The Child, Affective Memories of War, and Cruel Everyday in Nordic and Baltic Film and Literature


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This dissertation offers a comparative study of the literature and cinema of Nordic and Baltic countries, with the specific focus on the idea, representation, and construction of 'the child' in the intersection of World War II memories and the post-war everyday. My analysis explores the ways in which the traumatic memories are affecting the emotional histories and communities in the Nordic and Baltic spaces (with a focus on Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia). I argue that the figures of children in the narratives (such as, Susanna Alakoski's novel Svinalängorna, Sofi Oksanen's novel Stalin's Cows, Sulev Keedus' film Georgica, Viivi Luik's novel Seventh Spring of Peace, and Klaus Härö's films Mother of Mine and Fencer) analyzed here illuminate unique complexities in the collective memories, emotional histories of nations and generational remembering in the Nordic-Baltic region. These depictions of children also challenge some of the promises and expectations for a certain future or past that the images of children have often been invested with in national and familial narratives.

Engaging with memory, affect and queer childhood studies, this project incorporates close-readings and analyses of the literature and films. The combination of these theoretical frameworks, allows me to argue for some of the limitations of concepts, such as Marianne Hirsch's 'postmemory,' or Deleuze's 'time-image' when looked at in a different cultural context than the one that they were coined in. At the same time, I offer a reading of literature and cinema that is impacted by both Western and Eastern European narratives of collective memory regarding World War II, Soviet and Nazi occupations. The contribution of this project and its approach is that it makes visible connections and dialogues between dominant and silenced collective memories and emotions within the Nordic-Baltic region. For example, I argue that some of these texts illuminate the connections between emotional memories of war and the cruel everyday struggles caused by injustice based on class, gender and ethnicity in the experiences of what I call proximate migration. My analyses argue also for a new way of looking at the Nordic-Baltic region as a whole. This dissertation is a contribution to post-World War II literary and cinematic studies, memory studies, Scandinavian, and Baltic studies.