Revenge of the Trolls
Norwegian (Post) Colonial Gothic

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ABSTRACT
Recent studies by Naum and Nordin, Fur, and Keskinen et al. suggest that the Nordic nations participated in the pan-European colonial project of the nineteenth century and that they also pursued an internal colonial project through the invasion of Sápmi. This realization constitutes a vantage point from which Nordic culture can be revisited and re-examined as (post)colonial. With this in mind, the article examines how the Norwegian films Troll Hunter (2010) and Thale (2012) engage with the repressed history of Nordic colonialism. Like many other Gothic films that discuss colonial matters, they are ambivalent, concurrently supporting and disturbing the imperial notions that they bring to the surface. Particular attention is devoted to how the films situate modernity in relation to a metaphorical indigeneity that they imagine as both attractive and abject, and to how they visualize categories of gender and race in relation to this indigeneity.

SAMMANFATTNING
Nya studier av Naum och Nordin, Fur, och Keskinen et al. visar att de nordiska nationerna aktivt deltog i det pan-Europeiska koloniala projektet under artonhundratalet, och att de även utförde interna koloniala projekt genom invasionen och koloniseringen Sápmi. Denna insikt är en utgångspunkt för nya undersökningar av den nordiska kulturen som (post)kolonial. Med detta i åtanke studerar denna artikel hur de norska filmerna Trolljegeren (2010) och Thale (2012) tar sig an den nordiska kolonialismens undertryckta histo-
ria. Liksom många andra gotiska filmer som diskuterar det koloniala, är dessa filmer ambivalenta och både stöder och oroar de imperialistiska förtecken de lyfter fram i ljuset. Särskild vikt läggs vid hur filmerna positionerar modernitet i relation till en metaforisk ursprunglighet som de beskriver som samtidigt attraktiv och frånstötande, och hur de visualiserar genus och ras i förhållande till denna ursprunglighet.

Keywords
Gothic Film, Postcolonialism, Imperialism, Nordic Culture, Norwegian Film

Nyckelord
gotisk film, postkolonialism, imperialism, nordisk kultur, norsk film

The low-budget Norwegian mock-documentary horror film *Trolljegeren* (*Troll Hunter*, 2010) by Andre Øvrelid tells the story of the troll hunter Hans, played by famed comedian Otto Jespersen. Hans is the only operative of the secretive TST (Troll Security Team/Trollsikkerhetstjensten), a fictive branch of the Norwegian government; at the beginning of the film, he has been tracked down by media students from Volda University College. They watch in awe as Hans hunts and kills a series of gigantic trolls modelled on Norwegian artist Theodore Kittelsen’s seminal troll artwork from the turn of the last century. The trolls are normally contained in reservations in the Norwegian wilderness, enclosed by enormous electric fences disguised as high-voltage power lines. It is when trolls stray from their reservations that Hans must hunt and destroy them to keep them from killing people and livestock. However, Hans has also exterminated troll populations that stand in the way of the Norwegian state’s expansion. In a crucial scene towards the end of the movie, Hans tells the media students how he was forced by the government to eradicate a large group of trolls inhabiting a reservation:

There was a mountain troll territory up in Strynefjell. Back in the 70s they decided to build tunnels through that troll-rich area. Both the TST and I tried to object, but to no avail. I was given the task of going in and exterminating all the trolls. Every last one. Pregnant females. Kids. Newborns that hadn’t even learned to walk ... It was a massacre.

This is an emotional moment in the film. The self-assured and unsentimental Hans is visibly disturbed by the memory. He looks away from the camera, ashamed of and appalled by what he agreed to do. In one of few scholarly studies of the film, Ellen Rees (2011) has commented on the sequence, arguing that:

The way he [Hans] describes this mass killing creates an associative link to war traumas such as the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. The feelings of guilt that Hans experiences become associatively equated in the viewer’s mind with any number of Vietnam war movies in which the line between good and evil is blurred, and in which Western ethics are questioned and government-sanctioned exploitation exposed. (55)

Certainly, Rees is right in arguing that the scene questions Western ethics and seeks to expose government-sanctioned exploitation. However, to locate the focus of the critique
that the film seemingly launches to the Vietnam War of the 1960s and 1970s is distracting rather than enlightening. There is no need to avert attention from the specifically Nordic historical context to make sense of Hans’ shame and guilt. As Yvonne Leffler (2009) has argued, Scandinavian horror is “frequently concerned with evoking a collective trauma bound to a common Scandinavian past” (146). To Leffler, this trauma is linked to a general fear of losing control of the natural landscape and terror at the thought that a repressed pagan past might, in Gothic fashion, reassert itself. Indeed, it makes more sense to understand the horror that haunts Troll Hunter as related to a common Scandinavian past, rather than to US aggression in Asia. At the same time, what worries Hans in the sequence above is not the Scandinavian pagan past. Although his job in the film is to suppress this very past as it is manifested in the trolls, the horror he recounts in this particular scene is the Norwegian state’s ruthless extermination of the trolls and the past they represent. In other words, what constitutes horror here is the material and epistemic violence that the modern Scandinavian states used to take control of this northern region. This turns the focus away from what Rees describes as the “government-sanctioned exploitation” of Asia, towards the Norwegian state’s exploitation of the Nordic North; the territory termed Sápmi by the indigenous population. Thus, what Troll Hunter ultimately interrogates can be described as Norwegian or Nordic colonialism.

Troll Hunter is part of a current trend of troll fiction in Nordic Gothic literature and film. In Sweden, it is exemplified by novels such as Stallo (2012) by Stefan Spjut, by John Ajvide Lindkvist’s short story “Border” (“Gräns” 2006, trans 2012), and by films such as Vittra (2012), Utburd (2014), Marianne (2011), and Huldra. Lady of the Forest (2016). In Finland, the movie Rare Exports (2010) and novels such as Troll. A Love Story by Johanna Sinisalo (Ennen Päivänlaskua Ei Voi, 2000, trans 2004) testify to similar concerns. This article will focus on Troll Hunter and on Norwegian director Aleksander L. Nordaas’s Thale (2012), which, like the examples from Sweden and Finland, depict how Nordic settler modernity collides with an indigenous population in the shape of monsters that belong to folk mythology. The confrontation of the settler modernity with a monstrous and metaphorical indigeneity may appear strange when it occurs in a Nordic setting. Indeed (and this is perhaps why Rees imagines that Troll Hunter speaks about Vietnam) the Nordic nations have rarely been perceived as having anything to do with colonialism. While the colonial projects of Britain, France and Spain have earned significant scholarly attention, research on the Nordic nations has rarely explored the ways in which these nations exploited the global North. There are a few exceptional works from the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, including important publications by Gutorm Gjessing, Magnus Mörner, Birgitta Jareskog and Gunlög Fur, that do describe the incursion into northern Scandinavia as a form of colonialism, and which compare this effort to other colonial ventures by European states. These texts are provoking and ground-breaking, but their understanding of Nordic history in relation to colonialism was not taken up by mainstream historiography at the time.¹

With the beginning of the new millennium, this has begun to change. The publication of Hans Hauge’s “Imperiet svarer også i Norden. Norientalisme eller nordisk postkolonialisme?” (2001) has been followed by a number of studies that argue that the Nordic region did have, and to some extent still has, a strong connection to the pan-European colonial project. These include, but are not limited to, Eddie Donaghue’s critical investigation of
Danish colonialism in *Black Women/White Men. The Sexual Exploitation of Female Slaves in the Danish West Indies* (2006), and *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity. Small Time Agents in a Global Arena* (2013), where Magdalena Naum and Jonas Nordin have collected contributions that discuss how the Nordic region took part in a number of essentially imperial enterprises. Similarly, in *Colonialism in the Margins. Cultural Encounters in New Sweden and Lapland* (2006), Gunlög Fur places Swedish colonialism in the New World and in Sápmi alongside that of other European nations, arguing that while these colonial efforts were less prolific than those undertaken by the British or the French empires, they were conducted for the same reasons and produced similar results. Even when the Nordic states did not actively participate in the European colonial project, they still need to be understood, as argued by Suvi Keskinen et al in *Complying with Colonialism. Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region* (2009), as complicit in this project. Finally, just like the pan-European project, the Nordic colonial project was accompanied by the “reproduction and production of ideologies of race, difference and rights to conquer and subjugate” (Naum and Nordin, 4).

This colonial history and these colonial attitudes are still a part of the Nordic community. Mia Palmberg (2009) has argued that these histories and mindsets have produced what she terms a “Nordic colonial mind” (35) that exhibits the same racial prejudices as were prevalent in the rest of colonial Europe. This colonial mind is still in evidence, and still informs the ways in which the Nordic region understands its relationship to the rest of the world, and to its own intercultural society. Similarly, Keskinen et al and Kristín Loftsdottir and Lars Jensen have argued that the notions of whiteness and masculinity that structured the colonial project have continued to inform Nordic society. They exist today as a form of “residue from the colonial period [and] become recreated or projected onto different groups in the contemporary Nordic countries” (Loftsdottir and Jensen 2012, 2).

The existence of past and present Nordic colonialisms, and of a set of discourses connected to this colonialism, constitutes the vantage point for the study of *Troll Hunter* and *Thale* that this article undertakes. The aim is to identify and contextualize these films’ sometimes explicit and sometimes furtive engagement with the repressed history of Nordic colonialism and with the discourses that legitimized this history. Like much other Gothic film and literature that discusses colonial matters, the films are ambivalent and, as this article claims, concurrently support and disturb the imperial notions that they bring to the surface. Particular attention will be devoted to how the films situate modernity in relation to a metaphorical indigeneity that they imagine as, at the same time, attractive and abject. The article will also be attentive to how the films visualize categories of gender and race in relation to specifically Nordic colonial material and discursive contexts.

In terms of structure, this article will first briefly account for how the relationship between Gothic, empire and colonialism has been mapped in the study of Anglo Gothic lit-

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erature and film. A discussion on the Nordic region and Sápmi as in itself a colonial territory, follows. In relation to this, the article will consider the prominence of racial ideologies and practices such as eugenics in the Nordic region as they take form in these two films.

THE GOTHIC, COLONIALISM, AND THE NORDIC REGION

Anglo Gothic has been widely recognized as intimately related to colonialism and imperialism. In fact, the Gothic has been conceived of as a reaction to colonialism, imperialism and modernity.\(^2\) In other words, the Gothic novel became a way to critique the commodification of humanity and territory that enabled large-scale colonisation during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the same time, as noted by Andrew Smith and William Hughes in *Empire and the Gothic* (2002) “the early Gothic incorporated within its anti-Enlightenment fervour a set of complex views on the East, although often in order to consolidate rather than to question the kind of Orientalism identified by Edward Said” (3). Indeed, as argued by Patrick Brantlinger in *Rule of Darkness. British Literature and Imperialism* (1988), the Gothic is sometimes “imperial” and supports the very categories that anti-Enlightenment Gothic arguably seeks to challenge (227).

If significant scholarly attention has been given to how Anglo Gothic literature and film negotiate these two positions, Nordic Gothic has rarely been perceived as having anything to say about matters of colonialism and empire. The recent sociological and historical studies mentioned above make possible a reconsideration of Nordic Gothic in relation to colonial and postcolonial issues. In particular, the Nordic participation in European colonialism includes the New Sweden colony that Fur discusses, which was founded in 1638 in the Delaware region. Sweden furthermore took possession of the Caribbean island of St. Barthélemy in 1784 with the intention of turning it into a hub for the slave trade. However, this colonial dominion pales in comparison to the Danish empire, which had colonial possessions in Greenland, India, the Gold Coast (coastal Ghana), and the islands of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix in the Caribbean (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012, 3). Also, and more importantly for this article, Norway, Sweden and Finland’s relationship to what they claimed as their own northern territory, inhabited by the Saami and referred to as Sápmi, exhibits many of the material practices and Orientalist attitudes that characterize colonialism in other parts of the world.\(^3\) In addition to very straightforward colonial efforts, the Nordic countries clearly imagined themselves as Western and European and identified with colonisation even when not actively participating in it. As Keskinen et al observe, colonialism in its material and ideological forms easily takes hold among all who identify with the ideological stakes identified by the coloniser:

The lure of an enterprise as powerful and authoritative as the Western civilising project, attracts even those who never belonged to its centre or were its main agents. Nations, groups and individual

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2. These processes are seen as intrinsically linked by scholars such as Walter Mignolo in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (2011) and Gurminder Bhambra in *Rethinking Modernity. Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* (2009).

subjects are drawn by the promise of power to adopt the discourses, imaginaries and material benefits connected to this project. The Nordic countries see themselves as part of the Western world, drawing their value systems from the Enlightenment, and showing themselves to be willing to defend these values sometimes even more forcefully than the former colonial centres (2009, 1).

The history of the Nordic nations and their relationship to colonial and postcolonial developments deserve far more attention than I can give it here. However, it should be clear that the Nordic nations do not exist, nor did they ever exist, outside the remit of the colonial project. The Nordic nations participated in the colonial project as slave traders in the Caribbean, as suppliers of administrators and engineers who helped further the colonial projects of other nations, as co-producers of the racial and sexual models that justified colonialism, and as colonisers in Africa, the New World, Asia and the Scandinavian north.

As this article attempts to illustrate, Troll Hunter and Thale make the most sense when read in relation to this complex colonial matrix. The films focus on the confrontation between the modern nation state and forest-dwelling Gothic creatures belonging to Nordic folklore. These films thus contrast the forested wilderness with the demands and desires of the modern Nordic state.

TROLL HUNTER AND THE SAAMI

Troll Hunter takes place almost exclusively outside modern, urban Norway. Most scenes are located in a forested, mountainous wilderness that seems untouched by civilisation, on the narrow roads that traverse this wilderness, or in liminal spaces where small communities of distinctly Norwegian people shelter in close proximity to the wilderness.

This is a common locale for Nordic Gothic. Leffler (2009) has argued that in:

most Scandinavian horror novels and films […] the mazy architecture of the Gothic building, the labyrinthine city or the haunted house, is replaced by a boundless, uncontrollable and wild Nordic landscape. The protagonist is not as much threatened by a distinct monster as by an undefined ever-present force connected to the wilderness. The scenery is not mainly, as in most Gothic fiction, an emotionally coloured landscape, that expresses the emotional state of the main characters or the narrator. Instead it is the generating locus of action or an acting character in the story. It has a life of its own and acts as an alien force or organism, threatening the protagonist (142).

This is generally true also of Troll Hunter and Thale. Both films turn the wilderness into a labyrinthine, Gothic space that is, at the same time, Gothic agent and the site of Gothic crisis. While both films do feature very distinct monsters, these are arguably so much a part of the landscape, so indigenous to it, that they seamlessly blend into and emerge out of it.

In Troll Hunter, this indigenous population obviously consists of monstrous, primitive and supernaturally ugly trolls who can smell the blood of a Christian (much to the detriment of the team’s secretly Christian camera man). The most important of the weapons that the troll hunter Hans wields in his constant struggle against the trolls are gigantic UV lamps that either make the trolls turn to stone (“calcify” them) or cause them to explode. This is consistent with most troll mythology, suggesting that trolls are, in fact, allergic to enlightenment.
Considerable effort has gone into creating trolls that look very much like the creatures of Kittelsen’s imagination. At the same time, these monstrous creatures, as well as the locations they inhabit, are always also metaphorical. One can understand this metaphorical dimension as a Gothic representation of the embattled ecosystem, or as the problematic Other of late-modern society in a general sense. A complementary, rather than contrastive, reading of these monsters, made possible by the postcolonial perspective I have argued for, considers in particular the colonial endeavours of the Nordic states and the situation of the Saami. In the long history of the often unspoken Nordic imperialism, the colonisation of Sápmi forms one crucial centre. This colonisation can be traced as far back as the eleventh century, when the Saami were taxed by traders known as “birkakarlar”. This move by early Nordic proto-nations into Sápmi was intensified with Norwegian settlement on the coast of Finnmark, general Christian missionary efforts, and the opening up of mines in northern Scandinavia during the sixteenth century. This bid for control of the Scandinavian north was further strengthened in the mid-eighteenth century when the Lapland Regulation was passed. This regulation enabled the formal colonization of land by the Swedish government which, at the time, commanded most of the Nordic region (Lindmark 2013, 132). Since this regulation Sápmi has been “measured, surveyed and mapped, divided into provinces, parishes and tax land’ by Sweden and other Nordic states (Lindmark 2013, 133).

This process went hand in hand with the domestication of the Saami themselves. As observed by Lindmark (2013), there were civilising “efforts of Lutheran missionaries and school masters aimed at reforming the minds and bodies of the students and creating obedient subjects” (133). As will be discussed in more detail below, the effort to Christianise and civilise the Saami made this group of people an object of study in the North. The Saami were measured and defined by a number of Nordic scientists on Linnaeus’s trip to Sápmi in 1732, as one of the first attempts to formally explore and map this population.

As the Saami were increasingly perceived of as an indigenous culture separate from Swedish society, they began to figure in Swedish folk narratives and literature. As argued by Jørn Sandnes, trolls and other mythological creatures were frequently conflated with the Saami (1965, 222–223). Also, the Saami were assumed to conduct “trollmesser” (religious troll services) to counter the influence of Christian missionaries in Sápmi (Bergsland 1995). Furthermore, as Hermann Pálsson observes in Ramasta-Sagaene (2002), a person with a Norwegian father and a Saami mother was given the additional surname “halvtroll” (half-troll). Certainly, the troll’s endemic dislike for Christianity speaks both about the Christian mission in Sápmi and about the reluctance of the Saami to embrace this religion.

That the Saami should be cast as Gothic beings by storytellers and writers in the Nordic nations is not strange. The same transformation of the colonized into Gothic Other has occurred numerous times in other national or regional Gothic cultures. In the British colonies in North America, and then in the early US, NativeAmericans were cast as devil worshipping fiends and in the Imperial Gothic of the late-Victorian era, the colonial Other is cast as vampire (in Stoker’s Dracula (1897)) or as transgressive Egyptian warlock (in Richard Marsh’s The Beetle (1897)). Considering the fact that American history records an almost constant conflict between indigenous populations and the imperial ambitions of the US, and that Britain was perhaps the most eager colonialist of the nineteenth century,
it is certainly not strange that the colonial subaltern appears as Gothic Other in the literature of these nations.

As argued, it is only surprising that modern Nordic horror film should be involved in a similar project if one ignores the long history of Nordic colonialism. The Scandinavian north is rich in natural resources in the form of minerals, precious metals, and forests. It is home to large rivers that can be used for hydro-electric industries. The distance between the far north and the more densely populated regions of Southern Scandinavia has also encouraged the creation of dumping sites for mining and nuclear waste in the north. At present, there is mining prospecting in Sápmi in both Norway (in Nussir) and Sweden (in Kallak). *Troll Hunter* thus appears both in the wake of a new writing of Nordic history that stresses the colonial nature of much state intervention in northern Scandinavia, and in connection to the current and on-going exploitation of Sápmi.

When the troll hunter Hans recalls how he had to exterminate an entire troll population in Strynefjell to make way for the tunnels that symbolize the progress of the modern Nordic state, this seems to be a direct and very critical reference to the relationship between the Saami and the modern state. The sequence invites an understanding of the trolls as Saami and also suggests that the modern Nordic state has been involved in a very traditional form of colonialism, prepared to exterminate, literally or metaphorically, the indigenous elements that stand in the way of modernity. The 1970s that Hans discusses was indeed a period when the Norwegian state did move into Sápmi on a large scale. What became known as the Alta conflict is particularly relevant here. In the late seventies, the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate put plans in motion for the construction of a hydroelectric powerplant that would flood a Saami village and destroy their local fishing and grazing grounds. The Saami protested and many non-Saami Norwegians joined in. A significant percentage of the Norwegian police were occupied with pacifying and arresting protesters (see Minde 2008, 67, and Hjorthol 2006). In the end, the dam was built, further broadening the rift between the Saami population and the Norwegian government.

In this light, *Troll Hunter* operates as a form of anti-enlightenment Gothic that identifies and interrogates the brutality of colonisation as part of modernity. The Gothic thus makes possible a metaphorical discussion of colonial practice in Norway. The massacre of trolls in Strynefjell may not mirror an identical genocide of the Saami, but the event does bring the massive epistemic and material violence that the modern state practiced, and still practices, to the surface. Similarly, Hans appears as an agent of empire: a scarred soldier in the service of a welfare state that protects the well-being of only some of those who inhabit its official borders.

At the same time, casting the Saami as trolls also complicates this historical connection. As the Saami enter the discussion on colonialism and genocide in the Scandinavian north, the monstrosity of the troll invades representations of the Saami. While the trolls of *Troll Hunter* clearly represent a poorly treated indigenous population, they are also primitive, violent and, notably, hypermasculine. Although there are obviously troll women and troll children in the universe of *Troll Hunter*, the trolls that appear on screen are overwhelmingly male. Their stature, dress and aggressive behaviour are emblematic of the masculine, and Hans refers to them as male. Because of their uncontrollable masculinity, and their monstrous and abject natures, the trolls do in fact demand the military attention of the...
state. The audience can see that it is necessary to try to contain them. Like the violent and unruly Indians of North American pioneer discourse, they belong on reservations. Thus, the representation of the Saami as trolls can be understood as a way to contain them even as the colonial nature of their history is made visible.

THALE AND EUGENICS

If the trolls of Troll Hunter are predominantly male, triggering a contest of masculinity between the trolls and the state agent Hans, the mythological creatures that appear in Thale seem to belong exclusively to the female sex. Thale takes place in a secluded cabin located by a lake in a dark green forest. Although seemingly just as removed from urban civilisation as the settings of Troll Hunter, this forest is less arid and inhospitable. In the cabin, two male cleaners are scrubbing the putrefied remains of a long-dead man from the floor. The work is nauseating and one of the men begins to explore the premises. In the woodshed, he finds a concealed entrance to a number of underground rooms that contain a terribly dirty laboratory with a bathtub filled with a milky substance, an ominous looking freezer, a tape recorder and a comfortable, if stained, bedroom. Suddenly, a young, beautiful and naked woman leaps from the tub, pulling plastic tubing from her throat. She attacks one of the cleaners but is pacified by the offer of a coat and some decade old canned meat. In the company of the voracious but stubbornly silent young woman, the two cleaners begin to piece together her story with the help of the audio diary kept by her now deceased keeper on the tape recorder. Speaking in Swedish he tells the story of a girl from another species taken from her natural habitat and experimented on. A great scar on the woman’s lower back and a cut-off tail in a freezer suggests to the audience that the woman belongs to the mythological hulder, a being whose feminine beauty is marred by a cow tail or, in some versions, by a hollowed-out back.

In Nordic mythology, the hulder is a female, hybrid, forest-dwelling creature that seeks to tempt those men who inhabit the border that separates human society from the forested wilderness that it infringes on. The hulder looks human, may sometimes dress in human clothing, and can even have intercourse and live for long periods of time with human men, but, as described above, she has a tail or a hollowed-out back, associating her with the animal kingdom or with the trees of the forest. Those who follow her into the forest, or who invite her into their houses, risk coming under her spell. To do so is perhaps best understood as a Scandinavian version of going native, where the hulder, the wilderness and indigeneity to which she belongs, represent an existence other than that condoned by the modern state.

Unlike the troll, the hulder is an attractive being. Like the trolls, though, she can be malignant and she does not belong to the human species. In one of the few studies of Thale, Tonje Skar Reiersen (2012) observes that the huldres exist at:

the intersection of nature and culture, they represent both freedom and fate. They are the abject, in Julia Kristeva’s terminology, the disruptive, the unclassifiables who frighten and fascinate with their otherness. In the book Powers of Horror, Kristeva describes the abject as that which destabi-
This is a useful understanding of the hulder, but it should also be observed that the qualities attributed to the hulder are the same as those assigned to many indigenous cultures, especially as encountered in the contact zones that appeared as indigenous populations and settlers interacted. Because of her animal nature combined with her human form and ability to interact with humans, the hulder can be understood as an alternative Gothic version of the indigenous Other. At once part of the forest and the category of human who inhabits the forest, the hulder constitutes the kind of ontological and epistemological challenge that indigenous populations presented settler cultures with.

To this should be added that whereas the masculinity of the troll in Troll Hunter sets the stage for the performative spectacle of masculine/colonial violence, the apparent femininity of the hulder instead creates a strong connection between sexuality and colonial conquest. As Sara Suleri (1992) has observed, the feminization of the subaltern is one of the most persistent strategies employed in colonial discourse. When the settler culture is imagined as male and the colony and its inhabitants cast as feminine, the meeting between the two turns into a ritual of love, an exchange of purposeful attraction, rather than the invasion and exploitation of territory and people. Thus, Thale connects the hulder’s beautiful and persistently naked body with the forest she inhabits. To desire Thale’s attractive and feminine form is to desire also the forested landscape from which she has come and with which she is intimately associated. The audience is made complicit in this desire, but it is primarily acted on by the men that seek to possess and control Thale in the film.

The central character here is Thale’s now deceased keeper. The tapes reveal that he first took her from the forest when she was a baby and, as the member of a military science outfit, imprisoned and experimented on her. Then, saddened by the violence committed upon her, and the tests she was subjected to, he freed her and escaped with her into the forest. In addition to this, the keeper has also tried to keep her separate from members of her own wild species that have been calling to her, wanting her to join them in the forest. Although the keeper has named her Thale and treated her with kindness, he has evidently continued his experiments and seemingly attempted to transform her into something resembling a human being. As Reiersen observes, Thale’s keeper has moulded the hulder in his own human image, the cutting off of her tail a form of castration that leaves a scar “like a bloody vagina”. This attempt to tame her animal impulses “has not been committed out of evil, but out of consideration. A consideration that can only occur when you think your race is

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5. See Mary Louise Pratt’s Imperial Eyes. Travel Narrative and Transculturation (1992).
above another, when you think that you know better what those who remain under you on the ladder need.”

In other words, the unnamed keeper has first removed the infant Thale from her parents, and then attempted to transform her body into something he imagines as more human. Both these operations resonate powerfully with practices common in colonial settler environments. In Australia, the forced adoption by white families of aboriginal children began in the early 1900s and did not cease until the 1970s. The same practice informed relations between the Saami and the Nordic states (Goodall 2006). The logic of this practice was that by removing the child from the harmful influence of the indigenous parent, and by placing the child in the care of the western state or in western families, the child could be weaned from its presumably harmful indigenous customs. A problem, however, was that indigenous children were also assumed to harbour a genetic indigenous nature. The indigenous rested thus not only in culture, but also in the biology of people. This type of racialised thinking became, as Philippa Levine (2010) is one of many to have observed, a pillar of the colonial ideological system. As cultural differences were increasingly reduced to automatic, racial behaviour in the late nineteenth century, the Saami were seen as inherently different from the settler communities supported by the state. The body of the Saami thus transformed from potential citizen into an object for anthropological and medical study. As discussed by Roger Kvist (1994), the Saami were rarely seen as political subjects after 1847. Instead, they were classified according to an increasingly pervasive racial order, which in the late nineteenth century was organized into a system named eugenics by its founder Francis Galton. This pseudo-science soon spread across Europe and the US, and it was enthusiastically practiced in Scandinavia well into the 1960s. The relationship between Thale and her Swedish keeper is obviously informed by these colonial practices and notions. Her keeper’s attempt to change her body, to strip her of her non-human attributes, is best understood as a form of drastic and direct eugenics.

Now that the keeper is dead and Thale liberated, she is free to escape into the forest. However, one of the cleaners has made the mistake of calling his employers to explain what they have found, setting the military outfit that once imprisoned Thale on their tracks. This outfit also wants her, not because of her feminine beauty, but because of the peculiar powers she apparently possesses; her native strength and her ability to heal organic material. Dressed in white hazmat suits and carrying machine guns, they sedate the cleaners with a sleeping gas and then proceed to interrogate them hooded and strapped to chairs in images reminiscent of Iraq and Abu Ghraib, despite the verdant forest setting. When the interro-

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7. Charles Darwin’s cousin Francis Galton, deeply impressed by Darwin’s The Origin of Species (1859), founded the discipline of Eugenics in the early 1880s. This discipline proposed that humankind could actively control what Darwin described as natural selection. By encouraging certain especially valuable members of society to procreate, and by discouraging or preventing less fruitful members from the same, society would be improved. Eugenics quickly gained traction across Europe and several centres were established in Scandinavian nations (see Gunnar Broberg and Nils Roll-Hansen (1996) for a discussion on Eugenics and the Scandinavian welfare states). Eugenics also formed the foundation for the program of racial hygiene launched by Nazi Germany.
gation goes nowhere, the officer in charge decides to kill the two men. He is only prevented from doing so by sounds of gunfire from the cabin. Thale, again hiding in the bathtub, has begun dispatching the soldiers with supernatural strength. She has also attracted other members of her species. These computer-animated creatures are far more animal-like than Thale, but like her, they all seem unmistakably female. Somehow sensing the good intentions of the two cleaners, they kill the military personnel but leave the hooded cleaners alone. In a final parting gift, Thale heals one of the cleaners who suffers from lung cancer. Then, with a smile and a wink towards the camera, she disappears among the trees.

**THALE, TROLL HUNTER AND NEW NORDIC (POST) COLONIAL GOTHIC**

As mentioned, Gothic scholars such as Smith and Hughes have contended that Gothic narratives often pair anti-enlightenment fervour with Orientalist tropes. In this way, they argue, one “of the defining ambivalences of the Gothic is that its labelling of otherness is often employed in the service of supporting, rather than questioning, the status quo. This is perhaps the central complexity of the form because it debates the existence of otherness and alterity, often in order to demonize such otherness” (Smith and Hughes 2003, 3). Thus, many Gothic narratives can be seen concurrently to critique and endorse the colonial enterprise. As modern Gothic, *Troll Hunter* and *Thale* are similarly torn between the colonial and the postcolonial, but their positions are not exactly the same.

Building on Brantlinger’s concept of “the Imperial Gothic”, I have suggested that there is a marked difference between the traditional anti-enlightenment Gothic of the late eighteenth century and the imperial Gothic as it appears in the US and in Britain during the late nineteenth century (Höglund 2014). While both the traditional and the imperial Gothic accommodate orientalist themes and images, these tend to be much more prominent in the imperial version. In addition, the imperial Gothic often favours what I have termed “the military solution”. Here, the Gothic threat is routinely managed with the help of modern guns. From the Indian Wars of Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* (1799), via the monster movies of the 1950s to the modern *Alien* films, the gun has become an increasingly common and universal tool with which to address the Gothic Other. In these narratives, the threat that the Gothic Other constitutes can only be brought under control with the help of modern tools of violence.

Looking at *Troll Hunter*, the military solution is still in effect here. The trolls may be an indigenous population, but their monstrous and aggressive natures make confinement and – should they escape – violence the only means by which to manage them. Indeed, they have to be managed. There is no language other than violence with which to speak to them. The anti-heroic protagonist Hans is furthermore the agent of this violence and, while the story is told through the perspective of the bewildered media students, we are made to identify also with Hans. We understand that the violence he practices is necessary.

By contrast, *Thale* describes the military solution as destructive and inherently incapable of resolving the Gothic crisis of the film. When the faceless soldiers enter the cabin where the hulder is hiding, the audience is encouraged to root for Thale. When she rises from the bathtub in which she has again hidden and, in slow motion, snaps the neck of the nearest soldier, this is a moment of triumph. In the confrontation between the forest-dwell-
ing, Gothic other and modernity in the shape of armed scientist soldiers, the audience is meant to understand that the modern welfare state is just as infected by eugenic theory and militarism as the European empires of the nineteenth century.

At the same time, even *Thale* represents the northern forest and its inhabitants as inherently abject Others. The audience may be rooting for the suddenly combative Thale, but she, and the territory and indigeneity she represents, remains fundamentally Other. She belongs, like the trolls, not simply to a different race, or to a repressed pagan past, but to a different *species*. While *Thale* seeks to counter racist attitudes and the colonial and eugenic practices that racism legitimized, and that legitimized racism itself, this fact still enables an understanding of difference as racially based. In “The Nordic Colonial Mind”, Palmberg accounts for a series of old and new prejudices regarding Africa that she has identified in Swedish textbooks for the secondary school. The first and most problematic of the old prejudices is biological racism: “the pseudo-scientific classification on biological grounds into peoples of ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ races” (2009, 38). When Palmberg turns to present-day Swedish textbooks, she finds evidence of all the former racist discourses with the exception of what she terms “biological racism”. This, she argues, seems to have disappeared.

Biological racism may have been largely eradicated from Swedish textbooks and from legitimate political discourse but it cannot be argued that it has actually disappeared. In the wake of the resurgence of nationalist political parties such as Sverigedemokraterna in Sweden, Sannfinländarna in Finland and Dansk folkeparti in Denmark, biological racism is again being recruited in the interest of fortifying the borders between the imagined Nordic and its Others. To return to *Troll Hunter* and *Thale*, the most common arena for disseminating notions of race is arguably imperial Gothic and fantasy culture. When different peoples are given metaphorical shape as different races, even as different *species* – which is something that occurs in countless widely popular cinematic narratives, including *King Kong*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Species* and the *Alien* franchise – the metaphorical guise renders biological racism unproblematic. Thus, when the indigenous subaltern is cast as an abject and potentially aggressive forest creature, the racist and sexist models from the colonial era once again become operative.

*Troll Hunter* and *Thale* both try to complicate the notion that the Gothic/racial other can be massacred with impunity; that genocide is a legitimate solution to Gothic crisis. Even when the Gothic other is as aggressive and predatory as the trolls of *Troll Hunter*, the wholesale massacre of entire families is perceived as monstrous. At the same time, *Troll Hunter* and *Thale* cannot help but to erect new racial borders between the Other and the Nordic/Western self.

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8. Indeed, Palmberg recognises that crude racial descriptions may “continue to have a life as undergrowth away from the light” (39).
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