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## Incoherent Narration, Hauntology and the Liminal Status of Female Vampire in Swedish Films *Frostbite* and *Let the Right One In*

### Intro: Swedish Horror and “the long shadow of Ingmar Bergman”

Swedish cinema is not perceived as a medium that is particularly interested in exploring fantastic fears on the screen. Horror films from this country have often struggled with many obstacles that made their production highly difficult. Censorship and the unfriendly financing system for this genre efficiently blocked projects related to uncanny angst (Muszalski, 2016, p. 77-79). Undoubtedly, there are some classic productions from this country, such as *The Phantom Carriage* (*Körkarlen*, 1921) by Victor Sjöström and *Häxan: Witchcraft through the Age* (*Häxan*, 1922) by Benjamin Christensen,<sup>1</sup> but their aesthetics seem to be closer to the narrative patterns of artistic cinema.

Hence, most movies from the short and not very impressive list of Swedish horror films belong to the domain of cultural texts produced outside the official system. Few others conceal their origins in the areas of arthouse creativity, related to some existential fears. A good example of this type of author's strategy may be Ingmar Bergman's picture called *The Hour of the Wolf* (*Vargtimmen*, 1968). This title often appears in various registers of influential horror movies and is mentioned by many creators of the genre as an important inspiration but, similar to the Swedish movies from the 1920s, cannot be treated as an example of a horror production *per se*. Indeed, “the curse of Bergman's overwhelming talent” has become another reason for the lack of support from the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) for the projects related to the cinema of fears. Such a situation was usually related to the fact that the decision makers from SFI most often consider

<sup>1</sup> More about other Scandinavian horror films from the first fifty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century may be found in: Iversen, 2016, pp. 332-333.

scary movies as insufficiently artistic to compete with the works of the author of *Persona* (1966).

However, not only the “the long shadow of Bergman”<sup>2</sup> hindered the production of horror films in Sweden. The negative attitude towards cinema of fears was strengthened by the media debates about the destructive influence of cinematic, TV and “video violence” (called in Swedish „*videovåld*”) on young viewers. Taking all these factors into consideration, it is no wonder that the desperate directors from the younger generation, who tried to shoot horror films, were content to create self-made images. This situation prevailed until the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when two important events happened.

The first was the international career of John Ajvide Lindqvist’s vampire novel *Let the Right One In* (*Låt den rätte komma in*), published in Sweden in 2004. Lindqvist’s work is an extraordinary hybrid of a story about adolescence and the elements of horror. Created with an unhurried and depressing narrative style, the plot of *Let the Right One In* evocatively reflects the climate of life in the Swedish suburbs in the 1980s. Its poetics is strongly rooted in the tradition of social critique from Scandinavian literature and films (known, for example, from the classical works of Selma Lagerlöf, whose text *Körkarlen*, from 1912, became the basis of the scenario of *The Phantom Carriage*).

The main protagonist of Lindqvist’s book is a teenager bullying victim called Oskar. He befriends a mysterious girl that has just moved to the flat in his block house. Eli does not go to school, looks strange and dresses unusually. The shutters in her apartment always carefully isolate the sunlight and the curious gazes of neighbors. The two outsiders develop an emotional bond. In addition to the story of Oskar and Eli, the plot of the novel presents the life of people living on the margins of society – such as the alcohol-abusing guests of a local pub – who will become the first victims of the teenage vampire. Many readers have interpreted the book as a deliberate expression of criticism of the Swedish welfare state system, concerning such serious issues as fear of immigrants, social alienation, school violence or even pedophilia.

National recognition of Lindqvist’s novel expanded the cultural field of the unpopular genre. This was a milestone for the initiators of the second major breakthrough in the history of modern Swedish vampire movies. Daniel Ojanlatva, Piddé Andersson and Anders Banke, fans of cinema of fears, had been unsuccessfully applying for co-financing of their horror project since 1999. A film-based legend says that eventually its authors decided to appeal to a “narrative fraud” to get funds for the production of their dream movie about vampires. Banke claims that he had presented part of the script of his film to SIF employees. It imitated an existential movie and contained a war scene, which appeared as a gloomy settlement with the specters of Scandinavian cooperation with the Nazis (Muszalski, 2016, p. 89).

<sup>2</sup> This term was also used to describe the influence of Bergman on the earlier generations of directors. See: Gustafsson, 2017, pp. 33-40.

However, a more credible explanation for the phenomenon of partial financing of the first horror movie in the history of modern Swedish cinema seems to be the positive reception of the novel *Let the Right One In*.

Probably a factor that might also have strongly influenced the decision of clerks from Svenska Filminstitutet was the fact that the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was a time of transnational popularity of romantic images of vampires. This phenomenon was mostly associated with the commercial success of two literary cycles for teenagers from the USA.<sup>3</sup> The first of them was the series of books by Charlaine Harris, released in 2001, known in the Anglo-Saxon world as *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*.<sup>4</sup> The second publishing phenomenon, associated with the teenage vampire-mania, was the case of Stephanie Meyer's novels, called *The Twilight Saga*. Meyer's books were quickly adopted by Hollywood becoming the cinematic trilogy. In both sagas strong female protagonists initiate their adult life through a romance with vampire lovers. And the teenage hype for vampire fiction might be the last factor that helped Banke, Ojanlatva and Andersson to develop their project. However, the effect of their attempts was nothing that the SFI decision makers could have imagined. It can also be presumed that the young Swedish audience did not expect any of the narrative surprises that came to the cinema screens.

### ***The incoherent narration of Frostbite***

The first Swedish vampire film appeared to be a genre hybrid of horror, teenage coming of age story, historical drama and comedy (with a huge amount of surreal black humor and gory special effects) with the already mentioned serious prologue. The beginning of the plot places the action on the periphery of the winter front of the Second World War. A group of soldiers, who belong to the infamous SS Panzer Division Wiking, roams the snowy ground on Ukrainian soil where they found a hut inhabited by vampires. To avoid spoiling the pleasure of watching the movie, I will just add that the prologue ends with the abduction of a small vampire girl in a coffin to an unknown place.

The modern part of the story also presents the winter realities, transferring the action to the north of Sweden, where the polar night period has just started. The specific genius loci can be regarded as a metaphorical allusion to the social relations prevailing in Scandinavia, oscillating between the demystification of many stereotypes (for example in the suggestive presentation of the local youth's

<sup>3</sup> Of course, the bases for the romantic vampire-mania from the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were prepared a little earlier by such films as *Dracula* (1992) by Francis Ford Coppola, *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*, (1994, directed by Neil Jordan) and the success of the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), showrunned by Joss Whedon.

<sup>4</sup> A few years later HBO produced a TV series called *True Blood* (2008-2014), based on the Harris stories. The show about the adventures of Sookie Stackhouse (and other characters) from her saga deconstructed many fictional models from horror literature and cinema in a camp way.

party) and their confirmation (in scenes showing the alienation of people who do not belong to the local community).<sup>5</sup> In such a kind of geographic and mental background, we meet the main female characters of the movie. Their plot models have been linked to the nomadic character of vampirism, already known from the 19th-century classic novels such as *The Vampyre: a Tale* (1819) by John Polidori, *The Dark Blue* (aka *Carmilla*, 1871-72) by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker.

Moreover, characteristic features of the *Frostbite* protagonists are also combined with the vampire figure of the Other, popular in post-modern cinema (Mutch, 2013, p. 45). The adult female character, doctor Annika Wallén, looking for a change in her life, grabs a new career opportunity and goes to the North of Sweden with her daughter. Of course, the role of stranger does not only belong to Annika and her teenage child, but also to the small vampire from Ukraine, who is kept in a pharmacological coma in the local hospital. It is no wonder that their fates will quickly link together, finally resulting in nomadic wandering across Sweden, which, is vividly reminiscent of the wanderings of the vampire Eli in *Let the Right One In*.<sup>6</sup>

In the plot related to the adventures of the Swedish lady doctor, the screenwriters also used other popular narrative strategy from horror cinema – a combination of the scientific element with the male figure. This figure in *Frostbite* is represented by the mysterious professor Gerhard Beckerts, who secretly conducts research on vampirism to improve the Scandinavian genome. The movie script also contains some structures connected with the critique of patriarchy. The researchers involved in the feminist studies of horror rightly note common uses in this genre motifs related to the *bio-power* and *clinical gaze* – terms described by Michel Foucault in his book *The Birth of the Clinic* (1999, p. 7-17). In such relationships, women are dependent on the power of men and usually perform the role of victims or monstrous beings, who are trying to liberate themselves from the male control.

Interestingly enough, the case of Maria (a name written in Cyrillic on the coffin of a small female vampire) connects both these narrative anatomies. It is her character who plays the role of a monster woman in the plot (and eventually kills her male antagonists), but she is also the unconscious perpetrator of a vampirism plague, because her blood is used by some unruly teenagers during a party. Moreover, in the creation of the underage heroine, we can also find a third narrative figure – the outline of a victim woman – aggrieved

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the process of embedding the film's action in the winter realities can also be found in the already mentioned novel *Let the Right One In*. Cold and snow will also become important narrative factors in texts of culture from the whole Nordic region and have been used until today in such genres as crime stories and horror films quickly named by Anglo-Saxon journalists as *Nordic noir* and *Nordic horror*.

<sup>6</sup> Especially the end of *Frostbite* interestingly mirrors the end of *Let the Right One In*. Both female vampires have to leave the places where they were taken by their male "patrons" and travel with newly met mortal human beings who do not represent masculine *bio-power*.

by the scientist trying to control her superhuman powers. This incoherent and nomadic status, very popular in many other postmodernist vampire incarnations (Creed, 2007, pp. 60-71) also vaguely implies the possibility of sexual abuse of the unconscious, minor girl. Such an attempt may be found in the scene with the medical apprentice, who goes to the room with the “Slavic sleeping princess” to test the young vampire’s involuntary reactions.

Finally, the usage of the bio-power and clinical-gaze themes is also connected with the genesis of vampirism, which here is partly detached from metaphysical connotations, and related to the presence of an unspecified virus in the blood of the infected people.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, the deconstruction of the genre’s roots (that might already be found in Richard Matheson’s classic story *I am a Legend* from the year 1954) is an attempt to undertake a transnational dialogue with postmodernist formulas from the Anglo-Saxon vampire horror (Weinstock, 2012, p. 70). Similar narrative patterns were used in the memorable *Rabid* (1977) by David Cronenberg, cinematic adaptations of the comic series *Blade* or Guillermo del Toro’s TV series *The Strain*, (2014- 2107).

On the other hand, the separation of vampirism from its cultural roots may also be interpreted as an autoreferential attempt to use a different model to the artistic one, known so far from the Scandinavian productions from the 1920s. And probably the change in the narrative tone of *Frostbite*’s narration is also connected with this second aim. As I mentioned before, the unexpected turn in the second part of the plot into the regions of black humor and grotesque violence effects in many comic reinterpretations of horror conventions. Dogs speaking with human voices, a tasteless accumulation of gags in the absurd scene of a family dinner (during which one of the young antagonists devours the domestic white rabbit) or quite unusual uses of a garden gnome to fight vampires are elements that vividly recall the obscene jokes from the work of Peter Jackson (known from his trilogy of bad taste) as well as bloody sketches from three full-length images of Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead* series. The camp perception of vampirism in the second part of the story also evokes memorable cinematic parodies and pastiches of horror classics, such as Roman Polański’s *Dance of the Vampires* (1967) or *Blood for Dracula*, (1974) by Paul Morrissey (whose protagonist ineptly looked for some virgin blood in Marxist-infected Italy).

After all, the idea of separating the new Swedish horror from the artistic and social roots of classical Scandinavian cinema does not seem to have been fully realized. As I mentioned above, despite its humorous form, the plot of *Frostbite* still resonates with the model of socially involved cinema. The movie script takes up the difficult subject of reluctance towards foreignness and otherness. It also draws attention to the patriarchal division of work power and the mundane problems of the modern welfare system (Hakola, 2015) such as alcohol and drug

<sup>7</sup> However, Swedish teenage vampires still avoid garlic and Christian crosses.

use or colonization of young people's interests by the artifacts of American culture. A similar mix of incoherent narration, genre and arthouse liquidity and serious social critique were also used in the next Swedish horror productions about female vampires such as Peter Pontikis' *Vampyrer* (2008) or *Let The Right One In* (*Låt den rätte komma in*, 2008) by Tomas Alfredson.

## Swedish Vampires and Hauntology

There are, moreover, many other examples of narrative discontinuities in *Frostbite*, related to the evolution of horror aesthetics and syntax. One of the most interesting issues connected with the field of world creation is the asynchronous application of time presentation.

Such a figure evokes the phenomenon of the hauntological reproduction of the past, researched by Jacques Derrida in his *The Specters of Marx* (Derrida, 2016). Derrida analyses, among others, a motif of "time out of joint", known from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. He perceives the strategy of nostalgic eliciting of the spirit of the past (which, in his opinion, "is at the same time present and not present") in many texts of culture as an expression of mourning that directs the reader to the vanishing of some concepts in culture (Derrida, 2016, pp. 43-50). According to Derrida, such a spectral nostalgia "haunts" modernity. Its presence should be described as "hauntological" or even "haunt-ontological" and might be easily spotted in *Frostbite*.

The characteristic clothes of young characters, their pop culture fascinations or the vehicles seen on the streets suggest that the action of the movie is located in what is a very popular period in contemporary popular culture, that of the 1980s. The aesthetics of the image from this time in the Swedish film leads us to the postmodern narrations from such American vampire productions as Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983) and *Lost Boys* (1987) by Joel Schumacher.

However, the attentive viewer will realize that certain elements of *Frostbite's* world do not match the nostalgic reception of the presented story because their time references are inadequate to the rest of the scenography.<sup>8</sup> A good example of this strategy is the appearance of a modern laptop in one of the scenes. The hauntological dimension of such a narrative play (previously known, among others, from Derek Jarman's movie *Caravaggio*) fits well with Berthold

<sup>8</sup> The incoherent character of the narrative in *Frostbite* is also emphasized in the language diacritic, used by the characters from the movie. Their accents do not match geo-linguistically with the area where the story is located.

Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* ("defamiliarisation effect" or "alienation effect").<sup>9</sup> This narrative figure is "stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them" (Brooker, 1994, p. 191) by using the actor's direct speech to the viewers or mixing different times of action and dialogues. Equivalents of such attempts may be found in the narration of *Frostbite* both in the changes of mood (from humorous into serious tone, and back) and in the incoherent time settings, based on the idea of mixing the temporal status of things presented on the screen.

The sense of dyschronia, caused in *Frostbite* by showing objects that do not belong to the temporal order of the presented world also leads us to the hauntological and liminal state of vampires (and perhaps entire popular culture). This fictional character is, after all, the embodied phantom or the discontinuous spectral entity, which (as Agamben mentions in his essay about the spectral status of Venice):

is suddenly condensed and crystallized into a figure that is at once labile and exigent, mute and winking, resentful and distant. [...] Spectrality is a form of life, a posthumous or complementary life that begins only when everything is finished. Spectrality thus has, with respect to life, the incomparable grace and astuteness of that which is completed, the courtesy and precision of those who no longer have anything ahead of them (Agamben, 2009, p. 39).

The hauntological perspective seems to be an adequate form for the description of incoherent Swedish horror diegesis. It is also the creative conception for the interpretation of the vampire heroine, who might be considered a specter or a ghost of historical (and also contemporary) Scandinavian Nazi fascinations. Such a hauntological phantom of II World War traumas related to partial cooperation of some Scandinavian countries with Nazi Germany might also be the SS zombies from the Norwegian horror movies of Tommy Wirkola (*Dead Snow*, 2009 and *Dead Snow 2*, 2014) and Hitler's army, hidden for over 60 years on the dark side of the moon from the Finnish *Iron Sky* (2012), directed by Timo Vuorensola.<sup>10</sup> The hauntological dimension of the world and characters from *Frostbite* can also be interpreted as an autoreferential gesture, pointing to the multidimensional meaning of vampirism in culture. The incoherent narration reveals the displacements and discontinuities in this figure, which are responsible for the ease of adjusting its liminal features to the

<sup>9</sup> The roots of the alienation effect are also shortly described by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who is looking for a substitute of parody, often used in modern culture (and which is also present in *Frostbite*). In his essays from the book *Profanations*, Agamben writes about the figure of *parabasis*, which opposes the usage of parody. As an example of a *parabasis*, Agamben evokes a moment in the ancient drama, when the actors leave the stage and the choir addresses the speech directly to the audience. The Italian philosopher proves that the usage of such a narration trick disorients the recipient of the cultural text: "Called forth and carried away from his place and his position, the reader accedes not to the place of the author but to a sort of space between worlds" (Agamben, 2007, p. 51).

<sup>10</sup> Nordic movies about all kinds of Nazi specters, that were produced in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century might also be interpreted as a parody expression of social traumas caused by more contemporary, real life horrors, connected for example with Anders Behring Breivik's terrorist attacks in Oslo and on Utøya island.

new themes and aesthetics. Unfortunately, this status is also conducive to the process of trivializing postmodern vampires which is a tendency that frequently affects contemporary texts of audiovisual culture. And perhaps that is why the second part of the plot and aesthetics in *Frostbite* transforms into areas of gore and black humor.

Finally, all these narrative attempts and references are not only responsible for the cult status of the movie in Scandinavian countries, but also boosted its popularity on the Anglo-Saxon market of DVD rentals.<sup>11</sup> And even today, *Frostbite* is regarded as the Swedish production with the largest number of special effects. It is also the first Scandinavian film to receive an award at Fantasporto fantasy film festival in Portugal.

### **Incoherent Narration, Liminal Vampire and Hauntological Tropes in *Let the Right One In***

The incoherent form of narration and hauntological status of vampire and film worlds was also continued in the most known Swedish horror production – *Let the Right One In*, directed by Tomas Alfredson in 2008, and might be considered as one of the pillars of the artistic success of this movie. The cinematic adaptation of John Ajvide Lindqvist's novel includes an even more complex model of the vampire protagonist and also contains a far more complicated dimension of the fictional world. First of all, the status of its main female character is blurred by the incoherent gender determinants. Firstly, the vampire figure in this movie is suspended between sexual and asexual perception by means of age categories (swinging from the teenage body status to the determinants of the unnaturally old creature). Secondly, due to some visual narrative patterns (such as the androgynous appearance), Eli's character transcends from female to male gender categories.<sup>12</sup>

The sexual status of protagonists from *Let the Right One In* might also be analysed in the perspective of Foucault's bio-power relationships. On the one hand, Eli is both a victim of pedophile practices (that are strongly suggested in her relation with Håkan) and a person who uses her uncertain sexual status to control and seduce young Oskar. On the other hand, Eli may also be perceived as a manipulative monster that chose young Håkan for her teenage lover. However, when he became too old to hunt for human prey, the vampire decided to replace him with Oskar, who is bullied at school and needs a protector and imaginary (girl)friend. Finally, Eli is also the monster *per se*, because, after Håkan's death, the vampire has to kill people to feed on their blood. Nonetheless,

<sup>11</sup> *Frostbite* was the first Scandinavian horror movie with the leading role played by the TV star – Petra Nielsen. See: Eat My Brains!, *Exclusive interview; Anders Banke, director of Frostbite*, <http://www.eatmybrains.com/showfeature.php?id=60> [Accessed March 20, 2018].

<sup>12</sup> Sometimes the Swedish vampire's actions are connected with passivity and sensibility (stereotypically perceived as female), in other cases Eli is an active and stronger character than Oskar. Moreover, in John Ajvide Lindqvist's novel Eli is a castrated boy, called Elias, and a victim of a vampire pedophile.



such a status is, once again, blurred in the screenplay, due to the fact that the murders are not connected in the movie with sexual (or any) pleasure and vividly cause the feelings of shame, repulsion and guilt, which effectively disrupt the viewers' point of view on this character.

Furthermore, the camera work of Hoyte von Hoytema (a Dutch-Swedish cinematographer who studied at the National Film School in Łódź, Poland) often indicates the uncertain ontological status of Eli by using a shallow depth of field in the shots presenting the vampire in the company of Oskar. These frames are usually composed by placing the boy in the foreground and in focus. In contrast, his vampire companion is often presented behind or in the shadow of the human being, and appears as a blurred specter, which is out of focus. Such narrative attempts again suggest that Eli may be an imaginary friend (or the imaginary monster). However, we can perceive him as a hauntological creature, born of family and with the school traumas of a teenage boy, who cannot defend himself and is not able to give vent to his angst and anger.<sup>13</sup>

The phantomatic (or hauntological) status of Oskar's dreams about an imaginary protector and a girlfriend also relates in the movie to the lack of metaphysical attributes of gothic vampirism. As I mentioned before, this narrative pattern was previously used in John Ajvide Lindqvist's novel and partly appears in Anders Banke's movie *Frostbite*. In the film adaptation of *Let the Right One In*, there are also no visible signs that Eli is afraid of Christian crosses or holy water.<sup>14</sup> However, the teenage predator still owns some inhuman superpower – such as the ability to climb high building walls or walk barefoot in the snow. What is more, the vampire is a part of the supernatural world, too, thanks to the power to change into an animal-like creature that can quickly and effectively attack human beings. This last ability may be interestingly analyzed by the concept of “becoming-animal” that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari developed in their texts, such as *A Thousand Plateaus*. In a similar perspective, Oskar's fantasy of Eli might be interpreted as an example of a subconscious dream connected with sexual maturation and the urge to control his changing body. It can also be regarded as an illusive attempt to transcend the liminal status of teenagers in society.

Finally, similar to Maria from *Frostbite*, Eli is the symbolic Other in the meaning of national identity and nomadic status. The vampire travels across Sweden to avoid being caught by the police. The androgynous creature looks different and wears clothes that may be linked to immigrants from Syria or Gypsies from Eastern Europe. The uncertain ethnic status of Eli links this character to the margins of Scandinavian society. The Swedish vampire lives in an empty, rented flat, in a poor neighborhood of blockhouses and feeds on the

<sup>13</sup> The negative feelings of Oskar are presented, among others, in the scene where the boy attacks a tree with a knife.

<sup>14</sup> In the novel, the vampirism is described as a kind of parasite that roots itself next to the human heart.

blood of the alcohol abused unemployed citizens. All these elements might be interpreted as a critique of the changes in the welfare state system that started in Sweden in 1980s. (Nestingén, 2008, pp. 9-13).

The social critique behind the hauntological status of Scandinavian horror narratives is also clearly visible in the textual and visual creation of Blackaberg, the place where the book and the film are set. At the beginning of John Ajvide Lindqvist's novel it is mentioned that this district of Stockholm was built as "an urban utopia for the middle class". The narration of the book even presents this new estate in the manner of the Old Testament, but this figure introduces irony and anxiety:

It was not a place that developed organically, of course. Here everything was carefully planned from the outset. [...]. One could imagine that it had fostered a pioneer spirit. The Mayflower; an unknown land. Yes. One can imagine all those empty buildings waiting for their occupants. And here they come! Marching over the Traneberg Bridge with sunshine and the future in their eyes. The year is 1952. [...] They are probably singing something. "The Internationale" perhaps. Or "We Come Unto Jerusalem," depending on their predilection. It is big. It is new. It is modern. But that wasn't the way it was. [...] "It's a good place we've come to." Only one thing was missing. A past. [...] You were beyond the grasp of the mysteries of the past; there wasn't even a church. Nine thousand inhabitants and no church. That tells you something about the modernity of the place, its rationality. It tells you something of how free they were from the ghosts of history and of terror. (Lindqvist, 2008, pp. 1-2)

In a later passage of the book "the landscape anxiety" transforms into feelings of fear and repulsion that are connected to the figure of the vampire, who appeared in Blackaberg. In such a perspective, Eli is a specter of the impure past that tries to mingle with the utopian and modern character of the district:

These buildings, the walking paths, the spaces, people, everything is just... like a single big damn sickness, see? Something went wrong. They thought all this out, planned it to be... perfect, you know. And in some damn wrinkle it went wrong, instead. Some shit. [...] like they had some idea about the angles, or fucking whatever, the angles of the buildings, in their relation to each other, you know. So it would be harmonious or something. And then they made a mistake in their measurements, their triangulation, whatever the hell they call it, so that it was all a little off from the start, and it went downhill from there. So you walk here with all these buildings and you just feel that... You shouldn't be here. This place is all wrong, you know? Except it isn't the angles, it's something else, something that just... like a disease that's in the... walls and I... don't want any part of it anymore. (Lindqvist, 2008, p. 333)

The idea of the uncanny character of geometry in Blackeberg's architecture is creatively used in the camera work of Hoyte Van Hoytema that escalates the feeling of paranoia and social isolation connected with The Cold War in the 1980s (Troy, 2015, p. 30). To boost the uncanny and nomadic relations between the figure of the vampire and the negative determinants of place and time, Hoytema uses many figures of visual narration related to liminality, transition and voyeurism, such as doors, gates, tunnels, bridges, windows and mirrors. They are often presented in geometrical patterns and the appliance of spherical lenses indicates their disquieting character.<sup>15</sup>

These visual attempts effectively deprive the movie of nostalgic atmosphere and positive memories of adolescence – the figures that are often used in contemporary horror films. However, the creators of *Let the Right One In* go even further in their narrative games and successfully mix the hauntological status of vampires and 1980's fears, linking them with the third element of textual and visual narration from the novel – the specter of the Russian submarine that was discovered in the Baltic Sea on 27<sup>th</sup> October in 1981. (Troy, 2015, pp. 30-31) This ghost figure of the Russian invasion appears in the fictional world, among others, in the dialogues of the boys, who are equally afraid of the vampire killer and the nuclear conflict with the communists. All these factors, once again, after the Nazi reminders from Banke's *Frostbite*, direct our attention to the fact that the film specter of Swedish vampires strongly relates to the unburied traumas of the past and contemporary fears of late postmodernity. Finally, the narrative inconsistency of the first Swedish vampire horror film leads us to some more general ontological discontinuities, associated with the fluidity and spectral character of many figures in the culture of late postmodernity.<sup>16</sup> Their incoherent status may identify the insufficiency of some methodologies, which are only based on the conflict between modernism and postmodernism. All the narrative games mentioned above are also probably responsible for the extraordinary status of both movies and the Swedish novel.

### **Coda: Transnational Popularity of Swedish Vampires**

Above all, the ambiguity, complex narration and originality of both vampire productions from Sweden have opened the gates of transnational productions for the directors of *Frostbite* and *Let the Right One In*. However, their transnational careers are slightly different. Anders Banke, who studied

<sup>15</sup> Detailed analyses of Hoytema's camera work might be found here: Hemphill, J. *An Unusual Romance*. Available at: [https://theasc.com/ac\\_magazine/December2008/LettheRightOneIn/page1.html](https://theasc.com/ac_magazine/December2008/LettheRightOneIn/page1.html) [Accessed March 20, 2018]. Vaziri, T. *The Cinematography of "Let The Right One In," Part 1*. Available at: <http://fxrant.blogspot.com/2009/11/cinematography-of-let-right-one-in-part.html> [Accessed March 20, 2018].

<sup>16</sup> Derrida claims that almost all 20<sup>th</sup>- century media have a spectral, hauntological status. The phantom of human voice is used on phones and mobile phones (as well as on the radio). Also cinema, TV and Internet contain the phantoms of voices and images. See: Derrida, 1989.

film production in Russia and used professional help from this country during the creation of the special effects to *Frostbite*, directed his next film in the homeland of Andrei Tarkovsky. Then he also created a television series there. In contrast, the film version of *Let the Right One In* became a ticket to the world of high budget co-productions for Tomas Alfredson. He directed the highly prized film adaptation of John le Carré's novel *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* in 2011 and later, in 2017, transposed Jo Nesbø's book, called *Snowman* (with the cast of Michael Fassbender, Rebecca Ferguson and Charlotte Gainsbourg) to the language of cinema.

Furthermore, the transnational success of *Let the Right One In* quickly attracted the attention of producers from the USA to the Nordic horror.<sup>17</sup> Two years later Matt Reeves directed the re-make of Alfredson's film, transferring its action to Los Alamos in New Mexico and changing the dynamics of the relationship between the two main characters. Until today, the movie scenario has also been adapted into two theatre dramas. One of them was performed in Sweden, the other in Scotland. What is more, in the USA, the fans of Eli can buy the comic book prequel, called *Let Me in: Crossroads*. Besides, in 2016, Jeff Davis directed the pilot of the television series based on the script of *Let the Right One In*, but the production of the show was suspended due to a lack of financial support from the American channel TNT.

Looking forward and taking into consideration the examples of both films' transnational popularity it is hard to imagine that all these things might not have happened if some stubborn people had not started to fight for the right to direct horror films professionally in the post-Bergman Sweden of the late 1990's and had not decided to use the incoherent narration for the creation of hauntological specters of the Scandinavian vampire.

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<sup>17</sup> Thanks to this phenomenon, many directors of horror films from Scandinavian countries, such as Tommy Wirkola, Roar Uthaug or André Øvredal, started to work in Hollywood.

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### **Incoherent Narration, Hauntology and the Liminal status of Female Vampire in Swedish Films *Frostbite* and *Let the Right One In***

This text is an attempt to analyze selected elements of the incoherent narration in the first contemporary vampire movie from Sweden. *Frostbite* (directed by Anders Banke, 2006) is an image that reinterprets classical horror figures in various ways. The authors of the script use visual patterns from films and horror novels, intriguingly linking them with social criticism and a feminist perspective. The incoherent models of the narration may also be found in such strategies as mixing serious topics with comedy and dyschronic presentation of elements related to the plot's time. By using these types of strategies the Swedish horror can be read as an attempt to create a hauntological reflection on the liminal status of vampires in postmodern fiction or even more general meditation on the spectral status of modern audiovisual media.

**Keywords:** Swedish cinema, horror, vampires, hauntology, parabasis.