
Losing Heroes and Heroic Losers. Precarity, Class, and Space in Contemporary Scandinavian Young Adult Fiction.

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Résumé

Ever since the ‘Jantelov’ was famously proclaimed in Aksel Sandemose’s *En flygkting krysser sitt spor* (1933), the Scandinavian societies seem to have adapted a new moral and behavioural code of conduct. This catalogue of rules emphasises the role of the individual within society and ostracises noncompliance, even if only socially and not by law. Hence hero figures have a complicated standing in the Nordic countries, as their transgressive behaviour and ethical and physical superiority result in exceptionality that protrudes beyond the egalitarian average norm. This peculiar attitude towards heroism continued even after the end of the Cold War and reflects in cultural products as well. Of particular interest is the handling of heroism in literature aimed at a young readership, where the protagonists are presented mainly as underdogs. These underdogs are defined by their marginalised status and are introduced as social outcasts due to circumstances beyond their own control (such as e.g. poverty, health, gender identity) – foiled against the allegedly egalitarian Scandinavian welfare societies. Authors take up this discrepancy and transfer the larger discourses into individual accounts. Reacting to the dynamics of a globalisation, the categories class and space play a significant role and are intertwined with the everyday challenges of precarity. Situated within the broader context of my PhD-project, this paper is designed as a single-case study. Its aim is to show how underdogs can capitalise on their potential between the poles of class, space and precarity and how notions of the heroic are moulded in this context on different textual levels. I will illustrate my findings on two Scandinavian Young Adult novels.

Mots-Clés: literature, young adult fiction, scandinavia, underdog, hero, heroism, welfare state, space, class, precarity, heroism, heroisation

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