verisimilitude is connected to different forms of identity – class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity – which in itself

could be seen as a democratization of history – saying that this was a "lighthearted and loosely tied fantasy following the aged old theme (and American Dream) of challenging the social order" (Anon. 2001).

Another nearby media example of how history is employed with intentions that are disconnected from past, are the numerous internet memes of Hitler (Bruno Ganz) raging in a scene taken from the German film *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004). While *Downfall* is a highly serious audio-visual adaptation of history, these memes keep the original German dialogue but add subtitles in different languages and thereby create wholly new readings of the scene where, according to film scholar Vinzenz Hediger, "the ubiquity of the figure of Hitler, if nothing else, seems to indicate that the trial of accuracy and correspondence can no longer fully do justice to the circulation of images of historical events" (Hediger 2010: 105–108).

The National Reception of *The Unlikely Murderer*

Netflix distributed *The Unlikely Murderer* is a crime drama television series in five episodes about the still unsolved murder of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986. The series concentrates one of the main suspects, the so-called The Skandia Man or Stig Engström, a self-proclaimed eyewitness to the assassination. In 2016, amateur detective Lars Larsson singled out Engström as a possible murderer in the book *Nationens fiende* (Larsson 2016). In 2018, this theory was taken up by the journalist Thomas Pettersson in a highly noticed non-fiction book (Pettersson 2018), and as mentioned, in 2020, the prosecutor Krister Petersson named Engström as the prime suspect when closing the case. Soon after the prosecutor's spectacular statement, Netflix announced that they would produce a series about Engström, based on Pettersson's book.

The debate that followed this announcement touched upon the question if historical accuracy and the concept based-on-a-true-story constituted a threat to democracy as television fiction in general and Netflix in particular had pushed the boundaries too far with its manipulations. Hultman even warned that "if we do not look out – we may have a public that knows all about conspiracy theories, but not very much about our past" (Hultman 2020b. See also Gustafsson 2020). In connection to this, Beevor has claimed that Faction-creep – the blurring of the lines between fact and fiction – has increased in audiovisual media, which he in turn connects to a development where the creation of human drama overshadows the component of historical accuracy as audiences are becoming more nonjudgmental (Dyer, Geoff et al 2015).

Nevertheless, criticism that perceives audiovisual history as a mere manipulation of the past, and as undermining democracy, is usually based on the perception that factual history and common knowledge of the past is connected to the democratic process – which is the main reason that children are taught history in school. Typically, this knowledge is connected to national processes and, to paraphrase political scientist Benedict Anderson, to

an imagined common past which supports the notion of the nation in the guise of nationalism (Anderson 2016).

Accordingly, Hultman's attack on *The Unlikely Murderer* before it even was produced can be connected to this sense of a common past. In this particular case, the traumatic murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme, which sent shockwaves through Swedish society and still is part of Swedish historical consciousness, in fact changing the relation between politicians and citizens in Sweden (See, for example Berggren 2010 and Wall 2023).

From a Swedish viewpoint it is important to note that the prime suspect in the assassination had been a man called Christer Pettersson who was sentenced and then acquitted for the murder in 1989. The view that Pettersson was the murderer is also an opinion expressed as a common historical memory by Hultman who states that *The Unlikely Murderer* "is created with the premise that Christer Pettersson cannot have been the perpetrator. The problem with that attitude is, of course, that he can. Pettersson was acquitted in the Court of Appeal, but there is still plenty of evidence left, which makes it perfectly reasonable to stick to the hypothesis that he was guilty" (Hultman 2020).

In connection to this it should be mentioned that another high-profile Swedish thriller, *Sista kontraktet* (*The Last Contract*, 1998), already had acquitted Pettersson, portraying him as an innocent scapegoat to the murder, why it is possible to question if Hultman's opinion really could constitute a common historical memory of the event. In any case, in Hultman's view, the common historical media memory of the event tends to trump the actual legal judgement of the case.

The Unlikely Murderer was released in November 2021 and the producers exploit a variant of the based-on-a-true-story concept where they have it both ways regarding historical accuracy and truth. Each episode starts with the introductory text, "Based on an unsolved crime", which is then combined with a disclaimer that closes each episode, "It has not been proved that Stig Engström murdered Olof Palme, but the Swedish police and Prosecution Authority suspect him". This ambivalent wording simultaneously points out the mystifying aspects of the unsolved murder and the fact that the police and the prosecutor suspected him, thus exonerating the producers of any wrongdoings at the same time as the finger heavily is pointed at Engström as the culprit. In addition, after the "Based on an unsolved crime" text in the first episode, the time indication "February 28, 1986 – 11.21 P.M." is shown and while the screen is still black, two gunshots are heard, and then audiences see a distressed Engström, gun in hand, and Palme in a pool of blood on the street. Although the series, in the end, is somewhat inconclusive as to whether Engström really killed Palme, the overall impression is that he was guilty.

The great majority of Swedish reviewers appreciated the series, especially the *mise-en-scène* and the acting, ingredients that increase the sense of historical accuracy in historical fiction, thus making it credible (Toplin 2002:

47–50. See, for example, Larsed 2021; Lindblad 2021; Sundell 2021). At the same time, they dismissed or even rejected the idea that Engström actually was the murderer, or as one reviewer framed it: "[b]y drawing a believable and engaging portrait of him, the series – in absence of the definitive answer to the murder mystery we will never get – provides a colorful picture of who Engström was, and a satisfying explanation for why he is now considered the likely killer" (Fjellborg 2021. See also Minell 2021; Tapper 2021). Hence, the appreciation of the meticulous recreation of Stockholm in the 1980s and the acting abilities of foremost Robert Gustafsson as Engström, a comedian acing in a serious role, does not seem to have changed the overall historical view of the event. What emerges is a more nuanced view of *The Unlikely Murderer* as a well-produced piece of entertainment in correspondence with the long line of Nordic Noir productions that have flooded the national and international markets in the last twenty years (For an overview, see Toft Hansen and Waade 2017).

However, what the reviews did agree upon as historical accurate was the failed police investigation:

> The series paints a picture of an incompetent police force that was clearly not prepared for a case of such dimensions, and/or did not have routines for it. Internal power struggle and prestige destroyed the investigation, and both the PKK and Christer Petterson became critical red herrings. It can be argued that this was at a time when the police in the Nordic countries still lived in the age of innocence, with a completely different crime rate than we have in 2021 (Aavatsmark 2021. See also Tapper 2021).

When the case officially closed in 2020, the assassination of Palme and the numerous theories of who had done it had been headline news for 34 years in Sweden. The obvious failure of the humongous police investigation, the largest in Swedish history, had thus become an established historical fact that the producers of *The Unlikely Murderer* could build their story, and therefore historical credibility, on in a way that circumvented the question of liability in a double sense.

Even so, relatives to Engström as well as relatives to another character – a gun collecting neighbor who in the series provides the murder weapon to Engström – reported the series for defamation of deceased (Lindkvist 2021; Laurell 2021). In response, Netflix put out a statement: "Dramatizing a theory connected to one of Sweden's biggest national traumas is challenging – and we respect that the image painted by some of the characters is not shared by everyone. The series is inspired by an already existing story […] and does not claim to present a solution to the case – something that is also made clear in connection with each episode" (Anon. 2021b). The preliminary investigations were dropped without action and, furthermore, these allegations did not spark any further debate about the requirements for historical accuracy in popular culture.

The International Reception of *The Unlikely Murderer*

Although *The Unlikely Murderer* is a local production, the Netflix involvement meant that it was distributed internationally, thus making it possible to compare the Swedish reception with the international reception regarding historical accuracy and the based-on-a-true-story concept from an outside perspective. Using reviews from four different countries: Denmark, Germany, Norway, and UK, the first thing that can be established is that the Swedish television series did not ignite any debate concerning popular culture and democracy and its relationship to historical accuracy. This probably depends on the circumstance that, although both Denmark and Norway are culturally and geographically close to Sweden, the assassination of Olof Palme is not part of the historical consciousness of these countries. This can be exemplified by the fact that the convicted but acquitted Christer Pettersson – so clearly a part of the Swedish historical memory of the event – is not discussed or even mentioned once in the reviewers' assessment of the series' historical credibility where, as in the Swedish reviews, the *mise-en-scène* received praise and thus contributed to the series' historical credibility (See, for example, Armknecht 2021).

What is mentioned and even discussed as the prime objective of the television series is the failed police investigation. A German reviewer states as a fact that the "police's bungling of these murder investigations cannot be denied" (Mirschberger 2021), while a British reviewer points out that "the actual murder isn't the core subject. It's merely the starting point. The actual subject is the very flawed investigation into finding the murderer" (Adelgaard 2021. See also Seale 2021; Armknecht 2021). Unlike the Swedish reception where the failed police investigation was part of the historical memory, here it is foremost the presentation and narrative structure – where the two last episodes concentrate on journalist Pettersson's investigation into the murder – of the television series that "convinces" the international reviewers of the accuracy. And in line with this understanding, since Pettersson's investigation clearly points out Engström as the perpetrator, a clear majority of the international reviewers buys the series' setup with Engström as the de facto killer. Danish reviewer Bo Tao Michaëlis goes so far as to claim that "the series […] feels a bit like watching a kind of propaganda film that will convince everyone to be the definitive truth about the Palme Murder" (Michaëlis 2021. See also Armknecht 2021; Mirschberger 2021; Seale 2021). Only one reviewer doubts Engström's guilt, based on the series' portrayal of him as a failed bumbling attention seeker (Borup 2021).

In addition, the international understanding of *The Unlikely Murderer* is framed by the circumstance that it was perceived as belonging to the True crime genre, which affects the interpretations in relation to the historical accuracy and the based-on-a-true-story concept (See, for example Adelgaard 2021; Armknecht 2021; Hedenstad 2021). Although True crime usually is produced as nonfiction, in recent years this genre has transcended its

documentary aspects and extended its popularity to fictionalized television series such as *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022), and here Netflix has become one of the most influential streaming services regarding its wide selection of True crime content. Paradoxically, the fact that *The Unlikely Murderer* was perceived within the realm of True crime led to the unintended consequence that some reviewers considered the series to be boring because "it cannot hide the fact that everything has actually been said right at the beginning" (Armknecht 2021). In other words, the opening scene both revealed and confirmed that Engström was the killer, thus ruining the suspense factor of the True crime genre.

Conclusions

Audiovisual history used to be a specific national affair, the only exception to this rule has for a long time been American productions with a transnational approach to world history. However, with the advent of Web 2.0 and the formation of streaming services – especially transnational SVODs like Netflix, Prime Video, and HBO Max – the national outlook on audiovisual history has changed in that the national component now is thrown out in an international context where what were considered specifically national ingredients now are changing or even losing their meaning.

 The Unlikely Murderer is a case in point with its very specific story about the unsolved murder of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme – a national trauma that still creates headlines almost forty years after it happened. When analyzing the national and international reception of this miniseries it becomes apparent that some components of this historical fiction, i.e. the *mise-en-scéne* and the acting, are generally perceived as historically accurate while the based-on-a-true-story concept generated different viewpoints, depending on nationality, on how to interpret the historical content and how the story was conveyed. While the Swedish debate and reviews saw the series as a piece of audiovisual history based on a true story, thus dismissing Stig Engström as the murderer at the expense of other theories – where the acquitted Christer Pettersson continued to be the top suspect – international reviews perceived *The Unlikely Murderer* within the genre of True Crime, thus accepting Engström as the culprit but also complaining that the set-up with the revealing of the murderer already in the first scene ruined the build-up and excitement that True Crime is associated with. This viewpoint is confirmed by the fact that international reviewers generally are talking about the series as entertainment (Armknecht 2021; Michaëlis 2021; Seale 2021) in a way that does not happen in Sweden, where the weight of the historical content (the trauma) takes on a more serious meaning, verified by the debate where Netflix was accused of using historical fiction as a weapon, thereby threatening democracy with manipulations and lies.

 However, this debate and its reverberations on democracy were solely connected to the portrayal of Engström as the murderer of Palme, and not to

the series as a whole, shown by the general approval of the portrayal of the failed police investigation. Thereby, the attacks on *The Unlikely Murderer*'s historical accuracy by Swedish reviewers could be interpreted as a defense with nationalistic implications that simply evaporated in an international context. *The Unlikely Murderer* could therefore be characterized as belonging to a Swedish historical culture that uphold nationalistic and community-creating notions and activities.

Finally, debates about historical accuracy versus artistic freedom will continue to rage, but what this article has established is that the perception of historical accuracy influences the understanding of history, and that this understanding depends on a certain knowledge of the national component. Hence, the perception can affect whether audiences will perceive historical fiction as pure entertainment or as a threat to democracy.

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Malmö in the Public Imaginary: *Thin Blue Line*, Dialect Television Drama, and Local Patriotism

Mariah Larsson

Malmö is Sweden's third largest city with a population of 350.000. In the 2010s, the city made headlines nationally and internationally for shootings and crime and became emblematic for a segregated welfare state in decline. Located in the far south of Sweden, close to the Danish capital Copenhagen, Malmö used to be an industrial city, dominated by the huge shipyard Kockums and construction companies such as Skanska. In the 1970s, the oil crisis led to unemployment and even depopulation in the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. An effort was made to rebrand the postindustrial city as a "knowledge city", with a newly started university in 1998, the construction of the bridge across Öresund to Copenhagen which opened in 2000, and the landmark high rise Turning Torso, by famous architect Santiago Calatrava, finished in 2003. In the 2000s, Malmö on the one hand moved forward as a "creative city" (Florida 2002), home to the successful gaming company Massive Entertainment as well as several other film, music, and gaming studios, and on the other hand continued to have a reputation of ethnic segregation, crime, shootings, and an informal economy.

In this article, I address the local press and media reception of recent television series *Tunna blå linjen* (*Thin Blue Line*, 2021-) and how it relates to a local sense of Malmö as the peripheral underdog vis-à-vis Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. Although originally intended to take place in Stockholm, the screenplay was rewritten to fit Malmö when southern-Sweden based production company Anagram took on the show. In several ways, this seems to have been a lucky choice – the setting of *Thin Blue Line* provides much of its color, its soundscape, and its ambience as well as gaining it a large and enthusiastic following in southern Sweden.

In order to chart the reception of *Thin Blue Line*, I have used "Svenska dagstidningar", a database administered by the Royal Library, consisting of digitized Swedish newspapers from 1645 to now (Kungliga biblioteket). By entering the search term "tunna blå linjen", and then filtering by year (2021 and 2022), and then by newspapers, it is possible to get a overview of how a (searchable) phenomenon or event appears over time and space in Swedish press. For instance, for 2021, the search term yielded 8.127 hits, the absolute majority of these in the first three months of the year, while the series was airing. Due to the number of editions for some newspapers, however, several of these hits were duplicates. Moreover, the search engine finds any mention of the word or phrase in any of the digitized newspaper pages, which means that all television schedules are included in the search. Consequently, such a

search can only give an indication of press attention. For instance, the Stockholm-based, nationwide evening newspaper *Expressen* had most hits (286), the local daily *Sydsvenskan* the second most (242), and Stockholm-based, nationwide daily *Dagens Nyheter* the third most (227). However, about a fifth of the Stockholm-based papers' mentions were duplicates, whereas only about a tenth of the smaller, local newspaper's came from the same article in a different edition.

In spite of some commentary that the series was apologetic in relation to the police, that it reproduced racist stereotypes, and that it aligned itself, through its title, with the American anti-Black Lives Matter movement which constructs the police as the "thin blue line" between chaos and civilization (Pahnke 2021; Krutmeijer 2021; Tapper 2021), it mostly received positive attention. However, as I argue below, even the negative commentary in the local newspaper is grounded in a sense of lived experience in this particular city.

For the purpose of this article, I adapt the concept of "dialect cinema" (Martin 2020). Dialect cinema is an apt term in this context, because one of the most highlighted aspects in the reception of *Thin Blue Line* was that most characters spoke the southern dialect, *skånska*, which is prevalent in Malmö. However, dialect cinema does not exclusively or even necessarily refer to the sound of the dialogue. Instead, it can be seen as extending or paralleling Hamid Naficy's concept of "accented cinema". In contrast to accented cinema which signifies filmmakers in exile or diaspora, whose film styles reflect dislocation, displacement and movement and thus are marked as different from majority, mainstream or classical cinema (Naficy 2001; Martin 2020:63), dialect cinema "retains the visual and audio character of its place of origin" (Martin 2020:62, in reference to Goldberg 2008).

However, both accented and dialect cinema share several similarities, not least that both, at their best, concern identity "as a process of becoming" (Martin 2020: 63; Naficy 2001). In the case of *Thin Blue Line*, I would argue that the connections rather than the differences between accented and dialect cinema provide the distinctive audio-visual ambience of Malmö that the local reception responded to. Not least because Malmö is a melting pot, with a third of its population born outside of Sweden, most commonly in Iraq, Syria, or Denmark (Malmö stad, befolkning), and that this is both a point of pride and something highlighted in the external negative image of Malmö.

Thin Blue Line, quite obviously, is not cinema, and several of the parameters Naficy draws for accented cinema and of those Martin demonstrates in dialect cinema rely on the notion of the filmmaker as auteur, as the creative artist behind the film. Nevertheless, bringing the theoretical perspective of a dialect into the analysis of the reception of *Thin Blue Line* can more specifically explain some of the response it stirred. As a dialect television drama, it "renders its scenic and cultural origins visible and audible" (Martin 2020:64). The reception in the local press can be understood

in the light of a perception of having previously had such a dialect audio-visual representation repressed, which in its turn is connected to the construction of a center and periphery, not least in Swedish film and television history.

Representations of Malmö in Film and Television History

Urban representations on film and the relationship between cities and cinema is a vast and nebulous field of study, spanning across disciplines and encompassing explorations of specific directors', or auteurs', relationships to cities, the representations of specific cities on film, sociologically inspired studies of class, ethnicity, and (urban) space, architecture's relation to cinema, modernity, memory, and history, and much more (Stigsdotter & Koskinen 2018). Many of these studies are devoted to large cities or capitals such as New York, Rome, Stockholm (e.g Rhodes & Gorfinkel 2011; Koskinen 2016). Malmö, however, falls a bit through the cracks. It is large in a Swedish context but tiny in relation to the urban sprawls or giant skyscrapers of international big cities. Also, Malmö has historically not been particularly represented in fiction film or in television.

The relative non-existence of Malmö representations until around the turn of the millennium is at least partly a result of the centralized film production in Sweden. In 1911, Sweden's biggest film company, Svenska Biografteatern, moved from Kristianstad in the south of Sweden to Stockholm, and between the years 1912 and 1995, the domestic film industry was based in Stockholm. Although films sometimes were shot outside of the capital, the studios, the money, and the power was concentrated to the capital, a tendency that was even further reinforced with the induction of the Swedish Film Institute, the institutionalized center of power of the national cinema, in 1963. "For more than eight decades Swedish film was accordingly basically synonymous with Stockholm," film scholar Olof Hedling observes, and indicates Sweden's entry into the European Union in 1995 as a starting point for a decentralization of Swedish film production (Hedling 2006:19-20). The EU membership entailed new possibilities for regional production, and beginning with "Trollywood", the production facilities in Trollhättan, run by Film i Väst, where Lars von Trier as well as Lukas Moodysson made films, various regional film centers began to break up the hegemony of Stockholm (Hedling 2006).

Similarly, the public service model with a broadcast monopoly chosen for Swedish television when it was introduced in 1956 offered one channel with its production base in Stockholm. With the second channel, introduced in 1969, production diversified and was outsourced to various districts around the nation, but decision making was still located in the capital. In 1987, Swedish television reorganized the two channels, creating one "Stockholm channel" (Kanal 1) and one "Sweden channel" (TV2). Tellingly, TV2 was quickly nicknamed the "hillbilly channel" (bonnakanalen), evoking various

stereotypes of the countryside being a bit "behind" the modern, sophisticated urbanites of the capital (Furhammar 2006:20-22).

Glimpses of Malmö can be seen in some silent films with actor and movie star Edvard Persson. In 1958, Jan Troell, made a short documentary film, *City* (*Stad*, 1958/1960), which was inspired by Arne Sucksdorff's famous, Oscar-winning *Symphony of a City* (*Människor i stad*, 1947) but portrayed Malmö instead of the Swedish capital. *City* was broadcast on Swedish television in 1960. Malmö came to be featured more consistently in the early 1960s, with Bo Widerberg's two first films, *The Pram* (*Barnvagnen*, 1963) and *Raven's End* (*Kvarteret Korpen*, 1963). Significantly, Edvard Persson, Jan Troell, and Bo Widerberg were all from Skåne, the southern county of Sweden. In the 1970s, a television series about a property manager, *N.P. Möller* (1972–1980) took place and was shot in Malmö, showing not only the streets, squares, and buildings of the city but also letting the southern dialect be heard in the dialogue.

Because of the decentering of Swedish film production and the new regional film centers (Hedling 2006), by the 2000s and 2010s, Malmö was one setting among many in Sweden for film and television makers. As such, it formed a location for productions such as some of the Wallander films, Jan Troell's *Everlasting Moments* (*Maria Larssons eviga ögonblick*, 2008), and *The Yard* (*Yarden*, 2016). The Nordic Noir television series *The Bridge* (*Bron*, 2011– 18) was also shot and took place in Malmö and Copenhagen. Arguably, the decentering of Swedish film and television production can be seen, to some extent, as a democratization of audiovisual representation, but although these productions awoke some regional pride – not least when *The Bridge* was exported as well as remade in several different versions around the world – they did not stir the same local frenzy as *Thin Blue Line* would do. As a television show which methodically constructed a sense of authentic connection to its location, to its place, it raised the stakes for local viewer involvement and recognition.

Thin Blue Line and its Reception

Thin Blue Line is a police television series, made by the production company Anagram for Swedish public service television. At the time of writing, it has been released in two seasons with a third planned for release in the fall of 2024. The first season of ten episodes premiered on January 17, 2021, and the second with eight episodes on September:18, 2022. These episodes were broadcast on regular, scheduled television but were also made available on Sveriges television's streaming platform SVTplay. Unlike other Swedish police dramas, such as *The Bridge*, it does not focus on the solution of one case per season, but follows a handful of police officers on patrol duty and their everyday encounters with small-time criminals, lost children, suicide attempts, drug dealers, crime victims, intoxicated and disorderly people, domestic abuse, drunk teenage parties, accidents and much else. One of the

officers, a young woman from northern Sweden, is new both to the profession and the city, another one struggles with an older relative and her own ambivalence to the job, a third has an anger management problem that likely comes out of his bitter and resentful father, formerly on the force himself, who is in a wheelchair. There is a clandestine lesbian couple and a boss who goes through a painful divorce. The series shows them at work and at home, illustrating how the stress and tragedies of their daily encounters bleed over into their private lives and vice versa. As such, the parallels drawn by reviewers to *Hill Street Blues* (1981–1987) are apt: *Thin Blue Line* uses the same kind of genre mix of police procedural and soap opera, but it also inevitable aligns itself, too, with series such as *The Wire* (2002–2008) and Nordic Noir productions like *Forbrydelsen* (*The Killing,* 2007–2012) (cf. e.g. Wilson, 2015; Vint, 2013; Redvall, 2013). With a layered "double storytelling" (Redvall, 2013), the personal lives of the protagonists provide continuity while events in their work life frequently are presented as fragmented and disrupted.

So far, the series has been extremely well received. Not only was it popular with the audience (reportedly, the first episode had been streamed 2.395.000 times by March 19, 2021, which, according to newspapers, was a "viewer record", *Expressen* March 19, 2021). It won the national annual television award, Kristallen ("the crystal"), for best tv drama and best tv program, in 2021, and received much favorable publicity, in particular for its first season. Already in December 2020, about three weeks before the premiere, the local evening paper *Kvällsposten* published a rave review:

> it is the television series of the year, if you can say that now before 2021 has even begun. It is Malmö, it is love, it is pain, it is laughter, it is the place where we live, the world we live in, the life we live in it. [---] I watch episode after episode, with a strong sense of THAT'S IT: This is how it is. This is what I see. [---] THIS IS HOW IT REALLY IS (Rydhagen 2020).[1]

A week after the first episode had been broadcast, the local daily newspaper *Sydsvenskan* headlined a page with "Malmö smells, gasps, moans, and smiles". The journalist, Maria G. Francke, describes that "the sense of Malmö is genuine" in the series, and that she admittedly is "easy prey for all kinds of Malmö lyricism", but that the genuine sense of Malmö does give the series "a surplus value for all of us who live here". Stockholm, she observes, is "over-represented in relation to Swedish film and television" (Francke 2021).

In Francke's article, several aspects of the series that create this sense of genuineness are mentioned: that geographical verisimilitude has been maintained, that the music is made by local artists, that much of the dialogue is in dialect, and that several of the actors are a part of the city and known from their work on the stage of the City Theater. She raises a warning finger

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[1] All translations of quotes from the Swedish reviews and articles are made by me.

that such authenticity may create expectations of documentary truth but ends the article with a "congratulations to us" (Francke 2021).

Outside of the local context, journalists were enthusiastic but in a more toned-down manner. One of the evening papers highlighted in an early pre-review Gizem Erdogan (Leah), the most known of the actors, and newcomer Amanda Jansson (Sara) (Andersson 2021). Although the praise is well-deserved, neither of these two are Malmö-based and neither of them speak the southern dialect. The series is "believable" and "accurate", and script-writer Cilla Jackert is given credit for "a bull's eye" (Andersson 2021). In the regular review in the same evening paper, the assessment that this "contemporary urban narrative" is something "beyond the usual" and "of a kind we have not really seen in Swedish before" (Fjellberg, 2021).

In Sweden's largest daily newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, the reviewer also praises the series, stating that although the name associates to the US expression, this fiction is "steadily rooted deep in the Swedish soil" and a "somewhat irresistible mix of horror and feel-good" (Lindblad 2021). She – like many others – draws parallels to *Hill Street Blues* , and she points out that the police force has been used as "a battering ram in political debates" and therefore, "a narrative that keeps to the ground and gives space to both small and large crimes" is something of a relief (Lindblad 2021).

Nonetheless, the political discourse about the police found its way into reviews, too. In the other large Stockholm paper, *Svenska Dagbladet*, the reviewer pointed out the uncritical view of the police: "What is 'Thin Blue Line'? A PR-film about Malmö's uniformed police?" (Gentele 2021). The reviewer observes that the expression "the thin blue line" in the US and the UK symbolizes the "frontier in the war that the police feel they wage on barbarism and for civilization" and that the ten hours of *Thin Blue Line's* first season seem to be an illustration of this idea. "Is it true that Sweden is threatened by anarchy and that the only thing stopping the complete societal breakdown is the police? Here, that conception is presented without any question" (Gentele 2021). The review gives accolades to the actors' performances and to the use of dialect and locations but is on the whole critical to its avoidance of any in-depth analysis and its negative portrayal of Swedish society.

Although *Thin Blue Line* overall was well received, objections such as the ones made in *Svenska Dagbladet* were made in *Sydsvenskan* as well. "It creates an excuse for police brutality," claimed the headline for an article in the arts and entertainment section by Elina Pahnke. Describing how the series does show when police cross the line into excessive force, she points to how, nevertheless, the viewers get to know the individual police officers guilty of such excess and thereby find excuses for their behavior (Pahnke 2021). Accordingly, she finds the series "manipulative" and observes that "people are always assumed to know too little about police work. In the hierarchy of credibility, there is no room for the opposite narrative" (Pahnke 2021).

Similarly, a month later, Malin Krutmeijer responds to an in-depth article by Hynek Pallas in *Göteborgsposten*, where he charted a historical "blue line" in Swedish crime fiction. With references to several film and television scholars, Pallas described this line from the novels of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö where a critique of Swedish welfare society from the left grows increasingly sharp in installment after installment to *Thin Blue Line*, claiming that the new television series "awakes a more profound ethical struggle with what may be accepted – maybe even sometimes must be accepted – in the name of the monopoly on violence" and that it "thereby, in a new way, brings back critical crime fiction to its roots" (Pallas, 2021). In *Sydsvenskan*, Krutmeijer states that she cannot see this ethical struggle in *Thin Blue Line*, only that the series conveys that "police are just human beings" and that "nothing is really their fault. If they make mistakes, it is because they have been pressured too hard" (Krutmeijer 2021).

In July that same year, after the first season concluded, Michael Tapper reflects on the expression "the thin blue line", its origin , and its political baggage, finding it remarkable that although Sweden often imports terminology and debates from the US, Swedish journalists have not seemed to take in the problematic aspects of the term (Tapper 2021). He describes how it was used during Nixon's "war on crime" and Reagan's "war on drugs", becoming a symbolic border between "us" (wealthy white people) and "them" (poor people of other ethnic groups) and how the symbol of the thin blue line has been used by rightwing extremists and during the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021 (Tapper 2021).

Such objections draw attention to the seriousness of a popular culture phenomenon, how *Thin Blue Line* not only can be understood in the context of fiction and entertainment – as Krutmeijer points out – but also in the context of the reality it purports to portray and the society in which it is produced and received. That Malmö forms the setting for the series provides it with a rich background of actual events that are explicitly and implicitly reflected in the series, and that the producers have taken care to retain audial and geographical verisimilitude in the production further reinforces that connection to Malmö itself. At the same time, as the Malmö-based writer Charlotte Wiberg observes in her review in *Dagens ETC*, a national, left-oriented paper: "the police we get to follow in Thin Blue Line is the police as we wish it would be" (Wiberg, 2021).

Nonetheless, Wiberg also points out that "as a Malmöite, I take pleasure in the locations and the lovely, flawless Malmö dialect from many of the actors" (Wiberg 2021). There is a qualitative difference in how *Thin Blue Line* is received by the local as compared to the national newspapers: the capitalized exclamations in Rydhagen's review, the sensuous description of a Malmö that "smells, gasps, moans" by Francke, the reference to actual events in the more critical pieces such as Pahnke's and Wiberg's all have a more personal note than the more detached reviews from other parts of Sweden.

Dialect Television Drama

The disparity between the local and the national media attention quite clearly originates from *Sydsvenskan*. Not only are most of the articles about *Thin Blue Line* from the local paper, but there was also other material. *Sydsvenskan* held "after talks", videos with invited guests that commented on each episode, and during the second season, a chronicle about the latest episode was published every week. Moreover, the Facebook group Snacka om Tunna blå linjen ("Talk about Thin Blue Line"), consisting of approximately 7.400 members, was started, and is administrated, by *Sydsvenskan*. At the time of writing, there is little activity in the group. However, while the seasons were being broadcast, the group was very active, commenting on events and developments, arguing about the realism and the politics of the series, discussing characters and so on. The discussions of the group generated an article by the editor of the arts and entertainment section, commenting on how it was like a "corona-safe reading group" and thanking the readers for their contributions (Ölmedal 2021).

There are several reasons why *Thin Blue Line* came to receive so much attention in the south. Very likely, the Covid19 pandemic, which was still in full force the first few months of 2021, contributed to this. *Thin Blue Line* offered "an escape to reality", as the headline to Ölmedal's article stated, not least because the first season was shot before the pandemic and so the urban life portrayed was unaffected by social distancing, working-from-home, face masks, and closed bars. Nonetheless, although the pandemic may very well have contributed to the engagement of the audience, the opportunity for local engagement arose because the series emphasizes its own verisimilitude, its sense of authenticity, as well as its sense of place.

Clearly a work of fiction, labeled "drama" by SVT, various stylistic choices still serve to underline the sense of realism, of documentary. For instance, the production took advice from active police officers. Almost all the actors were relatively unknown prior to the first season, and scenes are often shot with a handheld camera that pans for dialogue and reaction shots.

More importantly as an example of dialect television drama is that locations are the streets, parks, squares, and homes of Malmö. As pointed out by the location scout, they wished to retain actual geographical continuity so that people familiar with Malmö would recognize the place. This distinguishes *Thin Blue Line* from other crime fiction shot in Malmö – in both *The Bridge* and in the Wallander film series for instance, characters can turn a corner and be in another part of town (or even another town) which disrupts the continuity for those in the know and may alienate local viewers. Another, essential, aspect of the sense of authenticity of the show and its strong sense of place, was the spoken dialogue. Most of the actors spoke *skånska*, the regional dialect in southern Sweden. Of the six main characters in the first season, four hail from southern Sweden: Oscar Töringe (Magnus), Per Lasson (Jesse), Sandra Stojlijkovic (Danijela) and Anna Sise (Faye).

Dialect is commonly defined as a variety of a language from a specific part of a country and is as such an indication of origin (see *Encyclopedia Britannica*; Martin 2020: 66; *Cambridge Dictionary*) and can also connote class or occupation. By using the dialect of *skånska* in *Thin Blue Line*, the production added to the sense of verisimilitude by creating a soundscape which was very distinctly and recognizably Malmö with its rhythms and intonations and the variations related to background, class, gender, and age. Thereby, the spoken dialogue in the series included both traditional *skånska* and the more modern sociolect developed with immigration, sometimes called "Rosengårdssvenska", after the suburban area of Rosengård in Malmö. Furthermore, that a few of the characters did not speak *skånska* only seemed to add to the sense of Malmö as melting pot, consisting of people shaped by their respective backgrounds. The streets, parks, squares, and buildings were not just a backdrop for actors; their speech integrated them firmly with their environment.

Only the year before, a true crime drama about the disappearance and murder of a young girl in central Skåne, *Jakten på en mördare* (2020), had been lauded for its realist environments but received criticisms for how people spoke – although the southern dialect was used, it sounded fake to viewers, according to Sveriges radio (Frithiof, 2020). And during the time *The Bridge* was broadcast on Swedish television, viewers commented that very few people, and none of the major characters, spoke the southern dialect. Likewise, Kurt Wallander, in his various reincarnations by Rolf Lassgård and Krister Henriksson, spoke standard Swedish or even the Stockholm dialect.

Moreover, the music of Malmö in *Thin Blue Line* functioned to anchor the series in its regional context. Composer Irya Gmeyner who had lived in neighboring Lund and been a part of the southern music scene for many years was hired to create the soundtrack together with Martin Hederos (Gillberg & Brundin 2021). Much of diegetic and non-diegetic music in the series is made and/or performed by local artists.

The theme music, "Urban City", that accompanies the introduction of each episode, is a mainly wordless, melancholy, swelling tune with a brief motif of Arabic-sounding strings recurring at the beginning and at the end. In many ways, it sets the tone for both the vignette sequence and for the series as a whole and cues the viewers' emotional response. In addition, it sets up an audial framework for not only the television series but for Malmö itself, by juxtaposing the soundtrack with several diverse images of the city. The introduction sequence is 44 seconds long and shows 22 different city views, with brief shots from each. In several of the shots, the people displayed react to the camera by glancing towards it, waving to it, or extending a middle finger. About halfway through the sequence, a line of shop windows reflects a police car, and the viewer can draw the conclusion that all these views are from the inside of the car. Connecting the music to the images provides, somewhat paradoxically, an audial sense of authenticity: this is what Malmö

sounds like, as if the music has sprung from the concrete, the fog, the sea, the railroad, the skaters, the blondes, the women in hijab, the hot dog stands, the graffiti, the squares, the apartment complexes, the townhouses, the parks. Although the images are shot in varying light and weather – dusk, daylight, rain, sunshine – and portrays people in many different situations, the melancholy sense of the music also infuses those shots which could be seen as idyllic, like for instance people bathing in Västra hamnen (the West Harbor).

Furthermore, accented cinema and dialect cinema both thematize means of transport, travelling, and wandering (Martin 2020:69). Already in the introduction sequence of *Thin Blue Line*, the theme of moving around in the city is established, and the vehicle for this movement is the police car, in which most of the characters spend much of their days. The reactions of the people that the car passes in different parts of the city are in a way the reflection that creates the identity process Martin points to as important to both accented and dialect cinema, which are about identity "as a process of becoming, as a performative act" (Martin 2020:69). Here, that process takes place continuously, underlining the performativity of the police identity, as it develops in relation to actions and reactions of the inhabitants of the city and the public.

The Underdog?

A significant difference between accented and dialect cinema, Martin claims, is that accented cinema expresses the experience of displacement, of dislocation, of exilic and diasporic filmmakers while dialect cinema is based in its place of origin (Martin 2020:63). This could open dialect cinema, or dialect television drama, for accusations of a kind of regional (even ethno-) nationalism or local patriotism, a special interest placing group identity foremost and connecting such a group identity to a specific geographical region. If accented cinema comes out of the experiences of the itinerant, the migrant, the transnational and the displaced, exploring identity at the disjunction of loss and belonging, dialect cinema might be understood as firmly rooted in its place of origin, with the identity process resolutely connected to belonging in this place.

Such an implicit tendency can be discerned in the local reception, further aggravated by an underlying perception of Malmö as misunderstood by the rest of the country and, indeed, the world. However, a vital part of the self-perception of this specific geographical region is that its identity is diverse and multi-ethnic, a place for the displaced, a destination for the transnational, itinerant, and migrant – in short, a kind of melting pot, precisely a local identity at the disjunction of loss and belonging. As such, the democratization of audiovisual representation that the series is a part of, is matched by a local self-perception of Malmö as a place which includes these aspects of dialect and accented cinema that are expressed in *Thin Blue Line*.

Using Malmö and anchoring this setting with geographical, actual continuity, the southern dialect, and the use of local music artists, *Thin Blue Line* put "its place of origin center stage" (Martin 2020: 68) and can, consequently, be regarded as a kind of dialect television drama. As such, it spoke to a local sense of being the underdog, while at the same time it employed the reputation of Malmö to provide a resonance to the events unfolding in the fiction.

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Warnography: Hollywood Cold War Cinema, Critical Hostility, and *Rocky IV* (1985)

Richard Nowell

"During the last few years, the film industry has resorted to using U.S. versus Soviet nationalism to sell movie tickets", opined Carol Basset of *Rocky IV*; "The Anti-Soviet, pro-American flavor of this and other films like it, cannot but damage U.S.–Soviet relations (1986: 14). Denouncing writer-director-star Sylvester Stallone's boxing sequel as hawkish trash liable to inflame geopolitical tensions, this *Chicago Tribune* writer exemplified the period's dominant US popular critical perspective on 1980s Cold War Cinema.

The outrage expressed by Bassett and others notwithstanding, Cold War Cinema occupies a reductive location in histories of Hollywood of the 1980s. Scholars have tended to distill this decade-spanning production trend to a national cinema, one whose projection of hyper-patriotism and Anti-Sovietism supposedly reflected the conservative values of American filmmakers, politicians, and audiences (see Prince 1992: 49-80; Shaw 2007; Shaw & Youngblood 2010). Such a position has been reinforced time and again in American popular culture. For example, a 2022 episode of the animated series *South Park* (1997–), entitled "Back to the Cold War", depicted a fifty-something's retreat into the comforting binaries these films offer him, upon learning Russia has invaded Ukraine. And, voiceover narration to a 2015 episode of the ABC sitcom *The Goldbergs* (2013–2023) reminisced: "Back in the '80s, America had one clear enemy: The Russians. It was the age of the Cold War, capitalism versus communism, Reagan versus Gorbachev, Rocky Versus that 'roided-out monster who killed Apollo Creed […]".

The largely uncontested diachronic construction of 1980s Cold War Cinema as nationalistic comfort viewing – shorn of the disgust of Basset and others – remains something of an exception to histories of American cinematic relations to the Eastern Bloc however. After all, historians have long-since relativized Hollywood's reputed institutional antagonisms toward this region, revealing, among other things, its productive working relations with Communist Party elites and its Communist-friendly branding strategies at local film festivals (Blahova 2010; Nowell 2023). They have also shown that Hollywood's earlier forays into Cold War-themed output took up a range of positions on East-West relations. Tony Shaw has, for instance, detailed how scenes of Americans and Soviets cooperating on the screen were intended to promote similar collaborations behind the scenes on a planned US-USSR coproduction of 1966's *The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming* (2010). And, Mark Jancovich has argued that the sci-fi invasion

narratives of the 1950s – traditionally read as allegories of Soviet attacks – often mediated concerns about the homeland, including fears of increasing conformity (1996).

Under these circumstances, I would like to suggest that a reconsideration of Hollywood's 1980s Cold War Cinema is both pertinent and overdue. This article therefore seeks to contribute to such an endeavor by expanding the terms under which this prominent production trend may be understood as a significant component of American popular culture. Derived from a far-reaching examination of the US popular press of the mid-to-late 1980s, I argue that journalists and their sources consistently presented the aforementioned *Rocky IV* as perhaps the single most troubling release of its day. The first section of the article details the sociocultural and political developments underpinning this critical hostility, the second the mechanics of the film's elitist critical devaluation, the third how its politics were distorted and demonized. In so doing, the article invites us to reconsider a principle rubric under which the Cold War-themed output of the 1980s has been situated: Reaganite Cinema. This critical category comprises films from around the period deemed to advance a conservative vision of a resurgent America built on neoliberalism, nostalgia, family values, masculinity, and interventionist foreign policies (see Britton 1986; Wood 1986; see also Needham 2016). By concentrating on what they see as the promotion of these themes in commercially successful examples, scholars have given the erroneous impression that such fare was universally embraced stateside. However, by shifting focus to its popular critical reception there, it soon becomes clear that these traits – whether an accurate reflection of the films or otherwise – were vociferously rejected in some quarters.

The positions of Carol Bassett (and others) highlight a tension between synchronic and diachronic understandings of arguably the most prominent intersection of American popular culture and political discourse of the day. For, although the synchronic popular reception of Cold War Cinema like *Rocky IV* was characterized by similar thematic readings to its diachronic academic reception, the significance journalists assigned thereto was quite different. Granted, both camps may have concluded that such films advanced a right-wing vision of American social, economic, ethical, and military superiority over the Eastern Bloc. Yet, academic perspectives remained interpretative, neutrally casting the films as wish-fulfilment fantasies for a post-malaise America requiring national healing via projections of geopolitical mastery, rather than considering their potential real-world impact (Prince 1992: 49-80; Shaw 2007; Shaw & Youngblood 2010). By contrast, the press coverage examined below rested on a form of participatory democracy rooted not just in the definitions and interpretations characterizing later scholarship, but also a third facet genre theorists recognize as central to the social construction of media categories: evaluation – which is to say the perceived virtues or lack thereof of a given format (see for example Mittel

2001: 8-9). The US popular critical backlash against *Rocky IV* would ultimately provide the popular press with a stage upon which to consider how responsibly to dramatize East-West relations. Yet, by condemning the film for threatening such relations – through its supposed exploitativeness, xenophobia, jingoism, and bellicosity – American journalists effectively overwrote the film's makers' own efforts to advance this exact position.

Cultural Hierarchies, Controversies, and the "Spirit of Geneva"

The American press coverage of *Rocky IV* was underpinned by three major sociocultural developments which together enabled this film credibly – although not necessarily accurately – to be situated within the variety of cultural categories discussed below. One of these facilitated the relegation of output to the lower strata of cultural hierarchies, another indicated the expediency of critical outrage, and a third suggested denouncing Cold War-themed entertainment supported a political position that journalists would be prudent publicly to endorse.

Patterns of industrial reorganization and critical reevaluation catalyzed the relocation of films boasting relatively prestigious qualities into a conceptual media ghetto. As Eric Schaefer explains, American audiovisual culture previously distinguished an imagined mainstream synonymous with Hollywood from an industrially, aesthetically, and qualitatively balkanized "exploitation" sector (1999). The former posited a glamorous, wealthy industry generating a polished product of conformity and conservativeness for middle-class patrons; the latter cash-strapped hucksters peddling salacious, violent, profane cheapies to marginalized audiences. These distinctions were eroded in the years prior to the release of *Rocky IV* after both the major Hollywood studios and cash-strapped independents diversified their output. Where the majors bankrolled taboo-busting films like *Cruising* (1980), lowbrow specialists released upscale output reminiscent of Hollywood fare, like *Teen Wolf* (1985). This convergence transformed the idea of exploitation cinema from an alternative to an imagined mainstream into a gratuitous caricature thereof (Nowell 2016: 110); understandably so, given both invoked the profit-seeking, formula, and sensation which stood binarily opposed to the purported authenticity, autonomy, and alternativeness of elevated culture (Newman 2009).

The intersection of these hitherto distinct conceptual fields exerted a significant impact on the US critical establishment. Again, this situation is unsurprising given media commentators routinely draw connections to, and distinctions from, media texts in order to rationalize their biases – elevating and denigrating output as they do. This practice is, of course, even more pronounced when stakeholders claim such output threatens mores or public order, particularly when counterarguments risk undermining said claims. In the years before *Rocky IV* opened, outrage over motion picture content had

reached a fever pitch in American audiovisual culture amid protests from activists, journalists, and politicians (see e.g. Prince 2000: 341–369; Lyons 1997). The main objects of their hostility were lowbrow Hollywood releases rendered visible by prominent marketing campaigns, wide bookings, and significant uptake. Examples included slasher movies like *Friday the 13th* (1980), children's horror like *Poltergeist* (1982), and women-in-danger thrillers like *Body Double* (1984) (see Antunes 2017; Prince 2000: 353–356). These films tended to destabilize the class distinctions that had previously quarantined exploitation cinema in subaltern arenas of the popular imagination like drive-ins and grindhouses. Journalists consequently summoned the migration of such fare into quotidian locations *à la* suburban multiplexes and video rental outlets as evidence of a symbolic threat to middle-class values. With the Chicago reviewers Gene Siskel & Roger Ebert achieving national celebrity status on the back of the aforementioned controversies, the incentives for journalists to produce activist criticism of this sort were profound (Nowell 2012: 74–75).

The very day *Rocky IV* premiered, an epochal geopolitical shift encouraged stakeholders to direct their critical outrage at Cold War-themed media. On the 25th of November 1985, US President Ronald Reagan addressed Congress about culture's roles in deescalating the Cold War. Returning from his first summit with the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Geneva, Switzerland, Reagan emphasized that cultural exchanges would bring the superpowers closer together, eventually leading to a reduction in their nuclear arsenals. "We've concluded a new agreement designed to bring the best of America's artists and academics to the Soviet Union", he announced; "this agreement will also expand the opportunities for Americans to experience the Soviet peoples' rich cultural heritage, because their artists and academics will be coming here" (Reagan Library). Reagan's belief that screen entertainment shaped perceptions of East-West relations had evidently crystallized in 1983 when he tempered his view on nuclear weapons having viewed *The Day After* (1983), a disaster film about a Soviet assault on small-town America (see Hänni 2016). The emphasis he newly placed on media's potential to enlighten and connect populations suggested that some output was anathematic to these goals. By concluding that cultural exchanges would "break down stereotypes, build friendships, and frankly provide alternatives to propaganda", Reagan effectively designated media trading in Cold-War caricature and conflict an impediment to global security (ibid.). Sentiments of this sort rendered all but the most unequivocally glasnost-inflected of output vulnerable to charges of jeopardizing peace for profits. Circumstances of this sort in turn threatened to implicate those who seemed sympathetic to such fare. Appearing at odds to the "Spirit of Geneva" was so undesirable that the television station ABC had postponed its production of a mini-series about a Soviet invasion of the US, entitled *Amerika* (1987), following requests from the Kremlin (Doyle 1986: C22). With remarkable speed and consistency,

journalists showcased their contributions to the reconciliatory ambitions of Geneva by casting their voices as alternatives to the "propaganda" of which Reagan warned. Whether sincerely or strategically, they invoked prominent releases as foils against which to position themselves. Standing with progress and hope in this manner typically involved reimagining such counterweights as the lowest of lowbrow culture.

Exploitation Cinema

Via collective elitism, journalists maneuvered *Rocky IV* into the newly constructed cinematic lowbrow to prevent this particular media text from being received as a serious condemnation of media warmongering akin to their own offerings. The oft-overlooked satirical dimensions of the *Rocky* series derived from its use of a content-tailoring strategy characterized by oscillations between detached irony and emotional sincerity, now termed metamodernism (Van Den Akker & Vermuelen 2017). Though typically associated with the twenty-first-century, metamodern cinema was already being made in the 1970s, as exemplified by Hal Ashby's bittersweet political satire *Being There* (1979). The *Rocky* films employed this approach by pairing sensitive depictions of its eponymous hero's personal struggles and biting criticism of the media's role in both his mental wellbeing and that of those around him. The first film combined an uplifting tale of a depressed outsider rediscovering his sense of self-worth through romance and professional dedication, and a sober indictment of the impact of commercial entertainment on below-the-line talent. *Rocky* may well be remembered as feelgood cinema *par excellence* (Brown 2014: 277); but, the film also depicts its eponymous underdog being manipulated into a publicity stunt that ends in his defeat on the Bicentennial Independence Day of 1976. Similarly, *Rocky IV* paired a storyline about its newly demoralized southpaw regaining his self-esteem – this time against a Soviet fighter – and a sustained denunciation of the politicization of entertainment during the Cold War. As I have elucidated this point elsewhere (Forthcoming), I shall limit my discussion here to a necessarily brief yet hopefully instructive sketch. *Rocky IV* depicted media agents on both sides of the Iron Curtain repeatedly inflaming East-West relations by imbuing Balboa's motives with geopolitical import, when in reality he seeks redemption for his culpability in another fighter's death. Rocky blames himself for not throwing in the towel at a critical juncture in the bout, leading him to fight the Soviet boxer as a means of pursuing personal redemption by processing his grief and guilt. Given this series used the Rocky-character's travails to allegorize Stallone's celebrity, the fourth film's critique of the politicization of entertainment reads as calculated, reflexive denunciation of real-world media pressures and amorality. In short, as a condemnation of the inflammatory excesses of *some of the* Cold War cinema of the period (ibid).

To foreclose the possibility that *Rocky IV* would be read in this way, journalists portrayed its production as comparable to the crass opportunism reputed to characterize the exploitation sector. This strategy invited readers to divorce the film from a cinematic middlebrow congruent with sociopolitical engagement, and instead situate it in a "vacuum where satire and dramatized political analysis once flourished" (Matthews 1986a: 1). Little was therefore made of *Rocky IV*'s status as an auteur piece tracible to a respected contribution to the much-vaunted, left-leaning Hollywood Renaissance of the late 1960s and 1970s (King 2002: 11–48). Rather, journalists cited the film's sequel-status as evidence of an apparent creative exhaustion characterizing its assembly. "This was the year that Hollywood dropped all pretentions toward art and openly declared that movies are practically pure business", romantically declared Michael Blown of the *Boston Globe*. "How bankrupt the movie industry must be", he continued, "when two of the biggest hits of the year starred Sylvester Stallone either murdering or bludgeoning foreigners?" (1985: A1). Lewis Grizzard of the *Orlando Sentinel* went as far as to link *Rocky IV* to a monumental human tragedy. "This thing is second only to AIDS in terms of harmful epidemics", he coldly proclaimed; "sequels will beget sequels and then beget them some more. *Rocky* movies will come to be known as the longest unpleasant experience in history" (1985: A23).

Journalists also routinely suggested that *Rocky IV* exhibited the textual hallmarks of exploitation cinema. Claims of the film's anti-intellectualism abounded, with Jack Matthews of the *Los Angeles Times* dismissing it as "simple-minded" and "moronic" (1986b: 1). Especially pronounced were suggestions that it relied upon a similar degree of formula to exploitation films. *Time* lamented "[t]he scheme of *Rocky IV* is numbingly familiar", the *Philadelphia News* complained it "repeats every blessed ingredient that went over in the first three editions", and the aforementioned Roger Ebert insisted "this movie is the bottom of the barrel […] this movie is absolutely formula" (Schickel 1985: 110; Baltake 1985: 39; *At the Movies* 1985). Journalists often turned the blue-collar aspects of its writer-director-star's public persona against the film, insinuating that the purported intellectual limitations of his brand of populism prevented a considered, informed reflection on complex topics like geopolitics. Where the *Wall Street Journal* stressed his involvement meant "we are not discussing high art", John Bloom – writing under his exploitation aficionado persona of Joe Bob Briggs – jokily described *Rocky IV* as "the most sensitive and intelligent movie about nuclear war ever directed by Sylvester Stallone" (Anon. 1985: 1; Briggs 1985: 31).

Journalists supported their claims about *Rocky IV*'s low cultural standing by caricaturing the composition and conduct of its audiences. Several stated that they had witnessed firsthand how moviegoers responded to the film with visceral outbursts reminiscent more of schlocky horror movies than serious political drama. Such claims positioned *Rocky IV* as an example of what Linda Williams dubbed "body genres"; formats whose low prestige derives from

provoking involuntary physical reactions over reflective engagement (1991; see also for example Barker 2009). Even though the film thematized specifically adult-oriented topics like aging, obsolescence, and the politicization of entertainment, some critics juvenilized it. An aghast Jay Boyar of the *Orlando Sentinel* compared screenings to children's parties, lamenting "[k]ids are running up and down the aisle" (1985: E1). Others summoned classist portraits of a rabble roused. Mike McGrady of *Newsday* dismissed patrons of *Rocky IV* as "screaming, whistling, applauding fans who aren't inclined to be what you'd call overly critical" (1985: 93). He even compared the film to an attraction whose theatrical confrontations between All-American heroes and Russian villains provoked notoriously animated reactions among a fanbase of children and blue-collar southerners. "If there's nothing good going on at the wrestling arena tonight", he mused, "get right on over to see *Rocky IV*" (ibid.). Summoning audiences deemed low in cultural capital, alongside charges of crass commerciality and creative exhaustion, laid the rhetorical foundation upon which was built a denunciation of the film's politics; or, at least one particular vision thereof.

Warmongery

The popular critical reception of *Rocky IV*'s politics was undergirded by an Otherizing strategy used during an earlier high-profile US critical backlash. Half a decade before *Rocky IV* opened, American journalists had attacked the women-in-danger thriller *Dressed to Kill* (1980) and a spate of similar films. In a struggle over propriety of progressive alarm-raising, they lambasted such fare for the very misogyny its makers had sought to decry through their tales of sexist misfits menacing likeable, admirable women (see Wood 1983). Similarly, journalists charged *Rocky IV* with the very politicization of Cold-War-themed entertainment the film systematically condemned (see Nowell Forthcoming), thereby silencing competition for American hearts and minds.

Journalists advanced their denunciations of *Rocky IV*'s purported politics by aligning it with acknowledged right-wing fare. This practice typically located the film within a selective vision of the period's Cold War Cinema. In reality, this trend articulated myriad perspectives on East-West relations, from the anti-nuclearism of *Wargames* (1983*)* and critiques of US race relations in *Moscow on the Hudson* (1984) to the indictments of propagandizing in *Red Dawn* (1984). Journalists sidestepped such nuances however, instead distilling the trend to a mythical essence derived from their own claims of hawkishness. "[T]he American film industry in 1985 turned up the heat on the Cold War", wrote the aforementioned Gene Siskel in the *Chicago Tribune*, "offering gung-ho, anti-Communist entertainments in virtually every genre" (1985: 20). Journalists consistently drew parallels to *Rambo: First Blood, Part II* (1985), a critically reviled Stallone action movie about the rescue of American soldiers from Vietnam. "Rambo is really Rocky as an angry prisoner of war", opined Arthur Murphy; "[b]oth series basically

involve the same character" (cited in Stark 1987: 1D). Journalists also compared *Rocky IV* to postwar output, including several hyperpatriotic tracts Hollywood companies released to counter charges of leftist infiltration of the industry levelled by the House Un-American Activities Committee. "One can't help but compare the 'new wave' of the '80s with the alien invasion and anti-communist movies of the 1950s", wrote the *Chicago Tribune*'s Lewis Beale (1986: 4). "*Rocky IV*", noted Ryan Desmond of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "[is a film] Sen. Joseph McCarthy would have loved" (1985b: I2).

Such claims enabled the press more convincingly to decry *Rocky IV*'s depiction of Soviets as an extreme manifestation of representational practices deemed emblematic of 1980s Cold War Cinema generally. This step was evidently seen to be necessary because the film actually denationalizes villainy by condemning media warmongers on both sides of the Iron Curtain, especially American sports media and politburo propagandists (see Nowell Forthcoming). Yet, rather than address these complications, journalists employed evocative essentializing rhetoric, branding the film among others a "commie-baiting workout tape" and an "orgy of Commie-bashing" (Baltake 1985: 39; Desmond 1985a: C1). Among the more elaborated critiques, Sheila Benson of the *Los Angeles Times* claimed "*Rocky IV* says that Soviets are simplistic animals, incapable of loyalty or of decent human behavior", and the aforementioned Carol Basset insisted it led audiences "to scorn, pity and demean the Russian people and their government" (1985: 1; 1986: 14). Journalists also gave a platform to both US and Soviet citizens who expressed such views. Phyllis Coons of the *Boston Globe* cited an American student contending "I kind of got the feel of being set up to hate the Russians" (1986: A30). The *Los Angeles Times* quoted an 11-year-old Soviet envoy named Katerina Lycheva lamenting "[i]t hurt me to see that the Soviet Union and the Soviet people could be shown in that way" (Anon. 1986a: 21). And the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that local high school students visiting Moscow had been compelled to apologize to their hosts after learning they had taken offence to *Rocky IV*'s "anti-Russian messages" (Johnson 1986: H3).

The American press also decried the apparent jingoism of *Rocky IV*. Overwriting the film's thematization of Rocky's personal motivations and its critique of hyper-patriotism, claims of this sort were rendered credible by somewhat misleading promotion that cloaked Balboa in the stars-and-stripes – figuratively and literally. Where print advertising featured a victorious Rocky wrapped in the American flag, audiovisual marketing concluded with two boxing gloves – one emblazoned with the Hammer & Sickle, the other Old Glory – exploding upon impact. Journalists framed this material, in the words of the *Chicago Sun-Times*' Richard Freedman, as "distinctly not in keeping with the spirit of friendship between the countries proclaimed in Geneva" (1986: 37). They scorned *Rocky IV* as "overly patriotic", "unnecessarily jingoistic", "juiced up with nationalism", and "a pitiful excuse

for unabashed flag-waving" (Lewis 1986: 25; Anon. 1986b: 12A; Anderson 1986: 11; Russell 1985: 8A).

Such condemnation, married to charges of Anti-Sovietism, led to a bottom-line criticism wherein the American press vilified *Rocky IV* as a bellicose tract that threatened détente by baiting audiences into a wanton blood-lust. Again, these claims did not reflect the film's critique of media warmongery or a message of reconciliation it conveyed through Balboa's calls for understanding among Soviets and Americans. Rather, journalists denounced *Rocky IV* for "whipping up a frenzy of hatred against the U.S.S.R" (Anon 1986b: 12A). Some of them submitted evidence – of a sort – of its incendiary capacities by way of statements about the audiences with whom they claimed to have seen the film; claims that went beyond the boisterousness described above. Where Julia Salmon of the *Wall Street Journal* described a man screaming "[s]platter him! Beautiful! I love it! C'mon Rocky!", Jay Boyer of the *Orlando Sentinel* claimed patrons were "spoiling for a fight" (1985: 1; 1985: E1). One writer even raised concerns about the film's potential to provoke nuclear conflict, warning "if the attitudes expressed in the fourth installment of the *Rocky* saga are an indication of genuine public opinion, it might be a good idea to check the location of the nearest fallout shelter" (Desmond 1985b: I2). Crucially, American newspapers provided a platform upon which others could voice these concerns, especially Soviet participants in the cultural exchanges agreed at Geneva. In a widely reported campaign decrying Cold War Cinema, the Kremlin's Deputy Minister of Culture Georgi A. Ivanov worried *Rocky IV* posited "you can only deal with a Russian with a gun", and the Soviet journalist Yevgeny Makorov proposed screenings should carry notices warning "ignorance plus ill will and hatred are dangerous things" (Boyer 1986: C22; 1986: C2). Perhaps the most damning indictment of all, however, came from the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, who coined a label that several American journalists would swiftly adopt (see e.g. Anon. 1986c: 18). Fusing notions of exploitation, xenophobia, jingoism, and bellicosity, Yevtushenko simply dubbed the trend and its most talismanic manifestation "warnography" (cited in Marian 1987: A15).

Conclusion

The case of *Rocky IV* confirms an ongoing need to enrich understandings of historical media output by considering the para-texts that contribute so much to its public identity. This issue is especially pertinent to 1980s-Hollywood, I submit, because understandings of the decade derive largely from histories produced before consideration of these texts was more fully integrated into research methodologies. One such case is represented by its Cold War-themed output, which has been largely constructed through diachronic thematic analyses that cast it as a cathartic national(istic) cinema. However, a survey of the American popular press reveals that these films – especially *Rocky IV*

– actually provoked wholesale critical revulsion. Journalists and their sources denounced this film in particular, for threatening to stoke a wave of indignation that jeopardized the reconciliations of Geneva. To showcase their support for the cultural exchanges intended to foster such steps, they disregarded the film's critique of media warmongering in order to frame it as jingoistic, xenophobic, bellicose exploitation.

The popular critical reception of *Rocky IV* represents a crucial albeit hitherto unacknowledged chapter in Cold-War-themed entertainment's passage through American popular culture. Given the influence contemporaneous controversies exerted on the formats noted above, recognition of this development opens up opportunities to enrich our understandings of the trend. In particular, scholars may wish to consider how the backlash against *Rocky IV* impacted the production, content, marketing, and delivery of subsequent Cold War media, from films to television and beyond. They may also wish to expand explorations of Cold War Cinema's reception into other spheres of American audiovisual culture such as cinephilia, as well as those of other countries. In so doing, we may develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Hollywood's most industrially and culturally significant political output of the late-Cold-War period.

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Introduction: The Fantastic in Cultural History: Essays from a growing Interdisciplinary Research Field

Anna Höglund

In this volume of *HumaNetten* we invite you to the realm of the fantastic, to a world filled by marvels and wonders; like flying steamships, time travelling devices, and mythological heroes and foes. We also take a trip to the dark side to meet the Bogey man from bygone ages, ghosts that go bump in the night, and monsters which haunt our imagination.

When we hear the word *fantastic* in present time, most of us think about fantastic or speculative fiction. The genre is stupendously popular, and it engages people of all ages around the world. In academic terms, the concept fantastic fiction is generally described as non-mimetic, aesthetic genres like fantasy, science fiction and horror. But this concept is built on a fairly limited understanding of the fantastic, both in space and time, and it has only been in use for 200 years. A long, long time before that, fantastic features were used in the oral tradition of myths, legends, and folk belief. "Many of the genre's most prominent works consist of re-telling and re-conceptualizing classical myths, legends, and folklore" (Höglund and Trenter 2021: 15) These narratives become a part of our collective imaginations and cultural heritage.

Scholars such as Kathryn Hume argue that it was the breakthrough of modernity, in the wake of Enlightenment, that created a dualism between the natural and supernatural (Hume 1984). Therefore, the understanding of myth changed. The author and the reader of fantastic fiction also became more self-conscious. The difference is not the ability to apply skeptical reason to magical motifs and supernatural beliefs; rather, "it is the new awareness of myth as something belonging to others, to the past, to unfallen primitives" (Attebery 2014: 26).

The dualism between natural and supernatural, the real and unreal, is reflected in both the earlier academic research of fantastic fiction as well as in the debate in contemporary media. The discussion of the concept fantastic fiction often centres on its boundaries and fantastic fiction is defined as "something else" than other fictional genres. Fantastic fiction deals only with the imaginative world and therefore differs completely from other genres that deal with the "real world". As a result of this, there exist a common misunderstanding that people use fantastic fiction as pure escapism, as a strategy to escape reality. In more recent research, though, the watertight compartments between the fantastic and the real is called into question (Höglund and Trenter 2021).

For example, Sarah Faber claims that fantastic fiction "[…] depend strongly on elements of the real. [...] In practice, there is no such thing as a blank slate" (Faber in Batzke, Erbacher, Hess and Lenhardt 2018: 235). Contrary to the common belief, the fantastic has an important role to play in our understanding of the realm we call reality (Roas 2018; Faber 2018: 234). Jan Christoph Meister describes the fantastic as an epistemological approach among others and a condition "under which we perceive things and events and acquire knowledge about them" (Meister 2012: 24). In this respect the fantastic does not differ from what is casually referred to as reality. It is a state that offers knowledge about ourselves and the world we live in. Some scholars therefore claim that "[...] the fantasy story world has the capacity to make explicit comments on urgent contemporary problems not despite, but due to its unrealistic and supernatural approaches" (Höglund and Trenter 2021: 12-13)

Fantastic fiction moves its readers to alien worlds. Yet this does not prevent the genre from reflecting and engaging in dialogue with the cultural and social order in which it is created. On the contrary, fantasy has been defined by several researchers as a highly political genre. One of the first scholars that argued that fantastic fiction should be regarded as a political genre is Rosemary Jackson in her iconic work *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981). Jackson claimed that the fantasy genres have a political potential because they construct fictional worlds that are "neither entirely real" and "neither entirely unreal". This position between the real and the unreal has an alienating effect that can make our political reality more visible to us (Jackson 1981).

Jackson emphasised that fantasy literature often portrays a resistance to the dominant social order (Jackson 1981: 3). If we take a look at contemporary fantastic fiction this is very common in narratives where monsters tell their own story. Monsters are often depicted as outsiders or outcasts who questions the dominant ideological structure in culture and gives a voice to marginalized groups in society (Höglund 2011). This does not mean that all fantastic fiction challenges the status quo. It is also common that the genre expresses norms and values that can be read as a defence of and preservation of the social order. It is furthermore typical that works of fantastic fiction contains both a questioning and a defence of the existing social order. Regardless of our interpretations of specific fantastic narratives, one thing is certain "[...] fantastic fiction offers great abilities to mediate political opinions and to annotate on societal orders, it also possesses a unique power to evoke our curiosity and concern for social and cultural issues. It makes us aware of urgent matters, encourages us to seek more knowledge and subsequently to act according to our convictions" (Höglund and Trenter 2021: 13).

The purpose of this interdisciplinary issue of *HumaNetten* is to present some academic approaches to the fantastic that illustrates the blooming research fields of the fantastic defined in its broadest sense, from ancient

times to the present. The contributors highlight how iconic fantastic narratives adapt and reinvent, they describe the complexity in fantastic genres and its ability to deconstruct gender stereotypes, they discuss how the supernatural and paranormal can bee used as pedagogical tools for those who seeks knowledge of the past and our historical, political, and cultural heritage. They also exemplify how mythological characters transforms over time and how folklore and historiography tell stories about the social experience of colonialism.

Despite the contributor's divergence in topics, they share the same conviction: the fantastic plays an important role as a cultural phenomenon. All though the concept has a long history of alien, odd, different, wonderful, unreal, impossible, sometimes strange, and always spectacular expressions it always works in order to help humans to understand, cope with, and learn about the world (Höglund and Trenter 2021: 3; Meister 2012).

This special issue presents the contents in the following order:

In "Beyond the Fantasy of Orcs. Orcish Transformations in Amazon's *The Rings of Power*", Bo Kampmann Walther & Lasse Juel Larsen delve into the intricacies of evil's role in Tolkien's world and its transformative nature, shedding light on how Amazon's *The Rings of Power*, through a reimagination of the Orcs and their moral role in society, contributes to a contemporary reinterpretation of Tolkien's lore. It dives into Tolkien's standpoint on evil and juxtaposes it with Amazon's disruption of it, and from a more theoretical position it discusses the epistemological as well as ontological characteristics of change in conjunction with Tolkien's notion of *phantazein*.

Maria Nilson's contribution "Longing for What Never Was –Steampunk and Nostalgia" focuses on steampunk romance and how we can understand the genre's use of an altered past, a "then" that never was. Nilson argues that we seem to long for the past, but not the past as it was, but rather a modern/different/other version of the past. A past that is different from our present, but still familiar enough so that we feel that we belong in it. But what happens when we imagine a different past, an alternate history in speculative fiction?

In "The Ghost in the Black Box" Jordan White and Martin Lund examine the cultural importance of so-called Boo Boxes. Boo Boxes are small gift boxes, tied shut with ribbon, and said to contain a ghost. Although deceptively simple-looking commodities, this article will argue that Boo Boxes, which are sold in conjunction with the annual ghost-story event, "A Tour of Southern Ghosts," are complex cultural products that tie together a host of historical, political, and cultural negotiations over meaning and memory.

Cecilia Trenter's contribution "Haunted Löfstad Palace: Spectacular Sensations and Educational Aids in the Wake of Castle Ghosts" deals with ghost tourism as exemplified by guided tours on an ostensibly haunted Swedish estate. Her thesis is that paranormal effects can be pedagogical tools

when the past is mediated. Ghost tourism is thus not merely entertainment but concerns the interpretation of cultural heritage.

In the article "Eve Revisited, Reimagined and Redeemed", Britt Johanne Farstad describes how the mythological character Eve features and functions in speculative fiction. She revisits and trace Eve through a few parts of our cultural history. According to the most common religious traditions, Eve was the first woman, and Farstad follows her story from *Genesis,* her recreation in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and further on to her major role in philosopher Hegel's argumentation about the inferiority of women and as the main character in Marianne Fredriksson's *Eva's book* (1980).

In "Negotiating with the Bogey Man: Perceptions of European-Southeast Asian Relations in Lore and Tradition", Hans Hägerdal takes up the theme of Occidentalism, stylized images of the West, in a fantastic context. He focuses on the collective memory of the inception of colonial presence in Southeast Asian societies, as epitomized in lore and historiography. As he demonstrates, the image of the European stranger tends to fall into a set of stereotypes which represent the local societies' effort to make sense of colonial intrusion and domination, often by inserting supernatural or outlandish narrative elements.

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Beyond the Fantasy of Orcs: Orcish Transformation in Amazon's *The Rings of Power*

Bo Kampmann Walther and Lasse Juel Larsen

Introduction

This article delves into the concept and portrayal of evil in J.R.R. Tolkien's universe. It specifically examines how Amazon's TV series, *The Rings of Power*, reshapes, revitalizes, and modifies the notion of 'evil' in the Tolkien lore, as explored in the first section. Additionally, the article explores in its second section the intricate concept of *phantazein* employed by Tolkien. This concept serves not only as a theoretical framework for comprehending what imagination is about, including depictions of good and evil, but also as a productive tool for harnessing its potential.

In Tolkien's world, Evil is often portrayed as a pervasive, corrupting force that threatens the very existence of the world. This notion is exemplified in the character of Morgoth (or Melkor), the central antagonist of the First Age in Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* (or *Legendarium*, as he himself called it). Morgoth, akin to a fallen angel in Judeo-Christian cosmology (Coutras 2016), embodies pure malevolence and seeks dominion over all of Arda, that is, Middle-earth, the Undying Lands of Valinor, and the island of Númenor, bestowed by the gods upon the noble race of Men in the late First Age. Morgoth's intention is to subjugate of all its inhabitants to his will—be they gods, elves, or men.

As the narrative unfolds, from *The Silmarillion* to *The Lord of the Rings*, evil undergoes a transformation from a nebulous, abstract force to a more personalized and incarnate entity (Walther 2020). This evolution is evident in Morgoth, and the character of Sauron, "The Dark Lord", but also the wizard Saruman, and the once-innocent hobbit turned wretched creature, Gollum. These figures, previously characterized by nobility or goodness, succumb to greed and the lust for power, illustrating how evil can adapt and become more intricate as it assumes different forms.

However, Tolkien's perspective on Orcs diverges from this pattern; the matter of Orcs is tricky. While he fought with crafting an origin myth for Orcs that aligned with his incorporation of moral theologies rooted in Augustine and Manichaeism, he maintained that Orcs should be perceived as legion, always in the plural, and created solely for total war and utter annihilation. "Tolkien's use and characterization of the orcs parallels the demonization of the enemy in wartime", Robert T. Tally writes (Tally 2019: 2). They were not conceived as singular beings with souls or an enduring purpose beyond their destructive role (Rearick 2004).

It would be unjust to claim that Amazon's ambitious and costly television series, *The Rings of Power* (McKay, Payne 2022-), completely subverts Tolkien's epitome of evil. Nevertheless, as we hope to show in what follows, the series' creators challenge and infuse it with nuanced shades, particularly concerning the concept of transformation and various instantiations of otherness. One of the significant modernizations introduced in *The Rings of Power* is a more diverse and inclusive cast of characters. While Tolkien's works were products of their time and primarily featured a homogeneous, Eurocentric world, the Amazon series makes a conscious effort to reflect the diversity of today's audience.[1] Furthermore, the series explores the allure of transformation and the underlying motives that drive individuals and entities to change – motives that are intimately connected to *phantazein*, which is Tolkien's idea of sub-creation, worldbuilding, and imagination. This will be taken up later in this article. The introduction of the character Adar (only vaguely indicated in the authoritative Tolkien lore), once an Elf and the "Father" of the Orcs, argues for the right of all living beings to coexist in the world and have a voice of their own. Here, Amazon modernizes Tolkien's tradition, not only by embracing 21st-century sociocultural themes such as racial diversity and environmentally conscious thinking but also by addressing innate moral and cultural opacities within Tolkien's works.

In *The Rings of Power*, evil takes on a tangible form and follows its own transformational trajectory. It becomes increasingly human, manifesting individuality and influencing others while simultaneously yearning for a passive existence.[2] Evil seeks to secure a stronghold, a region of the world from which it can orchestrate its malevolent designs (Tally 2016).[3] In many ways, *The Rings of Power* is a drama of how Evil's ambition is tensioned between restlessness and dwelling and craving a geographical as well as socio-cultural territory of its own.

Evil's alteration, both in its abstract and incarnate manifestations, confronts the very questions that troubled Tolkien. The origin of evil, such as

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[1] The emphasis on promoting diversity has ignited a series of controversies, particularly in the context of the show's portrayal of Elves, which deviates from their traditional Caucasian appearance. Notably, websites like Red State, known for their far-right stance, have raised objections, asserting that the series deviates from Tolkien's vision of a medieval-mythical world by casting Black and Latino actors in prominent roles, such as Ismael Cruz Cordova, who portrays the elf warrior Arondir. They argue that these roles should be exclusively reserved for white actors, based on their interpretation of Tolkien's original description of Elvish characters in his novels from the 1950s (Svetkey 2022).

[2] Spoiler alert! It wasn't until they were filming the third episode of the first season of *The Rings of Power* that producers J.D. Payne and Patrick McKay informed Australian actor Charlie Vickers he was, indeed, playing Sauron. This secret was kept from most of the cast and crew as late into the production as possible. Alluding to the idea that the formation of Evil can be strategized, it is progressive and in a way can be 'found', Vickers, being the first actor to play Sauron as a human being, likens Sauron's ability to shape-shift and fully immerse himself into being a human in order to accomplish his agenda to that of a thespian. See Vejvoda 2022.

[3] One can observe the modern trend of portraying malevolent entities as Romantic outsiders and outcasts, as discussed by Hartinger 2012.

the Orcs, remains elusive. If they are indeed living creatures under the Sun, and if all creation is inherently good, as posited by Eru Ilúvatar (the one God of the *Legendarium*), why did they turn to evil? Some might argue, like the Manicheans, that the world inherently harbors a malevolent impulse, a proclivity for doing harm. Yet, Tolkien sought to leave an enigmatic mark on this issue, preserving the Orcs as a mystery. And why does evil, or evilness in a broader sense, shift from an elemental force in the early shape of Morgoth to a nuanced, sentient form that favours order, organization, and hierarchical power structures?[4]

Amazon's *The Rings of Power* contributes to a contemporary reinterpretation or perhaps a reimagining of Tolkien's lore. To show how, section one dives into Tolkien's stance on evil and juxtaposes it with Amazon's disruption of it, for instance how Galadriel becomes the most unlikely racist of them all. This is followed by section two in which we discuss the nature of transformation and its relation to Tolkien's conception of *phantazein*.

The nature of Evil and the (new) role of Orcs

Martina Juričková posits that Tolkien adhered to the doctrine of Christianity, which draws from Augustine's teachings, and thus believed that nothing was inherently evil from the outset. This perspective stems from the notion that everything is created in the image of God, who embodies absolute goodness (Juričková 2019: 2). In this view, true evil cannot exist independently since the essence of every entity is rooted in its mere existence, its being. Evil, in this context, arises because of a deficiency or a perversion of good and is therefore reliant on the existence of good, much like a parasite (ibid.). Good can exist independently of evil, but evil cannot exist without good as its counterpart.

Tolkien's engagement with the concept of the "theft of the unripe fruit", as seen in his unfinished work "The New Shadow" (Walther 2022), demonstrates his deep connection to Augustinian dogma where evil is understood as the act of preventing the full realization of an entity's true potential (Costabile 2017; Walther 2021). Tolkien adapts Augustine's doctrine of goodness to his own concepts of how good can be perverted or corrupted and how it can lead to disfigurement or reduction (Smith 2006). Juričková highlights that evil, in Tolkien's art, can deform or diminish one's being. An example is Sauron, who ultimately becomes a mere shadow and later just an eye. This illustrates Tolkien's belief that evil not only corrupts individuals but also dehumanizes them, stripping away their physical form. They are reduced to a bestial state, as exemplified by characters like the

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[4] Nevertheless, while Adar is depicted as a 'noble' Orc, aligning him more closely with the aristocratic and hierarchically structured world of Tolkien, the majority of Orcs in *The Rings of Power* do not espouse this societal framework. Instead, they view it as oppressive and patronizing.

wretched Gollum[5], the snake-like Wormtongue in *The Lord of the Rings*, or the facially mutilated Adar in Amazon's *The Rings of Power*.[6] In Tolkien's narratives, disfigurement is closely linked to dehumanization or, as his mythological world advances into the 'modern' ages, de-individualization (Curry 1997; Rosebury 2003). Sauron and his ideals become defaced, reduced to a necromantic entity or an Eye surrounded by "Nothingness", as Frodo witnesses in Galadriel's enchanted mirror in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. This portrayal of evil aligns with an Augustinian interpretation, where evil lacks both goodness and existence.

However, it is worth noting that while Sauron is largely depicted as lacking physicality in most of Tolkien's work, he still exerts a significant impact on other beings (Tally 2023). This influence occurs mainly through proxies: firstly, by manifesting as a psychological or pathological force that corrupts, induces despair, fosters hopelessness, and causes disorientation in different creatures. Second, he controls his operations through armies, spies, alliances, slaves, and remote repression. Third, Sauron's presence is made tangible through the very landscape and geography he occupies or has seized (Walther 2020).

Yet, within Tolkien's narratives, traces of Manichean evil are also discernible (Fry 2015). The Manicheans believed in the existence of two equally potent principles or gods – one representing good, associated with Light, and the other embodying evil, associated with Darkness. These two forces engage in a perpetual struggle for dominion over the world, influencing human actions and decisions (Juričková, p. 3). This framework gives rise to the poetic concept of "splintered light", a prevalent motif in Tolkien (Flieger 2002).

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[5] Displaying schizophrenic symptoms that seem to have emerged from an unwilling descent into the murky underbelly of Middle-earth, Gollum is a captivating character within Tolkien's mythology. He introduces a more 'modern' and intrapsychic interpretation of evil, akin to the Jungian perspective, when compared to the visceral destruction caused by Melkor and the power-hungry ambitions of Sauron. Another intriguing hypothesis suggests that Tolkien might have drawn inspiration for the name Gollum from the Jewish Golem. The term golem appears only once in the *Bible* (Psalm 139:16) and is the precursor to the Golem in Jewish folklore. A connection to Christian theology entered the narrative when Tolkien revised *The Hobbit* in 1951. At this juncture, Gollum transforms into a fallen Hobbit in need of compassion and mercy. Furthermore, as an animated and anthropomorphic entity crafted entirely from inanimate matter, the Jewish golem serves as the antithesis to Augustinian (Christian) belief. If life can be constructed from pre-existing material, it implies that the distortion of being as a symbol of evil does not diminish the intrinsic essence bestowed by God upon humanity. Rather, it signifies a disruption in the ontological substance already shaped by humans or, at the very least, something that exists within the human realm. In this latter scenario, its origin remains untraceable, as it no longer traces directly back to God and God's creation. Paradoxically, the Jewish golem becomes 'unmade' within Christian orthodoxy. See also Wendling 2008.

[6] While bearing facial scars, Adar distinguishes himself from the other Orcs by not sharing in their dehumanization, disfigurement, and inherent ugliness. He aligns more closely with the archetype of the Byronic hero from the Romantic era, embodying an aestheticism that resonates with his inner moral character and the Elvish features he has retained.

A key element of Tolkien's storytelling that highlights the dual nature of evil (Laugesen & Walther, in press), straddling both Augustinian and Manichean origins, is the Ring. On one hand, the Ring is set in motion by Sauron as he invests it with his powers, making it a direct extension of the perverted good that has turned to evil within him, aligning with the Augustinian perspective (Davison 2013). On the other hand, the Ring also exhibits traits of an independent evil force in the Manichean sense (Caldecott 2009). It possesses its own will, as frequently observed by characters like Frodo and Gandalf.

Before Oromë's discovery of the Elves at Cuiviénen, during a time when the Earth was a flat sphere, Morgoth managed to abduct some of them and twisted them into the first Orcs. Tolkien believed that the creation of Orcs served as a grievous insult to the Children of Ilúvatar. Orcs served under Morgoth in the First Age and under Sauron in the Second and Third Ages. Around the year 1000 of the Second Age, the era Amazon's *The Rings of Power* focuses on, Sauron, sometimes bearing the name Annatar, reappeared in Middle-earth and claimed Mordor as his own, where he began constructing the Barad-dûr stronghold. During the War of the Elves and Sauron in the year 1700 of the Second Age, a battle led by Elrond and the Númenóreans, the Orcs served as Sauron's primary military force.

What *The Rings of Power* accomplishes, as suggested by Leon Miller in his *Polygon* column, is presenting the Orcs as "more three-dimensional villains" than in Tolkien's original work, thereby "showcasing their softer side" (Miller 2022). Episode six, titled "Udûn", features a full-scale battle between Men, Elves, and Orcs. After their defeat, the leader of the Orc pack, Adar, engages in a conversation with Galadriel about the complex topic of Orcs and their moral rights. Adar asserts that they deserve the same fundamental rights as any of Middle-earth's other sentient races and that their dubious origins should not make them any less the children of their world's god.

Galadriel responds with a recollection from thousands of years ago when she heard stories of Elves taken by Morgoth, subjected to torture, twisted, and remade into a new and corrupted form of life. To her, Orcs are "a mistake, made in mockery" of life. Adar, however, insists on being called an "Uruk" and argues that his "children" have no master, no longer serve Sauron or Morgoth, and deserve their place under the sun (even though the sun is fatal to them). 'Adar' is a gender-neutral name of Hebrew and Babylonian origin that means 'darkened', 'eclipsed', and 'majestic'. In the Silvan Elvish language that Tolkien composed, 'Adar' is Sindarin for 'father'. Adar is the father of the Orcs. "Adar is an elf who is not an elf and an orc that is not an orc", Rotem Rusak writes in a *Nerdist* column (Rusak 2022). Adar counters Galadriel by saying: "Each one has a name, a heart. We are creations of the One, Master of the Secret Fire, the same as you. As worthy of the breath of

life and just as worthy of a home". Adar's revelation implies that not only do the Orcs have a right to live but also to build a home of their own.

The fact that Adar does not get burnt by the sun is crucial.[7] In Tolkien illustrator David Day's books "Years of the Lamps" refer to the Lamps of the Valar, Illuin and Ormal, that stood upon pillars in the far north and south of the world during the Spring of Arda. They continued to shine for 1,600 Valian Years until their destruction by Melkor. The period after Day calls "Years of the Sun" that began towards the end of the First Age of the Children of Ilúvatar and continued through the Second, Third, and part of the Fourth in Tolkien's stories. Tolkien himself estimated that modern times would correspond to the sixth or seventh age. That Orcs do not endure under the sun is also a metaphor indicating that they are not 'shun upon', enlightened or behold, and thus are not genuine beings. This is in accordance with the Augustinian dogma: existence is goodness created by an external power, and it lives under the sun (or the Lamps), unless it, like the Orcs, has been tarnished, dispossessed of life, and driven to the shadows or darkness. The burning question is thus whether the Orcs can (or are allowed to) trace their cultural heritage to a point in history before or after they were burnt, chased away from the sun. The lack of permission for them to subsist under the sun means that they possess no goodness (since they are un-made, destroyed, rather than created, and no light shines upon them), and on top of that, they have no history (Sabo 2007). The Orc conundrum evidently parallels the Christian narrative of the Fall and the Original Sin very often touched upon by Tolkien (Schweicher 1996; Freeman 2022) – but in a mocking, stained fashion. And the fact that Adar, the spokesperson of the damper Orcs, even raises this question does not affect the Augustinian interpretation, but rather it confronts the socio-cultural and ethico-juridical world in which he and the Orcs are forced to live as shadowy beasts.

And speaking about history: We should not forget that Adar's societal apostasy happens in a time of great turmoil and change that forms the backdrop of *The Rings of Power*. In Tolkien's mythology the Earth (Arda) went from a flat sphere with glowing Trees and later Lamps to a round globe with sun and moon to the cataclysmic downfall of Númenor where The Undying Lands (Aman and Valinor) were forever separated from the known world (Flieger 2006).

Adar implies that the Augustinian corruption of goodness might have also affected the revengeful and morally blinded Galadriel. He suggests, "It would

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[7] A prevalent motif in the portrayal of vampires is the notion that those who retain remnants of their humanity can venture into sunlight, whereas the entirely corrupted and monstrous are relegated to nocturnal activity (Höglund 2011). One theory, which echoes Augustinian theology, is that since they are soulless evil creatures of darkness, they are set apart from God (the light). Thus, when they are exposed to sunlight, it is like being exposed to God, and this is anathema to them.

seem I'm not the only Elf alive who has been transformed by darkness. Perhaps your search for Morgoth's successor should have ended in your own mirror". Interestingly, many critics of *The Rings of Power* have observed that Galadriel appears to recognize Adar immediately upon meeting him. However, her attitude towards him reflects blind rage and a complete lack of compassion. Adar's backstory, on the other hand, introduces the idea that Orcs are "no longer the horde introduced in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, tumbling off a cliff in their haste to attack their enemy, but a singular, terrifying monster", thus shedding light on "the vulnerability that comes with each version of the monster" (Millman 2022).

There is also a scene in *The Rings of Power* (episode three) where Adar performs a ritualistic mercy killing of an Orc. It feels remarkably genuine, evoking a profound sense of sorrow and compassion. Adar harbors genuine pity for these creatures and seeks to extend his assistance, rather than merely exploiting them as an overlord might. In that moment, something extraordinary unfolds within these typically reviled Orcs – a glimpse of faith, reverence, perhaps even happiness, or a shimmer of 'culture'. Their demeanor towards Adar stands in stark contrast to the fear they hold for characters like Sauron or Morgoth. There is simply a marked difference in how they regard Adar and his mere presence.

In *The Silmarillion*, readers learn how Morgoth imprisoned some of the earliest Elves (the Avari) in Middle-earth to create servants for his growing army. Coveting the creator Eru Ilúvatar's ability to create life from nothing, and unable to possess that power, Morgoth resorted to taking lives that Ilúvatar had created and twisted them to their core through unspeakable torture and dark magic. When Morgoth was first captured and imprisoned, Sauron retained his power in the northern fortress of Angband, and the number of Orcs serving the Dark Lord multiplied exponentially. Despite the creation of other dark creatures such as trolls and dragons, Orcs became the backbone of Morgoth's army due to their rapid reproductive capacity. During Middle-earth's final battle against Morgoth, the number of Orcs fighting against the alliance of Men and Elves was simply incalculable.

Tolkien himself speculated that in the Second Age, Sauron was indeed "greater" in effect than Morgoth at the end of the First Age:

> Why? Because, though he was far smaller by natural stature, he had not yet fallen so low. Eventually he also squandered his power (of being) in the endeavour to gain control of others. But he was not obliged to expend so much of himself. To gain domination over Arda, Morgoth had let most of his being pass into the physical constituents of the Earth […] Sauron, however, inherited the 'corruption' of Arda, and only spent his (much more limited) power on the Rings; for it was the *creatures* of Earth, in their *minds and wills*, that he desired to dominate (Tolkien 2022: 48f.).

As a Maia, one of the spirits that descended into Ëa to help the Valar (Ainur) shape the world[8], Sauron likely possessed a more profound understanding of the "Music" of the Ainur, the grand song of creation before the dawn of Time, than even Melkor, as Tolkien explains. (Interestingly, in the ancient Indian Hindu tradition, *Maya* stands for the true power of illusion). Consequently, Sauron never descended into the depths of "nihilistic madness" (ibid.). However, the progression of Sauron's "plans" leads to an inescapable paradox: while he initially pursued an altruistic motive to organize goodness for all inhabitants of Arda, he ultimately became imprisoned within the confines of "his own isolated mind" because the "sole object of his will" became an end in itself. Tolkien here employs a play on words, suggesting that the means to an end indeed became the End. In essence, Sauron's original intent was to do good, but the agency required to achieve it spiraled out of control, giving rise to a malevolent individualization.

What's intriguing is that this transformation, from Morgoth's visceral, primal dominance to Sauron's more refined, noble, and human equanimity, parallels the shift from the countless Orcs to the singular individual, particularly exemplified in the character of Adar and his intricate story. Along with this deepening of character and moral complexity comes a yearning for order and structure (Guanio-Uluru 2015), akin to the civilized and 'natural' evolution of the earthly and tainted forces of the First Age. Sauron's fixation on order, which represents a departure from the crude chaos of the original evil, encapsulates his essence and his relentless pursuit of bringing it to Middle-earth, with Adar presumably being just a means to that end.

In a letter to his publisher Milton Wadman, where Tolkien offers perhaps the most extensive analysis of his own body of work, as quoted in the newly published *The Fall of Númenor*, he reflects on Sauron:

> Of old there was Sauron the Maia, whom the Sindar in Beleriand named Gorthaur. In the beginning of Arda Melkor seduced him to his allegiance, and he became the greatest and most trusted of the servants of the Enemy, and the most perilous, for he could assume many forms, and for long if he willed he could still appear noble and beautiful, so as to deceive all but the most wary (Tolkien 2022: 47f.).

And later:

> [Sauron] lingers in Middle-earth. Very slowly, beginning with fair motives: the reorganizing and rehabilitation of the ruin of Middle-earth, 'neglected by the gods', he becomes a reincarnation of Evil, and a thing lusting for Complete Power – and so consumed ever more fiercely with hate (especially of gods and Elves) (Tolkien 2022: 48).

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[8] Wood (2003) speculates that the semi-divine nature of the Maiar and the fact that they can be sent on missions to work out the divine purpose of Eru Ilúvatar makes them much like the angels of Christianity.

In Angband, located north of Middle-earth, Sauron was regrouping Morgoth's forces and devising his next moves. Sauron's further experiments on his own creations, the Orcs, aimed to discover how to gain complete control over others, a pursuit that ultimately pushed Adar to his breaking point. Adar claims, in his conversation with Galadriel, to have "split" Sauron open and killed him. Although viewers are aware that Sauron hasn't been completely vanquished, it is essential to remember that Adar's actions might be driven by a desire to ascend the hierarchy of darkness. His leadership's primary objective was to secure a land they could call home, ideally in the Southlands – a region southeast of Middle-earth, situated east of the Anduin River and the future kingdom of Gondor, including the forthcoming Mordor.

Galadriel finds this proposition unacceptable and informs Adar that the Uruk have "hearts that were created by Morgoth". However, as previously discussed, Adar counters by asserting that they were created by the same god who brought all things into existence, including herself. In an Augustinian fashion, Adar argues that the Uruk cannot be inherently evil.

However, there's a caveat to this argument. When Adar is presenting his creation myth, he employs a form of exclusionary reasoning. He is specifically referring to his *own* species – the Elves who were initially created ex nihilo by Eru Ilúvatar and subsequently corrupted or bred into a 'false' species, later known as the Orcs. Adar, therefore, excludes those Orcs who are his "children"; they were indeed moulded by Morgoth. This essentially means that the Augustinian argument, asserting that the essence of evil lies in the corruption of being or the complete absence of existence, only applies to the Orcs in Morgoth's lineage, not those created by Eru Ilúvatar (that strictly speaking were only Orcs *in potentia*).

So, is Galadriel exhibiting a form of racism?[9] Yes, throughout the series she's a chauvinistic and xenophobic Warrior Princess. And when it comes to Adar and his Elvish lineage, she fails to recognize not only that he is just as entitled to moral autonomy as she is but also that they share a common origin – they are both Elves. However, this bias does not extend to Morgoth's offspring; they are simply programmed to fit into a good-versus-bad dichotomy.

In conclusion, what does *The Rings of Power* has to say about the nature of evil? *Evolution of Evil:* Over the course of history, evil transforms from the amorphous and colossal force embodied by Morgoth, portrayed vividly and almost cartoonishly in *The Rings of Power*, to the cunning and scheming

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[9] Kiona Delana Jones writes in *Gamerant* that Galadriel's portrayal in *The Rings of Power* is a departure from her serene and wise persona in *The Lord of the Rings* movies. The younger Galadriel in *The Rings of Power* is angry, hungry for vengeance, and willing to use weapons against her enemies (Jones 2023). Discussing the inherent racism of Galadriel when confronted with Adar, Edward Sission ponders on the widespread audience rejection of Amazon's Galadriel being a racist. Galadriel is cast exactly to Tolkien's specifications, he asserts. She is a beautiful, long-haired, blonde white woman, and Amazon regrettably stereotypes her as the "inner Sauron" in every blonde (Sisson 2023).

essence personified by Sauron, known as the character Halbrand. This transformation reflects the shift from the chaotic and primal evil to the more subtle and strategic evil we encounter in the character of Sauron. *Duality of Evil:* Evil in the narrative becomes a matter of grappling with the tension between two opposing forces, one representing good and the other evil. This duality echoes both Adar's experiences, which have a Manichean quality, and Galadriel's Augustinian conviction. Galadriel, although perhaps holding a loftier stature, exhibits bias as well, believing that the true moral essence of Adar (or any other Orc) is eternally corrupt and, in a sense, stripped of existence, thus warranting their eradication. *Moral agency:* Adar also exercises a moral choice, or rather, he yearns for the societal right to make a choice. Having been passed from one evil lord (Morgoth) to another (Sauron), both merely the "makers of his misery", Adar aspires to attain communal and genuine agency. He seeks to escape his predetermined fate and the biased perceptions others (the Elves) hold about his destiny. He longs to act as an autonomous being with equal and unequivocal rights, with the capacity to transform in accordance with his autonomy. In essence, Adar desires to break free from the constraints of Tolkien's lore and yet still preserve its unique concept of *phantazein* or creational change, to which we now turn.

Phantazein

When Madame d'Aulnoy (1650-1705) termed her works *contes de fée* (fairy tales)[10], she invented the term that is now generally used for the genre, thus distinguishing such tales from those involving no marvels. In Tolkien's "On Fairy-Stories" (orig. 1939), where he expounds upon his own craft of storytelling and examines the role of imaginative literature, enchantment emerges as the defining characteristic of fairy-stories. According to Verlyn Flieger, *Fäerie* represents "the place and practice, the essential quality, of enchantment" (Flieger 2002). It's noteworthy that 'enchantment' traces its origins to Old French *encantement*, signifying both a magical spell and the act of singing, concert, and chorus. Latin *incantare*, derived from *in* and *cantare*, meaning to sing, is also at its root. Elves are inherently enchanting; they possess beautiful singing voices (Silk 2022), although their melodies may be perilous to Men, as Tolkien labels it a "perilous realm". The very world, Arda, initially conceived as a product of imaginative perception and then materialized matter, and inhabited by the Ainur (Valar), owes its existence to music, as expounded upon in Tolkien's cosmogony, the *Ainulindalë*. Consequently, fairy-stories not only captivate by immersing their audiences into a coherent and otherworldly realm[11] but also participate

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[10] It is worth bearing in mind that d'Aulnoy's fairy tales were written in a style suitable for entertaining in adult salon gatherings, and not with a child audience in mind.

[11] While Tzvetan Todorov's concept of the fantastic focuses on the unsettling, ambiguous nature of the genre, where the line between the real and the supernatural is blurred (Todorov 1975), Tolkien's notion of fantasy is characterized by the creation of immersive and internally

in the act of creation (Northrup 2004; Hart & Khovacs 2020). Essentially, Tolkien suggests that they aren't merely conceived but crafted.[12]

Fairy-stories offer four essential elements to humans: Fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation. Among these, Tolkien asserts that Fantasy is the most significant, as the other three responses to fantasy derive from it. He further emphasizes that Fantasy is both a mode of thought, born from imagination, and the tangible result of that thought. This duality mirrors the process of writing and the world it creates, not to mention the interplay between language and the world it inhabits (Ekman 2013).

Hence, *Fäerie* relates to both change and fantasy, that is, creation. Flieger posits that the term 'fantasy' is etymologically connected to 'phenomena'. While phenomena are associated with the appearances of the Primary World, fantasy involves the construction of a Secondary World supported by human language, a "device" well-suited for the creation of fantasy. The word 'fantastic', therefore, signifies 'making visible' or 'revealing appearances' (Flieger, ibid. p. 45). This might lead us to speculate whether human language possesses an even more potent, materialistic, or creative power, where *phantazein* not only signifies the ability to make things appear but also to *make* the things themselves that are imagined – revealing appearances *for the mind* or revealing *in plain sight* (Walker 2009). This appearance, born from the fusion of conception and execution, takes the form of *aletheia*, the Greek term for disclosure or truth, which clearly denotes the stripping away of the outer skin of things to reveal their true interiority. In Tolkien's philosophy of language, *phantazein* represents words that not only have the capacity to create the 'fantastic' (because they are cogently arranged into a sub-created world) but also to bring the imagined 'things' into existence. This dual nature of the fantastic bridges the divide between perception and creation, the purely imaginative and the ontological-material realm, connecting the noumenal and the phenomenal (in the Kantian sense).[13] The real question regarding fantasy and its place in the modern world lies in its potential to yield physical (ontological) change, not merely epistemological.

Throughout his body of work, Tolkien grappled with the concept of change, often highlighting its negative consequences (Shippey 1982; 2000). Among others, he saw the devastating impact of deforestation (a grim pastime

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consistent imaginary worlds where the presence of the magical and mythical is taken for granted.

[12] Fez Silk writes: "The metaphor of music […] in Tolkien's work serves both as a means of describing an Enchantment of the secondary-world characters, and as a means of enchanting the readers themselves" (Silk 2022: 101). Silk further notes that the etymology of 'enchantment' might be compared to the similar Modern English term 'spell', which derives from Old English *spel* and its Germanic cognate, meaning 'story', 'recital', or 'tale' (Silk 2022: 108). Tolkien himself speculates in "On Fariry-Stories" that 'spell' refers both to a story told and formula (or token) of wonder.

[13] Tolkien's idea of an ancient mytho-poetic rendition of language that would bridge the gap between symbols and reality was very much inspired by the philosopher and poet Owen Barfield (1973). See Flieger 2002.

of Orcs), as highly applicable to the modern wasteland. He conceived of the corruption of fairy magic, intricately linked to the created Earth, as intimately connected to the rise of the "Machine" that dominates life. And he reflected on the transformation of noble valour into the horrors of total war.

The Elves possess the secret of *phantazein* and have access to it. However, the Elves can choose to actively convey the apparition of fantasy to our perception, especially that of Men. Lothlórien, the forest kingdom of Galadriel, the vast woodland realm of the Galadhrim Elves located near the lower Misty Mountains in northern Middle-earth, as depicted in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, offers natural beauty, growth, and fertility. When Frodo the Hobbit enters this dominion, one can draw parallels with Kant's concept of the sublime and Longinus' *Peri Hypsous*. The qualities of light, shape, and colour become heightened, pointing to the faculties of reason and recognition. However, simultaneously, the perceived objects, "drawn at the uncovering of his eyes", elude the constraints of language:

> It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked upon a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed clear-cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured forever. He saw no colors but those he knew—gold, white, blue, and green—but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had, at that moment, first perceived them and coined new and wonderful names. In winter here, no heart could mourn for summer or spring. No blemish, sickness, or deformity marred anything that grew upon the earth. In the land of Lórien, there was no stain (FR, II, vi, 365).

Frodo's pictorial experience[14] in the realm of Elvish immortality appears to be a result of an artistic perspective—a moving camera or eye, adjusting itself to a "vanished world". The imagery of brilliance and the absence of decay or evil is framed through the lens of a "high window", akin to an artist's perspective. This elevated perspective introduces an element of distance and an aerial storytelling, contrasting with the grounded events unfolding during the Fellowship's journey. Frodo's initiation into Lothlórien's ageless realm may hint at Tolkien's own views on the role of fantasy, as we examined

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[14] In Tolkien's writings, a recurring theme is the infusion of ethics into the landscapes that characters encounter, highlighting his profound belief in the symbolic potency of language. However, when we examine the passage about Lothlórien, it becomes apparent that it not only emphasizes the vitality of the natural world and the names that give life to its elements, but also employs a subtle layer of allegory (which Tolkien famously disliked). In other words, this description is 'coded' with allegorical elements, manifesting as the *locus amoenus*, the idyllic landscape often with connotations of Eden or Elysium (Walther 2020). The tradition goes back to Homer's depictions of the grotto of Calypso and the garden of Alcinous (Curtius 1968). In contrast to the locus amoenus, we encounter the *locus horribilis*, a representation of the mundane incarnation of hell, reminiscent of Tolkien's Mordor. Overall, Tolkien held that the purity of the province is derived from its undeveloped state and therefore its closer proximity to nature and to God, whereas the urbanized and industrialized location has been tainted by the advent of manmade structures and attitudes, i.e., "the Machine" (Jacobs 2012).

above. Stories rooted in fantasy challenge conventional naming—"for which his language had no name"—while simultaneously offering renewed insight. Through the "high window", we witness an artist's portrayal of a specific agenda in writing, one in which fantastic objects not only appear but also empower the ability to create. Note the active sense in the passage: A reborn Frodo can now "first" perceive the colours in the land of Lothlórien and craft "new and wonderful", almost Adamic names for them. Lothlórien inculcates a power linked with language, enticing the artist (Frodo) to emerge as a maker.

The transformation that Lothlórien's scenery triggers in Frodo occurs across three dimensions: epistemologically, as a new appreciation of the wonders of crafted nature; societally, through an enhanced sense of moral goodness and a reverence for nature; and ontologically, as names suddenly come to naturally represent or even inhabit the things they signify.

Tolkien's perspective on language mirrors Plato's dialogue, *Cratylus*, where it is posited, that language undergoes a dual transformation, distancing itself from the real (the Idea). Words become representations of objects, which in turn are reflections of abstract concepts. This process results in language losing significance and value as it moves further from the Idea it seeks to emulate (Ewegen 2014). However, Cratylus presents an alternative viewpoint, much like that of Frodo or Tolkien himself. In Plato's eponymous text, language is seen as possessing a hidden, genuine name or naming capacity that closely aligns with the original Idea.

Phantazein can thus be seen as an idealized concept, from Plato to Lothlórien, bridging the gap between the perceptual and the phenomenal. One might even argue that the very notion of what *phantazein* can achieve is a fantasy in itself. Originally (i.e., in Tolkien's mind), its powers were reserved for Elves and later extended to Men in the retelling and reshaping of the sub-created World. However, here is where contemporary change enters the picture. In Amazon's *The Rings of Power*, with its anticipation of physical transformation and its lesson of respecting the queer or the other (Chance 2005), fantasy also becomes applicable to evil incarnated, Sauron, and to Orcs. Or perhaps we should say to *an* Orc.

In *The Rings of Power*, a notable distinction emerges between the Evil of Sauron and the malevolence of the Orcs. Sauron's descent into the abyss of burgeoning industrialization or instrumentalism sets him apart. He may exhibit, Tolkien confesses, a level of refinement far beyond the mere "nihilistic madness" of Morgoth, his predecessor. Yet, Sauron is ensnared by his own process of individuation—an inner fantasy—both liberating and imprisoning him. This internal struggle culminates in his insatiable desire and boundless hatred. Conversely, the corruption of Adar stems from external influences, particularly the spiteful forces of Morgoth and Sauron, from which Adar yearns to break free. When cornered, whether by Morgoth, Sauron, or Galadriel, Adar asserts his right to change and expresses a profound longing

to discover a suitable home for his sun-sensitive children. To put it bluntly, Sauron speaks of power while Adar dreams of agency.

Returning to the discussion of Augustinian concepts of good and evil, it is possible that the occurrence of *phantazein* in an ontological sense depends on whether a person remains unaltered, preserving their existence. Typically, this is not the case for Orcs, who are often portrayed as hordes of ruthless warmongers hardwired for total war and annihilation. This perspective aligns with the portrayal of Orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* (the books and Peter Jackson's film trilogy). However, as we have seen, the story of Adar in *The Rings of Power* presents a different narrative.

Adar not only possesses the capacity to contemplate the nature of good and evil, whether viewed as an internal 'godlike' state of mind (reminiscent of Manicheism) or the corruption and eradication of one's being (in the Augustinian sense), but he also carries a significant amount of Elvish heritage. This heritage is evident in his adherence to Elvish rituals, such as the planting of new life as an act of defiance against death before going to war (as depicted in episode six). Additionally, Adar expresses a genuine longing for the sun, suggesting a connection with the Elves that transcends racial dominance. Could it be that *The Rings of Power* secretly tells the story of an Orc's resurrection?

Conclusion

In this article we have tried to extrapolate the complex and multifaceted journey and fabric of evil in Tolkien's Middle-earth, as exemplified in Amazon's *The Rings of Power* and the Tolkien lore. The philosophical and moral roots of Augustine and Manicheanism reflect Tolkien's own evolving perspectives on the nature of malevolence and shape the style of his prose, as we witnessed in the Lothlórien passage. The deep connection to Augustinian ideas of evil is evident in his belief that nothing is inherently evil from the outset. Evil, in his view, is a perversion or deficiency of good and cannot exist independently. This perspective is exemplified in the gradual transformation of evil across different ages, from the primordial and colossal Morgoth to the cunning and scheming Sauron. It highlights how evil can corrupt and dehumanize individuals, stripping them of their physical form and reducing them to shadows of their former selves.

Turning to *The Rings of Power*, the duality of evil is a recurring theme that echoes both Augustinian and Manichean interpretations. Characters like Adar and Galadriel embody this duality, representing the tension between opposing forces of good and evil. Adar's quest for moral agency and recognition underscores the desire for autonomy and redemption even in the face of biased and suppressing perceptions. *The Rings of Power* invites new audiences to contemplate the intricacies of evil in Tolkien's world, emphasizing the ever-evolving nature of malice and the potential for redemption and transformation. It challenges them to reconsider preconceived notions about

the origins and essence of evil, highlighting the complexity of moral choices and the yearning for agency and change in a world defined (but not limited) by its mythical lore.

We furthermore scrutinized the key concept of *phantazein,* a term signifying the power of fantasy and creation, particularly in the context of the sub-created world of Middle-earth. This concept intertwines with Tolkien's examination of the transformative nature of language (Fawcett 2007) and its potential to bridge the gap between perception and reality. *Phantazein* resonates with the enchantment found in fairy-stories, emphasizing the role of imagination and language in crafting secondary worlds. The Elves are inherently enchanting since they possess the ability to create and convey the apparition of fantasy. This process involves both an epistemological transformation, where one gains a new appreciation of the world, and an ontological change, where names come to represent or even inhabit the things they signify.

Presumably the Orcs do the exact opposite: They can neither imagine, create, nor sing the world into existence. Their creation is not *out of nothing* (ex nihilo) but *into nothing* (in nihilo), a tearing down of creation which their masters (Morgoth, Sauron, Saruman) then alter – disfigure or mutilate – into something different. It is exactly this blind and sullied destruction or anti-creation that sickens Adar and which he rebels against.

The portrayal of Lothlórien, a realm of Elvish immortality, perfectly illustrates the power of *phantazein*, as it transforms the perception of beauty and goodness in the world. Through the lens of a "high window", the landscape becomes an arty perspective, and language gains the ability to craft new and wonderful names for things, reinforcing the connection between language and creation. Tolkien's exploration of change, both positive and negative, highlights the consequences of the transformation brought about by fantasy. While the long-gone Elves are the primary bearers of this power, contemporary adaptations (or reimaginings) like Amazon's *The Rings of Power* suggest that even Orcs, traditionally depicted as forces of evil, may have the potential for change and agency.

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"Longing for What Never Was" – Steampunk Romance and Nostalgia

Maria Nilson

In turbulent times we seem to look back to what is familiar, to what was or rather, to what might have been, in order to find security and maybe also hope for the future (Nilson 2022). It is no wonder that television-dramas such as *Downton Abbey* and *Bridgerton* are popular today. We seem to long for the past, but not the past as it was, but rather an "other" version of the past. A past that is different from our present, but still familiar enough so that we feel that we belong in it. The tv- adaptation of Julia Quinn's historical romance novels about the Bridgerton family are an interesting example. The story takes place in the Regency period and follows an upper-class family with eight siblings. How much is a depiction of the past and how much is a comment of the present? When do historical fiction need to be accurate and when is anachronisms welcome? There was an outcry after the first episode of season 1 with included a scene where the heroine Daphne is forced into a corset, but a corset from the 1850s rather than a Regency-corset. But when Daphne and her duke dances to a version of Madonna's "Material Girl" many applauded. Historical fiction often merges historical facts with the modern to establish common ground with readers (Ehriander 2012: 167). The modern reader/viewer needs to be able to connect in some way to the characters to find them compelling. Even if there is a widespread idea that some human traits are "universal" and never changes, few believe that an 19th century person would act and think exactly as a contemporary one. A lot of historical fiction balance between depicting a past that is, on some level "correct", but change it enough so that is feels familiar for a modern reader.

Maybe there is an advantage to imagining a different past? Steampunk romance can be seen as an example of trying to do this; of trying to envision a different kind of past what might be able to change the society we live in. There is an episode from *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, season 7, "Badda-Bing, Badda – Bang" which takes place in a holographic version of a 1940s nightclub in the US which is interesting in this context. Commander Sisko complains to his wife Kassidy that this version of history hides the fact that a black man would never be allowed to be a guest at such a night club. Kassidy answers that the version of history told in the holodeck program is how history *should* have been.

But what happens when we imagine a different past, an alternate history in speculative fiction? When the anachronism, in a way, take over? In this article I focus on this longing for that never really was with the help of steampunk romance novels discussed below read with through the lens of

Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* in which she envisions two different kinds of nostalgia (Boym 2001). Using Boym's definitions, I argue that the steampunk novels discussed contain different versions of a nostalgic longing. Is this nostalgic longing always filled with peril? Or might reinventing the past be a way forward?

My examples are from what could be labelled mainstream steampunk romance with authors like Kady/Kate Cross,[1] Gail Garriger, Bec McMaster and Kate Locke. The novels analysed can be seen as examples of steampunk romance but steampunk as a genre consists of several different subgenres as it is a vast genre with authors like Scott Westerfeld, Philip Reeve, Cherie Priest, China Mélville and Elizabeth Bear, to name but a few. It is also a growing genre with e-books and self-publications, which is one reason that we today have such a variety of texts (Bowser & Croxall: xiv-xv).

The article begins with an introduction to steampunk followed by a discussion on nostalgia. I then turn to the novels and analyse the reimagined past that is presented and focuses on both the possibilities and the pitfalls of imagining a different past. The article concludes with how we can understand this imagination with the help of Boym's ideas of nostalgia.

Steampunk – what is it?

Steampunk is a particularly interesting example of speculative fiction as it is a diverse genre which focuses on how to understand the present using the past (Nilson & Ehriander 2019). Defining what speculative fiction might be is not uncomplicated. R.B. Gill argues that: "Classification is at best a complex and controversial activity. The woolly tangle of types and examples commonplace in speculative fiction makes it especially so" (Gill 2013: unpaginated). Speculative fiction, on some level, avoids a clearcut definition, and can be used to problematize genre labels such as science fiction and fantasy (ibid). Speculative fiction as a long tradition of "making the familiar strange" and thus forcing its readers to question the world around them (Farstad 2023: 14). In steampunk the "defamiliarization" is often achieved how the genre's attitude towards history, where historical facts and fantastical elements are blended. If we focus on steampunk's attitude towards both a historical past and an envisioned future, it can be argued that it fits rather nicely in the fold of speculative fiction. S. R. Tolliver discusses speculative fiction to make a previously marginalized history visible in "Can I Get a Witness? Speculative Fiction as Testimony and Counterstory". Using examples of black storytelling that combine realistic elements with fantastical ones, the study shows how this mix has a potential to destabilize traditional views of historical past which as excluded all those without power (Tolliver 2020; unpaginated).

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[1] This author uses different names and writes steampunk romance for an adult audience as Kate Cross and for a Young Adult audience as Kady Cross.

The most common way to describe steampunk is as "Victorian science fiction", a blend of historical fiction and science fiction. Another way to describe the genre is: "it's a way of looking at the future based on the collective imagination of the past" (Winchester 2014: 10). The term itself is coined by K.W. Jeeter in 1987 in connection to his novel, *Infernal devices*. He says:

> My coining 1987 of the word steampunk originally might have been more of a humorous jab of a tendency going around those days, of labelling two genre writers with more in common than bipedal locomotion as the '[insert word here] punk' movement, but if it assumed some sort of life after that, or at least clawed itself up from whatever grave in which old jokes are laid to rest… well, it could've been worse, lexicographically. (Jeeter 2017: 9)

The genre has naturally evolved in the past thirty-five years. Steampunk is today often a blend of science fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, and horror. In steampunk we not only meet flying steamships, a variety of automatons and time travelling devices, but also vampires and werewolves. This makes it a "messy" genre which contains very different kind of texts, but at the same time there are several recurring tropes from female characters clad in corsets, the use of historical figures such as Queen Victoria and Nicholas Tesla, to the fascination with steam engines and googles (Vandermeer & Chambers). But even if there is a similarity between novels labelled steampunk, there are also many differences. If fantasy as a genre can be described as a "fuzzy concept" (Attebury 1992) then steampunk is more of a chaotic puzzle, making if challenging to describe.

Julie Anne Taddeo and Cynthia J. Miller argue in *Steaming into a Victorian Future* that steampunk is a genre defined in a way by being without limits. The novels are often placed in a familiar environment such as London for example, where realistic details are blended with fantastic ones.

> Here, in a London darker and wilder than anything imagined by Dickens, scientists and magicians, philosophers and poets, time travellers and clockwork humans animate worlds inspired by Gothic romances, where extraordinary inventions are seamlessly integrated into everyday life. (Taddeo & Miller 2014: xv)

When talking about steampunk as a genre, it is important to remember that it is a collection of different genres, a genre characterized by hybridity. Rachel A. Bower and Brian Croxall says in *Like Clockwork* that "As a literary genre, it is frequently discussed under the umbrella of science fiction and speculative fiction, raising interesting questions for critics about the relationship between technology, history, and ideology, as well as about what counts as science fiction" (Bower & Croxall 2016: xix). Just as R.B. Gill argues that trying to define speculative fiction raises interesting questions about what constitutes a genre (Gill 2013), steampunk can be seen as another example of this

phenomena. Steampunk also often includes a discussion of our understanding of history and how we create different versions of a historical past.

But steampunk is not just a genre. It is also a movement, a community with people not just building fictional world, but building a "Teacup Stirling Engine", or a steam driven gigantic penguin or creating your own perfect corset. Jeff Vandermeer and Desirina Boskovich write in *The Steampunk User's Manual. An Illustrated Practical and Whimsical Guide to Creating Retro-Futuristic Dreams* what "One person's unmakeable one-hundred-foot-high Steampunk penguin is another's plot device for a sprawling steampunk novel trilogy" (Vandermeer & Boskovich 2014: 14). The "hands on" part of the steampunk movement where, for example, an author like Gail Carrigan makes her own Victorian-influenced attire complete with corsets and gowns, can be understood in many ways. Roger Whitson argues in "How to Theorize with a Hammer; or Making and Baking Things in Steampunk and Digital Humanities" that, for example, Victorian baking contests can be seen as a way of trying to understand history by practically emerging oneself in it; eating the food, wearing the clothes etcetera (Whitson 2016: 40). Even if my aim in this article is to discuss fiction, it is important to describe the context of these novels as part of a community that is driven both by a desire to relive a past (that is often romanticised) but also have the freedom to change it. When the community is described, words like inclusive and open is often used. Paul Roland argues in *Steampunk. Back to the Future with the New Victorians* that:

> Furthermore, steampunk is an all-inclusive community, welcoming one and all regardless of race, colour and creed, unlike their real-life counterparts who weren't to kind to the natives, exploiting their natural resources and worse, subjecting them to the tender ministrations of pious missionaries. (Roland 2014: 13)

There are, of course, critical voices that points out that steampunk communities around the world consists mostly of people from a middleclass background with enough money to build a gigantic steam driven penguin and that steampunk as most popular genres are dominated by white middleclass characters that are, for the most part, heterosexual, but there are exceptions (Nilson & Ehriander 2019). Steampunk can be controversial, subversive challenging norms and ideals but it can also strengthen stereotypes and ideas of gender, class, and race.

Steampunk and history

Steampunk is a genre where the aim is to reinvent the past, to offer alternatives and in so doing, offer a critique of what has been. Jenny Sundén says that "Steampunk is […] centrally concerned with re-imagining the past with the technological sensibilities of the present" (Sundén 2013: 370). It is a genre that feeds on anachronisms. Margaret Rose argues in "Extraordinary Pasts: Steampunk as a Mode of Historical Representation" that steampunk can be

read as in a way "defending" the critique of popular culture's uses of anachronisms.

> We might look at steampunk as speculative fiction's revenge against such arguments because steampunk is a fiction that places premium on minutely accurate historical detail, within flamboyantly wrong imagined pasts, in order to explore the ways in which the conventional historical sensibility sometimes gets it wrong. (Rose 2009: 319)

The "punk" in steampunk, says Rose, "evokes an irreverent attitude toward history", (Ross 2009:324). This "irreverent attitude" does not mean that historical facts are seen as unimportant. Cherie Priest discusses how to balance facts and fiction in the "Author's Note" to her novel *Boneshaker*. In this short text she explains how she is aware that her version of Seattle in 1863 is "wrong" as it contains not only anachronisms but also dates well-known events incorrectly but argues that she as a writer must have the freedom to change historical facts in the story world she has created.

> So there's no need to send me helpful e-mails explaining that Kings Street Station wasn't started until 1904, that the Smith Tower wasn't begun until 1909, or that Commercial Street really is First Avenue. I know the facts, and every digression from them was deliberate. (Priest 2009: 416)

In the novel it is important that Smith Tower and King Street Station, actual are places that did exist in Seattle. These places situate the novel in a very precise environment, but the Seattle described is not the "real" Seattle, but part of Priest's story-world. A defining part of steampunk is its blatant disregard for historical facts when creating a different past.

The novels discussed here is what is labelled steampunk romance. Steampunk romance is, of course, connected to historical romance, one of the oldest subgenres in the popular romance genre (Ficke 2020). From Georgette Heyer to Barbara Cartland to Julia Quinn, historical romance has been not only a setting for a love story, but also to imagine a past where, for example, women had an opportunity to be much more than what was often possible. In their introduction to *Steaming Into a Victorian Future* Julie Ann Taddeo and Cynthia J. Miller points out how historical romance has become a tool for many authors to critique contemporary society (Taddeo & Miller: xix). Historical romance as a subgenre has changed from the days of Barbara Cartland and Georgette Heyer. Modern historical romance often portrays strong female heroines (Nilson 2015: 63). In novels by Tessa Dare and Eloisa James female protagonists not only travel the continent, become experts on fossils or build habitats for endangered animals, they also find their Happily Ever After-ending with a man who celebrates their strength. Dru Pagliasoutti argues in "Love and the Machine: Technology and Human Relationships in Steampunk Romance and Erotica" that it is in steampunk romance that the "punk" of the genre is most visible. Here strong female characters are not an

exception, but a rule and we find many examples of authors rewriting history to challenge patriarchal ideas and notions. "Although strong female protagonists have since appeared in non-romantic steampunk fiction, romance novels seem to have been instrumental in breaking the barrier" (Pagliasotti 2014: 78).

Speculative fiction has a significant advantage here as it can experiment with the past, making us view it from a different perspective. Discussing the tv-adaptation of *Bridgerton* (reading historical romance as a kind of speculative fiction), Piia K. Posti argues that the casting of Regé-Jean Page as the duke Simon Basset, for example, can be understood to visualize not only racism and racialized power structures, but also the way colonialism has influenced our modern thinking, an influence that continuingly needs to be problematized and critiqued (Posti 2024: 124). Even if the adaption of Quinn's novels reinforces several integrated stereotypes, Posti sees a potential in the way the series portrays history which is made possible by the genre´s attitude towards history (Posti 2024: 137–143). As all renderings of a historical past are always subjective and influenced by the individual creating them, the adaptation both an acknowledgment of that and a kind of celebration of it. When we try and understand and interpret the past, we are always influenced by the contexts in which we are situated. Donna Haraway argues in her today classic article on situated knowledges that there has to be an alternative between the claims of objectivity and complete relativism. No scientist can disregard the context from which they analyse whether its minerals, economic development, or descriptions of historical facts. Haraway says: "I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (Haraway: 589). In steampunk the goal is not to achieve a rendering of historical facts, but to create a fictional world, and authors make a point to allow themselves the freedom to interpret, visualize and change history as they see fit.

Nostalgia and steampunk

Steampunk is nostalgic in a variety of ways. There is an often-loving tribute to the details of a proper afternoon tea, or a perfectly made corset that visualizes a kind of longing for a romanticized past. But what is nostalgia? Nostalgia was for a long time a description connected with what was seen as a mental illness that soldiers often suffered from. When deployed, their longing for home made them literally ill (Johannisson 2001:8). Even if nostalgia is seen as a much broader concept today, the idea that nostalgia can be basically unhealthy remains (Johannisson 2001: 149). Dwelling on an inaccurate version of the past may make it difficult to live in a real present.

But there is an abundance of ways to define nostalgia which sometimes differs from each other. In an appendix to the book *Revolutionary Nostalgia: Retromania, Neo-Burlesque, and Consumer Culture* Marie-Cécile Cervallon

and Stephen Brown lists over fifty different definitions for nostalgia including: "A sentimental or bittersweet yearning for an experience, product or service from the past" to "Longing for what is lacking" (Cervellon & Brown 2018: 167-168). To yearn for a madeleine cake, for example, is very different from longing for a different way of life. Can all this be nostalgic?

In discussing *Downton Abbey* Rosalía Baena and Christa Byker notes how Julian Barnes drama has created a kind of "collective nostalgia" that not only makes viewers feel as we belong to an exclusive group, but also makes us long back to a time that we are fully aware of as far from perfect. "Especially collective nostalgia can promote a feeling of community that works to downplay or deflect potentially divisive social difference (class, race, gender and so on) even if only temporarily" (Baena & Byker 2015: 261). The past becomes a refuge from the present when we choose to merge ourselves in a version of the past where we might be the countess or the happy housemaid, content with her lot in life; an escape from everyday modern life. The past becomes "easier" than the present.

This nostalgic longing is, of course, something to be very vary of. In Sweden we even have a special name for it – "Bullerby-syndromet" after Astrid Lindgren's books, an idealized idea of what used to be what has more to do with what we *want* the past to have been like, then what it actually was, (Sjöholm 211: 127). The concept of "Bullerby-syndromet" highlights how this version of the past not only simplifies it by ignoring, for example, rigid class structures and inequalities. The past as presented in Lindgren's novels are often seen as "better" than the present day. There are countless of examples of how an idealized past has been used as a political tool.

In her book *The Future of Nostalgia* Svetlana Boym discusses growing up in the Soviet Union and how images of, for example, "Mother Russia" was used to strengthen the regime. The past was reimagined and a new version of it was integrated in the story created about the Soviet Union by the government. A way to understand this reimagination is through Boym's ideas of different kinds of nostalgia. One of her main points are that we need to acknowledge that there are different kinds of nostalgia. She defines *restorative* and *reflective* nostalgia as follows:

> Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nosts* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance […] Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstruction of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on the ruins, the patina of time and history in the dreams on another place and another time. (Boym 2001: 41) [2]

If restorative nostalgia is trapped in an often-false dream of the past, reflective nostalgia problematizes the past, tries to understand it and move forward

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[2] Nosts from the Greek word for "home" and algia for "pain".

without forgetting it. History has shown us that attempts to restore the past can be used by forces with a specific political agenda which makes dreams of, for example, Bullerbyn, something to be vary of. Reflecting on the past can, however, be a way to critically examine our nostalgic notions.

Margaret Rose discusses how steampunk often includes a nostalgic remembrance of a time long past but at the same time problematizes stereotypical understanding of, for example, progress and scientific advances (Rose 2009: 330). In "Retrofuturism and steampunk" Elizabeth Goffey and Kate C Lemay argues that both genres can be seen as examples Boym's ideas of reflective nostalgia as they "push our understanding of nostalgia in new directions" (Goffey & Lemay 2014: 442).

> Steampunk is a malleable cultured manifestation, but one that, like retrofuturism negotiates a present longing for a historical past; if reimagined with different applications, this past might have yielded an alternate current moment. (Goffey & Lemay 2014: 442).

Steampunk makes a point of remembering the past "wrong". That is an important trope of the genre. In the novels I discuss below, the past is both idealized and critiqued.

A different kind of patriarchy

In steampunk romance the world in the nineteenth century and onwards is both similar and different from our contemporary world. Novels that take place in the 1850s, for example, often describe a world where a society divided by class, gender, and race, but where some individuals have the possibility to transgress these divisions. In Kate Cross *Heart of Brass* heroine Arden is a typical strong female heroine who has managed for years on her own after her husband Luke is believed to have been killed in action. Luke has been imprisoned and tortured for years by evil forces making him forget his wife, but he manages to escape and slowly regains his memories. Arden is happy to be reunited with him, but not ready to give up her independence. "So, I am very sorry, my lord, but for years I have lived by no other counsel than my own. I am not about to give my free will over to a man who has forgotten more about me than he knows" (Cross 2012a: 200). During their years apart, Arden has grown strong and independent. She has come to realize that she is capable not only to survive on her own but to build a successful career. Arden is an inventor who not only builds weapons for the Wardens, a secret society that protects England, but has also invented a vibrator that London's upper-class women are very fond of. "Best of all was the design. If anyone saw it, they might think it an odd piece of jewellery or a trinket, unless they had one of their own. It was certainly more subtle than a brass phallus", (Cross 2012a: 108). In this version of a Victorian society, upper-class women can buy themselves a vibrator, but in secret. Imagining a vibrator in Victorian times not only provides an anachronistic bridge to today, but also highlights

female sexuality. In Cross' version of the 1850s the stereotypical idea that upper-class women did not have any sexual longings and should "lie back and think of England" is disputed. The demand for Arden's invention becomes a comment on women's right to sexual pleasure.

The steampunk heroine is often strong and capable. In *Touch of Steel*, the heroine Claire, a trained assassin is described as:" She wasn't overly soft, but she was firm and strong, and there was nothing demure about her" (Cross 2012b: 83). Claire is ruthless and violent, but has, what is often described as a more gentle and feminine side. Her work often puts her in danger and she faces perils that her male colleagues does not. Claire is, for example, equipped with an "anti-conception device".

> The Coppering or Anti-Conception Device was mandatory for every female field-agent. It was an understood fact that many female agents used their feminine charms to get close to a target, which made the protection necessary. Unfortunately, it was also understood that female agents were occasionally the victims of sexual violence, which also made the device necessary. (Cross 2012b: 225)

Even if both Arden and Claire live in a society which makes it possible for them to have successful careers defending the nation, the England they inhabit is still a patriarchal society, where women are regularly threatened with sexual violence. Whether male characters also faces these threats are not visible in my material.

In Gail Carrigan's *Prudence* the heroine refuses to marry and runs away when she inherits a flying steamship, "The Spotted Custard". Not only does Prudence come from a wealthy family, but she also has supernatural traits that can be used for defence. Her escape, however, is made possible by her steamship being what can only be described non-threatening. "If two young ladies of high society showed up on one's tower claiming a pleasure tour, it was more believable if their dirigible looked like an enormous friendly beetle", (Carriger 2015:110). The world that Prudence and her friend Primrose inhabits has strict rules for upper-class young women, but these rules can be circumvented. As I discuss below, the fact that these characters are upper-class also makes it possible for them to take liberties with society's rules. They are privileged women which makes it possible for them to have the kind of adventures that they have. But even with their social position, these female characters are vulnerable. In steampunk romance there are several aspects where the gender structures of Victorian society are reimagined, but the world is still dangerous for the women who inhabit it.

There is something ambivalent in how these strong female heroines are described in steampunk romance. They are often physically strong, several of them are engineers and many have supernatural traits, but they are also described as very feminine with a particular interest on clothes, and they are often clad in a corset. The corset has a special place in steampunk as it for

many fictional characters as, for example, Finley in Cady Cross' *The Girl in the Steel Corset*. There are several scenes in the novel which describe how Finley is dressed where a corset plays a significant part. When Finley, who is a strong fighter with a pendant for violence, meets Emily, an engineer, Emily makes a special corset for her.

> A steel corset – thin, shiny bands with embossed flowers and leaves, held together with tiny hinges to allow ease of movement. Little gears and other decorative pieces of steel were soldered over some of the larger gaps between bands. The garment looked like an industrial metal flower garden. (Cross 2012c: 265)

The corset protects Finley from both bullets and knives but is also beautiful and "feminine" with lots of flower. This can be interpreted as a kind of reconstruction of traditional views on femininity, but can also be seen as an example of what Kathryn James discusses in *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature*. She argues that even if YA literature often portrays strong female protagonists, these heroines are usually described in a way to make them less subversive, less threatening. They "are repeatedly depicted in a way which either undermines their strength and independence or tears down their though and aggressive image to reveal the 'real' woman underneath" (James 2009:166).

Finley is an interesting character. Even if Arden and Claire, the heroines previously presented, are described as strong and fully capable to use a gun or knife, Finley uses her fists and fights in a more physical way. Arden's position of power is based on her expertise as an inventor and Claire's on her ability for being covert and her intelligence, Finley is a fighter. In Cross' novel Finley is often described as longing to be more feminine and the more violent part of her frightens her. She is an example of a character that transgresses gender stereotypes but at the same time embodies traditional gender traits.

The corset is important in steampunk. There is even a "Corset Manifesto" written by Katherine Casey where she states: "We stand before women who broke their ribs for beauty. Now, we shall lace our corsets only as tight as we want to, able to breathe deeply as we prepare for adventure that will take our breath away" (Casey 2009). The corset becomes a tool, a garment that allows for a kind of transformation. Julie Ann Taddeo argues in "Corsets of Steel: Steampunk's Reimagining of Victorian Femininity" that the corset is described in the genre as something that gives the female characters strength. "Rather than an instrument of torture and disempowerment, the corset enabled women to manipulate and define their own femininity", (Taddeo 2014:44). There are several ambiguities regarding the corset in steampunk, connected not only to images of "femininity" but also of class. With very few exceptions the heroines in steampunk romance are upper-class women who are able to transgress the boundaries that restrict their behaviour.

If there is an abundance of female characters in steampunk romance that tries to break free from constricting gender patterns, what about the male characters? The trope that the female heroine is unsatisfied with her limited options in society and rebels against them, as Honoria does in Bec McMaster's *Kiss of Steel*, is one that is common also in historical romance. In McMaster's novel Honoria meets Blade, a king in the under-world, inhabited not only by human beings with mechanical body parts, but also by vampires and werewolves. As she teaches him to be a "gentleman", she gains strength to rebel against the rules she is taught to obey. In both steampunk romance and historical romance there are many young women who are described as not "fitting" in, who refuses to accept their limited options and who rebel, a rebellion that is often made possible by the hero. He is often the loner, the tortured Byronic soul who has given up on love but finds it as he meets this unique woman whose strength he admires (Nilson 2015: 63-79). A similar hero can be found in Kate Locke's *God save the Queen*, where the hero Vex is not just a werewolf but also a Scot[3] who after a few mis-understandings begin to admire Xandra's violent tendencies (Locke 2012). In these novels the hero is a rather traditional "alpha" male kind of character (Donald 1992). This kind of hero is a very common character in historical romance and is an interestingly ambivalent one. He is a version of "Superman", vastly superior all other men, but also vulnerable and misunderstood. In a world of patriarchal men who all wants to maintain the status quo, he is the only one who appreciates the heroines attempts to at least challenge gender norms.

In the novels discussed here, there are several characters that fit this pattern, but also a few exceptions. One is Perry from Gail Carriger's series "The Custard Protocol". He is described as a sensitive and thoughtful man that does not like to fight and prefers to solve a problem in a library. Another example is Griffin in Kady Cross' *The Girl in the Steel Corset*. Where the heroine Finley is the one who is a strong and capable fighter, Griffin can manipulate "ether" and even if his ability often helps the gang to solve mysteries and deal with dangerous situations, it is often Finley's fists that saves the day.

It is safe to say that steampunk romance provides an often traditional view of masculinity, something that is also true for a lot of category romance, like Mills & Boon and Harlequin (Allan 2020). When trying to envision a Victorian society with different gender structures, the novels focus on the female characters who are allowed to break free from stereotypes to a much higher degree than the male characters.

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[3] This is a common combination in steampunk romance. In Gail Carriger's "The Parasol Protectorate" the hero Lord Maccon is also a werewolf and a Scot.

Upstairs and downstairs – about class

The steampunk romance novels discussed in this article all portrays upper-class characters. The fact that the steampunk heroine so often is clad in a corset is but one sign of this, as working-class women of course did not wear corsets. As discussed above, the agency the heroine has in these novels is very often connected to her privileged position.

Being an upper-class character gives the heroines an advantage. In Cross' novel, for example, Arden can work as an agent and an inventor because of her position in society. Being a "lady" gives her not just an agency, but also a power over those below her in the societal hierarchy.

> "Being the considerate gentleman he was, Inspector Grant could not refuse a lady's request – specially not the request of such a high-ranking lady as a countess", (Cross 2012a: 115).

In the novel, Arden is often surrounded by characters who are trying to maintain the structures of a Victorian society. This sometimes hinders her as she refuses to bow down to traditional gender structures, but sometimes it works to her advantage.

There are few main working-class characters in steampunk romance, but they do exist. In Cassandra Clare's *Clockwork Princess*, the third novel in the YA-series "The Infernal Devices", the housemaid Sophie has to point out to the upper-class hero Gideon that she has a completely different life than he has. Being born into a privileged position, Gideon does not see how class differentiates people. He is interested in Sophie and often longs for her company, and so he asks for scones that he does not eat, forcing her to visit his rooms in the attic again and again. When Sophie realizes that he just throws the scones away, she is furious.

> Do you have any idea how much work I have to do, Mr. Lightwood? Carrying coal and hot water, dusting, polishing, cleaning up after *you* and the others – and I don't mind and complain, but how dare you make extra work for me, make me drag heavy trays up and down stairs, just to bring you something you didn't even want? (Clare 2015: 91)

Gideon slowly develops an understanding of his privileged position and a happy ending for the couple is made possible when Sophie becomes a "shadow-hunter", same as Gideon and goes from being his servant to being his equal.

In Gail Carrigers' Young Adult series "Finishing School" the heroine Sophronia is send to a boarding school where she learns not just proper etiquette, but also learns how to shoot and poison enemies of the realm in order to become a spy. She meets Soap, a so-called "sootie" that spends his day shuffling coal in the basement of the school. He is a working-class boy and black, and Sophronia knows that a relationship between them is impossible. In *Waistcoats and Weaponry* Soap starts to long for a different

existence and one way to break out from being what he is, is to become a werewolf. Werewolves lives in packs with their own hierarchies. Sophronia is worried that he might not survive the transformation, but Soap argues that "it's not like I'd have a long, healthy life as a sootie", (Carriger 2014:61). For them to have a life together, they both need to break free from the life they lead. Soap becomes a werewolf and Sophronia a "free agent", leaving her upper-class world behind. There is no place in the Victorian society envisioned for the couple, so they have to leave it in order to have their happily-ever-after.

There is an ambivalence in mainstream steampunk when dealing with class. Roland says in his introduction to steampunk that:

> And while it may be true that the real Victorians were not too kind to criminals, widows, and orphans, locking spare wives in the attic, confining the poor to the workhouse, putting debtors in the quad and transporting convicts to the colonies, it must be said in their defence that they had impeccable manners. And that lost art is something steampunks take particular pride in. (Roland 2014: 13)

Even if this is, of course, an ironic statement, it says something interesting. In all the novels discussed in this article there exists a critique of the society described but also a nostalgic longing for it. Cross', Carrigers' and McMasters' heroines rebel against their upper-class upbringing, but are able to do so because of it. And even if the steampunk version of a Victorian society is different from the one, we know from the history books, several aspects of it are the same. Maybe it becomes impossible to imagine a world with afternoon tea, extravagant corsets, and polite conversation without a rigorous class system? There is a nostalgic longing in these books which is often visible in the long descriptions of extravagant dresses or elegant balls. A kind of longing that could be seen as restorative with Boym's definitions. But there is also an effort to imagine a Victorian past as something else. By creating a fictional world where women have more opportunities, the past is critiqued in a way that borders on what Boym calls reflective nostalgia. The longing for the past is still there but a different past where at least a few of the injustices of both yesterday and today is addressed.

The exotic women in steampunk

There is a critique of patriarchal power structures in steampunk romance but there are also a visible discussion on race and sexuality which is a bit more ambiguous. In Cross' *Heart of Brass* the Wardens are run by Dhanya, a woman from India. On one level this of course opens a discussion on colonialism and race as the power structures of the Britain described in the novel are very different from the actual 1850s, but the way that the novel describes her is problematic. "Her thick hair was coiled into a large, heavy bun at the base of her skull, and large, piercing amber eyes stared out of a face that was just a little too dark and exotic to be wholly English" (Cross 2012a:

53). The word "exotic" is very frequently used to describe female characters who are not white in steampunk romance. In Cross' *Touch of Steel* Dr. Stone is introduced. She is a female mechanic from Africa. "Dr Stone was as exotic as Cleopatra herself" (Cross 2012b: 76). And in Carrigan's *Imprudence,* Tasherit, a were-woman from Egypt, joins the crew of the Spotted Custard and "[s]he was so beautiful it hurt, like breathing deep on an icy evening. She was all exotically strong features, tea-with-milk complexion, and long, thick dark hair" (Carriger 2016: 27). Tasherit is a strong character who falls in love with Prudence's friend Primrose, making them one of the few non heterosexual couples I have found in mainstream steampunk romance, but the way she is described can maybe be seen as an example of how difficult it can be to break free from stereotypical images that we have lived with for a very long time. In discussing Susan Price's fantasy novels, Sanna Lehtonen argues that Price present different and subversive images of gender but falls into what Lehtonen calls a trap of describing race in a not only traditional but very limited way (Lehtonen 2010). The indigenous people in Prices books often becomes a homogenous group that all share the same beliefs and customs (Lehtonen 2010: 12). Critically examining structures and how they intersect with each other is difficult and to fall back to traditional and stereotypical ideas that one has been subjected to is always a danger.

Diana M. Pho argues in "Punking the Other: On the Performance of Racial and National Identities in Steampunk" that it is a challenge to combine a nostalgic longing back to the Victorian era with, for example, a critique of colonialism. In trying to create an alternate history, there is danger of reproducing stereotypes and instead strengthening the norms and ideal one wants to challenge, but she still sees a potential in the genre. One example is the way that steampunk can problematize national identity.

> Beyond simple designations of nostalgia or subversion, however, steampunk participants frequently (but not always) explore the complicated intersections of racial and national hybridity, fracturing any notions of a homogenous national culture and dismantling historical narratives. (Pho 2016: 128)

Pho sees a possibility that speculative fiction such as steampunk can by imagining a different past, at least make us aware of the challenges of remembering the past (who's?) and trying to embrace a different future.

A new past?

The novels discussed can all be seen as a blend of restorative and reflective nostalgia. There is a longing for a past where the power structures a woman (at least an upper-class woman) needs to fight are clearly visible and portrayed as possible to overcome. This can be seen as dangerously restorative as the longing for a "simpler" past always come ladened with perils, but there is also an opening to something else. In steampunk romance there is an overall theme that women should have had these opportunities, that a woman from India

should be able to lead an important organization keeping England safe and that it should be possible to break rules and imagine a different path for oneself. If I may generalize, I would say that a lot of mainstream steampunk has the individual in focus, and not society at large. There is, what we could call, a "girl-power" layer to the novels discussed here. Heroines like Arden and Prudence are critical to the society they live in and its rules for women. They refuse to adapt and limit themselves and can achieve the freedom to make their own choices. But there is seldom in these novels a discusson about changing the society for every woman, man or "sootie". In *Feminism Inc.* Emelie Zaslow argues that

> Girl power focuses on style as a mark of one's autonomy, on sexual expressions as a symbol of one's connection with the self, on independence from men rather from patriarchal systems and relations of power, and on the individual as independent resister rather than as a member of collective social change movement. (Zaslow 2009: 150)

These novels express the need for change and the possibility for change, but almost always for the individual. Maybe this is because imagining an equal and just society is too difficult today as we see very few examples of utopias? Creating individuals who are able to transgress integrated societal power structures might be easier and seen as a "quick fix", but even if the societies in the novels discussed in this article have many flaws, there is a suggestion in them that the world could be different.

One of the recurring ingredients in steampunk is the idea that the past could have been different. The thousands of years of injustices and oppression that our history consists of, could have been an "other" history. But there are of course dangers to imagining a different past, as this has been and still is a tool that is used by those with authority to make events or people etcetera that somehow threaten a specific world view invisible. Boym argues that restorative nostalgia can be a powerful weapon in the hands of, for example, a totalitarian regime. "Unreflected nostalgia breeds monsters" (Boym 2001: xvi). This kind of nostalgia can easily become a threat, but nostalgia as a whole can be a useful tool. But even if there are dangers, Boym sees a potential force in reflective nostalgia. "Nostalgia can be both a social disease and a creative emotion, a poison and a cure" (Boym 2001: 354). Reflective nostalgia embraces the longing back but forces us to question our cultural memories and critically imagine the past. And maybe fiction can help us to this? Maybe Kassidy in the Star Trek: Deep Space 9 episode has a point. To imagine history as it could, should or might have been is never without its perils, but maybe it can be a way for us to move forward towards something else.

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The Ghost in the Black Box: A Haunting in Negative Space

Jordan White and Martin Lund

Nestled in the sprawling suburbs just outside of Atlanta, Georgia, Stone Mountain looms large in the city's imagination. The second Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was established atop the mountain in 1915 and, with the help of the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), laid the groundwork for the bas-relief of three Confederate figures on the mountain's face (Engebretson 2015). Stone Mountain can be many things to many people – it's a landscape and a naturescape, for instance – but, as a contested and contestable memoryscape fraught with racial politics, the space can never be politically neutral.

During the weeks leading up to Halloween, a visitor to the park surrounding the mountain might choose to purchase a memento that's a bit different from what one can ordinarily find there – a "Boo Box." Boo Boxes are small gift boxes, tied shut with ribbon, and said to contain a ghost. Although deceptively simple-looking commodities, this article will argue that, far from being simple souvenirs, Boo Boxes, which are sold in conjunction with the annual ghost-story event "A Tour of Southern Ghosts," are complex cultural products that tie together multiple networks of historical, political, and cultural negotiations over identity and memory at Stone Mountain. While similar to other tchotchkes sold in tourist gift shops across the world, Boo Boxes – like all such objects – are best historicized in relation to their place of origin. These particular boxes become most legible when they are seen as connected to the ghost tour, which they help fund, Stone Mountain, and, ultimately, the geographic US American South as a site of official and vernacular cultural memory-construction. That is, we focus on the "public," or the "negative space," surrounding the souvenir – the location of cultural production and the context of identity formation – because it is in this space, filled with social and cultural relationships, that the Boo Box gains its identity (cf. Ikegami 2000: 994–995). We argue that the box, and its negative spaces, can productively be understood as fantastic in a dialectical sense, and that this dialectic is crucial to the positioning of the Boo Box as a souvenir and Stone Mountain as an apolitical place of fun and recreation rather than one permeated by the ongoing legacies of slavery and white supremacy.

We will begin by outlining a critical theory of hauntology before showing how the Boo Box turns from a seemingly mundane object into something fantastic. We will then place the Boo Box in its larger context, analyzing its public negative spaces – Stone Mountain Park, Historic Square, and A Tour of Southern Ghosts – through textual analysis to show how it can be

understood to offer a choice between historical and ahistorical understandings of the local past and between politicized or depoliticized ways of engaging with a contentious space. We will do this through the analysis of not only the Boo Box itself but also official literature, news items, online photos, informal fieldwork, and a recording of some of the stories presented at "A Tour of Southern Ghosts'" in the early 2000s. Boo Boxes provide a way to navigate the complicated network of meaning and understanding that occupy the negative public space surrounding them, while at the same time allowing the ghost inside to distract from what others would view as the true haunting of Stone Mountain.

Of Hauntings and Ghosts

When is a ghost not a ghost? In *Rhetorics of Fantasy,* Farah Mendlesohn understands the fantastic "as an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, [a] fiction of consensual construction of belief" (2008: xiii). This phrasing suggests that the fantastic shouldn't be limited to literature in the traditional sense. If the fantastic is a rhetoric, or a language as Mendlesohn also argues, it could be understood to function in other texts and contexts as well.[1] That is, the fantastic in this sense can be seen to be operationalized not only in literary fictions, but also in everyday speech, in politics, or at heritage or memory sites. Really anywhere that language is used to foster a "sense of wonder" or to construct a sense of belief among listeners or visitors can be viewed as potentially fantastic. As such, fantastic rhetoric can be understood to be socially formative, inviting its audience to be co-creators of an image of how a society or the world should preferably be understood.

Take monsters, for example. Steven T. Asma outlines a theory of monsters as simultaneously repulsive and attractive; as something inhuman; and something unmanageable, claiming that monsters often represent a breakdown of intelligibility (2011: 10). In short, they are wondrous. Importantly, he also notes that monsters can be both literal and symbolic. People speak of monsters variously as actual (even if fictional) beings and, metaphorically, about people *as* monsters. "Monster," he notes, is a cultural category (2011: 13) employed in many different domains by different people to different ends: "[W]e still employ the term and concept to apply to *inhuman* creatures of every stripe, even if they come from our own species. The concept of the monster has evolved to become a moral term in addition to a biological and theological term" (2011: 7). Monsters, then, aren't born; they're rhetorical. They are spoken into being, made monstrous to serve some purpose for the people doing the labeling. But monsters only exist when people credit their existence.

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[1] Mendlesohn explicitly differentiates between the fantastic and the genre of fantasy, when she writes about "the way in which a text becomes fantasy or, alternatively, the way the fantastic enters the text and the reader's relationship to this" (2008: xiv).

The same can be said about ghosts. They can also be understood as a cultural category, spoken into being by rhetorical means. In this framing, ghosts haunt people in both literal and symbolic ways, through fictions of consensual belief. Those fictions can be explicit, marked by a rhetoric of the fantastic, or implicit, marked by silence and haunted by the ghosts of the past, as the term "hauntology" is often used to suggest. In proposing a critical hauntology, Martha Lincoln and Bruce Lincoln note that "contemporary hauntologists have primarily concerned themselves with literary re-presentations and figures of the imaginary" in their discussions of cultural and historical hauntings (2015: 194). In much hauntological writing, ghosts turn into "ghostly" signals and traces, into figurative rather than literal figures, as with the metaphorical monsters above. Ghosts, specters, phantoms, and hauntings then become evocative tropes of troubled memory work, serving as metaphors for political interpretation. This is what Lincoln and Lincoln term *secondary haunting*: "a process in which living authors recount to large audiences the injustices suffered by the victims of brutal regimes, not with the hope of putting anyone to rest, but to mobilize a moral community to prevent such atrocities in the future" (2015: 195). As such, secondary haunting isn't concerned with the fantastic; it may be utopian, in its hope for redress or change, but its focus is historical.

This transformation, write Lincoln and Lincoln, leaves little or no room for "haunting as something consistent with, and rooted in, [individuals' or social groups'] cosmology, ontology, and psychology" (2015: 195). After all, ghosts are also theorized as something other than metaphor. Indeed, ideas about ghosts are common among people who view "spiritual existence" as no less real than material existence.[2] Lincoln and Lincoln remind us that "[g]iving attention to such materials and the culturally specific beliefs that render them credible seems a necessary precondition to any serious discussion of haunting, metaphoric or not" (2015: 197). This is what they call *primary haunting*: "when a single spirit (or a small group) confronts and terrifies a small number of the living, transforming a situation where the dead alone suffer disquiet into one where the living share their state of anxiety and anguish, and are prompted to take moral action so that the living and the dead can share a righteous peace" (2015: 210).[3]

At first glance, neither primary nor secondary haunting seem fitting labels to put on the Boo Boxes or "A Tour of Southern Ghosts" we discuss below. Both can be called negative-space, liminal cases of haunting, and how they are understood can be suggestive of which type of haunting is more likely to attract a Boo Box-buyer or ghost story-listener. This is unsurprising: ghost

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[2] There are other ways of understanding or relating to "ghosts," "haunting," and other conceptions of "spiritual" planes and beings that are irreducible to the "unquiet dead." The model of hauntology used in this article does not and cannot address such conceptions.

[3] Other forms of primary haunting include "occupational ghostlore," such as stories about ghosts who appear to warn fishermen or airline staff of impending trouble, which might be shared within limited – occupationally defined – frameworks (Santino 1988: 217).

stories as a form can be concerned with either an "outer" or an "inner" world, and can be used to work through human impulses viewed as destructive just as readily as to negotiate social, cultural, economic, or political threats.[4] As such, they can easily point towards primary haunting with ghosts positioned as real, metaphysical entities or towards secondary haunting, where ghosts are understood as residues of horrific historical events or tropes for collective memory and collective trauma.[5] Whatever their focus, however, ghost stories tend to "challenge the rational order or the observed laws of nature, though they may do so in a variety of ways, reintroducing what is perceived as fearful, alien, excluded, or dangerously marginal" (Briggs 2012: 176). In their own ways, Boo Boxes and the Tour's ghost-stories do the same, reveling in what Julia Briggs calls ghost-stories' chief source of power: "[t]he ambivalence or tension is between certainty and doubt, between the familiar and the feared, between rational occurrence and the inexplicable" (2012: 176).

More concretely, especially as far as ghost tours, ghost tourism, and ghost stories are concerned, ghosts can function as indexes for how certain histories are viewed or remembered. By this definition, ghosts are creatures of the past that occupy a time not their own. They signify a time gone by and can help people process their own time and think about the future, writes Tiya Miles. She argues that "[s]ince ghosts are essentially about the past–that is, historical–the modern ghost story can be understood as a popular form of historical narrative" (2015: 14). Understood in this way, ghost stories can be framed as a form of history- or memory-making, "a cultural process by which we create, use, and understand history" (2015: 14). This, she emphasizes, can make ghost stories a way to preserve or address events that have been otherwise forgotten and, as such, a potentially radical form of storytelling. But, we would add, they can also be a means to facilitate forgetting. Ghosts can haunt in different, sometimes contradictory ways, even at a single site.

Ghost stories capture ghosts and present them to audiences, no matter how frightening, in a contained and controlled form (cf. Goldstein, Grider and Thomas, 2007: 2; Briggs 2012: 177). Boo Boxes literalize this containment process in a nicely wrapped package. While both our examples are commoditized and packaged for consumption, they're still more like folkloric ghosts than contemporary, mass-market popular culture ones as they're offered in more intimate, face-to-face settings than mass-mediated ghosts.[6] While it's impossible to prove or measure belief in ghosts in any concrete

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[4] For example, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* "appeals to Victorian middle-class smugness while exposing the forces of poverty, greed, and ruthlessness that simultaneously maintained and threatened his society" (Briggs 2012: 180). Cf. p. 183 in Briggs.

[5] E.g., Briggs 2012: 183: "In an age haunted by the unnumbered ghosts of those who died in horror and pain at the hands of other human beings, the ghost story can only figure as a form of light relief." Also p. 180.

[6] Cf. Ben-Amos' influential definition of folklore as "artistic communication in small groups" (1971: 13).

way, Stone Mountain's ghosts must be studied with full acknowledgment that, no matter how deep the impact of post-Enlightenment rationalism, popular culture figurations of ghosts, and technological advances, the reality of ghosts, hauntings, and the unquiet dead is still very much an open question to many. In survey after survey, significant numbers of US Americans say they believe in ghosts, hauntings, or claim to have otherwise communed with the dead (e.g. Lyons 2005; Lipka 2015; Kambhampaty 2021; cf. Miles 2015: 14). It's impossible to say how accurate these numbers are, since some people are reluctant to credit ghost stories in public for fear of negative consequences (Santino 1988). But the fact that large numbers say they believe in ghosts or act as though they do means that, at the very least, we should consider ghosts a social fact (cf. Herzog 2018). After all, as Tiya Miles notes, "[s]trong belief in the existence of ghosts persists in [US] American culture, and that belief does historical work" (2015: 14). Thus, whether packaged as primary, secondary, or liminal, hauntings speak ghosts into being and, in the process, present those being haunted with choices about which past to engage with.

Commodifying the Fantastic

Ghost in a Box

an official

"Tour of Southern Ghosts"

souvenir

BOO Y'ALL!™

Stuck to the front of every Boo Box is a label proudly proclaiming it as a souvenir. These decorated boxes are said to "contain a 'ghost' and 'ghost food'" and are priced at $5 in the A Tour of Southern Ghosts gift shop located in an old schoolhouse (Anonymous 2018). Also attached to the top of every box is a small pamphlet asking buyers to "Adopt a Ghost." Each year, Boo Boxes are crafted by volunteers in a local women's club to benefit the Tour operator, ART Station, a not-for-profit arts center located in an old trolley car barn in Stone Mountain Village. As a souvenir, the Boo Box is a commodity: aside from referencing, however obliquely, an idealized heritage of "Southern ghost stories" (discussed below), it is also a commercial product that transforms volunteer labor into exchange-value (for ART Station) and use-value (for buyers) (cf. Kelly 2009: 93; Cave and Buda 2018: 712–713). Its use value is largely emotional or symbolic. Through the purchase of a Boo Box, visitors are offered not only a chance to contain and domesticate ghosts, but to own them. They are fantastic objects.

Our claim isn't that Boo Boxes are fantastic objects because they contain ghosts and can be yours for the low, low price of $5 a box. Instead, the box in its closed form exists in a liminal state, one which Tzvetan Todorov refers to as the fantastic. In Todorov's view, the fantastic is "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (1975: 25). The fantastic must always be considered in relation to what is real and what is not, and, most importantly, "*someone* must choose between them" (1975: 27). Since the ghost in question has no mass, there's no added weight to the box. The only way for a person to be sure whether a ghost inhabits it is to open the box. Then, and only then, can the box be confidently declared a mundane object with little importance attached to it and likely thrown out just like nearly any other piece of cardboard in the USA (US EPA 2023). While we cannot know for sure what people do with their Boo Boxes after purchase, we can say that, by remaining closed, they offer a person the ability to safely commune with the fantastic indefinitely.

So too can happiness perhaps be brought about by a Boo Box in its commodified form. In *Haunting Experiences*, Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia Ann Grider, and Jeannie Banks Thomas interviewed ghost tour attendees about their beliefs around the supernatural and why they attended ghost tours. Contrary to some academic critiques of these commercialized and commodified experiences as theatrical, shallow, and ahistorical (read: "inauthentic"), they found that attendees did not hold the same reservations. In fact, just as with Miles' findings, tour-goers enjoyed the "inauthentic," theatrical nature of ghost tours because it offered a sense of safety. They wanted to see ghosts on the tours, but at the same time, they did not. The "inauthentic," commodified experience provided both the perfect opportunity to commune with, and shelter from, any actual supernatural entities (2007: 197–198). As a commodified supernatural object, the same can be said for Boo Boxes. With the label and the pamphlet both proclaiming that the box contains a ghost, and little evidence to the contrary unless one were to open the box, Boo Boxes offer the same kind of balanced experience for a buyer. They know they have purchased an inauthentic object – a souvenir – but as long as the box stays closed, buyers can hold out hope that one day, the ghost might emerge.

As the Boo Box is a souvenir meant to commemorate a specific time, place, and experience, the particulars hold weight. Layer by layer, as a souvenir is constructed, meanings take shape in the negative space around it. These meanings are not fixed. They stretch and transform with each added layer of context. The power of a souvenir to affect people is not overt but subtle and ever-present. They afford different possibilities for buyers through layers of cultural context (cf. Davis 2020). Shape, color, placement, time, and space all play a part to transform any mundane object into a fantastic one encoded with meaning and subtext (Goldstein, Grider and Thomas 2007:

174). Through his greater point about the humility of objects and the power they hold, Daniel Miller maintains that objects should not be thought of in isolation but instead as an interconnected system with the power to socialize people (Miller 2009: 51–54). In other words, an object does not exist alone. Every commodified souvenir, such as a saint's relic or piece of the Berlin Wall, is surrounded by its own meanings and imaginings – its own negative spaces – all starkly different from that of the Boo Box.

The box itself is our way in to better interrogate the networks of differing and intersecting discourses that surround it. Here we understand networks as defined by Eiko Ikegami, where the term "'networks' implies not only concrete external and measurable social ties […] but also shifting cognitive associational maps perceived inwardly in the form of narrative 'stories'" (2000: 996). Over time, these stories reproduce and begin to form "a relatively coherent network of meaning." Diverging from Ikegami, we are not so much concerned with matters of agency in the actualization of a network as we are with social structures and conditions of possibility for cultural production and identity formation, which are made more visible as the stories begin to form a network. Much like amassing water droplets, this reproduction or change in quantity of stories always leads to qualitative changes, the specifics of which "are often sensitively dependent on historical trajectories, and as such are unpredictable even in principle" (2000: 1004–1005). This unpredictability makes it impossible to trace every aspect of a network branching out from a single point (our Boo Box), yet there are some lines we can see more clearly than others. These lines link to an assemblage of networks in the realms of history, memory, and storytelling that help to foster the viability and sustained existence of a dominant public.

Stone Mountain: A Fantastic Memoryscape

Stone Mountain Park is many things to many people. It's a space with broad appeal that offers many different kinds of experiences to its circa three million yearly visitors. At its most basic, the park is a 3,200-acre naturescape centered on the "stone mountain" from which it takes its name: the world's largest granite outcrop, visible for miles around. Stone Mountain offers a variety of outdoor activities, from day hikes up the dome, camping and glamping, and even artificial snow sledding on the great lawn. It's also a theme park that attracts visitors looking for experiences as varied as "a songbird preserve, a cable car ride, a scenic railroad, a miniature golf course and two full-size 18-hole courses, a seasonal outdoor park with life-size dinosaur replicas and a seasonal indoor dinosaur-themed play area," as well as a "Historic Square" consisting of a collection of houses built between 1793 and 1875 and moved to the park in the 1960s (Author Unknown nd; Stone Mountain Guide nd). Additionally, Stone Mountain has what a writer for the widely circulated *Condé Nast Traveler* magazine describes as attractive features for "history buffs," including tours in an amphibious World War II vehicle (Bradley

Franklin, nd). Perhaps its biggest attraction is the free – and immensely popular – laser show with fireworks that has been a summer-month staple since 1983. As such, Stone Mountain could also be described as what Tom O'Dell calls an experiencescape: a "strategically planned, laid out and designed" landscape, organized to attract consumers seeking certain experiences (2005: 16). Among the most popular experiences offered are those discussed in this article: the Historic Square, the Tour, and the world's largest Confederate memorial.

As an experiencescape, what one can read in the dominant public space, Stone Mountain does not fit with the traditional understanding of dark tourism which is "about death and the dead" (Stone 2018: viii). *The Darker Side of Travel* suggests a slightly more specific definition of dark tourism where it is about "death, suffering and the seemingly macabre" (Sharpley 2009: 10). Neither definition fits with a view of Stone Mountain and certainly not our Boo Box. The ghost in our box is just that – a ghost that never died nor experienced death. When considering the park itself, the closest one can get to discussions about the dead there are on two occasions. First, during the laser light show when General Robert E. Lee, the leader of the Confederate army and one of the most revered figures of the Confederacy, sheds a tear for the Southern men who died during the Civil War before breaking his sword, and second, while listening to ghost stories during A Tour of Southern Ghosts. In the first instance, the dead are faceless and nameless – mere props for the greater symbolism of the moment. In the second, they are ahistorical phantasma used largely for a light scare or comedic relief. There is nothing macabre in either instance, as the dominant public space discourse does not allow for it. This is to be expected from a commercial standpoint. Most virtual experiences must offer "an aesthetic appeal in order to attract customers," notes Lynn Hunt. Just as "the slaves at Colonial Williamsburg cannot suffer too much" (Hunt 2018: 27), the ghosts at Stone Mountain cannot speak too much of "their own" time, lest listeners begin to consider the dissonance between story and history. Instead, you have to interrogate the unspoken history of the space to learn about the true dead and a far more macabre history than one would find in a Stone Mountain gift shop.

Making Memories at Stone Mountain
Historic Square, the ghost tour, and the memorial carving will be addressed below, but we must first address the park's place within a larger Southern memoryscape. This network comprises both concrete relations (political, social, economic) and structures – including constructed ones like monuments – as well as intangible, narrative or representational cultural structures (stories) that constitute a wider network that helps constitute a contested and contestable public. Cultural memory doesn't present an image of the past as it was, but rather an image of the past that can serve a group's needs in the present. The Square, Tour, and memorial can be regarded as *lieux de mémoire*,

sites where a particular image of the past is concentrated. They signify "moments of history, torn away from the movement of history, then returned" (Nora, 1989: 12). Such sites provide important conditions of possibility for the formation and perpetuation of memory since, as Jan Assmann notes, "[m] ajor elements of culture [...] have the task of keeping alive a memory that has no support in everyday life" (Assmann 2006: 10–11).

Assmann is focused on religion, but things like national and regional identities also need support. Just as national identities can be imagined into being and maintained through shared symbols and stories, and supported by seemingly innocuous or "banal" signifiers like flags or currency (cf. Anderson 2006; Billig 1995), so too are regional identity formations dependent on explicit and banal support. Memory-making can happen through official, public channels and through vernacular, private channels – or, as in the case of Stone Mountain, through public-private partnerships. Memory-sites, other memory-aids like stories, and supportive social structures are threaded throughout Georgia, providing the conditions of possibility for Old South and Lost Cause memories and attendant identity formations at Stone Mountain (cf. Ikegami 2000: 995–997, 1001–1002). The Lost Cause narrative positions the Confederacy not as secessionists who fought to uphold white supremacy and the system of chattel slavery, but as principled defenders of state's rights and a noble civilization, the so-called Old South (Cox 2019; Churchwell 2022: 8).

As an example of more "banal" conditions for regional identity formation, many Georgian roads and streets are named after Confederate figures or other signifiers of the antebellum South. Tara Blvd. in Jonesboro, for example, is named after the fictional plantation in Margaret Mitchell's Atlanta-set *Gone With the Wind*, the world's "most popular romance with the American Civil War and its aftermath" and an influential purveyor of the Lost Cause and Old South narratives (Churchwell 2022: 8). Albeit increasingly contentious, street names like these keep the Confederacy close to the surface of everyday life and cultural memory.[7] Stone Mountain's official address is 1000 Robert E. Lee Blvd. This is the road through which most visitors enter the park, connecting the space to a wider network of Confederate street-names. The Historic Square is sandwiched between Lee Blvd., Jefferson Davis Drive – named after the President of the Confederacy –, and John B. Gordon Drive, named after another Confederate general. Most of the other recreational areas are ringed in by Stonewall Jackson Drive, yet another much-celebrated Confederate general. Confederate symbolism, then, is inscribed into the very (infra)structure of Stone Mountain.

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[7] Two things are worth noting here: first, struggles over street names are taking place, which might signal changes in the overall conception of what the South is or can be (cf. Cooper and Knotts 2010: 75); second, the retention of such names might serve as proxies for the persistence of racially discriminatory practices (Williams 2021).

So, while Stone Mountain is positioned as a space for fun and recreation, it's also undoubtedly a "politically charged realm where power relations are played out, political interests are materialized, cultural identities are contested and dreams are redefined" (O'Dell 2005: 18). The Lost Cause and Old South offer attractive cultural memories for what still remains the dominant "public" in the area: that is, the "negative space" comprised of the structures most privileged by long-term political influence, racial formation, and socio-economic standing (cf. Ikegami 2000: 995, 1009). Through constant repetition, these narratives offer a sense of imagined community to people who perceive themselves as sharing a cultural identity based on an ostensibly noble heritage. Georgia, the South, and the rest of the USA remain littered with Confederate monuments erected during particularly vitriolic periods of racial and social formation in the post-Civil War USA, especially between the 1890s–1930s and after 1954. As will be discussed presently, Stone Mountain Park was created as part of the second monument boom and the attempts behind it to uphold white supremacy.

This is largely elided in the public-private representation of the Lost Cause and Old South at Stone Mountain and in other, similar, Southern experience- or memoryscapes. This is unsurprising: as Aleida Assmann has noted, "[i]n order to remember some things, other things must be forgotten" (Assmann 2008: 98; 2006: 57). Forgetting can be active, effected through destruction or censorship, or passive as things are lost, hidden, neglected, or the like (Assmann 2008: 98–99). Both types of forgetting take place at Stone Mountain. Lost Cause and Old South memories, and the stories, places, symbols, and structures that can promote them become canonical, while anything that doesn't fit with – or contradicts – them, is forgotten.

Canonization implies selection (and, with selection, power struggles) as well as ascription of value, with the goal of securing long-term durability (Assmann 2008: 100). Similarly, Ikegami notes that, "once they emerge as collective cultural representations and are retained in collective memory in narrative or representational form, symbolic emerging properties manifest their own dynamic course and persist even when the network base that originally produced them disappears" (2000: 1006, 996). The impetuses behind the Confederate monuments-booms, as well as the construction of Old South and Lost Cause imaginaries, are largely past, but their concrete and less tangible traces – monuments and stories, for example – remain, as do the networks and publics that they helped form and sustain. However, what is forgotten, but not destroyed, is still accessible to others. And as the Old South and Lost Cause narratives are increasingly coming into question through, for example, social history, public history, protests, and movements like Black Lives Matter, places like Stone Mountain are becoming more important for the identity formations and cultural production being challenged. Like ghosts, the Lost Cause and Old South must be spoken into being through rhetorical means; and like ghosts, not everybody believes in them. These narratives, and

Stone Mountain itself, are highly contested and contestable, and subject to both secondary and primary hauntings, to which we now turn.

Forgetting Carved in Stone

Stone Mountain's perhaps most well-known cultural feature and arguably the centerpiece of the park is an unfinished, 158ft/48-meter tall monument featuring a relief carving of General Lee, General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson, and President Davis on horseback. The carving is the largest Confederate monument ever erected and the largest bas-relief carving in the world. It is also a memory-site around which generations of collective cultural representations, through a mix of repetition and selective forgetting, have become embedded.

A monument at Stone Mountain was first proposed in 1914, championed by the UDC, who had long been vocal proponents of Lost Cause narratives and leaders of the first monuments-boom (Cox 2019), and funded in part by the KKK. The first decades of the 1900s were a period of renewed interest in erecting Confederate monuments, which coincided with the codification of segregating Jim Crow laws in the South and the rebirth of the KKK atop Stone Mountain in 1915 (cf. Brandt and Herrington 2022: 65; Alexander 2011: 30–35; Kruse 2007: 50ff.; cf. Anderson 2017: 39–66). All of this, and much more, was done in challenge to changes to the South's social and racial order that had taken place during and since the post-Civil War Reconstruction era. This resistance was also dramatized in D. W. Griffith's widely influential and KKK-romanticizing movie, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).[8] Work on the carving began in 1923 but had stopped completely by 1928, due to personal conflicts, funding difficulties, and technical issues. The fact that the work was begun, and was supported, speaks to the existence of an anti-anti-segregationist public that sought to reassert its primacy in the political, cultural, and natural landscape, over and against other resistant counterpublics (cf. Ikegami 2000: 1008–1011). And it provided conditions for later publics to form around similar ideas.

A new boom of Confederate monument-building began following the rise of a civil rights movement and challenges to Jim Crow racial segregation, including the Supreme Court's decision in the 1954 case *Brown vs. Board of Education* that in principle (if not in practice) ended school segregation. The state of Georgia joined in the backlash in several ways. Confederate battle flags ("Stars and Bars") became increasingly prominent political symbols in the South from the late 1940s onward to the extent that even Georgia's own state flag was changed to include a Confederate design in 1956. Work at Stone Mountain resumed during this period. In 1958, the state of Georgia founded the Stone Mountain Memorial Association, with a mission to create "a perpetual memorial to the Confederacy." The Association bought the land and

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[8] *Birth* led to increases in KKK membership, racialized violence across the USA, and was the first movie screened at the White House (cf. Ang 2023).

helped finance the carving, alongside commissioning a private partner to assemble and run what would become an "antebellum plantation" attraction (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 63–66; Bevan 2022: 36–37). This public-private relationship remains to this day: the land is public but the park is operated by a private actor.

The carving is a monument, and monuments are, at their core, assertions of power (Hunt 2018: 9). The project was a reminder that, "regardless of the mounting fight for civil rights, antebellum racial hierarchies would remain intact," and was part of the Southern strategy of "massive resistance" to desegregation (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 64, 66; cf. Webb 2005). That is, from inception to grand opening as a segregated park, Stone Mountain Park was built on a public-private foundation of "white rage" – a backlash against Black advancement in the USA effected through systematic means – that was spreading through the country in the aftermath of Reconstruction and *Brown* (Anderson 2017: 1–6, 67–97). Work on the carving continued and wasn't officially concluded until 1972, but even in its unfinished state it constitutes a literal inscription of the three Confederate personages as larger-than-life figures to be looked up to.

This is all the more noteworthy when one considers that, as a reporter for NPR notes, Stone Mountain's ties to the Confederacy are weak: "While the imagery on the carving calls to mind the Civil War, no battles were fought at Stone Mountain. None of the three men was from Georgia, and the carving isn't even that old, having been finished in 1972" (Moffatt 2021). The non-threatening figures, with their hats in front of their hearts, stand in silent witness to the Old South and the Lost Cause, and their presence in the Southern landscape and memoryscape is naturalized. Perhaps no better indication of how banal they have become, while still remaining firmly at the center of a collective field of vision, is the fact that the three men on horseback are at the heart of the popular laser light show, which through a form of active and conspicuous forgetting tells their stories without any mention of their roles in supporting and sustaining chattel slavery or white supremacy.

Anti-historical Historic Square

The second major site – a cultural production in every sense of the word – is the "Historic Square." Historic Square is a recent name; previously it was called Stone Acres Plantation, then Antebellum Plantation. Aside from the name-change, however, the site remains "strikingly unaltered" from its original form (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 80). The Antebellum plantation originally contained not only a plantation house, but also an overseer's house and two slave dwellings, relocated there from rural Georgia (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 63).

In many ways, it resembles other tourist plantations, of which there are a large number. The major difference is that, unlike most tourist plantations, there's nothing in Stone Mountain's past that positions it in any "obvious"

way as a place for celebrating the Old South or for venerating the Lost Cause because there was never a plantation there until one was assembled and optimized for tourist consumption. The houses weren't so much "moved from [their] original site and carefully restored to preserve [their] authenticity and historical value," as the Park's website claims, but rather concentrated to offer white tourists a chance to experience the "storybook Old South" as exemplified in the deracinated, whitewashed 1939 blockbuster movie *Gone With the Wind*,[9] and packaged as "a polished fantasy of White leisure" (Stone Mountain Park nd; Brandt and Herrington 2022; cf. Maland 2007: 248–251; Butler 2001: 171–172).

Nevertheless, when the Antebellum Plantation was first opened, it was billed as an authentic Civil War-era scene. Visitors were prompted to "marvel at the antique furniture and decorative arts on display, the possessions of a make-believe planter family" (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 63). Plans for a space honoring Margaret Mitchell were abandoned because they would disrupt the illusion of authenticity and "break the spell of being carried back in time" (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 70). That spell is strong at Stone Mountain and other tourist plantations: visitors often leave thinking they've experienced antebellum life as it was (Butler 2001: 173).[10] Stone Mountain is also similar to other tourist plantations in its emphasis on the architecture and furnishings, not on enslaved peoples or slavery, which, when mentioned, is more often than not related to planters' generosity (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 77–78; Butler 2001; Rice 2009: 227–232). The big house highlights how an imagined planter family spent its money, not how that money was made (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 76; cf. Rice 2009: 227). As Lydia Mattice Brandt and Philip Mills Herrington repeatedly emphasize, this presentation is to a great extent an anti-historical fantasy: it implicitly guarantees that the plantation's imagined family were not abusive slave-owners, and by extension invites visitors to marvel at the Old South's "way of life" and to be co-constructors of a long-promoted belief that this way of life was benign and worth preserving or aspiring to.

Thus, while it's undeniably true that Stone Mountain offers much for "history buffs," the claim comes with some caveats. Historic Square is almost completely fabricated, but the traces of that fabrication are carefully hidden. The site is historic in name only: it's an assembled hodgepodge of structures from around the state, built across several decades, moved to Stone Mountain, and arranged to produce an image of pastness rather than to evoke any specific past (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 69). The plantation house was subject to

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[9] In the early planning stages, the Stone Mountain Memorial Association even considered building a replica of the plantation house from the movie (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 64, 67).

[10] And the spell is continually reinforced. After the big house burned in November, 2023, a representative of the park's police force reiterated the authenticity-claim: "Everything in there represents the 1800s. It's all antiques [...] It's just a historic representation of the 1860s" (FOX 5 Atlanta Digital Team 2023).

major exterior and interior alterations, to the extent that the structure that was put up at Stone Mountain in 1961–1962 bore little resemblance to the one that had been disassembled in southwest Georgia in the years prior (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 73–74). The alterations allowed for a particular narrative and aesthetic arrangement of the space, a *Gone With the Wind*-inflected simulacrum of a plantation that combined many images without an original. The arrangement offered both a fantasy of the antebellum South and a style for visitors to admire or aspire to for their own homes (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 71; Butler 2001: 171–172).

The result was, and remains, a domestic image of plantations as opulent leisure spaces for white planter families and tourists alike, with only marginal references to chattel slavery and none to racialized violence (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 76–77). Thus, the Confederacy can be said to haunt Stone Mountain in a dual sense. To those who lament the Lost Cause and Old South, the recreated plantation might suggest ghostly traces of a lost, idealized way of life, perhaps a specter of what might have been or further changes yet to come. To those who, more historically, view the Civil War as a war over slavery and white supremacy, it may be the specter of the racialized and brutal socio-economic formation that made that way of life possible. The latter is common enough – to quote one local resident, "this land is bloodstained with the blood and bones of our ancestors" (Shah 2018) – but the park's public-private memory-construction unmistakably privileges the former.

Fantastic White Supremacy
To the extent that Stone Mountain Park is a heritage site, then, it's a wholly fabricated heritage (cf. Lowenthal 1998) that, in the monument and plantation, foregrounds a whitewashed image of plantation life, the socio-economic system that propped it up, and white supremacy, deliberately championed by the KKK, the UDC, the state of Georgia, and the Stone Mountain Memorial Association, among others. Although some efforts have been made to delink the plantation, monument, and park from the violent, racist histories they were made to simultaneously memorialize and forget – the plantation has been renamed and fewer Confederate flags are flown, for example – it's still fair to say that the privately operated "plantation and the mountain are constituent parts of a state-sponsored landscape of White supremacy" (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 63), as are other parts of the park. The park today may not be primarily an expression of white supremacy in an ideological sense (i.e., the notion that the "white race" is superior), nor in the sense that it celebrates and props up a political system built on racial separation despite this being a reason for its inception (cf. Fredrickson 1981; 2002). However, the monument and plantation continue to prop up white supremacy in an epistemological sense, by providing conditions for white supremacist identity formation.

According to Charles W. Mills, "[w]hite supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today" (Mills 1997: 1). In this sense, white supremacy is a sociopolitical paradigm that rests on what Mills describes as a "racial contract" between "those categorized as white over the nonwhite." Through misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception, this racial contract provides the foundations for white supremacist societies and polities, but requires an "epistemology of ignorance" to determine what counts as a "correct" and "objective" interpretation of the world. "One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority" (Mills 1997: 18–19).

This ignorance promotes and facilitates the kinds of fantasy offered by the plantation and carving's deracinated Lost Cause or Old South narratives – both of which can be described as fantastic, as fictions of consensual construction of belief. The Historic Square and carving validate those narratives for those who have consented to them. But any narrative or signification of the antebellum or Civil War-era South is necessarily fraught with opposition (cf. Miles 2015: 31). At a place like Stone Mountain, with its histories of erasure and manifest white supremacy, it could be no other way. In recent years, as criticism of Stone Mountain has grown, so has the potential for secondary haunting. Even when wholly erased, marginalized, or portrayed as content and servile, Black US Americans are never – and can never be – completely absent from stories about a time when their forced labor built an economy and supported a society for others. No matter how vehemently one might claim that the Civil War was about states' rights or that veneration of the Confederacy was about "heritage," the specters of white supremacy and the defense of slavery that motivated secession cannot be ignored. At every turn, to use the language of secondary hauntology, the ghosts of slavery, the Confederacy, and the continuing history of Southern white supremacy remain, if perhaps only at the edge of the field of historical vision for some. For the carving and plantation to continue offering a sense of wonder amenable to memory- and heritage-making, and for Stone Mountain to avoid becoming a death-defined dark tourism destination, the history they always suggest must be actively forgotten. The active public-private forgetting we've addressed so far is compounded by passive vernacular types of forgetting, as seen in A Tour of Southern Ghosts.

The Tour: Telling Stories at Stone Mountain

Stone Mountain is also part of a networked landscape of primary haunting. While not as dense with supposedly haunted places as other parts of Georgia, the Atlanta area has its share of ghosts. Oakland Cemetery, for example, is said to house a mass grave for over 3,000 Confederate soldiers, and, "[o]n some nights, people say, you can hear their names being whispered in the wind." Many guests have booked a room at the Village Inn Bed & Breakfast,

in the city of Stone Mountain, because it's supposedly haunted by a "Rebel" who died there. Even ART Station's headquarters itself has been the scene of reported ghost sightings (Auchmutey 2004; see also Minn 2019). The owners of the Stillwell House inn, a former Confederate hospital, have spoken of multiple hauntings, saying that, "Some of them [the ghosts] need help, and some of them are just here to hang out" (Reddy 2016: np). Those in search of ghosts, then, can easily find them in or around Stone Mountain.

But with a few exceptions, like the claim of one Main Street shopkeeper in Buford to have seen two Black men hanging from the rafters in their shop (Auchmutey 2004), ghost stories told in and around the networks undergirding the dominant white public generally tell of Confederate soldiers or planters far more than they do of those they oppressed or fought to keep enslaved. Many of the area's primary hauntings thus seem filtered through an epistemology similar to what informs many white visitors' views of the plantation or carving just as many of the unquiet dead who linger around Atlanta come from the same romanticized South that haunts Stone Mountain.

This is not always the case. While many tourist plantations, ghost tours, and other historical sites in the South are largely silent on the matter, there are stories where Black ghosts and slavery are part of the presentation. Some tours acknowledge and dwell on slavery to add pathos and drama to their narratives, often for profit (cf. Miles 2015: 118). In Miles' experience, however, "much of the black history material that I encountered during my ghost-touring journey appeared to me as exoticized, romanticized, or decontextualized" (2015: 123). There are also counterpublics in which slavery or Black suffering are not used for entertainment purposes, such as Black heritage tours or public history efforts, but they are nowhere near as visible as the larger offerings that cater to white epistemologies of ignorance or those that present "safe" and distanced tours (cf. Miles 2015: 128–133; Ikegami 2000: 993, 1008-1011). Stone Mountain's A Tour of Southern Ghosts falls comfortably within the latter category.

As part of Georgia's haunting and ghost tour network, ART Station has welcomed around 10,000 visitors each year for nearly four decades to the Antebellum Plantation/Historic Square, for "A Tour of Southern Ghosts" on October weekends leading up to Halloween. The Tour consists of a lantern-lit stroll across six stations, each with a storyteller regaling visitors with "Southern ghost stories" set in a nebulous antebellum past (ART Station np; Staff 2023). In many ways, just as for Stone Mountain's plantation, keeping the stories situated in some mythical and unspecific yester-year seems to be crucial to the tour's success. Visitors might be told a tale about a man who twice fooled the Devil before finally trapping the Adversary in his coin purse for all eternity or one about menacing graveyard dogs. Many of these stories provide no contextualizing information whatsoever, although some are situated in a particular state or area. Rarely do they offer any clear dating (cf.

ART Station 2000).[11] Thus, visitors are neither weighed down by history lessons, nor forced to confront any hard truths about ancestors (cf. Miles 2015: 11). Rather than reminding visitors of a specific place and time, the Tour evokes nothing so much as the perfect Halloween outing. It's packaged as an experience, tied to Stone Mountain but also largely separated from it: the value comes from taking part (cf. O'Dell 2005: 13).

As such, the tour is largely free from the most pressing implications of both primary and secondary haunting. Indeed, some ads for the tour highlight its liminality. In the October 2019 issue of *Smoke Signal*, a local community newsletter, ART Station presented the 34th annual tour as being for "the young and old and for those who believe, those who don't, and for those who just want to have a good time" (ART Station 2019). The good-time focus is emphasized in the staging and the storytelling too. The storytellers are dressed in period(-ish) clothing and the tour is advertised to emphasize its family-friendly but spooky atmosphere (for examples, see *ART Station's 'A Tour of Southern Ghosts' Storytelling Festival* 2009; *'A Tour of Southern Ghosts' Commercial* 2009). The audio recordings are complemented with ambient sound effects and sounds meant to emphasize narrative elements, like growls or moans (ART Station 2000). Everything about the tour is calculated to entertain.

It's therefore unsurprising that slavery and white supremacy, although defining features of the time and place in which these stories are set, are almost entirely absent from the tour. Its few references to the Confederacy or slavery adhere to the patterns discussed above. For example, "I've Been Waiting for You," a story that focuses on the murder of a Confederate soldier's wife by his jilted brother, is the most detailed about its setting. The audience is told that it takes place in Georgia, around November 23, 1864. The story contains celebratory references to the glory and valor of the Confederate dead and condemnatory language about Northern "punishment" of the South, Sherman's march to the sea, and "plundering Yankees," but leaves the cause for secession and war unmentioned and unaddressed (ART Station, 2000: track 8).

Similarly, slavery is generally absent. The only recorded story to mention the topic, "Shadow," begins by celebrating Mr. Hobbs as "the most kind-hearted plantation-owner you'd ever want to meet," and adding that he treated "them folks living in his plantation as kinfolk" (ART Station 2000: track 10). After Hobbs died, however, his spoiled son – who was angered when his father bought a slave instead of buying him a horse – turns pleasant plantation life violent. The slaves revolt because the son is unkind, not because the institution of slavery and the treatment of human beings as property was

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[11] "Patin's Pumpkin Patch" (track 2) is identified as taking place in Acadia Parish, Louisiana, and "Railroad Bill" (track 7) and "Little Cottage in the Wood" (track 9) are both identified as being set in Alabama. Few other recorded stories contain such information.

dehumanizing, leading to a story that in effect reduces a racist structure to a personal defect.

Miles notes that ghost tours are often thought of as escapism and voyeurism, and that because of this, even those that address the Civil War or slavery in more direct, and in more historically oriented ways, tend to mask the state-sponsored violence of war (2015: 9), or the socially sanctioned racism of slavery. This applies to this Tour as well, but it's not only the individual stories that promote or reward an epistemology of ignorance. The framing of the tour as an event and spectacle further contributes to this impression. In 2016, a local newsletter feature about the Tour claimed that it "celebrates the delightful southern tradition of telling incredible stories about ghosts, spirits, phantoms, specters, ghouls and other apparitions" (Anonymous 2016: 1). This framing suggests that ghost stories are a regional phenomenon, ignoring that there are multiple ghost story traditions in the South. Notably, each story in the Tour ends with the storyteller saying "Boo y'all!," encapsulating spookiness and Southernness within a single phrase. The fact that the phrase is trademarked (as seen above) even suggests an ownership claim to "Southern ghost stories" on ART Station's part.

As noted by Lawrence Levine, ghost stories and other folk and magical beliefs were used by enslaved Black people to teach their children about morality, and ghost stories could inspire comfort as well as fear, and even satisfaction, "in stories of dead slaves who returned to demand justice from the whites who had abused or killed them" (2007: 78–79). These weren't necessarily stories in the way the newsletter or much secondary hauntology suggest, as "[g]hosts [...] were *natural* phenomena and by no means invariably a source of fear" (2007: 79; emphasis in original). In a collection of "Southern Ghost Stories," Alan Brown notes that "it is a fact that southerners love to tell ghost stories," but quickly adds that the idea of "the South" is a problematic category at best. The region is diverse, and has been shaped by many groups and influences throughout its history (Brown 2000: xvff). For all their diverse influences, Brown adds that the Civil War is one of the primary elements that distinguishes Southern ghost stories from other parts of the USA. Another is the "sad legacy of slavery," although most stories featuring enslaved people don't condemn the practice. Rather, they might condemn miscegenation, characterize enslaved people as possessions, or present slave-masters in a positive light (2000: xxix–xxx).

This is a far cry from Black Georgians' talk about ghost stories in interviews with the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s, to cite one prominent example. "The stories they told about ghosts," Miles notes, "include a persistent theme: a view of spirits of the dead as powerful, potentially harmful entities to be both respected and feared" (2015: 126). One of the examples Miles discusses is "a terrifying story symbolizing the deadly profit-centered grind of slavery," that Emmaline Heard told about her mother's escape from a plantation. Her mother passed a cemetery and heard

a loud clanging sound of "wheels and chains" and saw a "big thing like a house," that "looked like a lot of chains, wheels posts all mangled together." The cause of the haunting, which Heard said was ongoing in her own day, "was because old Dave Copeland used to whip his slaves to death and bury them along there." Here, slavery haunts the Georgia landscape in a direct, primary way – the ghost is neither whitewashed nor contented, but ominous and menacing. Stories like these emphasize the point that not every ghost story is frivolous or fun, and that some stories are told not to entertain but to remember, to warn, or to grieve those who were murdered in the name of white supremacy or profit.

A Tour of Southern Ghosts, then, like other ghost tours, is the product of choices. Choices about which unquiet dead to listen to and to empathize with; choices about which pasts to address and foreground, and which to forget. But these choices are invisible, presented as if the stories were the obvious candidates, and thus naturalized (cf. Barthes 2009). While this process is mostly implicit, the dehistoricized and dehistorizing framing of the Tour is sometimes stated outright. In an advertisement for the Tour in an issue of *Smoke Signal*, for example, ART Station's President and Artistic Director David Thomas says: "Along the lantern-lit paths of *one of the South's most authentic – and spookiest! – plantations*, you'll meet six professional storytellers (alternating nightly) who will share their *'real southern' ghost stories"* (Anonymous 2016: 1; emphasis added).

As we've seen, the authenticity-claim is questionable at best (the plantation is a complete fabrication), and the claim to "real Southern" stories is flattening and generalizing. Most ghost-tour attendees aren't after "real," but positioning these types of ghost stories as "real" helps obfuscate the existence of other stories and traditions. Thomas' framing suggests that "real'" Southern ghost stories do not dwell on what plantations were or what caused the Civil War. How else could he approvingly tout the "authentic" plantation setting of the Tour? And it tells us, by extension, that "real" Southerners are either white or, if not, willing to accept white supremacy. Even the spookiness claim must be read in relation to the above as the Tour may be frightening to some, but it's not challenging to white epistemologies. There is certainly no call for collective redress for slavery or white supremacy, and no attempt to prompt "moral action so that the living and dead can share a righteous space," in relation to the enslaved dead (Lincoln and Lincoln 2015: 210). If anything, the Tour is likely to support such epistemologies, by feeding into well-established tropes of the Lost Cause, the Old South, the kind plantation owner, and the contented slave. A Tour of Southern Ghosts, the carving, and the plantation all point in the same direction, then: to the extent Stone Mountain is to be thought of as haunted, it is haunted not by the victims of slavery and white supremacy, but by their perpetrators, and they are calling out for justice against those who opposed them.

The Ghost in the Black Box

None of the above makes Stone Mountain, the carving, A Tour of Southern Ghosts, or the Boo Box unique. Myriad other plantations and Confederate monuments offer similar romantic and deracinated accounts of the antebellum South; ghost tours are a cultural staple in the South and in many other places, often offering similarly simplistic memory-fodder; and the Boo Box is a souvenir offered for fun and (charitable) profit, like those found at innumerable tourist destinations. However, the distinct interrelations between the souvenir and its negative spaces offer a distinct, contested and contestable, networking effect that supports the formation of certain publics and identities.

This network is predicated on forgetting. Stone Mountain Park was created in the mid-1900s to be a "landscape of recreation, amusement, and veneration of the Confederacy" (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 63), and remains so to this day. Its Confederate monument was made long after the end of the Civil War with planning beginning nearly half a century after war's end and work on the carving not concluding until more than a century after the Confederacy's fall. The carving was partially funded by the KKK and sanctioned by the state of Georgia as part of a perpetual memorial to the Confederacy. Regardless of its name-changes, the Historic Square plantation has always offered an anodyne, pastoral image of the South's past that not only exudes a calculated inoffensiveness, but also a safe dehistoricization that elides any potentially disturbing aspects and comforts white visitors with the assurance that the Confederacy and slavery weren't really all that bad. The Tour dramatizes this image to perhaps unsettle attendees – "Boo y'all!" – but also to comfort them (after all, ghosts aren't real, right?). Ultimately, both separately and in the aggregate, these sites are social spaces that allow visitors to suspend their participation in a wider, more complex world, in favor of a simple worldview that can bolster memories that are otherwise contested and unsupported in everyday life. The Boo Box potentially makes that suspension portable, offering a charitable and fun, maybe even silly, and thus "apolitical" symbolic reminder.

Everything we've discussed above can be regarded as fantastic. Ghost stories build on a consensual fiction of belief. Like many tourist plantations, Stone Mountain Park is shot through with claims to authenticity about a fabricated plantation not much more than half a century old. And much of the park's well-documented history, including the KKK's involvement and the recent vintage of its memory sites, is largely effaced from the space and from marketing. Visitors must buy into every aspect of this fabrication – Stone Mountain's continued charm and allure rest on this dialectic. This dialectic is political: Stone Mountain is haunted, explicitly and romantically, by the Old South and the Lost Cause, and implicitly - and for some traumatically - by slavery and white supremacy. These hauntings and histories are mutually exclusive. Like choosing whether or not to open the Boo Box, a visitor must choose between awe and wonder at the imposing and impressive sights

providing a pleasant memory-fantasy, or the mundane, but troubling, history they obscure, and thus give up the fantastic. This stark choice is succinctly summarized in the above-quoted *Condé Nast Traveler* article:

> If you're offended by the South's Confederate history, you may want to steer clear. The world's largest bas-relief carving on the mountain depicts three Confederate generals. However, those who want to get their blood pumping with an outdoor workout, history buffs, and parents who need their kids to expend some energy will love it here. (Bradley Franklin nd)

The price of enjoyment and family fun at Stone Mountain, it seems, is forgetting.

Forgetting at Stone Mountain can be viewed as socially formative. It produces certain images of the past – certain imagined worlds, certain memories – that, while fantastic, aren't only fantasy. They can also lead to social practices with real social consequences. Stone Mountain is not the only place that promotes this type of rhetoric, but it can contribute to opposition towards reckonings with the South's past and to belligerent claims that veneration of the Confederacy is about "heritage not hate." This view of the Southern past has been so widely and successfully sold that some – perhaps unaware of the irony – even regard questioning it to be anti-historical. "Confederate flags and monuments are in dispute in several states of the former Confederacy," writes Hunt: "those who want them removed consider them present-day symbols of white supremacy, while those who oppose their ejection cast such efforts as a wilful erasure of history" (Hunt 2018: 7).

And this is where the answer to our question above emerges: When is a ghost not a ghost? Certainly when it's in a box sold as a souvenir at Stone Mountain, a place where the UDC, the resurgent KKK, massive resistance, and political as well as epistemic white supremacy have calcified into a set of firm conditions for white-racialized, anti-historical identity formation. At the same time, critics of Stone Mountain Park and its memory sites – as well as of Confederate monuments in general – are chipping away at the positive "historical" models they offer to some. By suspending everyday political complexity, the presentation of the plantation, the carving, and the ghost tour offer a way of depoliticizing a deeply political space so that Stone Mountain's antebellum and Civil War-era South can be presented as a place without politics that instead overflows with leisure, honor, and wonder. The theme park atmosphere permeating Stone Mountain commodifies forgetting in order to sell white supremacy. Which is why our empty box makes no reference to the space at all, so as not to accidentally give the game away.

As a souvenir, a keepsake and reminder of the visit to Stone Mountain and participation in A Tour of Southern Ghosts, the Boo Box reduces and obfuscates the fact that Stone Mountain was built on a foundation of 20th century white supremacy. Moreover, it encourages consent to the fantasy of a benign, homogenous antebellum South and acts as a means to uphold and

remember this image of the past that permeates the place and spectacle. If it's ever opened, the Boo Box risks becoming just another cardboard box. While closed, it remains not only a commodity, but a memento that allows for perpetual dwelling on the fantastic – a way to avoid looking at the very negative space to which the box owes its existence and reason for being. That is, it bears silent witness to how a dialectic of meaning-making afforded by the fantastic can produce modes of memory and forgetting and support politicized forms of cultural production and identity formation. Either way, its value lies entirely on the surface. In begging for our attention it becomes another distraction from Stone Mountain. To look any deeper than that would necessitate looking beyond the object itself and would embarrass those selling it. But make no mistake: while there is no ghost, the box is haunted.

BOO Y'ALL!™

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Haunted Löfstad Palace: Spectacular Sensations and Educational Aids in the Wake of Castle Ghosts

Cecilia Trenter

Introduction

This study takes as its starting point 12-year-old pupils' imagination when they take a tour and learn about past events at Löfstad Palace, a historic house museum in Sweden. The guide stimulates affections and haptics -- sensory dimensions such as hearing, seeing, and smelling (Ludvigsson et al 2021: 1) by telling ghost stories when mediating the past to the pupils.

Most research about dark tourism and ghost tourism starts with analyzing the special guided tours in which paranormal elements characterize the event. This essay examines the use of paranormal features on a regular tour at Löfstad Palace to learn more about the past. The premise of this essay is that authenticity is not created solely by historical facts or by material traces of the past but rather by people's ability to collectively imagine (Trenter et al. 2021). Imagination is fundamental in the assumption that ghost experiences create authenticity.

The essay proceeds in the following way: after presenting paranormal tourism's relation to heritage and the past, I will briefly introduce affective and haptic aspects in history learning followed by how this pedagogical research can be connected to critical heritage studies' focus on how visitors collectively encounter the past. Thereafter, these perspectives are combined with how the paranormal contributes to the affective and haptic dimensions. The paranormal element as a means of communicating cultural heritage is here understood in terms of how emotions and bodily senses, such as sight and hearing, as well as materiality, affect visitors' experience of the past. The theoretical standpoints are accompanied by a presentation of the design of the project and method. Finally, tourist guides' use of paranormal stories during a guided tour and the pupils' subsequent reactions is explored.

Paranormal tourism and the past

A common feature for ghost tourism, fright tourism, gothic tourism, and ghost tourism— several names are used for this niche tourism industry—is the connection between the past and the present. In this type of tourism, the macabre is at the center, highlighting the paranormal as it relates to past tragedies and dramatic deaths. Much like the idea of ghosts themselves, ghost stories contribute to bringing the past to life. So-called haunted places are associated with urban geography (e.g. commercial ghost tours), ruins, castles,

monasteries, and cemeteries, usually infamous houses and castles frozen in time, as when used by the "ghosts" when they were alive (Holzhauser 2015: 184-185). The history of the site is established during the tours and transforms into ghost places. The historical place is created by liminal spaces and times such as underground vaults, candlelight and darkness, and supported by the guide's stories about experiences of ghosts which not only concretize the ghostly space but additionally connect the tourists with former tourists' experiences. The experiences at the ghost tourist site are marked by juxtapositions, such as the present and the past, darkness and light, and the living and the dead (Holzhauser 2015: 74-76, 81).

The complex branding of paranormal ghost sites is based on both history and cultural heritage, such as that of "gothic Scotland". Here, paranormal cultural heritage becomes an important part of the Scottish brand, where its historical roots and folkloric traditions provide the background for the paranormal phenomena (Inglis & Holmes 2003; Holzhauser 2015: 38–42; Light et al. 2020). The "ghosts" function as conduits for the local stories about the heritage site, and thereby condense and materialize values and external memories into the site (Edwards 2020: 1320-1323). The ghost's "presence" sheds light on temporalities where the present—here and now—is tied together with the past—there and then (Holzhauser 2015: 66)—making the encounter with the past at the site seem more authentic than it would have without the paranormal effects (Inglis and Holmes 2003: 66).

The paranormal experience requires not only imagination but also an understanding of the past. When engaging with the past, imagination is crucial, but what is imagined is not necessarily historical fact. The paranormal experience, then, can be considered an epistemological stance based on beliefs and jointly negotiated fantastic experiences. Therefore, imaginations that are sparked collectively during a guided tour can be experienced as authentic in a cultural heritage environment without being grounded in historical fact. The authenticity of the tour has been interpreted as a kind of double authenticity, stemming from the emotive tourist experiences and the tour itself (Wang 1999 in Holzhauser 2015: 127-128). Holzhauser introduces the concept of "subverting authenticity" to overcome the traditional interpretations of authenticity as born out of "the real". She argues that authenticity is created during these kinds of tours in the co-performing and co-production of the participants, and furthermore, that it is only the visitor who controls the authenticity (Holzhauser 2015: 131). The subjective experience is central to creating the feeling of authenticity, and this authenticity is strengthened through communication with others. Bristow discusses the liminal phase as a "created communitas", in other words, a group of strangers collectively experiencing manufactured terror and fear at the site (Bristow 2020: 324).

Sensations and affections when encountering the past

Scholars within the research field of critical heritage studies highlight the notion of performativity to understand what happens when groups encounter heritage sites (Smith 2006; Smith 2021, Harrison 2013; Divya et al. 2018; de Nardi 2021). One such scholar, David Crouch, coined the term "heritaging" to refer to the activity at heritage sites (Crouch 2010). In addition, Martin Selby uses the term "stock of knowledge" to refer to the knowledge that is activated during the tour in order for the tourists to make sense of what is happening (Selby 2016). When the happenings at the heritage site contradict what has been relayed to them by others, the visitor attempts to reconcile the new experiences. This means that part of the stock of knowledge that is activated in a collective experience at a tourist site rumored to be haunted consists of comparing the experiences of others. The testimonies from previous visitors about the paranormal experiences are important components for creating authenticity within the visitor group (Hill 2011; McEvoy 2014).

Emotions and the connection between the expression of phenomeno-logical experience in body and mind is operationalized in research on cultural heritage as dynamic practices (i.e., encounters between people and cultural heritage that evoke emotions and affective registers such as pain, loss, joy, nostalgia, pleasure, belonging, or anger) (Smith, Wetherell & Campbell 2018). Emotional engagement has been found to stimulate people's historical understanding by bringing a past world to life, and the tangible and intangible cultural heritage in museums play important roles in creating these holistic encounters where emotions and cognition are stimulated (Brooks 2008; Kohlmeier 2006; Spalding 2012; Martinko & Luke 2018; Endacott, & Brooks 2018; Harris & Bilton 2019; Ludvigsson et al. 2024).

Method and design

The guided tour and the interviews at Löfstad Palace were conducted as part of the project, Schoolchildren Relate to Historical Sites (The Swedish National Heritage Board 2017–2019). The project investigated the encounter between school and cultural heritage by following elementary school classes as they visited historic sites located in the region of Östergötland in southeastern Sweden to, among other things, study the interaction between the pupils, the site, and the guide. The methodological starting point is that the visitors should be seen as "co-producers" of the guided tour (Larsen & Widfeldt Megedt, 2013; Ludvigsson et al. 2024). The visit to Löfstad Palace took place in May 2018 and included a visit to the Swedish Air Force Museum in Linköping. The pupils had been taught about Swedish history up to and including the 1800s and therefore had a certain understanding of the eras that the palace represented. In semi-structured interviews, the guides and pupils described what happened during the excursion. The interviews with the individual guides were conducted directly after the tour, and the interviews with the pupils, in groups of four or five, took place at school a week later.

The emphasis was placed on the pupils' pre-understandings and expectations of the tour. With the guides, individual interviews (about 30 minutes long) were conducted that were designed to include more general questions about all the tours on offer and the location, as the guides conducted many more tours than solely the tour observed for the study. David Ludvigsson, a fellow researcher, accompanied the field trip and conducted the interviews. Parts of the observation and the interviews with students and the guide is published in *Here and now at historic sites: pupils and guides experiencing heritage* (Ludvigsson et al. 2024).

Löfstad Palace: The historic house museum

Löfstad Palace, located 170 km south of Stockholm in the region of Östergötland, is a historical house museum, originally built in the 1600s but was given its current design during the 1700s. Emilie Piper, who was the last owner to live there, transferred the palace to Östergötland Museum for preservation in 1926. Inside, the palace is fully furnished and looks much as it did the day Emilie died. In addition, it contains objects belonging to those who lived there in the centuries before her. Through the décor and these objects, Löfstad Palace gives a good insight into the kinds of homes that were inhabited by the nobility, the very highest social circle in Sweden. The material consists of objects and artefacts organized in a contemporary staging that corresponds to Emilie Piper's interior design of the home from the 1920s, which includes wallpaper, furniture, utensils, clothes, and textiles. The layout of Löfstad Palace is focused on the narrative of Emilie Piper's time there and her ambition to stage earlier eras in the palace's history (Sylvan 2010; Ludvigsson et al 2024).

Löfstad Palace is a tourist destination that offers a wide range of thematic guided tours and events. It has a reputation for being the site of paranormal phenomena, and the ghost stories form part of the palace's value as a tourist destination; however, the palace is not a ghost tour destination per se. Unlike commercial ghost walks, Löfstad is first and foremost a historic house museum. The paranormal aspect—when Löfstad turns into a haunted site—is marketed and practiced as a special tour. The ghost hunt and the Halloween tour are examples of how the museum's educators tell the dramatic history of the palace through paranormal narratives that bridge the present with the past by introducing the visitors to past inhabitants through paranormal phenomena. The ghost tours are divided by age group: the family ghost tours are for children, and the adult ghost tours are for adults. The following is how the ghost tours are presented on Löfstad Palace's website:

> Löfstad Palace is notorious for the many ghosts and exciting stories. We start in the basement and finish in (ghost) room number 13. The hike takes place in the evening, right at nightfall. The Palace is completely darkened, only the guide and his assistant carry lanterns. This show is not for the faint-hearted (Löfstad website Spökvisningar, own translation).

Branding by using ghost stories takes place in other media as well and is commonly connected to popular culture's use of the paranormal and macabre. Tourism research shows that the destination's branding of the paranormal is created through traditions, history, and portrayals in the media (Holzhauser 2015, Johnston 2015, Hanks 2016). The visitors become participants by commenting on, discussing, and witnessing the ghost story experience after having heard more about it in podcasts, sites, and blogs (Hill 2011).

Löfstad is well represented in Swedish media as a haunted place with several "famous" ghosts. Understandings of ghosts can, roughly speaking, be either named characters who represent canonic pasts, which is the common strategy when museums and tour producers use ghosts in uncontested presentations of the past, or they can be unnamed spirit beings used as counternarratives or alternative interpretations of the past (Hanks 2016: 29-30). Löfstad Palace's ghost branding belongs to the former. The ghosts are named and have a place not only in the palace's history but also in Sweden's national history. For instance, Löfstad Palace features prominently on the website, "Hemsökta platser" (Haunted places). The site gives details about sensory traces that connect the present with the past through supernatural ties: unexplained sounds and voices, doors that inexplicably open, and objects that have been moved around, also without explanation.

The ghost stories also refer to named people who represent different eras in the history of the palace: The first lady of the Palace, Christina Mörner (1610–1663), is said to walk around with her keys rattling and crisp skirts rustling, the fire that was caused by a maiden who committed suicide still haunts us (1750), and the ghost of Sophie von Fersen (1757–1816) still mourns her murdered brother. The temporal distance between then and now is highlighted by paranormal events that remind us about the palace reconstructions: a figure has been seen at night polishing weapons in a corner where a weapons cabinet once stood. The most famous material remains is a bloodstain in Room 13 that, according to legend, cannot be washed away no matter how hard one tries. The bloodstain is the result of a duel that arose from a jealous drama that took place in the early 1800s. One of the men died of his injuries in the room now known as No. 13. (Hemsökta platser). The site is part of a group called Nordic Ghosts on YouTube that hunts ghosts at famous haunted sites. They visited Löfstad Palace's park at night and used various techniques and measuring instruments to try and detect paranormal activity in the area.

At the time of the tour and the project, one of the most popular Swedish YouTube channels was created by Jocke and Jonna, two so-called influencers. Jocke and Jonna often posted videos of them visiting houses known to be haunted and attempting to contact ghosts. The interviews with the pupils as well as comments during the tour show that the pupils share prior knowledge about Jocke and Jonna's ghost tour at Löfstad. The guided tours are primarily aimed at school classes for pupils of different ages, and the ghost tours are

not normally part of the educational package for schools. However, as one guide explains in an interview, the pupils wanted to visit Room 13 with the bloodstain, so she decided to include the "ghost room" in the tour.

The tour, the guide, and the ghosts at Löfstad Palace

The interview with the guide revolves around the goals and purposes she defines in her assignment. She has a clear view of what is significant in history, and knows what the most important dimensions are:

> […] to explain a social structure – because that is what interests me and made me want to study history. Because when I went to school, I thought I could do without kings and wars, it's too abstract, and I am probably not alone in thinking so. There are many visitors who come and have relatives who once worked here, and then we must apply a worker's perspective, and I make that part of the tour. Then they get to see themselves in a context and it has meaning. It is so easy to be seduced by a beautiful environment, but you must understand where it comes from. (Interview with the guide 2:02)

The guide comments on the ghosts of Löfstad as part of the palace's image and how the pupils started the tour with questions about the ghosts at Löfstad.

> The most common question, regardless of age, and even before entering, is whether the palace is haunted. They asked about Jocke and Jonna, the YouTubers, who wanted to make ghost programs, but as a museum we don't allow that kind of production. So, I replied [the visitors] that they [Jocke and Jonna] have been out in the park ... They wanted to get in, but we don't allow that, we have a kind of credibility as a county museum. And when we have our own ghost walks, we only tell you about the ghost stories that exist. After all, they are not so spectacular. (Interview with the guide, 9:20)

The guide dissociates herself from the more commercial ghost story told by the YouTubers Jocke and Jonna, even though the media attention constitutes an important experience for the pupils and the group. Her comment shows how important the ghosts at Löfstad are for the palace's brand, and that this brand should be protected from commercial interests.

The guide uses the branding from the ghosts of Löfstad but tries to keep the sensational aspects separate from the tour. When she refers to ghosts, it is consistently done with the addition that paranormal experiences are for people who believe in ghosts. She carefully points out that the ghosts do not exist in the same way as the visitors or the history that the palace's collections and stories convey—the choice to believe lies in the eyes of the beholder. The guide uses the references to ghosts during the tour to emphasize the emotions of people from the past and to create closeness between the visitors and these historical people.

Her first reference to the ghosts of Löfstad occurs when she tells of the lives of the servants at Löfstad, concretized through the story of Kajsa

Jönsdotter and the fire in 1750 that destroyed the baroque castle. The guide tells the story of this young maid who was suffering from the cold one night between January 7 and 8. The guide brings the plot to life by recounting how Kajsa decided to look for her mittens to warm her hands and needed to set alight a piece of tarred wood in order to see. She dropped a piece of the lit wood, and the castle, with its newly laid tarred roof, caught fire. The inhabitants tried to save as many valuables as possible from the burning building, but the disaster is a fact, and the palace burned down. The last glimpse anyone saw of Kajsa was when she ran down to Löfstad lake, where she drowned herself in despair. The guide adds that, as the pupils showed an interest in ghosts, she told them that those who believe in ghosts can see the spirit of Kajsa Jönsdotter running down to the lake every year on the night between January 7 and 8. However, the guide adds that they have never seen the ghost, "but a lot of weird things happen in this house, I can promise you that!" (The guide 4:56).

The spectacular ghost story of the former servant girl—nowadays a ghost—who caused the fire and drowned herself in the lake, serves as an example of the living conditions of servants at Löfstad during the 1600s. Both the magnitude of the catastrophe when the castle burns down and, consequently, the depth of despair of the girl who caused the fire, are amplified in the story. Her despair is heightened by her transformation from human to spirit being, although that the guide explicitly expresses that the paranormal experience is subjective for those who believe in ghosts.

When one of the palace's owners, Sophie von Fersen (married name Piper, 1757–1816), is mentioned, an extensive political history is required to place Sophie von Fersen in the right historical context. Sofie was the sister of Axel von Fersen, famous for being a close friend of the French queen, Marie Antoinette, for participating in the French royal family's failed escape attempt in 1792, and for being lynched by a mob in Stockholm after being accused of complicity in the murder of the Swedish crown prince. The guide tells about the political circumstances in Sweden, in Europe (the French Revolution), and the American Revolutionary War and thus places both Axel and Sophie von Fersen within the political drama of the time. The guide tells that Sofie erected a memorial at Löfstad Palace in memory of her brother. She concludes the exposé of the political development of events, which culminates with the lynching of Axel, by referring to Löfstad and Sophie's grief: "Speaking of ghosts, you can still see a gray lady mourning her brother" (Observation Löfstad Palace, 52). The emotionally tinged loaded image of the grieving and despairing Sophie expressing a universal emotion—grief over the death of a relative—is reinforced by the notion that the ghost may still mourning even today. The spirit of Sophie, in the form of the gray lady, reduces the distance between the people of the 1700s and the visitors at Löfstad Palace during the guided tour. The concrete connection between the existential dimension

finalizes the narrative about the von Fersen siblings' role in the political history.

A main part of the guided tour takes place in donor Emilie Piper's apartment. The museum's website highlights Emilie Piper presence at the palace to inform the visitors that the rooms look the same as when the donor passed away. She donated the palace and its furniture to Östergötlands Museum in 1926 with clear instructions to preserve the milieu exactly as it was: "The feeling is that Emilie has just gone out for a while and will come back at any moment (Löfstad Palace webbsite, Emilie Piper, own translation). The guide talks Emilie Piper, who she refers to with the contemporary title "Miss Emilie". During the part of the tour that takes place in Emilie Piper's private department, she mentions her own curiosity about the Emilie Piper. This frozen moment and the closeness to Emilie's everyday life, makes a perfect starting point for the guide's stories about the architecture and the era in which Emilie lived and worked. The group walks though Emilie Piper's private rooms, which serve as a kind of stage, creating the impression of presence, with flowers on the table, an inkbottle and paper on the desk, a knitted scarf on the chair, and so forth. The guide talks about Emilie's will and her wish to make her home a place for others to learn more about her time and the people who once lived in the palace. The guide also tells of how young women during Emilie's time were prepared for marriage, taught the importance of "learning to bend your neck", expected to converse in polite conversation, make music, and embroider.

As the group enters the bedroom, the guide approaches the personal and intimate sphere of Emilie Piper's life. She notes that there are not many sources available to draw from, so we must piece together the picture of who Miss Emilie was from what little exists. Not many of her letters or diaries remain because she had all her private letters burned upon her death. Photographs show that she was fond of dogs, and we know the names of her favorites. The group also learns that her private cabinet was a nursery when "Miss Emilie" was a child, prompting the guide to comment that, as haunted Room 13 is located directly above the nursery, the choice of location for the nursery was rather odd. The guide tells that when Emilie was asked whether she believed in ghosts, she replied that, of course, Löfstad is haunted, but only by friendly spirits and ghosts. The guide explains that she is aware of the significance of dramatizing the past and engaging the visitors during the tour.

> I try not to drone on, it's the worst thing, I try to change my tone, I talk engaged, with my whole body (you get hot!). It can be a demanding situation for the listener, they are passive and just stand and listen. In that situation, when there is no object, it is the voice you are working with. It's almost acting, you're trying to catch people. (Interview with the guide, 21.35)

The guide performs this kind of acting in Emilie's bedroom. After showing some objects—a silver toothbrush and a toiletry bag with brushes and silver details—the guide dramatizes the presence of Miss Emilie:

> In this room, you can experience strange things, I've done that myself. I'm going to start by saying that I don't believe in ghosts because I don't, but it's something that has happened to almost everyone who works here, sometimes (lowers her voice) you can smell Miss Emilie's perfume. It's not every day, for me it's happened once (lowers her voice further) so you get a little… a little wondering..."what's going on here?" For this perfume bottle, we know what perfume it is, is stored in a storage room one floor up. I can't really, really explain it, but it's cool. It is perhaps her kind spirit that is still here in the house and who thinks it is nice that we are here and that we show her home as she wanted.
> (Observation Löfstad Palace 1:05:22)

By referring to her experience of smelling the perfume, the guide creates a new dimension of authenticity, which, until this point in the tour, has been based on the guide's stories about Miss Emilie and the material traces in her room. She tells of her own experiences of sensory traces of the past, for example, the smell of the perfume, and this authenticity is strengthened by the confession that she does not believe in ghosts. The lowered voice creates an intimacy in the communication, a whisper between the visitors. Lowering one's voice also forces a bodily reaction from the visitors. To hear what the guide is talking about, the pupils must stop talking to each other, lean forward, if they are some distance from the guide, and sharpen their senses through their hearing. The guide also speaks for Emilie by sharing a message from her, namely, that she is happy that the pupils and other visitors are sharing her legacy.

Room nr 13 with the bloodstain is the last stop on the tour. The pupils are excited and talk loudly among themselves as they make their way to the room. The guide retells the well-known story about the gun duel in the park. The dying man who had been laid on the floor to await the doctor, promised he would return from the dead. The pupils are quite disappointed when seeing the remnant of the duel, the bloodstain. It does not look like how they expected. Some pupils say it looks more like a discoloration of the carpet than blood. Clearly, the bloodstain is the highlight of the tour for the pupils, although, at the same time, it is something of an anticlimax (Ludvigsson et al 2024: 44).

> P1: I thought it would be bigger.
> P2: More color.
> P1: I thought that it would be brown, with a bit stronger color.
> P2: Yes, I knew. I've heard from other people that it doesn't look like blood, but I thought it would be a bit bigger.
> P3: It looks like it could be something else, it might not be just blood.
> P1: It might be discoloration.

> P3: It should have been bigger if you lie and bleed to death.
> P1: Yes… (Observation Löfstad Palace 01.16.30)

The guide's dual relationship to ghosts and drama contains both insights into the fact that ghosts are important for branding and that they have a commercial bias. The guide comments on Room 13 and the famous bloodstain:

> Yes, and the bloodstain is crazily famous. It's also part of the ghost tour. Once they see it, it's not so cool, they think it's supposed to be red, and sometimes you must explain why it's not. They've watched detective stories on television and seen red bloodstains!" [laughs] (Interview with the guide, 14:35)

Here, the guide refers to the pupils' presumed prior knowledge and experiences that have created unrealistic expectations of how they experience of the bloodstain.

The pupils, the paranormal experiences, and the past

Although the pupils asked whether Löfstad Palace is haunted, they state in the following interview that they do not believe in ghosts (Interview 3, 10:50). One pupil stated that he wants to return to the palace to participate in a ghost walk (Interview 1, 2). Whether or not they believe in ghosts is not revealed in the group interviews, which do not elicit that kind of confession, but what is revealed is that the only objects the pupils found "scary" were the portraits on the walls (Interview 3, 4:45). The visit was arranged in conjunction with the school class's primary destination, the Swedish Air Force Museum in Linköping. In the interviews, some of the pupils stated that the Swedish Air Force Museum was more fun. One pupil justifies this by saying that they were allowed to "do things"—that is, to touch and feel the objects at the museum, implying that this kind of haptic activity was not an option at Löfstad Palace (Interview 1, 12).

Despite the negative comments, the pupils noticed certain unusual objects in the palace. In the interviews, the pupils mentioned a long smoking pipe and a silver toothbrush as memorable objects. Although the pupils were not allowed to touch the objects, the haptic dimension of the experience was activated in other ways. For example, when the interviewer asked what they remember about the experience, they mentioned that the rooms that got colder and colder the further into the palace they went. They also mentioned Emilie's perfume. The pupils knew in advance that the palace was supposedly haunted, but the detail about being able to smell Emilie's perfume was something they only learned about from the guide. The pupils reflected on the so-called paranormal experiences in different ways. One group recall the supernatural element by referring to the guide's story:

> P: In her bedroom … you could smell her perfume even though it was in another room several floors above.I: Yes, that's right, it was a bit strange. I didn't sense

any perfume when we were there. Could you feel it all the time or was it only sometimes.
P: Sometimes, she had felt it sometimes, the guide. (Interview 2, 6:40)

Another group referred to the explanation about the scent in the bedroom:

I: [Did you notice] A particular room?
P: Well ... the one I don't remember … (the others fill in with "Emilie Piper")
They knew she had died there, it was one of those ghost things, that she had died there ... and that her perfume was still there.
I: Did you feel it?
P: No.
I: Why could you sense the perfume?
P: Because she had died there. (Interview 3, 3:30)

One of the pupils compares the guided tour to a ghost tour that she has previously participated in. The pupil recalls that, during that tour, she was told about blood flowing from the ceiling, but this detail was omitted during the school tour. She comments that the stories differ (Interview 3, 10:10). It is noticeable how the guided tour of Room 13 is not conducted through dramatized storytelling in the same way as the tour through Emilie Piper's private chambers. The pupils remembered the story of the duel, but the stain and the staging of Room 13 seem to create distance with the past. They are clearly disappointed and complain about what they perceive as a lack of authenticity both during the tour and in the following interview. The blood is not red but brown and is more of a shadow than a stain. The pupils are disappointed with the bloodstain. It is obvious that the encounter with the material remnant does not meet their expectations.

I: Had you heard of it [the bloodstain] before?
D: Yes, and I thought it would be red and big ... and it was tiny (Interview 2, 5:15)

They recall the story: the drama with the duel in the park and the doctor who arrived too late and could not save the wounded man who died on the floor in Room 13. However, the authentic blood does not create a closer connection between the pupils and the people involved in the duel but rather leads to source criticism. The pupils argued that a bloodstain that small could not possibly be the aftermath of someone's death; therefore, the story about the duel cannot be true. The pupils' meeting with the remains creates a distance to the past and causes associations that cause the group to break their connection between now and then (Interview 1, 6; Interview 2, 5:15; Interview 3, 7:10)'

How does the encounter with the past, mediated by storytelling and material remains, affect pupils' relationship to the past? In the interview conducted a week later, the pupils question whether the duel even took place

because of the insignificant stain. In contrast, they retell the story of Kajsa Jönsdotter, Sophie von Fersen, and Miss Emilie, but without emphasizing the ghost stories (Interview 1, 5:30; Interview 2, 2:15; Interview 3, 1:30, 5:50). It seems that, after the guided tour, the stories about the historical actors remained with the pupils, but not the paranormal aspects to the same extent.

Encountering the past by using ghost stories: closing words

Using the paranormal in the heritage sector for marketing purposes has been criticized for playing with authenticity and making light of past traumatic events. However, the starting point of this study is that paranormal effects can be educational aids when the past is mediated. The challenge lies in integrating the paranormal with relevant history in an educational way. Imagination in collective encounters with the past and the ghosts is at center. The guide does not believe in ghosts or pretend to equate the spirits with the real world. However, her critical stance on ghosts does not concern their ontological status but rather the commercial interests of Löfstad Palace as a haunted site. Although the guide emphasizes a certain integrity about the palace's ghosts and the commercial use of ghosts both during the guided tour and in the interview, she uses the ghost stories to create emotional connections between the visitors and people from the past. Integrating named historical figures, historical actor who today haunts, and who during his lifetime has participated in complex political contexts, contributes to bringing the human being to life in political history. This approach was also used when the grieving Sophie von Fersen was presented. The paranormal element as a reinforcement of the historical content was made by the story abour the servant girl Kajsa Jönsdotter. and the paranormal component contributed to the visualize and depict cultural and women's history from the turn of the century as in case of Emilie Piper. In addition, the perfume creates a sensory connection between the historical figure and the visitors of today, making the fact that she was once a living person somehow more "real". The supposed perfume scent confirms the female historical actor's agent; she has lived and left traces behind. Each individual visitor can be in touch with Emilie, while the bloodstain prompts distanced critical thoughts about whether the story of the duel is true or not, due to the unspectacular remains.

Every self-respecting castle has at least one ghost that can be used as an effective resource when (re)presenting the heritage site (Hanks 2016: 50). Entertainment mixed with learning in ghost tourism and dark heritage through so-called edutainment has been criticized for not being historically accurate (see Wyatt et al. 2021). However, studies about tourists at ghost destinations show that visitors are interested in learning about the history, events, and heritage of so-called haunted locations (Hanks 2016; Wyatt et al. 2021). I argue that mediation of the past by highlighting supposed paranormal phenomena is not per definition inappropriate. The appropriateness depends on how the guided tour handles the interplay between the visitors'

expectations, the material and spatial conditions, and the pedagogical design of the paranormal phenomenon. This interplay is grounded in the art of storytelling, as the visitors are guided through historic sites. Their imagination stimulated by affections and haptics can be used to deepen the understanding of the past. The importance of emotions and physical reactions to these cultural heritage experiences coincides with the importance of emotions in ghost tourism. The frightening and macabre element that characterizes destinations in the dark heritage industry, so-called fright tourism, and the combination of horror and fun has attracted researchers who want to explore the emotional reactions of visitors. Studies show how both positive and negative emotions, such as terror and excitement, amusement and fear, are experienced all at the same time (Weidmann et al. 2023). Nevertheless, more research is needed in heritage tourism on how emotions affect the experience (Prayag & Del Chiappa 2021). Thus, dark tourism is not only entertainment, but affects the interpretations of cultural heritage (Hill 2011: 101).

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Eve Revisited, Reimagined and Redeemed

Britt Johanne Farstad

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable.
> What might have been is an abstraction
> Remaining a perpetual possibility
> Only in a world of speculation.
> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present.
> Footfalls echo in the memory
> Down the passage which we did not take
> Towards the door we never opened
> Into the rose-garden. My words echo
> Thus, in your mind.
> But to what purpose
> Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
> I do not know.
>
> (T. S. Eliot *Four Quartets* Burnt Norton I)

The article is a preliminary study of a larger research project on Marianne Fredriksson's (1927–2007) Bible-inspired novels. Fredriksson was a bestselling author, translated into many languages and loved by her many readers across the world. She was a prominent author, not only in Sweden, but around the world. Her books have been translated into 47 languages and sold more than 17 million copies.[1] Despite her success, Fredriksson's writing remains virtually unexplored. Fredriksson's novels where in the midst of important currents of ideas that took place during the 1980s and 1990s. In this article Fredriksson's debut novel *The Book of Eve* (1980) is read in relation to a number of mindsets about Eve in religious, postbiblical reconstructions and philosophical contexts. According to the Abrahamic religious traditions, Eve was the first woman and mother in a prehistoric world. I follow Eve's story from *Genesis,* through Milton's recreation of her in *Paradise Lost*, to her role in the Church Fathers' and philosophers' argumentations about the inferiority of women. From there, I scrutinise Eve's resurrection from the mythical darkness as the main character in Fredriksson's *The Book of Eve*, as a strong, wise and brave woman, daughter, wife, mother, mother-in-law and

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[1] https://www.nordinagency.se/clients/fiction/marianne-fredriksson

ancestorial mother to new generations. This new Eve is a possible, capable character and I argue that when Fredriksson revisits the legendary first mother and reimagines her, it is done with the aim to redeem the historically heavily burdened mythical character.

Many of the themes that recur and are further explored in Fredriksson's writing can already be discerned in the debut novel, *The Book of Eve*. Fredriksson returns time and time again to biblical characters and tells their stories from new perspectives. Her next book is a reimagination and retelling of another central biblical myth, *The Book of Cain* (1981) and is based on the scarce mentions of Cain in *Genesis*. However, as other archaic characters in *The Bible*, Cain has a complex history in jewish and islamic traditions (Kirby 2024). Fredriksson's third novel is *The Saga of Norea* (1983). This daughter of Adam and Eve is not found in *The Bible* but is found in gnosticism (Layton 1974; Robinson 1991). Matriarchal and patriarcal religions compete for power in a mythic past. Feminist authors belonging to the second wave of feminists had a need to create new narratives, reinvent and fill their characters with knowledge and reason, and ideas about prehistoric gynocratic or matriarchal societies emerged. Goddess worship and ideas about ancient matriarchal religions and societies supplanted by patriarchal belief systems, were important parts of discussions in feminist debates (Armstrong 1986; Irigaray 1993; Eller 2000; Gale 2003; Onsell 1985; 1992; 1994). The three novels were later published in the collection *The Children of Paradise* (1985).

He Who Walks by Night (1988) takes place a few decades before, during and after the birth and death of Jesus. One central theme is how a new religion emerges; how it is defined depends on memories, interpretations and choises from persons with power over the narrative. In 1990, Fredriksson returns to *Genesis* and the myth about Noah and the Flood and tells another story about the myth in *The Deluge*. Noah's wife and three daughters-in-law are resourceful and skilful women with great responsibilities in the construction and management of the Ark's construction and every accomplishment necessary for survival. In 1997, *According to Mary Magdalene* is published. Maria Magdalena's perspective gives new thoughts about the narratives in the *New Testament*. The central theme seems to be how a new religion emerges; how it is defined depends on memories, interpretations and choises from persons with power over the narrative, male apostles stand against female apostles. Mary Magdalene is at the center of the struggle for power over the new religion, where the male apostles use old traditions to silence the female apostles. The novel scrutinises coincidences that may have determined the formation of the new religion (Armstrong 1991; Skovmand 2021).

Fredriksson's Bible-inspired novels were published in the 1980s and 1990s, when important renegotiations were taking place in feminist philosophy, philosophy of religion, historiography and women's fiction writing. Female writers turned to historical figures, mythical characters and prehistoric times when exploring women's life opportunities. In that way,

Fredriksson's writings are part of a significant, ongoing rewriting project in the Western world, where myths, fairy tales, biblical and historical characters and events are being reformulated as acts of resistance against the dominant social order (Nilson 2005; Rønning 2012; Nauwerck 2018). Fredriksson work challenges the pervasive effects of religious and oppressive narratives.

A revised creation myth

In *The Book of Eve*, the reader meets the protagonist, Eve, on her arduous trek back to Eden, the land of her childhood and youth. She has recently lost one of her sons in the first well-known fratricide in Judeo-Christian mythology: Cain has murdered his brother Abel and for Adam and Eve their world has deteriorated. In her state of grief, Eve wanders away from her husband and son to seek answers, explanations and, perhaps, comfort. She struggles to remember, and to remember accurately. Memories of people and events come back to her during the journey. Early in the wandering, one of the first memories that comes to mind is how she and Adam "timidly and tentatively had begun to talk about the words. About how the words came to them" (Fredriksson 1980: 22). Adam and Eve had once left the old land to create a new life. They wanted to live in close proximity to each other and in harmony with the nature they lived in and from. According to Fredriksson's narrative, Eve is full of self-accusations and accusations towards her husband Adam and his God. She has lots of questions about how this tragedy could happen. The couple have distinct and entirely different strategies for their grief and shock. Adam locks himself away, prays and asks questions to his God. Eve walks both physically and mentally back in history, wanders in their old footsteps and seeks places that can trigger her memories. Eve's journey is a hazardous wandering back to the mostly forgotten land of her childhood as she struggles to come to terms with her life. The land of her childhood is shrouded in mystery, and only incomprehensible bits and pieces of images are found in her memories. Eve realises that she needs to remember correctly. The journey down memory lane turns out to be difficult – what was it like 'really'? She imagines that knowledge about her early history can help her family to cope with the present and the future. During the trip, many memories return, and she understands better what she and Adam have been through as children and young people.

The Book of Eve is a revised creation myth, where the characters we think we know something about are given bodies, new outlines, complex minds and lifegoals, new explanations and plausible life stories. They are also placed under the intense gaze of Jungian psychology and, thus, appear in a new light to the reader. Jungian psychology is not the focus of this article, however. It is the emancipatory project for Eve that is of interest. In Fredriksson's reconstructed myth, Eve tries to grasp and control her world – and her life – through language, memories and dreams. Early in her journey she states: "After all, words make the world rich in content, she thought. Before the

words there was only greenery, now there are colours, species, differences, experiences, characteristics, order, possibilities" (Fredriksson 1980: 22). In Fredriksson's narrative, Eve is a woman who believes in the power of language, stories and communication for solving disagreements and to understand the world.

The significant key in the Judeo-Christian creation myth is 'The Word' by which God creates the world. The word that creates and organises the world is also central in Fredriksson's narrative, although here the power over the word and language has to a great extent been assigned to Eve. Eve puts a lot of effort into describing what she experiences, reaching her memories and understanding how her early experiences have formed her as an adult. She is very thorough when recounting her journey to the people in the nomadic tribe she meets on her way back home. When she later comes home, she is extremely careful about reconstructing every move and communication she has experienced on her journey back to Adam. She wants him to really understand and not be furious and misunderstand her. She knows that her new understanding of what has happened to them will upset him, especially it doesn't fit with his understanding of earlier events and circumstances.

When Eve is finally able to tell the story to Cain it is easier because he really wants to listen to her experiences and learn from her. So, she weighs the words differently and considers who she is speaking to, as it is important to her that her narrative is correct. How something is said, how something is described, which names and words are used are particularly important to her. In the novel, it is Eve who masters the words, the name-giving, the argumentation and the storytelling. Adam cannot win a battle with words with Eve. They are both aware of this and his reaction is often violent or leaving home and fleeing to his altar and the prayers to his God.

Fantastic fiction as an emancipatory movement

Fredriksson describes a prehistoric world loaded with a multitude of essential ideas and moulds them into a new tale about 'the first woman'. It is possible to define the novel as fantastic fiction. According to Attebery, a key feature of fantasy is that it does not hide its fictitiousness. Furthermore, fantastic fiction does not put itself forward as literally true or authoritative, and here lies the subversive edge of fantasy. Atterby writes that there is "room within the fantasy genre itself for a range of responses to religious myth" (Attebery 2014: 40). He also claims that the fantastic, "that is, creative and disruptive play with representations of the real world—can be found in many genres of oral and written storytelling" (Attebery 2014: 52). Myths themselves belong in the realm of the fantastic. When myths are reimagined, rewritten and remade, they can offer new perspectives and thought possibilities on old, well-known narratives. This remaking often confronts and challenges so-called 'truths'.

The Book of Eve can be said to be a 'counter-narrative', or 'counter-myth'. Fredriksson addresses and challenges historic assumptions about the character she has chosen. Instead of arguing, she confronts previous concepts and tells us a new story, and chose to retell one of the oldest myths in our culture. The novel is understood as 'fantastic fiction'. Fredriksson is briefly mentioned in *The History of Nordic Women's Literature* (Volume 5, 2000: 94). Fahlgren writes that Fredriksson's novels "depict human beings who possess a special sensibility":

> It is mostly Fredriksson's female characters who keep in touch with their inner selves. Often they have a privileged relationship with nature. In *Evas bok (The Book of Eve)*, the first woman, Eve, is renowned for her knowledge of the healing properties of plants. The strong women radiate motherliness, a natural solicitude for others that is a prerequisite for their inner strength (Fahlgren 2012).[2]

Fredriksson is not alone in the urge to retell myths during the 1980s and 1990s (Rønning 2012)[3]. She uses narrative technique belonging to fantastic fiction as she speculates, changes perspectives and asks new questions to well-known mythical occurrences and characters. By giving the mythical figures thoughts, circumstances and life goals, and making them 'fully' believable as characters, readers gain new perspectives on well-known and sometimes old, worn-out images. According to Rønning something happened in Nordic literature in the 1980s, and several recreations of prehistoric and mythical characters were published. More or less forgotten mythical heroines were adapted to the contemporary world. Rønning writes that the new women writers in the Nordic region:

> began to write about hidden, forgotten, overlooked, or entirely unknown women from past centuries, and the books were welcomed by huge audiences (and by reviewers) with such overwhelming interest that it began to look like just the genre for which they had all been searching for so many years (Rønning 2012).

During the 1970s and 1980s, 'women's literature' was very successful in the literary market and, for a period, "this literature was at the centre of attention of both the critics and the readers" (Rønning 2012). During this decade, women's literature updated the heroines' issues, circumstances, phases and dreams: "1970s literature of experience expands the emotional register, sexuality is given more room, and the liberation theme is emphasized" (Rønning 2012). In the 1980s, the historical novel underwent a similar process and female heroines were adapted to the contemporary world. Rønning writes that in historical novels during the 1970s and 1980s,

> the story about female resistance and struggle takes on a new form, and the novels make the liberation discussion legitimate and relevant far beyond the

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[2] https://nordicwomensliterature.net/2012/02/13/the-good-story/
[3] https://nordicwomensliterature.net/2012/02/13/the-good-story/

> reach of the new women's movement. These new historical narratives are full of rebellion and sexuality, and the main characters are strong women who make a break from convention time and time again (Rønning 2012).

Several female authors have written fiction about women's lives during the misty prehistoric era. Eve and her antagonist sister, Lilith, re-entered the literary world in Sweden in 1980 when Anita Gustafsson published *Lilith, Adam's First Wife*. Lilith is interesting and has had an exceptional evolution throughout literary history. Adam's first wife has metamorphosed from a demon spirit into a significant icon of women's liberation (Dame et al. ed. 1998; Lantz & Farstad 2023). In 1980, another novel about a young girl swept across the literary world. Ayla, who miraculously survived a natural catastrophe, grew up to womanhood in a presumed prehistoric, patriarchal world. *The Clan of the Cave Bear*, the first book in what became a series of novels by Jean M. Auel. The series is known as the *Earth's Children* series and consist of six novels. Unlike Eve and Lilith, Ayla is not a well-known mythological figure, but a creation of Jean M. Auel's mind. She is placed in a prehistoric world surrounded by mindsets and myths. Critics were harsh against Jean M. Auel as an author, but scientific research has shown that the life conditions she gave Ayla are relatively plausible. The female protagonists in the above-mentioned novels are highly rational beings, physically strong, intellectually capable and have extensive knowledge about nature, how to use and live by it. These characters are – at least – equal to men in all respects.

The need to tell new stories about the kind of life that women could have experienced is understandably strong – and the readers need for this kind of fantastic fiction seems to be equally strong. Ideas about a prehistoric matriarchal world was also important during this period. Female authors belonging to the second wave of feminists had a great need to create new narratives about how life might have been for women in prehistoric times, to reinvent women and fill their characters with knowledge and reason. During the 1970s and 1980s speculations about prehistoric gynocratic or matriarchal societies engaged feminists (Onsell 1999; Nilson 2005; Eller 2000). Reusing myths in fiction can be a way of remembering the past and reminding the reader of the same, which makes it imperative that the myths are reformulated in relation to different worldviews and politics to avoid reproducing outdated ideas.

The word creates the world

Compared to her mythical sister Lilith, who became an icon for female emancipation, Eve has been perceived as a more obedient and 'dull' mythical character. Although Eve was allowed a place in religious history, she was also highjacked by patriarchy, philosophy and the church fathers. Fredriksson's recreation and elevation of Eve to 'royal descendant' and mother of a king to be, is a well needed act of emancipation for this character. Early in the

narrative, Eve believes that she and Adam invents the language. Later songs become vital part of their lives. The songs sung by the nomadic tribespeople that Eve encounters tell stories about important events. The songs are passed on, reformulated and developed further according to the different occurrences that appear and vary depending on the occasion. Music and song are unknown phenomena to Eve until she meets the people in the nomadic tribe who eventually becomes her dear friends and relatives through Cain's marriage. Through the stories and songs of the tribe, Eve learns about her own origins and her association with the royal family. The people in the tribe immediately recognise her distinct appearance. They call it 'the royal profile' and understand that she is the daughter of the princess who once left the temple where she was meant to serve. Prior to the wedding between Cain and a daughter from the tribe, songs are rewritten and complemented with additional information – mainly by the men in the tribe together with Adam's contribution to parts of his own and Eve's story. Eve recognises that Adam fabricates the story according to his own ideas about what really happened to them since leaving Eden. Adam portrays Eve as a temptress, a woman who lured him away from his calling. Despite the singer's editing of Adam's story, traces of Adam's perspective on their history will be passed on to new generations. Eve is troubled with his narrative but wonders mostly about his need to diminish her and why he needs do that.

In Fredriksson's novel the power of the language and the narrative is important themes. Helga Kress writes about how women were deprived of power over the word and the stories, or rather robbed of it, during the Old Norse Middle Ages. In the article "What a woman speaks: Culture and gender in Iceland in the Old Norse Middle Ages", Kress writes that there are "many indications that women were largely responsible for the oral tradition in Norse literature" (Kress 1995: 22ff) and that this largely concerns "the eddic narrative poems which by and large thematise women's experience and have a female perspective. The poetry was linked to the art of divination known as *seid* and to the *healing arts*, both of which were predominantly female spheres; that is to say, poetry, seid and healing arts were components of one and the same system, forming a ritual unit" (Kress 1995: 22ff). Kress describes how the skaldic mead was stolen from Gunlad, who was set to guard it. According to Kress's analysis, it is a myth about how and when men took control of the language, the words and the stories in the old Norse Middle Ages. When the ancient oral tradition was transformed into written language, women lost their voice and power in society.

The shift from oral to written language in human cultural history is a well-known and researched phenomenon. *Genesis* was written long before the Norse myths were committed to paper. Genesis is assumed to have become written text around the 6th and 5th centuries BCE (Armstrong 1996: 8-9). In the same way as old Norse literature, the stories are based on oral materials that are much older than the time of their incorporation into a written work.

The book that finally became *Genesis* is supposed to contain ancient oral and written traditions. In *Genesis 1*, God speaks eight times and everything comes into being and in its rightful place: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was unformed and void, darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (*Genesis* 1: 1-3). The Judeo-Christian God does not need a female counterpart. All he needs is his word by which he commands everything to come into being. Without exaggerating, it is safe to say that characters and episodes described in *Genesis* have inspired mindsets and cultural expressions throughout Judeo-Christian cultural history. Fredriksson was obviously aware of the long-lasting and often negative effects of mythical narratives and she shapes her characters in opposition to persisting mindsets. Mythical material can be used to maintain the status quo and to overturn ingrained thought patterns (Farstad 2013: 251-255). The modernisation of myths is a significant narrative technique, which in the fantastic fiction genre has the function of indicating development or potential change. Due to the mental place of myths and mythological characters in different imaginary worlds, archaic material can reformulate the meaning of what they represent to achieve constructive effects. At the same time, retold myths can function as conserving elements (Farstad 2013: 287). In Fredriksson's reimagination of Eve, several movements for change are set in motion.

Eve – according to *Genesis* and postbiblical reconstructions

> - Do you really believe all that you said about the snake's tongue and the apple that got you in my power? she said, drilling her gaze into his.
> - You eavesdropped, you bitch.
> But she got the answer, for he was scarlet with shame when he ran out of the cave (Fredriksson 1980: 157).

The Eva we meet in Fredriksson's novel is very different from the Eva we find in the stories told in post-biblical narratives. We start with the myth-building about Eve and the first two creation-myths in *Genesis* chapters one and two. These two stories have different perspectives – and most probably – different purposes. Orally transmitted for centuries, they were transformed into written text over centuries. According to tradition, Moses wrote the five first books in *The Bible*. *Genesis* was written about 950 BCE (Long 2023). In the *Complete Jewish Bible* (CJB) we can read: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (CJB). The earth was dark, unformed and empty and the myth tells a story about how everything came into existence. Late in the creation process we come to a passage of relevance for this topic:

> [Genesis 1:26] And God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and

over the cattle, and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

In the first chapter, the world and everything in it is given to the two human beings simultaneously. They are both created by God, in God's image, and are equal in a hierarchical sense.

The first two chapters in Genesis tell two different versions of the creation myth. According to bible historians, *Genesis* chapter 2 is assumed to be older than *Genesis* chapter 1 (Meyers 2021). In the second chapter, the man is created first, then the animals and finally "the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a helper meet for him'" (CJB).

> Genesis 2:21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.
> Genesis 2:22 And the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman and brought her unto the man.
> Genesis 2:23 And Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (CJB).

One common interpretation of the discrepancy between the two chapters is that the first chapter tells the story of Adam and Lilith, while the other chapter tells Adam and Eve's story (Dame et al. 1998; Lantz & Farstad 2023). In this context, it can be noted that the reconstructed myth changes the conditions of the woman's existence in the world. In this version, the woman does not exist in her own right, but comes into existence to fill the man's need for a helper. She is made of the man, and she comes into existence after the man has given all creatures their names. Consequently, as she is made of another material than the man, the world is already defined by the man, the social order is set before her arrival and she is ranked lower than the man.

Therefore, the next step in Eve's degradation follows quite easily when the infamous serpent enters the scene and tempts Eve with the legendary apple. This occurrence, known as "The Fall", is described in the third chapter of *Genesis*. According to the mythical calendar, the split between God and mankind happens in the early days of human existence. With the serpent's promise to "be as gods, knowing good and evil", the woman makes the mistake that will haunt her and her daughters for millennia:

> Genesis 3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and ate, and gave also unto her husband with her: and he ate (CJB).

When God confronts them with disobedience, Adam takes the easy way out and blames Eve. He also reminds the creator that the defiant woman was given to him by God himself. Eve ate the apple from the tree of knowledge and that act has since been used as an argument by the Church Fathers and

philosophers to prove that women are inferior to men (Tuana 1992: Tuana 1993: Lloyd 1995: Gale 2003).

The next significant postbiblical, literary reconstruction of Eve is found in John Milton's interpretation of the biblical creation myth in *Paradise Lost* (1667, book VIII). Eve is of no great interest to Milton, although he does describe the creative act in detail by focusing on how Adam falls asleep and how a perfect female human being – of great beauty and virtue – emerges before the man, in accordance with his dreams and wishes. In Milton's narrative, Eve is created by Adam and not at all by God (Milton, book VIII). In Milton's poem, Adam dreams about Eve and when he wakes up she is there, next to him in Eden (Milton: 194-195). Thus, according to Milton's narrative, Eve is a being of Adam's making, which makes her inferior in relation to the First Man, who is God's own creation. In short, Eve is the result of the man's desire and creative act. This is one of the postbiblical narratives about Eve which Fredrikssson challenges in her novel.

Johnsson (1987) states that *Paradise Lost* represents one of the "historically most weighty among the Bible-inspired literary genres. In learned terminology, it is usually referred to as a *hexaemeron*" (Jonsson 1987: 19). The Greek word indicates the connection with the six days of creation in *Genesis*. Johnsson finds that the biblical starting point is well-defined by the poem's name and form. Few subjects can be more demanding than the origin of all things, Johnsson contemplates, and "since the Bible's account of God's six-day work and the conditions he then set for mankind are the ultimate premise of the world-historical drama, it called for constant interpretations" (Jonsson 1987: 19). Literary "hexaemeron occurs in a fairly continuous stream during the late antiquity and Middle Ages, and the genre re-emerged into a new, this time vernacular life during the Renaissance and thereafter" (Jonsson 1987: 21).

According to this, Milton's narrative about Eve does not even exist in God's imagination. The scene is now set for all kinds of arguments for women's inferiority on all levels of life: physical, morally and intellectually. The overarching notion in philosopher Friedrich Hegel's theoretical construction is the greater awareness of the world spirit. The greater insight of this world spirit is the supreme goal of knowledge accumulation. For Hegel, there is an internal main enemy that can complicate the realisation of the utopian state he imagines. He writes: "Womankind - the everlasting irony (in the life) of the community - changes by intrigue the universal purpose of government into a private end" (Hegel 1987: 458). Hegel further writes that "since the community only gets an existence through its interference with the happiness of the Family, and by dissolving (individual) self-consciousness into the universal, it creates for itself in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it an internal enemy - womankind in general" (Hegel 1987: 458). Hegel's thinking is also part of a long tradition of arguing for the order of nature, which consists of the subordinate status of women and the

superior status of men. In accordance with a long tradition of thought, women have been undervalued and been seen to lack reason.

It is often said that *The Bible* is the bestselling book of all time. It has been cherished and celebrated as the word of God, yet ignored as mythical stories from distant times that have no meaning in our time. World religions and religious fractions of different conviction are based on interpretations of *The Bible*. Non-believers have judged *The Bible* as oppressive, especially of women. It is also considered to be spiritually liberating for believers. The poet William Blake stated that "The Old and the New Testaments are the Great Code of Art" and was himself inspired by the myths in his own writing (Frye 1993). Literary scholar Northrop Frye agreed with Blake and considered *The Bible* as the key, the great code, for understanding western culture. Frye used *The Bible* as a structural template and as an interpretation of literature in *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Frye 1993). Roland Barthes talked about "myths as stolen language". He asked what the characteristic of myth was and suggested that it was to "transform a meaning into form" and wrote that "myth is always a language-robbery" (Barthes 1972a: 131). When it comes to the Judeo-Christian creation myth, many 'thefts' have occurred over the course of history. Several efforts to trace and change the persistent narrative have been made, mainly by female philosophers. Here I would like to highlight a few religious scholars and philosophers who have clearly pointed to problems with the persistent argument about the inferiority of women based on the creation myth.

The Image of God

Fredriksson depicts a scenario where Adam and Eve are both suffering from the male idea about God. Eve has never had the need to communicate with Adams God.

> - God will decide, he said, and she smiled a little as usual as he handed over the decision to the god.
> A little later, she overheard the conversation with the heavenly lord from the garden where the man built himself an altar under the largest apple tree (Fredriksson 1980: 29).

Fredriksson's Eve finds her comfort and joy in nature and all that is living and growing. Eventually, it becomes evident even to Adam that his ideas of God are memories of the shaman who once was his teacher.

Eve finds no comfort or resemblance to herself in the God that Adam worships. Several feminist and religious scholars have pointed to problems with the Judeo-Christian mythology's lack of divine female characters. The Judeo-Christian God is male, and he needs no female counterpart. Women thus have no role model or existence in this religion. An early attempt to challenge gender problems from religious convictions was made by Elizabeth Cady Stanton when she published *The woman's Bible* in 1898. Another early

publication was made by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *His Religion and Hers: A Study of the Faith of Our Fathers and the Work of Our Mothers.* The book was published in 1923 and was – despite several difficulties with her view of race – a central text that initiated significant thoughts and debates about religion and gender. Authors and philosophers alike have been inspired by Perkins Gilman's approach to the foundations of our societies – which she found in the myths about creation and the arguments for female subordinance. Fredriksson makes a clear distinction between the man and the woman regarding God and religion. Adam has his belief, his religion, the God who gives him directions, restrictions and a purpose in life. Eve is neither interested, nor convinced, that her husband's God is worth taking into consideration. As God focuses on the man, Eve does not consider herself called by this God. To Eve, all nature has a divine force and she develops her skills to use plants and herbs to make food, clothes and medicine for her family and others.

Religious scholar Kari Vogt wrote that on "the basis of a common scale of values, the categories 'male' and 'female' are polarized, and the 'becoming male' metaphor indicates in all contexts a development from a lower to a higher stage of moral and spiritual perfection" (Vogt 1995: 171). The commonly used religious and literary metaphor 'becoming male' means that women can ascend towards perfection by becoming men: "When a woman becomes a 'man' in the path of God, she is a man and one cannot anymore call her a woman" (Vogt 1995: 182). Karen Armstrong has dedicated her entire career to research on religion and specialises in the effects of the holy books from ancient history to today's societies. In *The Gospel According to Woman: Christianity's Creation of the Sex War in the West* (1986), *Holy War: The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World* (1988) and *The End of Silence: Women and the Priesthood* (1993), she scrutinises religion in relation to gender. In *A History of God* (1994) and *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (2000) she goes through the whole history as we know it. Karen Armstrong argues against the "widespread assumption that the Bible is supposed to provide us with role models and give us precise moral teaching, but this was not the intention of the biblical authors" (Armstrong 2009: 42). She also claims that the Eden story is not a morality tale. Like "any paradise myth, it is an imaginary account of the infancy of the human race. In Eden, Adam and Eve are still in the womb; they have to grow up, and the snake is there to guide them through the perplexing rite of passage to maturity" (Armstrong 2009: 42).

Professor of religion, Carol Meyers, reminds us that the image of Eve, "who never appears in the Hebrew Bible after the opening chapters of Genesis, may be more strongly colored by postbiblical culture than by the biblical narrative itself" (Meyers 2021). However, the effects of the many polarised interpretations cannot be neglected. Religious scholar Mary Daly writes that the roles and structures of patriarchy have been maintained and

developed in accordance with the artificial polarisation of human characteristics. The image of man as sovereign and in power depends on his opposite for his existence. The effect of reusing archetypal models could be that patriarchal patterns are not only reinstalled but reinforced. In her article, "After the Death of God the Father", Daly writes that religious symbols "fade and die away when the cultural situation that gave rise to them and kept them alive no longer gives them the stamp of reasonableness. [...] Rather, symbols emerge from a changing collective situation and experience" (Daly 1996: 224). She also takes the myths very seriously and believes that the function of symbols is never something innocent in a process. She writes that I have "already implied that if God is man, man is God. The Divine Patriarch castrates women as long as he is allowed to live in people's imagination" (Daly 1996: 226). Daly goes on to say that the process of "cutting out the Supreme Phallus can hardly be a purely 'rational' affair" and argues that the biggest problem is "transforming the collective imagination so that this distortion of man's quest for transcendence loses its credibility" (Daly 1996: 224).

Philosopher Genevieve Lloyd traces the tedious and devastating view of women through the history of philosophy in *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (1984/1995). Philosopher Nancy Tuana continues to explore the topic in *Woman and the History of Philosophy* (1992). Using chapter headings like "a fallen soul" (Tuana 1992: 12-14) or "a mutilated man" (Tuana 1992: 157-158), follows this tiresome patriarchal argumentation. Tuana digs even deeper into gender related to religion and philosophy in *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature* (1993). In *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian tradition* (Børresen ed. 1995), several religious scholars analyse ancient religious texts and interpretations that have had a great impact on our societies. Eve and the apple are constantly used as evidence for women's inferior capacities. Nancy Tuana writes that a woman "must decide where to place herself. When the philosopher speaks of the nature of man, informs us of the rationality of man, provides us with the rules a man must follow in order to act morally, does the woman include herself within the referent in the term 'man'?" (Tuana 1992: 12.) The obvious meaning of the words has, of course, been problematised for several decades, but the doubt remains, and we have not yet reached a state where the female reader can identify with certainty in 'man' as a concept for mankind that includes women. Fredriksson evidently decided where she wanted to be with *The Book of Eve*. I read the novel as an emancipatory project of the first mythological woman. What follows could be an emancipatory project för women in general.

In *Sexes and Genealogies* (1993), the philosopher Luce Irigaray writes that when there is no female divine trinity, a woman will have no "mirror wherewith to become woman" (Irigaray 1993: 63). Irigaray argues that "as

long as woman lacks a Divine made in her image, she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. She lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path in becoming" (Irigaray 1993: 63). Irigaray may thus have pinpointed the main problem with the many interpretations of the ancient narrative about how human beings came into the world. Men's identity as godlike is repeatedly confirmed throughout postbiblical, western history. The stories were written by men and interpreted by men until quite recently. This is of importance to us, because one of the fundamental bricks in Judeo-Christian societies has been *The Bible* and the many interpretations of it.

Religion-anthropologist Gomola states that the "myth of creation of woman from man was also a crucial component of Western anthropology, until modern times being the cornerstone of relations between the two sexes and a justification of the inequality between them for Christians, sanctioned by God" (Gomola 2014: 77). Gomola points to translation as a fundamental part of myth transfer, both in the prehistoric past and in the present: "As myths by their nature carry with them ideas and notions that date back to ancient and distant cultures, translation of myths is always an act of interpretation, and usually one specific interpretation becomes so dominant that it excludes in time other possible renderings of the text" (Gomola 2014: 77). Hence, Christianity based its understanding of the relations between the sexes, among other things, on translations and interpretations of the Hebrew text – from certain perspectives in the translators' social and personal mindsets. Gomola suggests that different translations of the biblical myth of the creation of woman could have changed women's social status in Christianity altogether. However, what might have been we will never know. That's where fiction comes in – to play the imperative role as a mind-opening tool.

Stories and storytelling have increasingly become the focus of philosophers, historians and evolutionary theorists. One example is Jonathan Gottschall, an American literary scholar specialising in literature and evolution (2005; 2012). And according to evolutionary historian Yoval Noah Harari, stories are vital components of human development (Harari 2015). Harari argues that stories have played crucial roles in the success story of homo sapiens as the dominant species on the planet. In *The Good Book of Human Nature: An Evolutionary Rereading of the Bible* (2016), evolutionary anthropologist Carel van Schaik and historian Kai Michel advance a new view on *The Bible* in their re-reading as descriptions of homo sapiens' cultural evolution. They argue that the texts were written to make sense of the single greatest change in history, the transition from egalitarian hunter-gatherer to agricultural societies. Van Schaik and Michel read the texts in *The Bible* as documentation of strategies to cope with unprecedented levels of epidemic disease, violence, inequality, and injustice that confronted human beings. They argue that *The Bible* is "humanity's diary, chronicling our ancestors' valiant attempts to cope with the trials and tribulations of life on Earth" (Van Schaik & Michel 2016: 18). "That's why the Bible is such an inexhaustible

and incomparable anthropological resource. By surveying the problems described in its pages, we can assemble a catalogue of the afflictions that plague humanity" (Van Schaik and Michel 2016: 28).

In *Four Quartets* Burnt Norton I, T. S. Eliot elaborates on how memories evolve over time. One question is whether we are composed of our memories and, if they are constructive/reconstructive, how do they define us? "Down the passage which we did not take/Towards the door we never opened" (T. S. Eliot 1969: 171). Myths are our collective memories and they evidently define us far more than we like to believe. Eliot imagines that every time we access a memory we alter it in some way. In her authorship, Fredriksson works with memories and alterations of 'memories'. Eve's work of remembering is a crucial point in the novel. Using and reusing primordial material also means working with memory and memories. The transforming or conforming of myths is a struggle in individual and collective arenas. There can be a variety of intentions when authors choose to use ancient and mythical characters and happenings as narrative tools.

Risks and benefits in the reuse of prehistoric material

I think it is safe to assume that authors have distinct intentions when they reuse or reinvent mythical characters and events in fiction. Myths and mythmaking, stories and storytelling can be said to define what people believe to be their life's possibilities, or what is desirable or undesirable to achieve. Philosopher Karl Popper argues that humanity's greatest inventions are the myths, ideas and scientific theories about the world we live in. In *Objective Knowledge: A Realistic View of Logic, Physics, and History,* Popper structures human knowledge in three levels, of which the first is the material world with its physical objects, energy, weight, movement and rest (1972). The second level consists of subjective consciousnesses, intentions, feelings, thoughts and dreams. The third level consists of memories and ideas that, according to Popper, are objective and consist of patterns and structures of ideas that influence the material world. According to his argumentation, abstract thought patterns affect the concrete world. Popper claims that ideas are humanity's most important assets and strongest means of influencing reality. The consequence of Popper's perspective of thought is that fiction appears as a highly pragmatic phenomenon:

> … we have created a new kind of product or artefact which promises in time to work changes in our corners of the world as great as those worked by our predecessors, the oxygen-producing plant, or the island-building corals. These new products, which are decidedly of our own making, are our myths, our ideas, and especially our scientific theories: theories about the world we live in (Popper 1972: 287).

Thus, according to Popper, fiction belongs to the realm of ideas and abstract notions that we have about reality.

The pervasive structure of myths is important to reflect on. I think it is safe to say that when authors turn to myths as their narrative material and starting point, it is not a coincidental choice but has a specific purpose. Literary scholar Roland Barthes emphasises that myths should be regarded as a significant communication system (Barthes 1972: 205). According to Barthes, myths are not only concepts or ideas, but a way of giving something meaning or form. They "have a commanding, exhorting nature: are part of a historical concept, suddenly emerging directly from the state of the matter" (Barthes 1972: 205). The mythical address is authoritarian and, as Barthes writes, it is "me it seeks: it is turned against me, I endure its deliberate force, it forces me to receive its frank ambiguity" (Barthes 1972: 205). Barthes thus points to an unbending pattern that can be found in mythical material, its hint of inevitability and naturalness, and writes that "this exhorting utterance is at the same time a solidified utterance: the moment it reaches me, it is interrupted, turns against itself *and finds* a universality: it is permeated, excused and innocent" (Barthes 1972: 205). Long (2023) writes that the cosmogonic myth has a pervasive structure and expression in the form of philosophical and theological thought. According to Long, this is only one dimension of its function as a model for cultural life: "Though the cosmogonic myth does not necessarily lead to ritual expression, ritual is often the dramatic presentation of the myth" (Long 2023)[4]. Such dramatisation, Long suggests, is "performed to emphasize the permanence and efficacy of the central themes of the myth, which integrates and undergirds the structure of meaning and value in the culture" (Long 2023).

In *The Battle of Reality: Philosophy, Trend Analysis, Interpretation,* science historian Bengt Kristensson Uggla points to the problematic nature of re-establishing myths as a way of interpreting the world and history (Kristensson Uggla 2002: 145-150). He writes that social and political conflicts increasingly take the form of "a struggle over the past" and that it seems "highly problematic to let the battle for the past be decided in a mythical market where everyone talks at each other's mouths, even if the myths are never so life-affirming" (Kristensson Uggla 2002: 150). Kristensson Uggla emphasises the viewer's position and interpretive aspects and states that the present is not "something you can only analyse from a distanced viewer position and the future is not something you can predict in the extension of development trends in the present. There is no one who has privileged access to either the present or the future. We always perceive reality from a certain perspective" (Kristensson Uggla 2002: 12).

When formulating fictive and theoretical texts, authors and literary scholars usually choose some kind of position. Roland Barthes writes that "no one can write without passionately taking sides (however disengaged his message may sound) for or against *all that is or is not as it should be in the world:* the misfortune of men or their happiness, and what these *awaken in us*

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[4] https://www.britannica.com/topic/creation-myth

[...] all these constitute the primordial material of signs" (Barthes 1967: 13). This also goes for authors and how they choose to reuse the mythical 'primordial material' in modern texts.

Philosopher Paul Ricœur asks two central questions in the introduction to *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2005). The first is *what* is it that is remembered? and the second, *who* is it that remembers? (Ricœur 2005: 39). Ricœur places history in an intermediate position in relation to memory and forgetfulness to point out that what ultimately becomes history arises from complicated and interacting processes of individual and collective memory work. In Ricœur's hermeneutic model, forgetfulness also has a prominent role as a simultaneously active and passive action in the work of memory at conscious and unconscious levels and individual and collective levels. Oblivion also exists in cracks between beliefs, experiences and mental processes. For Ricœur, however, imagination is a key to memory and forgetfulness – imagination determines what ultimately becomes the story depicted in an individual or personal sense, as well as in a historical and collective sense. One purpose for the reuse of mythical persons or events could be to create possibilities for new knowledge to emerge. It is necessary for us to face the unknown and see it as something new or foreign in order to arrive at new insights. According to Ricœur, two distinct movements are initiated where the text both widens and closes the hermeneutic circle. The choice the characters are given is to alienate the familiar and thereby open a new understanding through the gaze that is forced to 'see for the first time', whereby new insight can arise. The second possibility is to make the foreign familiar. The latter option closes the possibilities for new knowledge, as the unknown is smoothed out and made familiar. Thus, the potential of the curious gaze is lost, in that the subject allows "the sign belonging to the absent present sensation to coincide with the present sensation", as Ricœur puts it, which according to his reasoning is to "make a complete mistake" (Ricœur 2005: 45). Ricœur's reasoning about 'the next of kin' as a bridge between past and present time is a method used by Fredriksson (Ricœur 2005: 169ff). In order to remember correctly and be able to forgive, close relatives and relations to other human beings are imperative. Relatives are a central part in Fredriksson's reinvention of Eve and her struggle to remember.

Reinventing symbolic, ancestorial, female characters

> Religion is the strongest modifying influence in our conscious behaviour. It expresses our highest instincts, and serves, or should serve, our best advancement. Yet the religions of mankind, so far, are responsible for much evil as well as good, and the best we know have only brought us to our present state (Charlotte Perkins Gilman 1923).

The tradition of man's interpretive primacy and supremacy is heavy and sits deep in language, metaphors, myths, our religious narratives and

philosophical foundations. According to philosopher Alice Jardine, a vital part of the crises of modernity is, "the concern over the father's loss of authority and [...] winding forecasts associated with Paranoia and the End of Man and History" (Jardine 1985: 25). Jardine emphasises the importance of the existence of gender identities and gender differences on a symbolic level, as determined by language and politics (Jardine 1985: 37). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu writes in *The Male Dominance* from an ethical point of view about the symbolic power factors that make changes in gender roles so difficult to access. He argues that "in a world where the order of sexuality is not constituted as such, but gender differences remain immersed in the contradictions that organize the cosmos as a whole, sexual attributes and actions are overwhelmed by anthropological and cosmological determinations" (Bourdieu 1999: 19). The result, says Bourdieu, is that gender differences "seem to be 'in the scheme of things' [...] to the point that it is inevitable: it exists in an objectified state" (Bourdieu 1999: 20). The reinvention of myths can therefore be helpful in a process to comprehend, on an essential cognitive level, how deep the constructions of mindsets that surround us are based on mythical presuppositions.

In *The History of Woman and the History of Philosophy from Plato*, philosopher Nancy Tuana describes the tradition that established that human nature consisted of two kinds and that "the superior race would hereafter be called man" (Tuana 1993: 111). This approach has permeated the mental climate so that, in accordance with Gnostic and early Christian thought traditions, 'becoming Male' is a metaphor for human perfection. Aristotle established the philosophical interpretation in his time, and from then on the argument was transferred to superiority/subordination between man and woman: "Therefore [...] the male is separated from the female. For the first principle of the movement, or efficient cause, whereby that which comes into being is male, is better and more divine than the material whereby it is female" (Tuana 1993: 129). As the philosopher Genevieve Lloyd writes in *The Man of Reason:* '*Male*' *&* '*Female*' *in Western Philosophy:*

> From the beginnings of philosophical thought, femaleness was symbolically associated with what Reason supposedly left behind - the dark powers of the earth goddesses, immersion in unknown forces associated with mysterious female powers. The early Greeks saw women's capacity to conceive as connecting them with the fertility of Nature (Lloyd 1995: 12).

This mindset leads to the idea that a woman's "role is mainly to be a kind of incubator for the foetus, created either by the father or by a male Deity" as Margaret Clunies Ross states in *Pagan Echoes: Myth and Society in Ancient Nordic Literature* (Clunies Ross 1998: 51).

The philosopher Luce Irigaray writes that one result of this mentality, tradition and reality is that women lack divine identity on both the symbolic and metaphorical levels, and that as they lack "a divine made in her image she

cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. She lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path in becoming" (Irigaray 1993). However, this symbolic construction of female and male mythical identity can be reformulated and consciously changed by allowing new stories to be created that also relate to this historical background. Ruth Bienstock Anolik (2001) writes about the appropriations and revisions of mythical stories and reconstructions of the motif of to "appropriate the authority of creation (and sexuality, the basis of biological creation) for women" (Anolik 2001: 41). Anolik claims that when authors rewrite the texts to include female figures of authority and power, the possibilities of female creation and power are revealed and surpass the original and traditional stories (Anolik 2001: 41). This is what Fredriksson does in *The Book of Eve*. She appropriates and re-visions the myth and creates a new mythical ancestorial character of great authority.

Fredriksson is not alone in her intention to deliberate and redeem Eve. In 2019, Qurrota Ayunin, a researcher in gender studies at the State University of Indonesia, writes that the purpose of her study "EVE, the Existing Abject", is to "offer another view and that the figure of Eve is a figure whose existence must be appreciated" (Ayunin 2019: 43). The study is conducted within a framework called *Postmodern Feminist Study toward the Story of Adam and Eve in Bible*. In the study, Ayunin emphasises that biased "interpretations are not supposed to be just silenced but those must be resisted by generating new interpretations and new views" (Ayunin 2019: 41). The creation myth in *Genesis* continues to engage researchers from several religious traditions. Ayunin writes that: "Holy books should be read with a variety of more egalitarian and unbiased perspectives so that gender justice can be realized without the pretext of religion as a barrier" (Ayunin 2019: 41). Ayunin's position is that the narrative of human creation is interpreted in a biased way, "not only in one or two religions, but there are many interpretations from various religions which still present a lame interpretation. Therefore, efforts to reread all religious texts are central" (Ayunin 2019: 47). The most significant achievement is to bring out a "woman as a subject rather than what the biased interpreter has been deliberately drowned in a patriarchal interpretation" (Ayunin 2019: 47). The liberation of mythical, ancestorial mothers continues to be necessary in emancipatory processes.

Fredriksson creates a history for Adam and Eve that coincides with the perspective of Eden as a prehistoric world of hunters and gatherers and that the people living there lived in a state of 'innocence', unaware of a future, 'sin', 'evil' or 'good'. Fredriksson assumes that they have no appraisal of the cultural and social conventions appreciated by other human beings living at the same time. In Fredriksson's novel there are still people who have not yet eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The people in Eden have no memories of the past or no plans for the future. Instead, they live in a long, constant 'Now'.

In the novel, the father's faith and the mother's work mainly reflect how religion may have been perceived in a prehistoric reality based on one of the fundamental myths in our culture. Fredriksson follows in Perkin Gilman's footsteps by making serious points about fatherhood and motherhood. Fredriksson also describes the critical occurrence that takes place in Eden after The Fall: the first mythological fratricide. Cain and Abel's offerings are described in a similar way as in *Genesis* chapter 4. However, the denial of Cain's offering, which is attributed to God in *Genesis*, is placed on Adam, the father, in Fredriksson's novel. It is Adam who explains to Cain that God has rejected his sacrifice. Eve is furious when she realises what her husband has said. Adam knew, she rages, that it was impossible for the smoke from Cain's offering of fresh grain to rise in the air. Hence, the father knew why the offerings behaved differently, but chose to blame his son for the failure.

Eve re-created

The novel is thus a reconstruction of the creation myth itself. Through her memories, Eve struggles to remember and remember correctly. She wrestles with Adam and his God. In the novel, Adam and Eve are two human beings born into an existing, prehistoric world with a multitude of societies, gods and traditions. Throughout the narrative, the reader learns that the societies vary from a primitive clan living on the steppe called Eden to well organised cities. The people in Eden are well known but not well liked by other human beings. They lack an advanced language and are driven by primitive, basic emotions, in that they eat, copulate, fight about females and sleep. They live day-by-day with no thoughts of yesterday or tomorrow and their lives are short. Eve wanders back to Eden in her struggle to remember and understand. She remembers a certain light that is connected to the steppe where she lived with the clan. Once she is back in Eden, Eve is repulsed by the sight of her old people. She recognises an old woman who she understands is her sister and starts to remember her mother. This is the most significant key to opening her mind and being able to remember. Eve realises that the behaviour of the people in Eden is not evil. They have no perception of good or evil – they just exist. On some level she misses the innocence of her life in Eden. Eden represents the innocent, childhood years that she has mostly forgotten.

We learn that Eve rebelled against the treatment of her when her baby daughter died in Eden. She was not allowed to grieve, became furious and verbally raged against the leader of the clan. Eve's mother and the shaman decided that she must leave the clan, and Adam, full of love for the beautiful girl, chose to follow her and leave his teacher, the shaman. They began a new life on their own and started a family in the mountains a few days journey away from Eden. When Eve started to remember her childhood and life before they left Eden, memories of her mother came back to her. She understood, as she watched the people in Eden, that her mother was different and not like the women in the clan. Memories from her childhood revealed that it was her

mother who taught her the language, the names of plants and herbs and how to use them to heal infections and wounds. In her memories, the pieces of the puzzle gradually fall into place during Eve's journey. Thus, Adam and Eve are far from alone in the prehistoric world of Fredriksson's making. There are nomadic clans and, eventually, the journey that Fredriksson invites us to join her in leads to a great city called Nod, which struggles with wars with neighbouring kingdoms. The people there are hunters, gatherers and farmers, in the city there are temples with priests and priestesses, royalties, soldiers and skilled craftsmen of all kinds (Fredriksson 1981; 1983). Eve is well known in the area for her great knowledge of how to cure people with healing herbs and plants. People seek out Eve and Adam in their mountain home so that Eve can heal their sick. Adam is also known to the people as an apprentice to the shaman who could conjure up rainy weather in times of drought. The nomadic tribe they become acquainted with eventually becomes closely linked to the family on the mountain through the marriage of Cain and the daughter of the tribe's leader.

Eve's journey can be read as a psychological journey. Her rebellion and leaving could be understood as a product of puberty and teenage years. However, I find this to be too simple an argument, even if we have learned from Campbell to understand myths and sagas as collective memories and symbolic psychological tools. In this context, it is perhaps more relevant to regard Eve's characteristics as a critique of the guilt-ridden and blamed first woman. According to Fredriksson's reimagination and re-creation of 'the first woman', Eve is a royal person, who on her journey learns from the nomadic tribespeople that her mother was a princess who had left the temple and city to be a teacher to the people in Eden. She had run away with the priest who became the shaman and Adam's teacher. So, Eve is descended from royalty and her kin will inherit the throne.

In the endeavour to recall her memories, Eve recognises that it is the shaman who condemns them as they leave. Fredriksson repeats the words in *Genesis* 3:17-19, but puts them into the shaman's mouth. Eve has a totally different view of the notion of God than Adam, and it is an unexpected revelation to her that it is the shaman's teachings that dictate Adam's apprehension of the world and how to live in it. Adam is a deeply guilt-ridden man and has, among other things, learnt from the shaman that sexuality is despicable. Eve is furious when she understands the damage that the shaman has caused in their lives. Eve holds the shaman responsible for the tragedy inflicted on Adam and, consequently, on their family, of considering sexuality as something ugly, something to be avoided.

Eve Redeemed

Fredriksson's Eve is a character with great social capital, which her husband and children benefit from in the reconstruction of the myth. She is indeed an extremely capable person with deep knowledge about how to live and manage

in the world. Above all, she is a rational, practical, independent and responsible person. Thus, Fredriksson redeems Eve from the myths surrounding her. But she does more than this. Fredriksson lifts Eve up in social ranking and makes her the daughter of an old bloodline of royals, the granddaughter of a queen and herself the grandmother of royals to come. However, Eve does not become a matriarch since her daughter is childless, so that it is Cain, her son, who continues the bloodline. Cain is the one who inherits and passes on an indispensable maternal legacy from Eve (Fredriksson 1981). Cain takes up Eve's interest in and knowledge about seeds, plants and medical herbs and develops it further. The first decision he makes as a newly chosen king is to establish gardens and plantations with medical and healing herbs and to teach people how to make medicines. He insists on medical treatments, instead of the meaningless magic rites conducted by the priests. Cain also reintroduces the goddess cult that has been tossed aside by the male priesthood. Norea, Eve's daughter and Cain's sister, eventually becomes the cult's leading priestess (Fredriksson 1983).

Fredriksson did not engage in polemics with theologians or gender theorists, nor did she engage in philosophical debates. Instead she told a new story, an epic saga. Fredriksson met the accusations that Eve has been exposed to over the centuries and provided her protagonist with all the qualities she has been deprived of. Fredriksson tested her ideas in fiction, told the story of an alternative Eve and placed her in a convincing and challenging context where she could evolve and prosper. Fredriksson reimagined Eve as an intelligent and strong woman with great skills – a woman who can heal people and relations and give advice to leaders. The simple home that Adam and Eve once built in the mountain developed and flourished thanks to Eve's multiple capacities. Eventually, their home became a central spot in the country and expanded as they get more deeply involved in the complex administration of the kingdom.

There can be no doubt about Eve's rationality, her moral competency, her power over language or her capacity to lead and govern. *The Book of Eve* is a convincing accomplishment in redeeming Eve from the numerous centuries of submission, guilt and blame.

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Negotiating With the Bogey Man: Perceptions of European-Southeast Asian Relations in Lore and Tradition

Hans Hägerdal

Introduction

The legacy of colonialism in the minds of those subjected to it is as diverse as the forms of colonial expansion over the centuries. Generally, more emphasis has been given to the dark and exploitative sides in recent decades, especially with the rise of Postcolonial and Decolonial studies (Grecco & Schuster 2020). Events such as the Rwanda Genocide and the Israel-Hamas War are often explained as being ultimately the result of Western discrimination and exploitation, with repercussions long after formal decolonization. Demands for reparations and apologies are increasingly launched by the ex-colonies (Weiss 2016: 16). Such images of past injustices are largely shaped by modern media, politics, opinion leaders, and feelings of social dispossession. But it also worth looking at how culturally embedded images of foreign domination have lived on in non-Western societies, in other words, how Occidentalism, stylized images of the West, has operated. In many local milieus, the collective memory has transmitted stories that attribute the European invasions with unusual and supernatural elements, thus epitomizing the social experience of colonialism (Reid 1994). These elements can be termed fantastic since they are set in an essentially dehistoricized past where power and moralism follow their own logic, often divinely mediated. While they are much less studied than national, widely disseminated narratives of the colonial past, such stories are highly interesting since they give local and regional perspectives of political and social processes conveyed by colonial rule. Since they are not bound by conventional historiographic norms and are usually recorded long after the event, the accounts may incorporate legendary and mythical elements in their understanding of foreign impact. This in turn provides mental traces of the colonial experience that may not be found in other, more conventional sources.

The "fantastic" stories of colonialism are therefore valuable from historical, sociological, and literary angles, and in the present study, I will focus on a region with a great variety of narrative traditions and an extended history of Western imperialism – in fact about as long as the colonial history of the Americas. This is Southeast Asia with many hundreds of historical cultures and persistent traditions of narrating the past. Southeast Asia is a sub-region of Asia that covers some four and a half million square kilometres. Because it is the home of five world religions and many hundreds of

languages and ethnic groups, one may ask whether it is actually defendable to discuss it under one heading. This is a problem that innumerable historians, social scientists, and geographers have battled over the years, but to make a long story short there are actually some features that make Southeast Asia analytically interesting as a category. While geographically a part of Asia with influences from the Chinese, Indian, and Muslim worlds, it differs from other sub-regions on account of its mostly tropical climate on both sides of the Equator. Rice cultivation in plains and river valleys has a fundamental economic role along with an assortment of other crops. The tropical climate has also favoured certain commercial crops and products of nature that have attracted merchants from outside since pre-historic times (Reid 1988-1993; Lieberman 2003-2009). It has furthermore been the unfortunate object of colonial intrusion – for many years it was entirely subordinated to Western nations with the exception of Siam (Thailand) (Osborne 1997: 61-80).

The world of Southeast Asia harbours a set of highly literate traditions. The history of Burma, Siam, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Malay world, and Java, can be traced in some detail via chronicles, inscriptions, religious tracts, and belle-lettres. It is also true, however, that large parts were basically non-literate until modern times but had a rich and varied heritage of orally transmitted narrations. Moreover, even written historical texts tended to incorporate mythical and folkloristic elements. It has been said that much Southeast Asian historiography was concerned with origins of the present order, and saw events as "fated", while the accurate chronology of events was of secondary significance (Vickers 1990). The distinction between orality and literacy in stories of the past is therefore moot. In terms of factual credibility, the regional genres vary greatly; while, for example, Vietnamese and Burmese historical writings are considered relatively accurate, Javanese and Balinese historiography contain elements of literary magic and supernatural features (Reid & Marr 1979).

Indigenous stories that detail the origin of a political order are sometimes discussed by anthropologists to elucidate how local Southeast Asian societies perceive their own position in this world, and their sense of temporality (Geertz 1980: 11-19). Historians have been less interested in oral tradition for the simple reason that its value in clarifying historical events and processes is so controversial and cumbersome. The aim of this study is to look into orally or textually transmitted stories of the Southeast Asian past that relate the coming of Europeans to the area and purport to explain how the white strangers subordinated the local populations. In other words, I am interested in the way that colonial diplomacy and expansion programs left an imprint on the collective memory and were frequently epitomised in fantastic narrative elements, here identified as elements that significantly transgress perceived social or physical boundaries. In order to explain how relations with the foreigners were created in a remote past, the narrative often resorts to magic or outrageous elements that highlight their disturbing of the social and

cosmological order. All this gives indications of how the foreignness of the Europeans was taxed, and the threatening and calamitous (or, less commonly, beneficial) aspects of their presence (Barnes 2008). The method applied here is to scrutinize accounts of the legendary or mythical past from various parts of Southeast Asia, recorded since the early modern era, which entail elements of Occidentalism. Modern studies of oral tradition have emphasized the importance to scrutinize both the performer and performance (Vansina 1985). In other words, who is entitled to relate a story of the past, and under what circumstances can it be narrated? Such analysis can help us understand the variety of forms that Occidentalism may take in the collective memory. Considering the vast geographical extension of Southeast Asia, the sample is mainly guided by the availability in printed sources. Due to the pattern of European penetration, most narratives pertain to insular Southeast Asia. At least, the endeavour demonstrates the breadth of how cultural encounters were mentally processed via folkloristic and fantasy devices.

A history of crises and misunderstandings, at worst bloody wars, apparently left its mark on the way that Westerners were portrayed. Their foreignness would have been strengthened by the physical and cultural differences, such as impetuous and loud-voiced behaviour, breaking of sexual norms, etc. Such miscommunication underpinned Occidentalism as a counterpart of the Orientalism that has been thoroughly researched by Edward Said and a number of postcolonial scholars (Said 1978; Hamidi 2013). Occidentalism as a concept emerged in the late twentieth century and is variously defined. It may signify the study of the West by the non-West (especially the Muslim and Asian worlds). It can also be a reflection of hostility towards the West. Or, more positively, it can strive to answer the question how Western values and innovations may be developed and adapted (Metin 2020: 184). In the context of the present study, Occidentalism is briefly defined as a set of stylized images of the West, or a community of Westerners. As such it occurs both in Western and non-Western contexts. For Westerners themselves, Occidentalism is the purported standards of normality and civilization by which they define themselves in contrast to non-Western cultures. Non-Westerners, on the other hand, may essentialize the West despite its sprawling and many-faceted aspects, constructing an image of white people as opposed to their own norms (Carrier 1995). The Orientalism that Edward Said described was a discursive formation based on the elliptic power relations between the West and the "Orient", in other words the positional superiority of the whites. Occidentalism, on the other hand, does not always mirror this, since African and Asian groups have frequently been disempowered for hundreds of years. A valid question to ask the stories of the past is, therefore, if they can serve as culturally mediated rebuttals of colonial claims to dominance.

Occidentalism, as a problem of apprehending European ascension, ties in with the so-called stranger kings syndrome. As studied in detail by scholars

such as Marshall Sahlins (1985), David Henley (2002), James J. Fox (2008), Robert Barnes (2008) and Elizabeth G. Traube (2011), many communities, especially Austronesian groups that encompass much of maritime Southeast Asia and the Pacific world, have developed a paradigm of linking political order to a semi-mythical encounter between an indigenous presence and newcomers from the outside. In these stories, the stranger king appropriates political authority while often maintaining the indigenous lord as having ritual authority over the land. This epistemology of origin makes a diarchic distinction between "inside" and "outside" in terms of status distinction (Traube 2011: 117). In many cases, as we shall see, Europeans are inserted into this epistemology in the local mind.

Intrusion and diplomacy in history and legend

Then, how did Europeans bond the Southeast Asian kingdoms and chiefdoms and subject them to colonial governance? Historically, the process started in 1511 (Melaka in present-day Malaysia) and accelerated later in the same century when the Spanish conquered the Philippines. The Dutch East India Company gained leverage during the seventeenth century when most of the important polities of the island world (present-day Indonesia and Malaysia) had to acknowledge Dutch suzerainty. A new and more thorough colonialism evolved in the nineteenth century as the mainland states (Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam) finally fell to the European arms or diplomatic pressure. While independent, Siam had to adjust to European demands in various ways. It was a process that was only broken with the events during and after World War II.

In the first centuries of colonial presence, the innumerable treaties and agreements that Europeans concluded with large and small Southeast Asian polities, were not so different from the ones that Europeans concluded with each other at the other end of the Eurasian landmass (Pitts 2018: 19-22). It is however obvious that treaty making was part of European strategies to construct commercial and political realms in Asia. Although the early-modern players, especially the Dutch, made treaties with Asian polities that did not (necessarily) infringe on their sovereign rights, the treaties were in fact geared towards European commercial control. Moreover, treaty-writing was not an alternative to warfare but very frequently combined with warmongering. From the beginning of European contacts with Southeast Asian polities, thousands of contracts and agreements are preserved in the archives, which tend to be increasingly intrusive over time (Van Ittersum 2018). For larger and smaller kingdoms and chiefdoms in the sub-region, the foreign writ was something the inhabitants simply had to relate to.

How would they have perceived the agreements that were concluded under duress or free will? Naturally, Southeast Asians had their own traditions of diplomacy. Treaties could be made orally, through ritual oath-making, or through written agreements. Sometimes they were based on traditions of

shared origins, sometimes on political hierarchy, sometimes on rational observations of geographical features (mountains, forests, river systems) (Korn 1932: 440; Stuart-Fox 1998: 91). However, European legal concepts were not easily translated to local languages. For example, the Malay word *janji* was not merely a treaty but had much wider meanings of pledges and promises. There would also have been a problem of time perspective. European powers regarded the written treaties as perpetual, until renovated by a new treaty. Also, they would have signed in the name of their country or commercial company, whereas the Southeast Asian part signed it in the capacity of a particular ruler. The Southeast Asian state, on its part, might not have seen the treaty as perpetual, but only as valid as long as the ruler was alive. Muslim legal notions, moreover, were averse to treaties with non-Muslims that lasted more than ten years (Borschberg 2021). Thus, there were many opportunities for differing interpretations, and the disagreement might very well result in a war or punitive expedition.

To illustrate how early diplomatic contact may be framed in the collective memory that mixes genuine reminiscences with narrative tropes, we can pick a case from Timor, a sizeable island in eastern maritime Southeast Asia where different colonial powers were competing for power and local products since the seventeenth century. Let us listen to the Na'i Bot or Great Lord of the small former kingdom of Fatumean, interviewed by an Australian scholar in the 1990s. Oral tradition still has an important role in the region, and the story refers to an unspecified time long ago when the Portuguese began to subordinate parts of Timor through warfare and diplomacy.

> The commander of the Portuguese used Fatumean as his base. He asked to exchange wives with Na'i Fatumean, but the Na'i [Lord] put clothes on a slave and gave her to the Portuguese as wife. Later he found out and was ashamed and so commenced hostilities between the Portuguese and Fatumean.
>
> This led to the war of 'Uma Tolu', the war of the three houses, Fatumean, Lookeu and Dakolo. They fought at Fatumean and won, driving out the Portuguese.
>
> Later Fatumean, Wehali and Gowa [the Makassar people of Sulawesi] attacked the Portuguese at Fohoren and defeated them. The Asuain cut off the heads of the Portuguese, leaving their bodies at Fohoren. Their heads were taken back to Fatumean and were placed on the *Sadan*, the ring of stones, the amphitheatre, for all to see and dance around. (Spillett 1999: 201)

In the collective memory epitomized by the local elite, the image of European colonizers is dark but also somewhat disdainful. As implied by the Na'i Bot, Timor has had a troubled colonial and postcolonial history where Dutch and Portuguese interests competed for hundreds of years to exploit resources of sandalwood, beeswax, and coffee. The narrator employs a trickster tale of a type often found in Southeast Asian lore to explain a historical event. The first

contact is sealed by wife-swapping diplomacy. However, the Portuguese leader is tricked to marry a slave woman, with blood-curling consequences. The local Timorese warriors ally with Gowa, a Muslim kingdom in faraway Sulawesi, and with Wehali, a prestigious kingdom in south-central Timor, and carry the day. Their headhunting customs show off as the heads of the hapless Europeans are placed in a megalithic ritual site.

There is no European source that confirms the story, which elides the fact that Western colonialism eventually did subjugate Fatumean, which was part of a five-kingdom federation that was split up between the Portuguese and Dutch. The scene of a Catholic colonial officer swapping wives with a local chief is not plausible, although the grisly headhunting scene makes sense in the light of the widespread custom (McWilliam 1996). What is known from Western archival sources is that the Makassarese of South Sulawesi tried to bond some Timorese realms in the seventeenth century, including the ritually exalted Wehali Kingdom that is mentioned in the story, although they were ousted in the end. It is also known from a Dutch source that the kingdoms of the south coast defeated the Portuguese intruders sometime around the 1640s (Hägerdal 2012: 83-91). Historical particles mix with lore and legend to produce a story where the beginnings of European expansion are portrayed in a fantastic and far from flattering light.

The story of Fatumean is retold through numerous oral performances over some 350 years. But textual sources likewise offer intriguing perspectives on colonial encounters. The Javanese royal chronicles were generally written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and extolled the Mataram Dynasty that dominated Java since c. 1600. The steady entanglement between the Dutch and Javanese ensured a set of stories of diplomatic and warlike interactions. At the origin of this entanglement lies the sieges of Dutch Batavia (Jakarta) at the hands of Sultan Agung, ruler of Mataram (1628, 1629). The sieges both ended in failure for the Javanese troops, meaning that the Dutch could not be dislodged from the island. This is represented by a long account in the late chronicles where the two sieges are telescoped into one. The Dutch are portrayed in less than glorious light. For want of ammunition, they shoot dung at the Javanese soldiers, forcing them to cleanse themselves properly. A prince among the besiegers makes a large hole in the city wall by supernatural means, and the Dutch shiver from fear after losing many men. Then, suddenly, the siege is lifted since "the Dutch have only come here to trade." Moreover, the ruler prophecies that the Dutch, in the future, will assist one of his descendants. Thus, the Dutch should henceforth be friends and allies and protect the court (De Graaf 1958: 152-5). In fact, this is exactly what happens much later, when the Dutch East India Company (VOC) saves the skin of Sultan Agung's grandson around 1680 and increases its influence in Java. A detailed comparison between Javanese and Dutch sources shows how "historical" chronicles work partly similar to oral tradition, entailing a moral turning of the tables: far from the victors of the

contemporary colonial accounts, the fearful and somewhat despicable Europeans of the chronicles are only saved by the prophetic wisdom and tolerance of Sultan Agung. This inaugurates a centuries-long history of colonial diplomacy at the Javanese courts. From both oral and textual sources, we encounter an Occidentalism that rearranges historical events to suit a Southeast Asian image of power relations and moral authority.

The stranger as deceiver

Occidentalism entails a moral categorization of the European Other, as a way of mentally handling a history of physical subordination. One category of stories about the coming of the Europeans emphasize their cunning and treacherous behaviour to gain the upper hand over local rulers and lands. This can be seen as local attempts to provide a rationale for colonial domination: it is not a question of the superior moral or material qualities of the white strangers, but rather their unscrupulous behaviour that allow them to break resistance against their governance. An example is a late oral retelling of an actual event that took place in 1752 in the colonial port Kupang in Timor, where the Dutch East India Company (VOC) confronted the prestigious ruler of the Sonbai Kingdom:

> A ruler called Bau Sonbai stayed there; he stood up and went to Kupang and stayed at Kiu Tuta (Bakunase). He searched for lands to make him equal with the [Dutch] Company. When he stayed there, Bau Sonbai sired three children, two daughters and a boy called Tafin Sonbai; the two girls were Bi Sul Sonbai and Au Lais Sonbai. Now, the lands of Bau Sonbai were enormous. The Company called him to Kupang. Now he [the Dutch leader] took a blowpipe and handed it over and said: "If you are a ruler, then crawl through this blowpipe and come out at the other end as Sonbai". Then Sonbai said to the Company: "Good, I will crawl in there first, and then you do it after me". Then Sonbai made his trick, I do not know how, and became a snake, and crawled into the hole and came out in the other end. Then he handed the blowpipe to the Company and said: "Crawl in there." But the gentleman could not do it. Then they made ten wax candles; the Company made them. And then they lit them in one end so they burnt like a lamp. Then it was said: "Take the candles between your teeth, then insert the candle in your mouth if you are really a ruler, and let the candle burn until it has is entirely molten in your mouth. Handing other candles to the gentlemen of the Company, Bau Sonbai said: "That you must also do." Bau Sonbai opened his mouth; there was no candle to be seen, the candle was molten. He gave them to the gentleman so that he would burn the candles as he, but the gentleman could not do it.

> […]

> Then Sonbai said and commanded: "Make a ball of earth and weigh me with it. If I weigh as much as the earth, then it is my land, then I am the ruler, and the earth is equal with me. Now, the Company said: "Sonbai has many places, his tricks

> are superior to mine. We shall exile him to another land." (Middelkoop 1938:
> 441-2)

The background to this fantastic story is that the ruler of the large inland realm Sonbai, Bau Sonbai, fled from the attacks of the Portuguese in 1748 and migrated to Dutch-dominated Kupang with thousands of followers. He made a pledge of allegiance to the VOC and stayed close to the port town but was soon suspected of colluding with his Portuguese former enemies. The Dutch took the precaution to arrest him and send him in exile to Cape Town where the fallen ruler succumbed under murky circumstances (Hägerdal 2009; Matos 2015: 168-9). The rather detailed Dutch documents do not, of course, tell of a competition in magic, but rather stress that Bau Sonbai had broken his pledge and was a traitor. For the locals, however, the treason was on the part of the VOC. Although Bau Sonbai had won the contests in magic and proved his status as the true ruler, the anxious whites acted in a base way to arrest and exile him. The story is widespread and told in slightly different variants in West Timor; its performance is thus an epitome of colonial coercion and injustice.

A related theme that recurs in several geographical contexts tells how European tricksters fool local rulers into ceding territory where they subsequently build colonial strongholds. As pointed out by Anthony Reid, who has studied early Southeast Asian images of Europeans, a fantastic story of an ox hide is found in as different places as Batavia (Jakarta), Melaka, and the Burmese port Syriam (Reid 1994: 292-3). The gist of the story is that the first Westerners ask the local lord to have as much land as they can cover with an ox hide. Unsuspecting, the ruler gladly agrees to this. The whites then cut the hide into narrow stripes and are thus able to enclose a substantial area. After that point, they can no more be dislodged. As clearly seen, this is a tale that has circulated round the world since Antiquity when it was told about Queen Dido and the founding of Carthage. It was later associated with the Viking leader Ívarr hinn Beinlausi and the founding of York (Tunstall 2005). How the story reached various places in Southeast Asia is less than clear, but it is anyway a standard trope that overlays basic historical events and again puts the foreigners in a dubious light: they may only gain ascendancy through vile tricks, which are calamitously underestimated by local elites.

The stranger as a friend

Occidentalism was thus mediated through the collective memory of intrusive and norm-breaking behaviour. Anthony Reid (1994) has pointed out that we mostly look in vain for positive assessments of Europeans in early texts of Southeast Asia. The tone is neutral or negative, with the negative images becoming dominant over time. Some of this is no doubt attributable to the perception of white people as essential outsiders, whether Spaniards, Portuguese, or Dutch. Their religion differed from the mostly Buddhist and

Muslim populations, and they were slow to learn and respect local rules of conduct. With their large ocean-going ships, they came from lands so far away as to seem mythical. Their use of firearms was more efficient, and they were able to defend their military posts with utmost tenacity against larger Southeast Asian armies – feats that were sometimes mythologized (Ras 1987: 140-3). Their never-ending attempts to force commercial monopolies on local societies in a way that had hardly been applied by local rulers, affirmed the negative image.

Still, colonialism was a many-faceted phenomenon. Historical data point at numerous cases when the Europeans were actively approached or invited, often by weak groups in search of security (Henley 2002). Interestingly, the strangers are not only ominous and frightening in the stories. In fact, legends from especially the eastern part of the Archipelagic world tell of lasting bonds between foreigners and locals which were initiated in a distant past. A nineteenth-century chronicle from the Moluccan island Ternate provides a wealth of details about the legendary and historical past of the volcanic island that was the centre of an extensive kingdom founded on the spice trade. The Muslim author of the chronicle, Naïdah, lived close to a court that was heavily dependent on the Dutch colonial overlords, and probably had to be careful when depicting the white strangers. Even so, the role he reserves for the Dutch is remarkable.

> Then a Dutch ship was visible in the sea. It blew hard and the waves went high. The travellers did not know how to help themselves and cried. Among them was an Arab. He told them not to cry and to go towards the land, of which they could already see the mountain. Coming to the mountain, they called it Ternyata, upon which the Dutch returned.

> At that time, Jafar Sadek, father of [the first Ternate king] Masahurmalamo, had sired seven children in Java and then came to Ternate. (Naïdah 1878: 437)

In this version, the Dutch seafarers actually give Ternate its name, *Ternyata* being the Malay word for "obvious", "proven". In fact, this is a folk etymology since the name of the island likely has a local origin. At the same time, the Dutch are saved by an Arab, a man from the revered homeland of Islam. Furthermore, the ancestor of the royal line appears to arrive to Ternate only after the Dutch "discovery". Clearly, this is a fantastic realignment of the time line. Jafar Sadek and Masahurmalamo supposedly flourished many generations before the historical arrival of the Portuguese in 1512 – and the Dutch only turned up in 1599, when they started to ally with the Sultan of Ternate against his Spanish and Portuguese enemies (Schulte Nordholt 2016: 93-4; Song 2020). The historical diplomatic bonding is supplanted by Naïdah with an origin story where the Dutch have a precedence of sorts. This is in line with colonial diplomatic etiquette that named the Sultan of Ternate as the "child" of the Dutch authorities (Andaya 1993: 177).

An even more pointed example is a set of legends that flourish in the eastern section of Flores Island and the Oecussi enclave in Timor-Leste. The majority of the population here is Catholic and still often have Portuguese-sounding names. From the primary sources it is known that Portuguese seafarers and missionaries were present in the region since the sixteenth century and established a number of strongholds. The Portuguese settlers on Flores and adjacent islands were soon mixed with the local populations via intermarriage, resulting in an ethnically mixed community often known as the Black Portuguese.

Early Portuguese diplomacy on Flores and Timor has been distilled to a few significant "culture heroes" in accounts known since at least the nineteenth century (Heynen 1876). As the story goes, the Raja of Melaka had two sons called Djogo Warilla (Diogo Varela) and Augustinho da Gama. The brothers had a quarrel over a cockfight, and Djogo Warilla eventually left his homeland in company with his son Da Costa and nephew Hornay. He and his seaborne followers eventually came to eastern Flores where they helped a local raja to defeat the mountaineers of the interior. Since the raja was unable to pay Djogo as promised, he received a piece of land instead, which became the stronghold Konga. At a later time he met the adolescent chief of the mountain Ilimandiri in easternmost Flores and arranged that he would come to Konga to be educated in the Catholic religion and the Malay language. He later became the ancestor of the Catholic kings of Larantuka. Meanwhile, Djogo's son and nephew went to Oecussi in Timor where they were involved in a fight with the local Timorese. Da Costa was wounded and taken by the enemy, but a peace deal was soon arranged between the Melaka people and the Timorese. Da Costa married the daughter of the ruler of Ambeno near Oecussi and his and Hornay's descendants governed the place in turns. After some time Djogo Warilla's junior brother Augustinho da Gama went out from Melaka with a seaborne expedition to look for his brother. At the south coast of Flores, he encountered a son of the chief of Nata Gahar who expressed his will to follow the foreigners back to Melaka. This was done and the boy was subsequently baptized under the name Alesu da Silva, later the first Raja of Sikka (Kleian 1891: 514-22).

Here, Melaka or Malacca on the Malay Peninsula, Portuguese since 1511, is at the origins of religion and ordered governance. The beginnings of Portuguese dominance in the Flores-Timor region is traced back to the acts of a prominent family and their princely apprentices. In fact, the process was much more outdrawn and complicated: the Portuguese settled in Larantuka in 1613, the first members of the Da Costa and Hornay families died in 1672 and 1693, respectively, and the genealogies of the Larantuka and Sikka rulers do not quite fit with early primary sources (De Roever 2002: 129-30; Hägerdal 2012: 145, 174-5). A Catholic Raja of Melaka is unknown to history. This, however, is less relevant for the purpose of the stories which is to legitimize

the early superimposition of a foreign religion and culture on indigenous socio-political structures (Lewis 2010).

Even the Dutch foreigners are incorporated in positively laden origin stories. A story recorded by a missionary in 1847 outlines the origins of the VOC settlement in Kupang:

> On a certain day, two Solorese fishers, going far out in the sea, harpooned an unusually large shark. As they had not wounded it mortally but held fast to it, it dragged their canoe all the way to the Bay of Kupang, by the island Semau where the regent now and then stayed at Oasa. On his friendly invitation, the Solorese stayed with him for a few days and related that the Dutch, whom they called the "Company", had expelled the Portuguese and treated their people very good. On the question whether the Company also claimed rights on the foodstuff that the Solorese used on a daily basis, they answered in the negative. The regent then spoke, "it is otherwise here with us; we can hardly put anything in the mouth without having to pay something to the Portuguese. The same thing goes for [the island] Rote. Especially, this is the case with the rice that they force us to sell to very low prices, so they can bring it to Macau..." (Heijmering 1847: 46-7)

Now the Timorese regent proposed that he might invite the Dutch to come to Kupang and expel them. The two Solorese promised to assist in this and indeed an alliance came into being. Even before the VOC had acted, the local Timorese attacked the Portuguese fort and massacred most of the garrison and traders, and their Sumbanese slaves. Thus began the governance of the Company. Interesting with this account is the Timorese agency. They, and not the Europeans, take the initiative to foment an alliance, and they actually defeat the Portuguese fortification on their own, before the Dutch men-of-war have even seen action. By implication, the colonial establishment is at least as much an indigenous as a Dutch creation. The alliance is moreover fated by the forces of "nature", since the big shark drags the fishermen to Kupang.

The contemporary Dutch and Portuguese documents clearly show that some historical events have been preserved by the collective memory over the centuries, but that the timeline and causality has been altered. The Dutch were established on the strategically situated Solor Island, adjacent to Flores, in 1646 and began to expand their diplomatic net to gain control of the lucrative sandalwood trade of Timor (thus, there was no need for shark catching adventures). Kupang is situated at a bay that offered some shelter for the merchant vessels, and the Dutch started to build a fort in 1653 with the consent of the local king of the Helong tribe (Roever 2002). There is no mention of a Timorese attack on the previous Portuguese fort. This was followed by a contract with two leading kingdoms of West Timor, Sonbai and Amabi, in 1655, concluded through the mixing of blood and the presentation of two severed Portuguese heads. This is unlike oral tradition that mentions these kingdoms as present in the diplomatic overtures with the Dutch from the start. The system of a Dutch settlement surrounded by three (later five) loyal kingdoms would survive until 1917, and the longevity of the arrangement

induced locals to construe an origin story that justified the power division (Hägerdal 2012: 111-2, 407).

Apart from Ternate, these somewhat positive stories of the coming of the Europeans are told in areas that were neither Buddhist nor Muslim, so that their creed was not seen as offensive. In the case of Ternate, moreover, the Dutch were usually careful not to interfere in the Islamic practices of the locals. Furthermore, there is always a non-European agency in the stories. The "discovery" of Ternate is secured by an intrepid Arab, the seafarers from Melaka seem to be as Malay as European, and the Dutch presence on Timor owes more to the Timorese than themselves. While this may not sit well with some students of coloniality/decoloniality, the narratives suggest that certain Southeast Asian groups saw the foreigners as functional as "stranger kings" in the socio-political order. As discussed earlier, the theme of a foreigner establishing a primeval order is found in many places in Southeast Asia, and was easily applied to Europeans, whose foreignness seemed to warrant a degree of disinterested adjudication (Henley 2002). It was a matter of installing an outsider inside, a process where the local community had considerable agency (Fox 2008).

Placating the stranger

Once the foreigners were in place, local societies were faced with the task of handling them to avert disaster and if possibly gain something. In societies where Europeans gained early influence, the degree of control shifted much. In the early modern era, up to approximately the first half of the nineteenth century, the only large territories that were included in a European administrative structure were the Philippines and certain sections of Java (Schulte Nordholt 2016: 152). For the rest, only port cities and their hinterland were directly ruled. It was only in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that this changed as the mainland kingdoms minus Siam were invaded and the maritime lands were forced into closer subordination. The common pattern for polities of present-day Malaysia, Indonesia, and Timor-Leste, was to enter into treaties and pledges with the Dutch, English, Portuguese, or Spanish, that left them internally autonomous. While there were some political and economic regulations in the treaty texts, the local rajas, sultans, and chiefs were rarely disturbed in their governing tasks: adjudication, tribute collection, slaving, warring recalcitrant subjects, and so on (Resink 1968). Still, the white stranger was a fearsome figure who had to be handled through supple and crafty means. Extreme violence was common in colonial-indigenous affairs, pointing at the potentially dire consequences of a breakdown of relations.

But there were also opportunities. For minor polities whose existence depended on their relations with the white foreigners, several stories explain how two princes compete for the throne and one cleverly uses the Europeans to gain the upper hand. On Savu Island in eastern Indonesia, one of the local

kingdoms was Dimu (Timu) which had a vague precedence position among the five small polities. At a time, corresponding to the eighteenth century, the polity was ruled by Kore Rohi. During his reign, the Dutch first arrived to Savu and brought his nephew Hili Haba to the colonial hub Batavia where he received education. Later on, Hili Haba returned to Dimu, and Kore Rohi asked his nephew about the Dutch food preferences in case they would visit Savu again in the future. Hili Haba told his uncle that the Dutch had taste for dog meat, the animal being served without its head or legs. After some time the Dutch representatives actually arrived in Dimu. The unsuspecting raja told the cooks who prepared the meal to put the head and legs of the dog in a separate basket, and to cook and serve the body to the guests. When the Dutch were about to return from Dimu, Hili Haba asked what they had eaten. They replied that they had no clue to the ingredients. Now Hili Haba disclosed that his moron uncle had actually served them the meat of a dog. The Dutch, predictably, were infuriated at the disrespect that Kore Rohi had shown them. They then promptly handed over kingship to Hili Haba, while his outwitted his uncle Kore Rohi was forced to step down (Duggan & Hägerdal 2018: 183).

Hili Haba is a well-attested character who ruled Dimu in 1731-1798, and he indeed became raja after outsmarting a relative with the help of the Dutch East India Company. Unfortunately for the legend, we possess a detailed Dutch account of the event that relates the diplomatic parleys at some length but does not mention a meal of dog meat. Above all, the Company had been present in Savu waters since the 1640s (Duggan & Hägerdal 2018: 152-7). The story serves to explain the long and relatively successful cooperation between the long-lived and cunning Hili Haba and the Europeans. The latter are essential outsiders: they have peculiar tastes, are easily provoked, and let their bad temper influence their political decision-making. While the story does not question the overwhelming might and authority of the Europeans, it also portrays them as frightening and unpredictable.

Another and even less tasty version of the contested succession theme is found in Termanu on Rote Island, also in eastern Indonesia. It was told to the anthropologist James Fox during fieldwork:

> I tell of the time when Sadu Kiu and Pello Kila went to seek the staff of office. They went to the very centre of the Portuguese domain. They went to the Portuguese and the Portuguese tested their shit: they tested their shit to see whose shit smelled sweet and whose shit smelled foul.
>
> Sadu Kiu prepared food and drink but only Pello Kila ate it; Sadu Kiu ate nothing. Instead, he went out to look for dilak fruit to eat. When the time came to inspect the shit, the result was clear: Pello Kila had eaten only delicious food, but his shit smelled foul; whereas Sadu Kiu had eaten only dilak fruit, but his shit smelled sweet. Therefore, they took the staff with the gold top and gave it to Sadu Kiu and they took the staff with the silver top and gave it to Pello Kila.

> They then returned from the Portuguese domain to the island of Roti. But as the saying goes: "Cleverness conquers stupidity". Thus, when a group of Europeans came to Ba'a, Sadu Kiu could not meet them because he did not know Malay. The only one who knew Malay was Pello Kila.
>
> One time after another, a delegation came; foreigners came. Pello Kila went to meet them, but Sadu Kiu did not, for Sadu Kiu was illiterate whereas Pello Kila knew how to speak Malay and knew how to write.
>
> After a while Pello Kila said to Sadu Kiu: "Nah! You're like a little girl. When Europeans come, I go to meet them; but you don't go to meet them. I act like a real man [*tou mane*] because I go to meet them, but you act like a little girl [*feto ana*] because you don't go to meet the Europeans face to face. Therefore, let us exchange staffs, for you deserve the silver-topped staff and I deserve the gold-topped staff." So, the two exchanged staffs of office.[1]

Again, the protagonists are genuine historical figures since Pello Kila reigned over Termanu in 1679-1698 under Dutch rather than Portuguese suzerainty (Hägerdal 2023 II: 139). However, his rival Sadu Kiu served as a regent during his minority, while the Dutch suzerains would have liked to see him as the actual raja. The faeces-smelling contest puts the Europeans in an absurd light, but it explains the historical fact that Sadu Kiu governed for some years before having to accept his kinsman Pello Kila as upper ruler (owner of the golden staff). The importance of knowing Malay is less surprising; this was the normal means of communication in much of the Southeast Asian Archipelago, and a prince who mastered the language was useful to the Europeans. In sum, the Occidentalism of these narratives point at the craft and canniness that local men of prowess had to apply to inveigle the dangerous and somewhat unpredictable strangers. In a way this also speaks to the aforementioned stranger kings syndrome: the strangers held a socio-political order together, and their presence was not necessarily questioned (Lewis 2010).

The essential outsider

Next, we ask how culturally laden features among Western groups created a distinct Occidentalism that mediated a sense of incompatibility. Several narratives referred in this article depict the Westerners as something out of the ordinary. Southeast Asia has been a crossroads since old, and Arabs, Persians, Indians, and Chinese have visited the region as labourers, traders, missionaries, and occasionally invaders. Literary and (semi-)historical accounts of these foreigners are often respectful. In Muslim areas, Arabs and Persians may gain prestige since they come from the central lands of Islam, often combining the pursuits of traders and missionaries. Even some royal dynasties of Southeast Asia have alleged Arab or Persian origins, such as

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[1] James J. Fox, personal communication, 27-9-2007.

Laikang, Pontianak, Brunei, Perlis, Singora, and Aceh for periods (Hägerdal 2023 I: 6, 144, II: 62). Chinese traders and settlers are seldom enemies in local lore and tradition, which is understandable since they very seldom constituted a political threat. Above all, Asian and Middle eastern immigrants tended to integrate in the Southeast Asian communities through intermarriage and acculturation to a much higher degree than Europeans.

The essential foreignness of the whites is illustrated by a passage from a history of the kings who ruled in Pegu in Burma up 1763. The chronicle is hardly at all concerned with Westerners, which in itself is interesting considering the long-term commercial relations. However, it devotes a few sentences to Filipe de Brito, a Portuguese adventurer who made himself the ruler of the port city Syriam (Thanlyin) in 1599-1613:

> The ship commander, the foreigner, Capitão Geral, was King again in Syriam. Because he was of Devadatta's company, a heretic, he had no opportunity of enshrining at the relic chamber of the pagoda […] The foreigner, Capitão Geral, was king in Syriam twelve years. His Majesty Nan Thaw of Ava was lord of the jewelled umbrella. In the year 974 (1612/13), on Wednesday the eight of the light half of the month Caitra, His Majesty Nan Thaw of Ava marching down with an army, besieged Syriam, and having overcome the foreigner, took the city. The King gave four hundred and twenty-eight men to keep the hair relics. He had them cast a bronze bell and offer it to the Buddha relics. (Halliday 2000: 106)

The events are more or less in accordance with other known sources, but the foreigner king is associated with Devadatta. This was a cousin of Buddha who opposed some of his teachings and made repeated attempts to assassinate him (Powers 2000: 64-5). The historical Capitão Geral (Captain-General) Filipe de Brito, as a staunch Catholic, had likely little or no knowledge of Devadatta but is still counted in his division, since he made himself notorious for destroying Buddhist shrines and objects. When the King of Ava in Upper Burma conquers Syriam and puts De Brito to a grisly death (not specified in this text), he is praised in the chronicle as a supporter of Buddhism.

In the world of Islam, the religion of much of maritime Southeast Asia, we might expect even more pronounced denunciations in texts and traditions from the islands. After all, Christianity and Islam had a long history of rivalry that spilled over to Southeast Asia after 1509. Sometimes, this is indeed the case. A chronicle from Ambon in the Moluccas, *Hikayat Tanah Hitu*, written by an imam in the mid-seventeenth century, gives a telling example:

> One day, a *perahu* [boat] went from Saki of Besi Nusatelo to the waters of Pulau Tiga to catch fish. He [the captain] brought the *perdana* [chief] Jamilu news as follows: "We encountered a *perahu* in the waters of Pulau Tiga. Never in our lives have we see people with such appearances. Their skin is white, and they have eyes like cats. We asked questions but they did not know our language, nor did we know the language of that people." Perdana Jamilu said: "Go and bring them here."

They returned and brought them to the *negeri* [settlement], to *perdana* Jamilu. Then he asked them: "From where do you come and what is the name of your land?" They replied: "We come from Portugal and we want to make trade. The reason that we came here is that we diverted from our course and do not know the route. We landed in the neighbouring land and our ship was lost on a reef in the waters of Pulau Burung. We thus left our ship and entered a sloop to go back to Portugal. But the pilot was not knowledgeable and so we arrived here. We cannot help it, we are safely here." Then a piece of land was given to them to build a house where they could stay.

After a while they suggested that some of them should stay in the house and others give report to their superiors. After that they let their ships coming annually at the arrival of the westerly monsoon, without interruption. The trading port of Hitu was busy and the entire land of Ambon became famous.

At that time, *perdana* Jamilu was entrusted the title Kapitan Hitu, and an agreement was now concluded, that Kapitan Hitu should have a gift of textiles when the ships arrived. Each year, the established custom was followed. In that time there was thus nothing to complain about them, and Kapitan Hitu enjoyed fame from Ambon to Portugal. The ruler of Portugal bestowed two titles of honour on him; first, Kapitan Hitu, and second, the title Dom Jamilu.

After some time, in accordance with God's will, the friendship that the blissful Lord had rewarded them, gave place for misbehaviour. It once happened that they became drunk and the plundered and rioted at the market. This was reported to the magistrate and the religious headman, and the last-mentioned said: "The transgression of these people can only be punished by death". The four *perdanas* said: "The magistrate and the religious headman are correct, but forgive them in the first place, since it is widely known that we treat them good. What will it do to our reputation if it becomes known that we do them harm? It is best that the remove them to another place, so they are not with us in one *negeri*." (Ridjali 2004: 109-11)

The historical background is the establishment of the Portuguese on the partly Muslim island Ambon, important for the spice trade, in the first half of the sixteenth century. But while the European arrival appear to be "fated" as they lose their direction and accidentally arrive to Ambon, their actual establishment was part of a commercial strategy. Apparent in the story is, first, the perception of the strange appearance of the newcomers and, second, their atrocious behaviour as they repay the patience and benevolence of the Ambonese Muslims with vile acts. In the coming passages of the chronicle, the situation quickly deteriorates into a holy war that rages until the Portuguese are finally defeated with the help of the Dutch in 1605.

Since the Dutch merchants and empire-builders were important in maritime Southeast Asia from 1596 to 1949, it is natural that they have a role in chronicles and other narratives. However, this role is less than might be expected, since their presence was mostly irrelevant for the succession of local dynastic rulers, or internal cultural and social conditions. There are

nevertheless a few cases where their foreignness is mythologized to offer an explanation of the European paramount influence in the region. Pseudo-historical traditions from Java tell of an ancient Hindu kingdom in the western part of the island, Pajajaran, which possessed great spiritual power. Pajajaran fell to a Muslim conqueror from Banten in 1579, but a princess with a flaming womb survived the catastrophe. Although she was an attractive woman, her flaming genitals made it impossible for any man to have sex with her and in the end, she was banished to an island off the northern coast of Java, in the vicinity of modern Jakarta. At a later time, the Dutch turned up in the Java Sea, and a certain Dutch captain bought her from her Javanese keepers for three magic cannons. The Dutchman was apparently endowed with qualities of another kind than the Javanese men, since he was able to have sexual intercourse with her. The interethnic marriage was fruitful and in time brought forth the Dutch colonial rulers, who are thus thought of as a kind of dynasty. Due to the powers inherited from Pajajaran, the Europeans could establish their implicitly legitimate power in West Java (Batavia, Jakarta). Later on, they allied with and eventually subordinated the kings of Java (Reid 1994: 292). A variant of this story is found in the fantastic romance of Baron Sakender, where the son of the Pajajaran princess and the Dutchman is the remarkable personality Jangkung. Behind this name hides the historical empire builder Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587-1629). Through his heavy-handed efforts to expand Dutch power in the island world, he ultimately avenges his insulted mother and the Muslim conquest of Pajajaran (Reid 1994: 293-4). As in several other narratives referred in this article, the authors have used certain stock data, which in themselves are ultimately historical, and rearranged them in a new chain of causality which offers the reader a rationale for colonial rule.

Triumphing over the white foreigner

In hindsight, the teller of tales living in the colonial era knew how things ended: with the white foreigner as the master. The forms of colonial rule shifted, from direct to indirect control, from relatively light to outright oppressive methods, from somewhat tolerant to blatantly racist attitudes. However, the Westerners could not be dislodged until the coming of the Japanese in 1940-1945. Tax rebellions, millenarian movements, holy wars, minority uprisings, all failed in the end due to the technological and logistic advantage of the foreigners. In chronicles and traditions, as we have seen, this translated into various explanations and examples of dealing with the dangerous overlord.

But there are also narratives that depict indigenous figures as triumphant in the confrontation with the Westerners. To these belong, of course, accounts of historical battles where the locals were temporarily able to halt the Europeans. Here, particular leaders might be endowed with supernatural powers that enable them to withstand the enemy. In the chronicle *Tuhfat al-*

Nafis (1860s), the author Raja Ali Haji relates an incident in 1759 where the local Sultan Mahmud of Siak on Sumatra approached a Dutch stronghold on Gontong Island, in the Siak River. Mahmud had accepted the aid of the Dutch East India Company and had to agree that they set up a post in his realm. However, incidents soon occurred, and the infuriated sultan sailed to Gontong with ship and men.

> The Dutch agent was taken by surprise and went out of the jetty to ask whose *perahu* it was. When Sultan Mahmud heard the agent approaching, he sprang out of his *perahu* onto the jetty with the swiftness of a tiger, and took the agent's arm. The agent said, "Why have you come without telling us?" Sultan Mahmud replied, "Why should I tell you? It is my state." The agent said, "What do you want? Tell me here." Sultan Mahmud replied, "How can I talk with everyone else here? I am frightened this platform will collapse," The agent laughed and said, "Two thousand people could not destroy it".

> Then Sultan Mahmud pressed down one leg, and the bridge creaked beneath his weight as if it would collapse. Taking the agent by the arm, he led him inside the fort. […] His Majesty gave orders for Sheikh Salim to be summoned, and he arrived with about forty men, each entering through the cannon embrasures. The Dutch soldiers were on the alert, and the agent was about to speak when His Majesty gave a signal to his son-in-law, Sayid Umar, who then stabbed the agent with his kris called "Jambuan", and the agent died. The Dutch guard showered bullets on the king, who put his son Tengku Ismail behind him, and braced his chest against the bullets which fell like rain. Those which struck him were like *emping* wafers and did not penetrate his body, so great were his powers of invulnerability. His Majesty's attendants all fought savagely and massacred the soldiers on Gontong Island. The Dutch patrol vessel escaped back to Malacca and Sultan Mahmud was once again in possession of Siak. (Ali Haji 1982: 96-7)

It is common in Malay historiography that a charismatic ruler can possess a concentration of macrocosmic power (*kesaktian*) that enables him to perform astonishing feats. Sultan Mahmud of Siak (1746-1760) is able to break a solid bridge with his foot and is impenetrable to bullets. Although he died shortly after the bloody incident, he is remembered in the chronicle as a rash and upright figure who halted the onslaught of colonial forces – a consolation at a later time when the British and Dutch divided up the islands between them (Reid 2005: 11-4). A modern reader might possibly find his actions treacherous and cruel, but this is irrelevant for the perception of his ability to stand up against the overbearing Europeans.

A somewhat similar case is the complex of texts that celebrate Surapati (died 1706), a Balinese ex-slave who defeated a Dutch force on Java in 1686 and created a realm of his own in Pasuruan in East Java. The background to the incident is the diplomatic position that the Dutch enjoyed after helping the Javanese king to victory against rebels in 1677-80. The Javanese ruler Amangkurat II (r. 1677-1703) found his situation increasingly difficult due to the Dutch demands, and he clandestinely supported Surapati and his followers

when they attacked the European soldiers on a diplomatic mission in the capital Kartasura. Around this historical kernel, a plethora of legends has evolved, where the adventurous spirit, strength, and supernatural activities of the Balinese hero are accentuated. Despite Java being a very hierarchical society, the slave origins of the hero do not detract from his status as an indomitable warrior and eventually ruler (Kumar 1976). Although Surapati was killed in battle against the Dutch and their allies in 1706, his ability to defeat and outsmart the non-Muslim foreigners caught the imagination of the collective memory.

A third example is strictly not "colonial" at all. Siam was never formally subordinated, and the royal Thai chronicles (generally written after 1767) contain stories that highlight the supernatural supremacy of the kingdom. One section tells of a diplomatic exchange with France under king Narai (1657-1688). The Thai embassy is received in the land of Farangset ("Franks") and the European ruler (by implication Louis XIV) is bewildered by the Thai ambassador's assertion that the king's musketeers do not have an advantage over the Thai soldiers. The ambassador invites the king to a demonstration where the French musketeers are to try their weapons on the armed retinue of the embassy. As the French trigger their muskets, the flintlocks first turn inefficient. When the bullets finally go off, they fail to hit any of the Thais. The French king, when hearing that the retinue are not even elite soldiers, turns "exceptionally fearful of the skill of Thai soldiers" (Cushman 2000: 272-5). Although the meeting ends in a friendly fashion, the story accentuates the supernatural qualities of the Thai monarch and, by extension, his retainers, against which European technology falls flat. The embassy to France is a historical event that took place in 1684-86, spurred by King Narai's Greek minister Constantine Phaulkon, and a comparison between Thai and European texts again shows how fantastic details were embedded in a historical setting to make the point. Even a distant European king would tremble for "the Supreme Holy Buddha Lord Omnipotent", as the Thai king is called. Taken together, the three cases demonstrate a historiographical vindication of indigenous royal power which is connected to a supernatural macrocosm that allows the protagonist to humiliate the powerful Europeans.

Conclusions

The examples referred in the article derive from various places and times but show some common characteristics, thus a regional discourse of Occidentalism. The stories of the establishment of the Europeans, and the diplomacy, conflicts, and incidents that come out of this, ultimately derive from historical events. These referential particles have subsequently been embedded into fantastic tropes, including supernatural transformations, unusual feats of strength, outlandish sexuality, intricate tricks, fiendish associations, and the telescoping of complex historical processes into single events. Whether the stories were intended to be taken seriously or were

literary castigations (and occasionally celebrations) of the European impact, is hard to say and would have depended on the circumstances. The Javanese *Baron Sakender* text was a romance and existed concurrently with chronicles and annals with (slightly) more historical content, while the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* was a serious representation of the history of the Malay World. Often, the distinction would have made little sense since local perceptions of the past followed other principles than the chronological and factual frame familiar to modern society.

Most of the stories represent Europeans in relatively dark colours. Their aggressive and unreliable behaviour is stressed once and again, features that tend to be more consistent and negative than depictions of other foreign groups, such as Arabs, Indians, and Chinese. This is sometimes entwined with reminiscences of economic exploitation, although economic factors are relatively low-key in the stories. The seaborne character of the Westerners was not so different from other outsiders, but in contrast with these, they did not adapt seamlessly to local Southeast Asian society (although Eurasian communities evolved over time) and seldom let themselves be governed by local rulers. Their diplomatic forays combined with excessive doses of violence and enforced treaties which were usually to the disadvantage of the locals. Religious differences and their own ideas of cultural superiority may have confined the white strangers to the role of essential outsiders in the view of most Southeast Asians (cf. Schulte Nordholt 2016: 95). The problems of diplomacy and mutual understanding in European-Southeast Asian relations is a very common theme in the referred stories. As certain accounts testify, this is nevertheless not the entire picture. In places where Europeans had a long and lasting impact and even converted populations to Christianity, they could be seen as protective "stranger kings" and even bringers of culture (Lewis 2010). It must however be mentioned that such places were relatively small-scale and vulnerable and dependent on cooperation with a mightier counterpart.

By representing the coming of the Europeans as tinged by fantastic and supernatural occurrences, the peoples of Southeast Asia tried to relate to a colonial world in the making, a world that entailed monopolies, deliverances, taxes, political reordering, racial divisions, and heavy-handed subordination in general. They thus construed a set of Occidentalist stereotypes which where culturally meaningful in an era preceding ideological anticolonialism. The stories of mythical princesses, shapeshifters, invulnerable champions, weird cultural clashes, and fated journeys, provide an explanation to the changes that the whites brought about, or even a psychological relief for the trauma of eventual defeat.

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Vårnumret 2023   gick i musikforskningens tecken och tog en titt på humorns relation till makt.

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Vårnumret 2022   har som tema educational linguistics och hur detta fält appliceras i skolor och på universitet

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Vårnumret 2020   är en festskrift tillägnad Gunilla Byrman, mest om språk

Höstnumret 2019   är en festskrift tillägnad Maria Lindgren och innehåller en blandad samling studier om språkvetenskap och didaktik

Vårnumret 2019   har temat ämnesspråk och ämneslitteracitet, samt tar en titt på 70-talets kulturdebatt

Höstnumret 2018   handlar bland annat om pirat- likväl som demonbekämpning

Vårnumret 2018	granskar posthumanistisk litteratur och publicerar några nyblivna professorers installationsföreläsningar
Höstnumret 2017	är ett jubileumsnummer tillägnat 10 år av litteraturvetenskapliga sommarkurser som bland annat innehåller artiklar om så skilda ämnen som vampyrer, bilderbokshajar, Harry Potter och Astrid Lindgren
Vårnumret 2017	granskar olika aspekter av språk och kön och tar en titt på behovet av ordentliga språkkunskaper på exportföretag
Höstnumret 2016	diskuterar staters historiska utveckling i en rad länder från Afrika till Asien, lyssnar på röster från Umeå och kollar in läromedel
Vårnumret 2016	tar oss från postkoloniala studier till litteratur och svenskt språkbruk
Höstnumret 2015	befinner sig på resande fot, i Belarus (Vitryssland), i Indien och på Östtimor
Vårnumret 2015	reflekterar över 2014 års valresultat, sakprosa som begrepp och språkets böjningar samt tänker på tankesmedjan Humtank
Höstnumret 2014	firar förläggaren m.m. Peter Luthersons födelsedag, följer norrmannen Peter Hauffs äventyr i (förra) sekelskiftets Indokina samt tar en djupare titt på en serie kopparstick från 1700-talet
Vårnumret 2014	är en festskrift till nordisten Per Stille som under året håller på att gå i pension, varför innehållet till stor del kretsar kring runor
Höstnumret 2013	sysslar med makt, kritik och subjektivering i Foucaults anda, fortsätter att fundera över arbetets eventuella mening samt firar 100-årsminnet av Martha Sandwall-Bergströms födelse
Vårnumret 2013	funderar över arbetets mening, bytandet av livsstil under stenåldern samt förekomsten av varumärken och andra tidsdetaljer i modern litteratur

Höstnumret 2012	intresserar sig för det aldrig sinande intresset för Hitler, modernitet och genus hos Wägner och Nordström, undervisning i franska samt åldrandet och språket
Vårnumret 2012	är en festskrift till litteraturvetaren Ulf Carlsson, och innehåller texter om såväl verkliga författarskap som gojor och musicerande vildsvin
Höstnumret 2011	ser tillbaka på efterkrigsdeckaren, studerar våldets filmiska ansikten, fortsätter i spåren efter holländaren Van Galen samt betraktar en småländsk kulturrevolution
Höst 2010 – Vår 2011	funderar över bibliotekets idé och Ryszard Kapuściński oefterhärmliga sätt att skriva reportage
Vårnumret 2010	handlar bland annat om deckaren som spegling av verkligheten, individuella studieplaner och Van Galens memorandum
Höstnumret 2009	behandlar bl a våra polisstudenters språkbehandling, Nina Södergrens poesi och berättelserna om den danska ockupationstiden
Vårnumret 2009	minns särskilt en av "de fyra stora" svenska deckarförfattarna, H. K. Rönblom, samt tar upp "Kampen om historien"
Höstnumret 2008	ställer frågan om samerna tillhör den svenska historien samt försöker höra den Andres röst bakom kolonialismens slöjor
Vårnumret 2008	behandlar såväl dagens miljöaktivism som (förra) sekelskiftets intellektuella ideal och en ny läsning av Beckett's Tystnaden
Vår och Höst 2007	är ett dubbelnummer som spänner mellan Carl von Linné och Vic Suneson, mellan intermedialitet och historiemedvetande
Höstnumret 2006	handlar bl.a. om vägarna till ett akademiskt skriftspråk och om slavarna på Timor

Vårnumret 2006	tar upp den diskursiva konstruktionen av "folkbiblioteket", kvinnors deltidsarbete, Maria Langs författarskap samt funderar över muntlig historiskrivning
Höstnumret 2005	gör nedslag i vietnamesisk historia, i indisk och sydafrikansk litteratur samt ger en posthum hyllning till Jacques Derrida
Vårnumret 2005	behandlar bl.a. intertextualitet i poplyriken, Stieg Trenter och ett yrke i förändring
Höstnumret 2004	tar en titt på tidningarnas familjesidor, den kanske gamla texten Ynglingatal och den nya användningen av verbet äga
Vårnumret 2004	för oss på spännande litterära vägar
Höstnumret 2003	rör sig fritt över horisonten, från Färöarna till Lund, från tingsrätter till tautologier
Vårnumret 2003	är ett blandat nummer där vi bl.a. bevistar en internationell konferens om sexualitet som klassfråga och möter idrottshjälten Gunder Hägg
Höstnumret 2002	behandlar etniska relationer
Vårnumret 2002	ägnas helt och hållet åt temat genus
Höstnumret 2001	domineras av texter från årets Humanistdagar och från ett seminarium om historieämnets legitimitet
Vårnumret 2001	försöker svara på frågan: "Where did all the flowers go?"
Höstnumret 2000	gör oss bekanta med en filosof, en överrabbin och en sagoberätterska
Vårnumret 2000	diskuterar frågor kring historiens slut, litteraturvetenskapens mening, översättningar och den moderna irländska romanen
Höstnumret 1999	speglar årets Humanistdagar vid Växjö universitet
Vårnumret 1999	rör sig såsom på vingar och berättar om nyss timade konferenser i Paris och Växjö

Höstnumret 1998   Här går det utför! Såväl med svenskan i Amerika
och den tyska litteraturen i Sverige som med
Vilhelm Mobergs sedebetyg

Vårnumret 1998   bjuder på en 'lycklig humanistisk röra' av
europeiska författare, svenska lingon i fransk
tappning och stavfel(!)

Höstnumret 1997   speglar årets Humanistdagar som hade temat
Möten Mellan Människor