

ASPECTS OF THE FANTASTIC AND THE GOTHIC IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE

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It is easy to agree with Tzvetan Todorov that fantastic fiction creates a certain "hesitation" in the minds of the intrafictional characters and the extrafictional readers. But it is not as evident that Todorov is right when he claims that what distinguishes the uncanny or gothic from the fantastic is whether the supernatural is explained or not (Todorov 1995:25). Many scholars, as for example Jackson (1981), have stressed that Todorov's definition does not work for those studying modern fantastic fiction. Neither does it work for nineteenth-century literature in Scandinavia. What distinguishes the uncanny from the fantastic in Scandinavian literature is not whether the fantastic events are given a rational explanation or not, but rather if the portrayal of the supernatural and the characters' reaction to it is such as to arouse a sense of horror in the audience. In nineteenth-century Scandinavian literature, hair-raising accounts of terrifying supernatural events are sometimes explained, but sometimes not. In neither case, the texts fit into Todorov's categorisation of the fantastic, the uncanny and the marvellous.

Realism as an ideal

Realism and naturalism have been keywords in Scandinavian literary studies and criticism since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Novels and plays exposing and discussing political and social problems have been classified as good works of literature while texts characterised by suspense, supernatural elements and intriguing plots have been

marginalized as light reading, or accused of being dangerous and demoralizing. Still, most of the greatest and most appreciated authors of the nineteenth century were influenced by the fantastic and gothic traditions in English, German, French and American literature.

Gothic fiction reached Scandinavia in the late eighteenth century. At this time many of the famous English, German and French novels and short stories were translated into the Scandinavian languages as they appealed to a growing bourgeois audience hungry for fiction. Judging from the selection of fiction available at commercial libraries, thrilling novels were the books most in demand. Of these, Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797) and Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) seem to have been the two most widely read novels in the early nineteenth century. Writers like Eugène Sue, August von Koetzebue and E.T.A. Hoffmann became popular later on and by the end of the nineteenth century Edgar Allan Poe and Guy de Maupassant were introduced to the Scandinavian audience.¹

In the mid-nineteenth century, Scandinavian readers revelled in fantastic stories, sensational crimes, exciting adventures and thrilling mysteries. At the time, those concerned with public weal warned against the effects of reading fiction. Especially the Swedish critics raged against stories about extreme passions, horror and the use of violence. Authors who had earlier been praised for rising above the trivial subjects of everyday life were now condemned for offering the readers "demoralizing entertainment".² The leading critics asked for realism and didactic novels of life and manners. Depictions of

¹ On popular reading in Sweden at this time, see Leffler (1991:41-48) and Björkman (1992).

² See for example Bergstedt (1851).

human passions and vices were claimed to undermine the moral foundations of society.³

These violent reactions – especially in Sweden – against the contemporary novel made many authors either cease writing or adapt to the new recommended literary programme. Very few authors continued writing uncanny horror stories or weird fantastic ghost stories, and those who did published their works in lesser known magazines and newspapers. Most of the important authors chose to write realist fiction, telling everyday stories set in a contemporary familiar Scandinavian environment. But there were some authors who on the surface adhered to the realist programme but, occasionally, included fantastic elements that undermined the standard concept of realism.

Fantastic and gothic texts

In early Scandinavian literature there are very few texts that have been discussed as belonging to the fantastic tradition in handbooks and studies on literature. Those that have – or could be – are for instance the Swedish author Claes Livijn's "A Fantasy of the Conscience" ("*Samvetets fantasi*, 1818), the Norwegian writer Mauritz Hansen's *Othar of Bretagne* (*Othar af Bretagne. Et riddereventyr*, 1819), the Danish writer Bernhard Ingemann's "The Sphinx" ("*Sphinxen, Et eventyr i den Callot-hoffmannske maneer*", 1820). Moreover, one of the most well-known Scandinavian authors in the Spanish-speaking world, the Swedish woman writer Selma Lagerlöf, is famous for her way of using fantastic elements in her texts, for instance in *Gösta Berling's saga* (*Gösta Berlings saga*, 1891). The narration in these stories makes the reader hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Especially the

³ See for instance Leffler (1991:93-103).

depiction of an ambiguous character, Sintram, provokes a sense of uncertainty in the reader as well as in the protagonist.

But these texts are exceptional cases in Scandinavian literature. Instead, I want to call attention to what I would call two distinctive categories of texts dealing with the fantastic. The first category of texts was marketed as horror stories or ghost stories. The title and beginning of the story prepare the audience for an uncanny tale. But although writers use the narrative technique and the themes of the fantastic and gothic genres they also use a narrative voice that places the stories in a realist tradition. The narrator's focalisation is such as to induce an atmosphere of consensus reality and at the end the narrator delivers a natural explanation to those events or phenomena that earlier seemed unexplainable or supernatural.

In the second category of texts, the fantastic or supernatural events take place within a framework of realism. Somewhere in the story something strange and unknown breaks into the everyday world and this something remains unexplained and unexplainable until the very end of the story. That is, these stories have more or less an open ending because of the fantastic elements.

Let me give you some examples of these two categories. Two rather similar tales of the first kind of texts are the Danish author Bernhard Ingemann's short story "The Werewolf" ("Varulven", 1834) and the Swedish author Victor Rydberg's short novel *The Vampyre* (*Wampyren*, 1848). In the first, a clergyman is reporting something he has witnessed during his time in a small village. In his parish there is a young farmer who sincerely loves a young girl but strangely enough seems to do everything to delay their wedding. When they eventually get married their union turns into a tragedy. On the wedding night the young bride is found brutally murdered and the bridegroom is nowhere to be found. The explanation to what has happened is according to the clergyman that the young

farmer is suffering from a delusion, because he thinks he is a werewolf, bound to transform into a wolf on his wedding night. He therefore considers himself condemned to kill his bride on their wedding night. After the deed the killer disappears never to be seen again.

Also in Rydberg's *The Vampyre* the so-called vampire, Ruthven, is – just as in “The Werewolf” – seen from an external focalisation position. A young Scotsman meets a young gentleman during his travels in Italy and he accompanies his new friend, Ruthven, to his fiancée's home. The night before Ruthven's wedding the bride is found brutally killed and Ruthven has disappeared. Next time Ruthven is seen is at his friend's castle in Scotland, where he is to marry his travel companion's intended bride. The day before the wedding Ruthven tells his bride that he is a vampire and that he is condemned to sacrifice the woman he loves. But at the very moment he is about to kill her, he suddenly discovers a letter that he starts reading. The letter reveals that he is suffering from a delusion, that he believes he is a vampire because he once was poisoned and considered to be dead, but that just after the funeral he woke up in his grave. Because of this, he has ever since been convinced that he has become a vampire and therefore has to kill the women he loves. Just as in Ingemann's “The Werewolf”, there is a natural explanation to the young man's strange behaviour. In both cases the killing monster is reduced to a madman, a tragic antihero suffering from a delusion.

Another example of gothic stories in which the mysteries are explained is *The House of the Devil* (*Hin Ondes hus*, 1853) by the Swedish woman writer Aurora Ljungstedt. In this short novel two men visit an old haunted house in Stockholm. They soon discover that the ghost of the house is obsessed by a manuscript hidden in an old cupboard. The manuscript reveals a strange story about a man, called Herbert, and his irresistible attraction to a young girl, Anna. Eventually, he submits to his passion and

marries Anna. But after their wedding he finds out that he has married his own daughter, a daughter he did not know of as she was born of his former mistress Agatha after he had left her. The ghost of the house is their son who, full of shame, hides in the house haunted by his parents' crime.

Like in Ingemann's and Rydberg's tales the audience is drawn into a strange world of mysteries in *The House of the Devil*, but at the end there is a natural explanation to it all. In all three stories the events are seen by an external focalizer, as the narrator is external to the represented fantastic events. In Ingemann's and Ljungstedt's tales the narrator acts like a detective. He is investigating what he has witnessed and he is trying to find an explanation to something he at first cannot understand.

In some other cases the narrator is an internal character-focalizer. In the Norwegian author Mauritz Hansen's tale "A Ghost Story" ("En spökhistoria", 1855), the first-person narrator is the one who has been frightened by the ghost but he still tries to find an explanation for the strange things that happened to him one winter night when he was travelling in the Norwegian countryside.

Thus the first category of texts seems to illustrate what Todorov calls the uncanny. The texts are introduced to the audience as fantastic or gothic stories by their titles and start off as typical fantastic narratives, but at the end the narrator gives us a more or less believable explanation to the mysteries.

The second category of texts is quite different. They are not immediately recognized as fantastic or gothic texts. Instead they introduce the reader to a fictional world that in every way seems to work as our own everyday world. But at some point something happens that sets the normal rules aside. It is also this second category of texts that is the most common in Scandinavian nineteenth-century literature, especially in Swedish literature.

Many Scandinavian novelists, such as the Swedish authors Carl Jonas Love Almqvist, Fredrika Bremer and Emilie Flygare-Carlén, are known as early realist novelists. But all of these writers frequently use fantastic elements in their novels and short stories. Emilie Flygare-Carlén was known, for instance, to be the first author to portray life at the Swedish West Coast north of Gothenburg. Her most famous novel, *The Rose of Tistelön* (*Rosen på Tistelön*, 1842), could be described as a combination of a domestic novel and a crime story. The novel starts with a crime that will haunt the killers' family until the very end. During a stormy night at sea a smuggler and his oldest son kill a customs officer and his crew. The crime is kept secret by the family, and the young heroine Gabriella, the killer's daughter, does not know anything about it. As a grown up woman she falls in love with the murdered customs officer's son. However, her youngest brother, who witnessed the murder, and who is, since then, considered insane, imagines that he belongs to the sea god, or the water sprite. He therefore acts on what he believes to be the sea god's demand when he starts to persecute his family and finally betrays his father and brother.

In one way the novel could be read as a psychological thriller but there are many elements that demand another reading. The composition is such as to create a gothic atmosphere and the characters are obviously subject to forces beyond their control. Gabriella's youngest brother is insane but he is also portrayed as a being with an uncanny connection to the sea. Gradually, he appears more and more as a supernatural or monstrous being. It all ends like a Hollywood film, the bad are punished and the good are rewarded. But however satisfying this closure may have been to the contemporary critics, the reader of the novel is left hesitating between a natural and supernatural explanation, between a reading based on a realist or a fantastic code.

Just as in *The Rose of Tistelön* the readers are presented with a rather well defined closure in another Swedish novel in this second category of fantastic novels, Victor Rydberg's *Singoalla* (1857). But just as in *The Rose of Tistelön* the readers are left with a lot of unanswered questions. In *Singoalla* a Christian knight falls in love with a pagan Gipsy girl called Singoalla. The first part of the novel is a story about two star-crossed lovers, a Romeo and a Julia, who are both opposing their parents' plans for their future. But the first part also contains many gothic elements. The moon, the Nordic night and pagan blood rituals gradually achieve a profound symbolic significance. The combination of these elements mystifies the love between the knight, Erland, and the Gipsy girl, Singoalla, in a way that turns the love story into a vampire tale à la Gauthier's *La morte amoureuse* (1845). The vampire motive becomes even more pronounced in part two when Erland's mind splits into two personalities. That is, the vampire myth adds depth to the portraits of the characters and the meaning of the events as it increases the ambiguity of the text.

In Selma Lagerlöf's texts, natural and supernatural beings sometimes act side by side in a way that makes her works marvellous, according to Todorov's definition (Todorov 1995:41–42). In both *The Löwensköld Ring* (*Löwensköldska ringen*, 1925) and *Herr Arne's Hoard* (*Herr Arnes penningar*, 1903), a ghost is one of the protagonists. In *Gösta Berling's saga* several supernatural beings from Swedish folklore interact with the characters, but in this novel there is also one character, Sintram, who is acting in a way that makes the reader wonder about his motives and nature. Is he the Devil, or the Devil's servant, or is he just an evil, sadistic madman, who enjoys to torment other people and who prospers on the sufferings of other persons?

However, in some of her short novels or short stories, Lagerlöf uses fantastic elements in a more sophisticated way. In "The Ghost hand" ("Spökhanden", 1898), placed through its title in the Gothic tradition, a young woman, who is to be married to

an older physician sees a ghost's hand, which is supposed to appear when somebody in the family is cheating at cards, lying or betraying. The young woman's problem is that she is not marrying the physician out of love but to get away from her two old aunts. Whether the young woman actually sees a ghost's hand, or whether she says that she sees it because she is suffering from a guilty conscience, is never explained. Not even her rational husband-to-be is able to explain what he has witnessed. The short story ends leaving the reader in a nagging state of uncertainty.

These examples of nineteenth-century literature may indicate that the Scandinavian texts with fantastic elements could be divided into two distinct categories, the uncanny and the fantastic, according to Todorov's definition (Todorov 1995:41–44). But that would be to simplify and to reduce the power of these texts. Just like Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1885), the first category of texts exemplifies the explained-mystery tradition of the gothic or uncanny tradition. As in Stevenson's famous novel the rational explanation of the mystery is always depicted as an unsatisfactory closure of the story. Just as the characters in the fictional world are intrigued and confused, so is the narrator not to be convinced of that rational explanation he or she finds at the end. At the end, there is always a passage giving away the narrator's doubts or disbelief, a passage that subverts the mimetic representation of consensus reality. The narrator's explanation is not trustworthy enough for the extrafictional reader to believe in. The mysteries remain and the narration opens up for several contradictory interpretations.

The second category of texts does not consist of fantastic texts similar to Guy de Maupassant's "Horla" (1887) or E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der Sandman" (1816). Instead the fantastic element is just a deviating feature in an otherwise realist novel. Unexpectedly, something strange happens. The protagonist is at one specific moment facing something unknown or

monstrous and the realistic description is then partly put aside for a fantastic or uncanny formula. Suddenly, there is a hole or a crack in the realistic discourse making the reader question the reliability of the narrator, the relationship between voice and focalisation, internal and external focalisation, first-person and third-person narrator. But although these elements and this technique may make the reader hesitate between two conflicting interpretations, the reader is always offered a traditional closure to the story, at least on the surface of the text. The fantastic discourse is reduced to a palimpsest, a symbolic layer below the realist surface of the narration.

This category of texts thus indicates that Scandinavian authors tend to have an ambiguous relationship to the fantastic and gothic traditions. When using fantastic elements they do it in order to tell another story, to reveal something marginalized, something hidden or taboo. As elsewhere, the fantastic literature in Scandinavia is erotic at root. At the same time as sexuality and sexual activity became more and more confined and hidden from the public realm by the rising bourgeois middle class in the early nineteenth century, the baser instincts came to life in the fantastic tales. This is by no means to claim that the writers who wrote fantastic tales advocated sexual liberation; most of them do not explicitly advocate or plead for anything at all as their texts are too tentative and too ambiguous to be didactic. In spite of this, it is obvious that certain themes and motives are more openly displayed in their fantastic works. For instance, in "The Wampyre" and in *Singoalla* Victor Rydberg is showing the danger of repressed sexuality, the strength of the sexual beast within man when denied or repressed by civilized man and his society. The theme is here expressed in a way Rydberg would never use in his later more realistic novels. The fantastic code or formula makes it possible for Rydberg to channel forbidden desires into the narrow confines of nineteenth-century conventionality. It was possible for him to depict the sexual animal within man as a vampire in a Gothic tale, while the conventions of the time

made it harder for him, as a well known public intellectual figure, to illustrate the same thing in a more traditional bourgeois nineteenth-century novel.

The uncivilized wilderness

It is obvious that Scandinavian authors used the fantastic genre to tell stories of madness and perversion, hidden crimes and forbidden desires. Besides that, they also adapted the fantastic genre to suit the audience. It is therefore possible to discern a certain Scandinavian tradition. The stories are located in specific Scandinavian social and geographic environments, and different classes of Scandinavian society are depicted in a way that fit and add to the gothic setting. In many novels, the evil characters are foreigners threatening the existing Scandinavian society. The novels also use regional folklore and local traditions to enhance the local atmosphere, as well as to intensify the gothic mode.

One typical example may illustrate this: Ingemann's short novel *The Dwarves Below* (*De underjordiske. Et bornhomskt eventyr*, 1817) takes place on the island of Bornholm, between Sweden and Denmark, and depicts certain historical battles. Nevertheless, the authentic setting is only there to introduce another story, a story about the evil forces within man. The Christian hero and heroine are threatened by those inhabitants devoted to the pixies or dwarves living underground. The most powerful and evil pagan on the island is thus naturally a dangerous foreigner, who is known to have sacrificed his own first-born son to the dwarves in order to gain power and fortune.

Ingemann's novel illustrates a most prominent feature of the fantastic and gothic in Scandinavian literature, that is, the setting and the powers of nature and the pagan past, which play a major part. As in most gothic fiction the setting is related

to the characters, but in the Scandinavian tales the setting – the landscape and the wilderness – also plays the part of a character itself. In Ingemann's novel *The Dwarves Below*, the dwarves are Nature: the earth, the sea and the forest. Likewise, in Rydberg's *Singoalla*, the knight Erland and the Christian society in which he lives are threatened by everything connected to the wilderness, that is, the uncultivated landscape surrounding the castle and the monastery. The Gipsies and Singoalla are not only foreigners and heathens, they are also part of that wilderness. They worship the moon, and by the powers of the moon they take possession of Erland and force him to leave his family, and in the process he splits into two personalities. In daytime, he is the righteous Christian crusader married to the pious lady Helena; at night, he becomes Singoalla's passionate lover succumbing to the influence of the forces of nature. Just as in Ingemann's novel the uncultivated landscape, nature untamed, is one of the principal driving forces of the plot in *Singoalla*.

In many Scandinavian stories, just as in *Singoalla* and *The Dwarves Below*, the male protagonist transforms into a savage being connected to the wilderness. Sometimes he even becomes a beast of prey. In Ingemann's "The Werewolf," the young bridegroom turns into a hunting wolf connected to the wilderness, who after his killing disappears into the forest. In Rydberg's "The Wampyre", Ruthven, unlike most European vampires, does not visit his victims in their bedrooms. Instead he brings them outdoors, into the forest like a werewolf, where he drains them of blood before he again disappears into the wilderness. In the Scandinavian texts, the romance structure is inverted: the protagonist's romantic quest is twisted into a journey back into darkness and a barbaric or savage state prior to civilisation.

Scandinavian authors are thus not only depicting alien and repressed forces within man as a product of savage, untamed wilderness and its predators. Their stories are also very much

about man and his pagan inheritance. In almost all Scandinavian tales the characters are victims of their ancestors' crimes and they are often forced to repeat them. The strange connections between the characters and their ancestors reveal dangerous forces within them and make them split, double and fuse in a manner reminiscent of the novels by Hoffmann. In *The Rose of Tistelön* by Emilie Flygare-Carlén the murderers are said to be the last Scandinavian Vikings and when at sea they become like their combatting ancestors, bloodthirsty and without remorse. In Ingemann's novel *The Dwarves Below*, the powerful foreigner is connected to the dark forces of an old uncivilized wilderness on the island and is therefore threatening the present Christian society. Similarly, the knight in *Singoalla*, Erland, is said to be the double of his pagan ancestor, and therefore destined to repeat the cruel deeds of his ancestor whenever he leaves the castle to go hunting with his dogs in the forest. He behaves in the way his ancestor is said to have behaved and by loving the pagan Gipsy girl and turning away from his Christian faith and his family he even further turns into the very image of his forefather. In the same way, Lagerlöf's "The Ghost Hand", is about the haunting of the past. In this rather domestic story, the young woman is haunted by the ghost hand of an ancestor in a way that make chronological time dissolved. Past, present and future lose their chronological and historical sequence and tend towards an eternal present.

What characterizes the fantastic tradition in Scandinavia is that the gothic castle, monastery or spooky ruin is replaced by the wilderness, the large dark forest, the stormy sea or the crags and rocks of the mountains. Like most gothic characters, the protagonists in these Scandinavian novels lose control of their repressed desires and are taken over by their dark sides. But in the Scandinavian novel the dark side is, in contrast to the European novel, both connected to and triggered by the landscape and therefore part of a dark pagan past. The barbaric is part of man and man cannot resist the powers of nature residing within him. Thus, the Scandinavian novels seem to

express a fear of and a lack of control over the external environment, the landscape and the climate, and the still present remains of a pagan past. Old conceptions of supernatural creatures and powers activate a repressed memory of a past condemned by the Christian church and denied by the new bourgeois society of the nineteenth century. Beyond the civilised bourgeois world there is another world calling forth the haunting memory of a hidden past. Because this dark primordial past is repressed, it is not easily exorcized. As it existed prior to the concepts of good or evil, it is a threat to both the existing social order and to the concept of a civilized world.

I do not think it is a coincidence that the fantastic tale in Scandinavia is dominated by these themes at a time in history that can be seen as a transition between two ways of life or two types of societies. In Scandinavia, this was a time when many in the growing upper middle class felt alienated from their rural origin, that old "natural" or "traditional" world they had left behind for a new public life in the towns. Because of this, the Scandinavian authors' obsession with untamed nature and the pagan past could be understood as a kind of nostalgia or an attempt to understand their fading original provenance. It has been claimed, that the more rationalistic an age becomes, the more it needs the possibility of escape into a fantastic fictional world. In Scandinavian literature this escape can be understood as an expression of the new bourgeoisie's painful recognition of repressed irrational forces, the powers of nature or the haunting memory of a prehistoric pagan past. It is, for example, noteworthy that Scandinavian writers do not, as most European authors, return to the Middle Ages to revive a medieval feudal past in their fantastic and uncanny stories. Instead, they recall prehistoric times further back in history, a pagan premedieval era before Christianity was brought to Scandinavia.

The fantastic tradition in Scandinavia

Many of the Scandinavian writers in the nineteenth century were influenced by European and American fantastic literature, but instead of imitating their predecessors they developed a certain Scandinavian tradition of fantastic literature. Firstly, Scandinavian literature very much illustrates an ambiguous relationship between the fantastic and the realist tradition. Although most scholars prefer to place nineteenth-century Scandinavian literature in a realist tradition, many works illustrate an ambiguous relationship between the realist and fantastic narrative forms. Like Guy de Maupassant, Honoré Balzac and Theophile Gautier the Scandinavian writers are preoccupied with a profoundly material physical sensible world, the visible contours of the Scandinavian nineteenth-century world they were all part of.⁴ The texts presented here are good examples of the realist preoccupation with the presentation of well known backgrounds and settings. Therefore, the works of Scandinavian writers clearly illustrate their realist authors' desire to control an incomprehensible world and to present a structured, coherent image of the chaotic reality it represents. Because of this, the Scandinavian writers write within the same fantastic subgenre as French and British writers like Balzac, Charles Dickens and the Brontë sisters: they maintain that the world of the realists exists if looked upon from an established realist bourgeois viewpoint. However, if the world is focalized from another position it appears quite different; it is much more inexplicable in terms of cause and effect, it is ruled by unknown mysterious, terrifying and violent powers. Therefore, the fantastic elements exist, as Rosemary Jackson's points out, "as the inside, or underside, of realism, opposing the novel's closed, monological forms with open dialogical structures" (Jackson 1981:25). In the Scandinavian texts, the fantastic is hidden within a realist framework, either

⁴ Compare Harter 1996.

as particular fantastic elements disturbing the surrounding realist narrative or as apparently fantastic elements eventually to be rationally explained.

One group of texts starts off as fantastic tales but once the fantastic or supernatural is recognized, the texts evolve strategies to contain and exclude it; they develop according to the formula of the detective story ending by explaining all mysteries. This group mainly consists of short stories and short novels. The second group of texts can be described as predominantly realistic narratives suddenly invaded by fantastic interludes of unreason and from that point on the fantastic and the gothic persist as a mood and a sense of doom, a hint of demonic forces lying beyond or beneath the well known everyday world we know. This group is dominated by the long novels.

Secondly, the fantastic elements in nineteenth century Scandinavian texts are almost always connected to something uncanny or frightening. Thus, the fantastic tradition in Scandinavian literature could be called paranoiac fiction, which David Punter defines as "fiction in which the reader is placed in a situation of ambiguity with regard to fears within the text, and in which the attribution of persecution remains uncertain and the reader is invited to share in the doubts and uncertainties which pervade the apparent story" (Punter 1980:404). If the realist novel is about seeing and naming a visual physical world, the fantastic novel is about obscuring the visual physical world by calling up the unnameable, by invoking an atmosphere of ambiguity or by introducing two conflicting codes in the text, the physically possible and physically impossible.

The Scandinavian tales often start by depicting a particular locus in space and time, a recognizable contemporary environment and society, but at some point something fantastic happens, something that challenges empirical reality. In the

Scandinavian nineteenth-century novel the fantastic undermines the standard concept of reality and the events often become a catalyst for questioning norms. As other fantastic narratives, the Scandinavian examples evoke a world in its partialness, in fragments and in contradiction to the structured and well-organized world of the realist novel. They show that Jackson was right when she called the fantastic the literature of subversion (Jackson 1981). In nineteenth-century Scandinavian novels and short stories the fantastic elements give expression to the marginalized, the hidden or the taboo. And in the Scandinavian novel and short story, the hidden and the taboo are always represented by the demonic wilderness and the violence of the past and its power over the present. Thus, the fantastic in Scandinavian nineteenth-century literature brings the reader up against the boundaries of the civilised society and shows the relative nature of ethical and behavioural codes, confronting him or her with a different world in which these codes do not operate, or operate in distorted forms. Thus, in the Nordic literary tradition 'the fantastic' is really Gothic.

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