
THE GHOST WHO WALKS GOES NORTH:
EARLY MODERN SWEDEN IN *THE*
PHANTOM, 1987–2008

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since its first appearance in 1950, the Swedish edition of Lee Falk's *The Phantom* (Swe. *Fantomen*) has been one of the most popular comic magazines in Sweden. The size of the print run reached its peak in the 1970s and 1980s, and each issue today is printed in 22,000 copies, with an estimated 71,000 readers. It is primarily read by male readers (60–80%) between the ages of 12 and 50.¹

Some of the most active contributors to *Fantomen* in recent decades have been the Swedish and Nordic comics creators who make up the so-called “Team Fantomen” (including editor and writer Ulf Granberg, writers Janne Lundström, Lennart Moberg, and Claes Reimerthi, and artists Kari Leppänen and Hans Lindahl). Characteristic for “Team Fantomen” is their many historical stories. Since the key concept of the Phantom legend is that the role of the Phantom has been inherited in the Walker family since the mid-16th century, history holds a central place in *Fantomen*'s world. Numerous adventures situate the Phantom in a well-known historical context, where he meets famous figures such as rulers, scientists, writers, and criminals. As a result, many *Fantomen*-readers have acknowledged the importance the comic has had for their interest in history. The perhaps most well-known professional historian in Sweden today, Dick Harrison, has pointed out that the comic clearly reflects values typical for its own time, suggesting that it would be possible to write a modern history of mentalities based on *Fantomen*.²

The present article, however, is not a history of mentalities. Rather, its approach is that of historiography, cultural memory, and the uses of history. This article is about *Fantomen*'s depiction of early modern Swedish history, or, to be more precise, of the 17th and 18th centuries. The aim of the article is to analyze how this period is represented in nine issues of *Fantomen* from 1987 to 2008, and to relate this to general and recent trends in Swedish historiography. How are rulers, wars, religious beliefs, and well known events depicted in *Fantomen*? How does fiction relate to facts? How are language and images used to create an historical atmosphere?

CULTURAL MEMORY AND THE USES OF HISTORY

A basic premise of this article is that our conception of history is continuously negotiated, reshaped, and used. According to the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs' influential research

¹ According to the publisher Egmont: <http://www.annonsinfo.se/ea/upload-material/egmont.annons.upload-material.fantomen> (Accessed August 4, 2015), and *Orvesto Konsument* 2014:1 http://www.tns-sifo.se/media/512210/orvesto_konsument_2014_1_rackvidd.pdf. On Rolf Jansson, one of the initiators of *Fantomen*, see Nellinge and Strandberg, *En bra bok till Rolf*.

² In *Från lila våldnad till blågul hjälte*, 51.



in the 1920s, individual memories of history depend on social frames and are transformed into *collective memories*. That is, our understanding of the past depends on the groups and societies to which we belong. Thus, collective memories are a bridge between identity and history.³ This notion has inspired Aleida and Jan Assmann to develop the concept of *cultural memory*. The cultural memory reflects a cultural remembrance and performance of the past. Memories can be shared through, for instance, rituals and texts, and are activated through reading, writing, criticizing, appreciating, and so on.⁴ In a recent companion to cultural memory studies, cultural memory is defined as “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts.”⁵ This does not mean that history and memory are the same. In the words of the historian Jay Winter, memory is a faculty, something we live with; history is memory seen through and criticized with the aid of documents of many kinds.⁶ In the present article, writing and reading comics is recognized as acts of sharing memories, and comic magazines as documents through which these shared memories can be studied by historians.

The notion of cultural memory can be related to the Swedish historian Klas-Göran Karlsson’s typology of different *uses of history* (Swe. *historiebruk*). These are the scientific, existential, moral, ideological, political-pedagogical, commercial, and non-uses of history. They answer to different needs. The scientific use is the professional struggle to reconstruct the past. The existential use is that of collective or individual reminiscence. The moral use seeks to rediscover and rehabilitate hidden groups, people, etc. The purpose of the ideological and political-pedagogical uses is to make comparisons for present purposes. The commercial use is of particular interest in this article, since it recognizes history’s value to popular culture. The non-use of history, finally, is a deliberate forgetting of history. These uses are ideal types, and sometimes they overlap each other. Thus, Karlsson has modified his typology several times. The commercial use was made a category of its own in one version, only to be included under other uses, especially the existential use, in his latest model. Applying Karlsson’s typology helps operationalize the overarching idea of cultural memory and identify in what ways a cultural memory is activated in the *Fantomen*-stories.⁷

³ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

⁴ Assmann, “Re-Framing Memory,” 43–44, 49–50. Cultural memory studies today forms a vast field of research. See e.g. Erll and Nünning, *Cultural Memory Studies*; Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*.

⁵ Erll, “Cultural Memory Studies,” 2. A further development of the cultural memory concept is found in Karin Kukkonen’s concept of popular cultural memory, which combines social, material, and mental dimensions of reading popular material, such as comics. See Kukkonen, “Popular Cultural Memory.”

⁶ Winter, “Re-Framing Memory,” 12.

⁷ Karlsson, “Historiedidaktik,” 56–69; “Historia, historiedidaktik och historiebruk,” 70–80. The typology is applied by Ulf Zander in his dissertation on uses of and debates on Swedish history during the 20th century in Fornstora dagar. For other approaches to the uses of history, see e.g. Aronsson, “Historiekultur, politik och historievetsenskap i Norden”; *Historiebruk*; Nordbäck, “Den heliga historien”; “Kyrkohistorisk historiebruksforskning.”



The analysis consists of four parts. The first three parts are chronologically arranged analyses of values, facts, and fictions in the *Fantomen*-stories as well as in the comic books' "facts-pages." The latter, often following after the stories, are explanatory texts about important themes in the stories. Finally, I will analyze how images and language are used to create an historical atmosphere in the stories and to reproduce memory. The article ends with a short conclusion.

THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR, GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS, AND THE JESUIT ORDER

The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) is much debated in Swedish historiography. For a long time, Sweden's involvement in the war was basically regarded as a glorious struggle to save Protestantism. Out of national and religious sentiments, the Swedish cause was thought of as intertwined with the Lutheran cause. Later, other reasons for entering the war have been highlighted, such as commercial advantages or a lust for power and prestige. The devastating effect of the war on German civil society is commonly acknowledged, as are the great trials the war brought to the Swedish population through conscriptions and taxations.⁸

In the epic story "Dödens ring" ("The Ring of Death," 17+19/1998), the fourth Phantom is drawn into an attempt by the Jesuit Order to assassinate the Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus (r. 1611–1632). His involvement in this causes the Phantom to lose his ring with the skull-shaped Evil Mark, and puts him in Magdeburg in Saxony when the city was sacked by Catholic Field Marshal Tilly's forces in 1631, as well as at the battlefield of Breitenfeld the same year. In this story, the afflictions of war are clearly expressed. "On our way to the Protestant city of Magdeburg, we encountered cruel testimonies of the devastating war," the narrator-Phantom tells us, while he and his travel company pass a tree with four hanged men.⁹ Later, they walk into a village sacked by Croatian soldiers, its inhabitants lying dead and bloody with crows circling above. "This senseless war has been going on for twelve years," the Phantom says, his female travelling partner Lady Kristina adding that it is always the innocent and defenseless who suffer the most.¹⁰

⁸ Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf, Gustav II Adolf*, 327–360; Englund, *Ofredsår*; Zander, *Fornstora dagar*. The title of a new Swedish monograph on the Thirty Years' War is actually a contemporary quotation saying: "A great suffering has come upon us." (See Harrison, *Ett stort lidande*.)

⁹ All translations by the author.

¹⁰ FA 17/98, 16; FA 19/98, 18–19. The Thirty Years' War is the setting of many *Fantomen*-stories, often describing the horrors of war in a similar, but rarely as explicit way. See also FA 25/95; FA 20/98; FA 10/05. A subject which is approached with a surprisingly unaffectionate tone is the African slave trade. A few pictures in "Min swenske fiende" illustrate the inhumanity and degradation of slavery. The facts-pages, on the other hand, are dispassionate and give an informative sketch of the Swedish slave trade in Africa. FA 9/07, 12, 17, 40–41. The story and facts are written by Janne Lundström, who has also written the comic *Johan Wilde* – a devastating reckoning with the entire slave trade.



The notorious sack of the Protestant city of Magdeburg by Field Marshal Tilly's forces in 1631 is at the center of the story. "Magdeburg became a chaotic nightmare," the Phantom tells us. The pictures show civilians being killed, a church set aflame, and finally the whole town ablaze. We are also told that a similar scene has taken place before, when Tilly himself mentions the sack of the city Neubrandenburg. In a footnote, the author explains that Tilly burned Neubrandenburg and slaughtered thousands of its townspeople.¹¹

Even by Thirty Years' War standards, the sack of Magdeburg was exceedingly cruel. The event was heavily used in Protestant propaganda and became a synonym for atrocities committed in the war. Today, the sack of Magdeburg is not a commonplace in general knowledge of the Thirty Years' War. In a very accurate facts-page, the event is set in its greater context, relating it to the subsequent battles of Breitenfeld in 1631, where Gustavus Adolphus won his greatest victory, and Lützen in 1632, where he was killed.¹²

Gustavus Adolphus is described as a capable ruler, who reformed the Swedish civil service and army. Here, the traditional, basically positive, and readily recognizable conception of Gustavus Adolphus and his reign is followed, although different opinions have been voiced.¹³ This seems natural, when, in the words of Klas-Göran Karlsson's typology of the uses of history, Gustavus Adolphus is adopted in a commercial use of history.

The battle of Breitenfeld in 1631 is the climax of "Dödens ring." The battle is described with great accuracy: troop movements and deployments, battle cries and commanders, weapons and uniforms are all detailed and correct. On more than three pages the battle is depicted, until – and here we leave history as we know it – Gustavus Adolphus, shouting "God is with us! Away, thou dark vulture!" overruns a Jesuit who is trying to shoot the king with a blunderbuss loaded with the Phantom's ring.¹⁴ This scene calls for further examination.

¹¹ FA 19/98, 6, 13–14.

¹² FA 17/98, 32–33. On Magdeburg, see Ericson Wolke, Villstrand, and Larsson, *Trettioåriga kriget*, 200–225.

¹³ Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf; Gustav II Adolf*, 327–360; Zander, *Fornstora dagar*. A positive view of Gustavus Adolphus is found in the third part of popular historian Herman Lindqvist's best-selling series about the history of Sweden from the mid- to late 1990s, when several of the *Fantomen*-stories analyzed here were produced. In contrast, Gustavus Adolphus most recent biographer, Professor Sverker Oredsson, holds a much less positive and admiring view than what is usual in Swedish historiography. See Lindqvist, *När sverige blev stormakt*; Oredsson, *Gustav II Adolf*, 360–361.

¹⁴ FA 19/98, 22–26.



Figure 1. Gustavus Adolphus and Jesuit Pater Emanuel Capistrano at the battle of Breitenfeld. Leppänen, Kari, *Fantomen* nr 19: *Dödens ring* del 2, Egmont Serieförlaget AB, 1998, p. 26. © King Features Syndicate Inc./distr. Bulls/EGMONT.

The main character in “Dödens ring” is actually the fictitious Jesuit Pater Emanuel Capistrano.¹⁵ In the beginning of the story, Capistrano meets with the Superior General of “the feared Jesuit Order” in Rome. The General orders Capistrano to kill the “Antichrist from the North,” the leader of the “heretic Lutherans,” Gustavus Adolphus. In order to achieve this, Capistrano must use the Phantom’s ring, which, we are told, was originally forged from the nails used at the crucifixion of Christ.¹⁶ Capistrano’s hatred of the Lutherans is immense and personal. After the battle of Lutter am Barenberge in 1625, Protestant pikemen had carved the letters IHS on his forehead (for Iesus Hominum Salvator, found on the order’s emblem). “I have no compassion for enemies of the Holy Catholic Church,” he clearly states. Capistrano’s methods are harsh: he threatens to cut the throat of Lady Kristina if he does not get the ring, and when he gets it, he says that a promise to a heretic (that is, to the Phantom to release Lady Kristina) is not binding, leaving her at the mercy of his

¹⁵ In the history of Christianity the name Capistrano is known through the Franciscan friar Saint John of Capistrano (1386–1456), “the Soldier Priest,” patron saint of military chaplains and jurists.

¹⁶ FA 17/98, 6–9.



mercenaries. In Magdeburg, he cold-bloodedly shoots the Phantom in the head. Luckily, he is a poor shot and only slightly wounds the Phantom. Finally, on the Breitenfeld battlefield he does not manage to load his rifle in time to shoot the king, and is trampled under the king's horse.

The evil and crafty Jesuit is one of the classic stereotypes in Swedish literature. Pater Capistrano seems to be closely modelled after the infamous Pater Hieronymus in the Finnish author Zacharias Topelius' epic tale *Fältskärens berättelser* (Vols. 1–5, 1853–67, transl. "The Surgeon's Stories" or "Tales of the Barber Surgeon"). There, Hieronymus first appears when he is captured by Swedish soldiers at Breitenfeld, who discover a hidden dagger in the Jesuit's crucifix. Later he is at the German castle Marienburg, which is besieged by the Swedes, where he somehow manages to forge a piece of gold from Virgin Mary's cloak into a cannonball, which he fires against the king.¹⁷ The Jesuit's schemes continue even after the death of Topelius' hero, the great warrior king Gustavus Adolphus, establishing Hieronymus as the evil, scrupulous, fanatic model-Jesuit.¹⁸

Much consideration has been put into the historical environment in *Fantomen* in general, and in "Dödens ring" in particular by writer Ulf Granberg and artist Kari Leppänen. The character Capistrano, however, is evidently more fictional than historical. Maybe it was the need for a clear-cut character that activated this stereotype – the Jesuit as the national and religious enemy. Of course, few people read *Fältskärens berättelser* today, and most readers of *Fantomen* surely would not recognize Hieronymus in Capistrano. But, in accordance with Klas-Göran Karlsson's typology, this modern-day commercial use of history could be seen as a reproduction of a latent cultural memory of the evil Jesuit, leading back to existential, ideological and political uses of history with national sentiments in late 20th and early 21st century Sweden.¹⁹

CHARLES XII AND THE FALL OF THE SWEDISH EMPIRE

Charles XII (r. 1697–1718) is by far the most controversial and debated ruler in Swedish history. Was he personally the cause of the fall of the Swedish Empire? Was he an immature, war-mongering oppressor, or a heroic ruler, losing his kingdom due to misfortunes and unstoppable

¹⁷ Topelius, *Fältskärens berättelser* I, 24, 47–48.

¹⁸ Topelius' view on Gustavus Adolphus is analyzed in Forsgård, *Femte inseglets tecken*, 222–228.

¹⁹ On the latter, see Zander, *Fornstora dagar*.



changes in the European power-balance? Entire “schools” have been formed around such questions.²⁰

In the 1699-set “Vraket i Bengalibukten” (“The Wreck in the Bay of Bengali”), the character of Charles XII is not clear-cut.²¹ First he is rather touchy and jealous, supposedly because Chris Walker (the future eighth Phantom) has taken an interest in the same girl as Charles, the noblewoman Ingrid of Holstein. (This is in itself quite interesting since Charles never married and rarely showed any interest in the opposite sex.) When on a bear hunt, equipped with thick sticks instead of rifles, Charles first acts rather foolhardy and is mildly injured by a bear. Chris throws himself into the fight, causing the king to return to the struggle, which ends with Chris too being wounded while killing the bear. Through this act of courage, Chris earns the king’s respect and friendship. Charles shifts his mind into kindness and generosity towards Chris, finally blessing his betrothal with Ingrid.²²

Charles’ physical courage, not least in combat, is well known. It is often said that the line between courage and foolhardiness is thin, and Charles XII often crossed it. In this story he reveals both qualities, just as he acts both rashly and kindly. It is a surprisingly complex portrait of the young Charles XII we meet in *Fantomen*; surprising, because Charles has often been either glorified or demonized (in a much more polarized way than Gustavus Adolphus), although later biographers tend to be more ambiguous.²³

In another story, “Tre Kronor brinner” (“Castle Tre Kronor is burning,” 26/1997), Charles XII only appears in one scene, not saying anything. His brief appearance, however, is nonetheless noteworthy and will be discussed later. In the story, crown prince Charles (XII) is the target of a 1697 assassination conspiracy instigated by the nobleman Johan Reinold Patkul.²⁴ The historical Patkul was a leading opponent of the reduction of the nobility’s estates – or “theft” as Patkul describes it to the Phantom – instigated during Charles XI’s rule (r. 1672–1697).²⁵ Set against this background, a fictitious assassination attempt takes place in the royal palace. When the Phantom

²⁰ An extensive analysis of Charles XII in Swedish 20th-century historiography and public debate is found in Zander, *Fornstora dagar*. Also Oredsson, “Karl XII och det svenska stormaktsvåldet”; Liljegren, *Karl XII*, 358–375.

²¹ Originally published in 7/1995, but my notes reference the reprint in the 2013 Christmas album [Swe. “Julalbum”].

²² FA 2013, 10–15.

²³ Herman Lindqvist, who wanted to rehabilitate the Age of Greatness, is positive to Charles and his reign. Sverker Oredsson on the other hand, is critical of Charles, and holds him responsible for the fall of the Swedish Empire. A similar view is held by Charles’ recent biographer Bengt Liljegren, who thinks that Charles XII clearly failed his task to preserve and provide for the Swedish realm and people. See Lindqvist, *Storhet och fall*, 674–681; Oredsson, “Karl XII,” 69; Liljegren, *Karl XII*, 382.

²⁴ Patkul is one in a series of scheming noblemen in *Fantomen*, like Adolf Fredrik Munck in “Guldmakaren” and the fictional character von Mansdorf in “Kungen är död.”

²⁵ FA 26/97, 7.



is fighting the assassin in the castle's attic, a fire starts which finally leads to the destruction of the palace.

A fire did blaze in the royal palace, Tre Kronor, in Stockholm in 1697. The exact reason why the conflagration started is not known. This lacuna in historical knowledge is creatively exploited by the comic creators. As far as the historical record tells us what happened, every detail is correct in the comic, down to the names of the fireguards in the royal palace. But to connect the fire with Patkul is an effect of the writer's "overheated imagination," and nothing else, as the writer himself states on the facts-page.²⁶ The facts-page itself paints a very dark picture of the 1700–1721 Great Northern War between Sweden and a Russian-led coalition, and the reign of Charles XII: With the coronation of Charles XII, the darkest period in Swedish history since the Black Death was at hand. One catastrophe succeeded another, and plague, war, famine, and death harassed the realm. After the Great Northern War, the impoverished and devastated country returned to its role as a minor European state.²⁷ This description follows a general view on the later years of the Swedish Age of Greatness in modern research published around the time the comic was published.²⁸

Like no other Swedish historical figure, Charles XII has been used and abused by posterity. Long used as a source of national pride, the conceptions of Charles XII and the Swedish Age of Greatness today are varied and most often sober. A living interest in the king and his age ensures that he remains a part of Swedish cultural memory, not least activated through commercial uses of history in popular culture – such as comics.

ENLIGHTENMENT, NATURAL SCIENCE, AND GUSTAV III

Shortly before the peace treaty of Westphalia was signed in 1648, ending the Thirty Years' War, the Swedes occupied Prague, where in the comics the Phantom's ring turns up and is taken to Stockholm. This causes the fifth Phantom to go to Sweden, where he meets the famous philosopher René Descartes, who historically actually had come to Stockholm around this time at the request of Queen Kristina. In "Sekhmets stjärna" ("The Star of Sekhmet," 20/1998), Descartes plays a central role in the Phantom's attempt to regain his ring. His presence renders historical substance to the story. He discusses the refraction of light in prisms with the Phantom and makes trigonometric calculations on a blackboard, but his skills in optics and mathematics are soon

²⁶ FA 26/97, 35.

²⁷ FA 26/97, 34.

²⁸ E.g. Oredsson, "Karl XII"; "Karl XII och det svenska stormaktsväldet"; Liljegren, *Karl XII*.



turned into mysticism and occultism. Still, science as a means of providing contemporary color is used in many stories. Even more so when we enter the Enlightenment.

In “Igeldammens hemlighet” (“The Secret of the Leech Pond,” 26/2008), natural science does exactly this. The reason for the tenth Phantom’s travel to Stockholm in 1751 is to deliver a stock of African plants to the famous natural scientist Carl Linnaeus. (The leech pond in the story’s title was kept by a pharmacist to produce leeches for medical treatments, but also, as it turns out, to drown the victims of his schemes and to hide their bodies.) There was also a great interest in natural curiosities at the time. In the comic, Linnaeus exposes an alleged hydra as a hoax. By doing this he acts just as he could be expected to – as an enlightened and rational scientist who does not believe in mythological creatures such as hydras.

Alchemy plays a part in the intrigue of “Guldmakaren” (“The Gold Maker,” 15/1999). When the modern-day Phantom is asked by his children what alchemy is, he explains that it is a “concoction” of science and mysticism, which, amongst other things, aims at transforming lesser metals into gold. The story is followed by a facts-page which deepens the thread on alchemy. These facts are most enlightening, but also difficult for a young reader to understand, since they are written with several old and difficult words.²⁹

The alchemy track turns into a plot involving counterfeit Russian currency and Swedish emergency money used in the 1788–90 war between Sweden and Russia. Here, King Gustav III (r. 1771–1792) is introduced into the story, which poses questions about his role in some illegal affairs with emergency money. Were these affairs the doings of the nobleman Adolf Fredrik Munck, or were they orchestrated by the king, acting behind the scenes with Munck as his tool and scapegoat? The story concludes that Gustav had decided to blame Munck and order his arrest. On the facts-page this question is developed further, stating that it probably was the king’s doing, but that we will never know for sure, which is also the opinion of historians today.³⁰ Here the complexity of history comes to the fore. The line between heroes and villains, most often so clear-cut in *Fantomen* (remember Capistrano), begin to blur.

Munck escapes due to the assassination of Gustav III, which is the historical background for “Kungen är död” (“The King is Dead,” 26/1987). This story too starts with the 12th Phantom delivering plants to Europe, this time to the Linnean Society of London, in 1792. There, he is drawn into the plot against Gustav III. He manages to stop a fictitious pretender to the throne of the house of Vasa from blowing up the entire Swedish elite gathered at a royal masquerade ball.

²⁹ FA 15/99, VI–VII.

³⁰ FA 15/99, VII. Landen, *Gustaf III*, 334–335.



However, he fails to stop the assassination of Gustav III, who was actually shot at a masquerade on March 16, 1792, and died from his wounds thirteen days later.

Gustav III is probably best known for his great interest in theatre. Accordingly, when he first appears in the story it is at his theatre at Drottningholm, a royal palace. There, Chief of police Liljensparre warns him that a conspiracy against his life is at hand, and tries to dissuade him from attending his upcoming masquerade ball. The king's reaction is to dismiss the threats and take Liljensparre for a dance on the theatre floor. "Enjoy life! Dance! Laugh!," Gustav tells Liljensparre.³¹ Not even a last minute warning letter, claiming that there will be an assassination attempt the same night, can stop the king from going to the ball. But now he gives a more rational explanation for turning a blind eye to the threats: He does not want the whole of Stockholm to think him a coward – a well-known utterance and one which could hold elements of both vanity and sound reasoning.

Next to Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII, Gustav III is one of the Swedish rulers to whom historians have given most attention. Opinions have differed considerably. Many have adopted a critical attitude towards him. He is often subjected to emotional judgments – not least because he himself is rendered as an emotional character.³² Even influential modern biographies tend to be quite psychological.³³

Gustav III only appears briefly in "Kungen är död." There is no room for (or point in, for the sake of the story) providing a deeper or broader image of him. Accordingly, by placing him in his most famous environment – the theatre – giving him a distinctly light-hearted personality, a comprehensive and well-known part of Swedish cultural memory is activated: Gustav III as the "Theatre King." This simplified image of the king seems reasonable in a commercial use of history. Still, this does not have to contradict a scientific understanding of the king. On the contrary, the short appearance of Gustav III in "Kungen är död" fits very well with the interpretation put forward by his most recognized biographer, the historian Erik Lönnroth, that one consequence of Gustav's great interest in theatre was that he thought of himself as the director of his life as a king.³⁴

³¹ FA 26/87, 28.

³² Landen, *Gustaf III*, 372–395.

³³ As in Hennings, *Gustav III*. Herman Lindqvist devotes a whole book in his series on the history of Sweden to "the days of Gustav," giving an overall positive evaluation of the king. Gustav III's most recent biographer Leif Landen has a sober and objective tone, alternating between pointing out the king's strengths and weaknesses. Lindqvist, *Gustavs dagar*; Landen, *Gustaf III*, 404–421.

³⁴ Lönnroth, *Den stora rollen*.



IMAGE AND LANGUAGE

Considerable effort is made to get the historical details correct in the *Fantomen* drawings. Clothes, weapons, ships, cities, buildings, and artefacts of all kinds, are generally very true to the period. Famous historical figures such as Gustavus Adolphus, Charles XII, René Descartes, and Carl Linnaeus are portrait-like in their appearance.

Charles XII makes for an especially interesting case. Most of the contemporary paintings depict him dressed in a blue Carolinian uniform with yellow sleeves and details, his hair cut short. This is how Charles himself wanted to be depicted, and, for most of history, has been – looking as he did several years after the outbreak of the Great Northern War in 1700. This is by far the most widely and readily recognizable image of Charles XII. But this also means that it is nearly impossible to depict him in any other way today. Even when a modern-day portrait is supposed to depict the young crown prince or king in 1697 and 1699, it is the older, soldierly dressed Charles that is depicted, despite the existence of contemporary portraits that show him as an ununiformed young man wearing an allonge wig. Consequently, the familiar image of the somewhat older, uniformed, and short-haired Charles appears both in Johan Fredrik Höcker's famous painting "Slottsbranden i Stockholm 1697" (1862–66), supporting his grandmother on the castle stairs, and in the *Fantomen*-issues, hunting bear with Chris Walker in the woods of Kungsör in 1699. Interestingly, the author of "Tre Kronor brinner" and the following facts-page points out the great importance paintings such as Höcker's "Slottsbranden" have had, and how they have shaped Swedish understandings of the events they depict.³⁵ That is, Swedish cultural memory of Charles XII is so intimately associated with his soldierly appearance, that it is very difficult to think of or represent him in any other way.³⁶

³⁵ FA 26/97, 34.

³⁶ As a contrast to the concept of popular cultural memory, which according to Karin Kukkonen "works through imagination and appropriation rather than through research and historical exactitude" ("Popular Cultural Memory," 265.), the artists drawing *Fantomen* strives for and generally comes close to historical exactitude, although sometimes in a somewhat simplified manner. On Carolinian portrait ideals and especially the depiction of Charles XI and his generals, see Olin, *Det karolinska porträttet*.



Figure 2. Crown prince Charles (XII). Lindahl, Hans, *Fantomen nr 26: Tre Kronor brinner*, Egmont Serieförlaget AB, 1997, p. 26. © King Features Syndicate Inc./distr. Bulls/SEMIC.

Regarding uniforms, the artists have not entirely resisted the temptation to dress early 17th-century Swedish soldiers in the yellow and blue Carolinian uniform, introduced only in the late 17th century. The Stockholm city guard, for example, did not wear the uniform already in the 1650s, as they do in “Sekhmets stjärna.”³⁷ And normally, Swedish soldiers did not wear blue and yellow uniforms during the Thirty Years’ War, as they do in “Sekhmets stjärna” and “Dödens ring.”³⁸ Rather than providing a historically correct depiction, then, a more familiar, traditional memory of the period is reproduced.

Still, “Dödens ring” contains a more problematic use of images. Again, it is the depiction of Pater Capistrano, and this time, literally speaking, his image. Capistrano has a typical Mephistophelian look, very suitable for a man with a character as that described above. Often drawn with an evil grin or fanatic expression on his face, his clear-cut features are distinguished by a black beard ending in a sharp point on his chin. He wears a black coat, a black hood and a sword – just like

³⁷ FA 20/98, 23.

³⁸ FA 20/98, 4–5; FA 19/98, 24–25.



Pater Hieronymus in *Fältskärens berättelser*.³⁹ His evil look signals his evil character in an over-explicit way that is typical for the whole depiction of the figure Capistrano.

Pater Capistrano is interesting also for his frequent use of Latin phrases. We will return to him shortly. First, it needs to be noted that the historical stories in *Fantomen* often include an element of archaic language, obviously intended to strengthen the historical atmosphere. In “Min swenske fiende” (“My Swedish Enemy,” 9/2007), set in the Swedish fort Carolusborg on the West African Gold Coast in the 1650s, Chris, the future sixth Phantom, clashes with a Swedish lieutenant who calls him “fördömda bälghund” (roughly: “damned rascal”) – an insult known by hardly anyone today.⁴⁰ But by virtue of its unfamiliarity, it immediately signals an old, “historical” language (as does the archaic spelling “swenske” instead of the modern “svenske” in the story’s title). In “Vraket i Bengalibukten” Chris is presented as a “studiosus” in Uppsala.⁴¹ This was the word used at the time, but it would have been quite correct to speak of him as a “student.” A similar signal is sent by using the Latinized name Carolus for Charles XI and Charles XII, instead of the standardized modern Swedish spelling “Karl.”⁴²

While there are not many Swedish archaisms in “Dödens ring,” Pater Capistrano more than makes up for this with his frequent use of Latin. Often used in affect, Capistrano excels in Latin imperatives. He calls the Phantom’s Protestant travel company “Maledicti haeresi!” (“Damned heretics!”). “Abi a me, male spiritus!” (“Go away from me, you evil spirit!”), he says to the Phantom. “Vos comburat ignis sempiternus!” (“May you burn in the eternal fire!”), he exclaims to an officer, a phrase which is also uttered by the wounded Jesuit Hieronymus in *Fältskärens berättelser*.⁴³ Pater Hieronymus, then, the prime Jesuit stereotype of Swedish literature, is cited to the very word. Capistrano of course says the Lord’s Prayer in Latin, and he even speaks Latin to the soldiers in his raiding party before infiltrating Magdeburg: “Se quere me!” (“Follow me!”), he says. And yet again, to the sentries who stop him from leaving camp the night before the battle of Breitenfeld: “Noli me tangere!” (“Do not touch me!”).⁴⁴ Capistrano’s Latin outcries are probably not so much archaisms as stereotypes, adding another element to his foreign appearance, and thus activating the cultural memory of the national and religious arch-enemy the Jesuit.

³⁹ Topelius, *Fältskärens berättelser I*, 47, 67.

⁴⁰ FA 9/07, 9. SAOB, “bälghund.”

⁴¹ FA 2013, 10. The word “studiosus” is also used in “Dödens ring” for “scientist.” FA 19/98, 7.

⁴² FA 26/97, 7, 27. One story more than others makes use of such archaisms, viz. “Igeldammens hemlighet,” where we meet old Swedish words and sentences such as “luguber” (gruesome), “bortom stadens hank och stör” (outside the city gates), “dennes” (this month), and “hornpär” (the devil). FA 26/08, 9, 14, 23, 28. See SAOB.

⁴³ FA 17/98, 15, 28, 30. Topelius, *Fältskärens berättelser I*, 25.

⁴⁴ FA 17/98, 27; FA 19/98, 8, 23.



Figure 3. Capistrano and the Phantom. Leppänen, Kari, *Fantomen nr 17: Dödens ring del 1*, Egmont Serieförlaget AB, 1998, p. 27. © King Features Syndicate Inc./Bulls/EGMONT.



CONCLUSION

The past is important in *Fantomen*. Exciting fictitious intrigues are woven into real historical events. The historical atmosphere is reproduced through a high degree of accuracy in details, a use of archaic language, and references to well-known pictures of the past. Generally, events and rulers in early modern Swedish history are depicted in an objective and modern way, especially in the informative facts-pages. Here, problems discussed and opinions found in recent historiography are accounted for. Sometimes a more “streamlined” and traditional historiographical pattern is used in the stories, according to which, for example, Charles XII has to have a certain appearance and Gustav III must be the lazy Theatre King. A striking exception from the generally objective tone of the stories is the evil Jesuit Pater Capistrano in “Dödens ring,” who is delineated from a tenacious negative stereotype in Swedish literature, originating in nationalistic and religious sentiments.

In this article, writing and reading comics are recognized as acts of sharing memories, reflecting a cultural memory of the past. The *Fantomen*-stories become part of – and help form – Swedish cultural memory. With comics being a popular medium, the use of history in comics such as *Fantomen* is primarily commercial – it appeals to a great interest in history in modern society, which helps sell more copies of the comic. That is why the *Fantomen*-stories involve famous rulers such as Gustavus Adolphus, Charles XII, and Gustav III. In the case of Capistrano, the commercial use of history leads to the adoption of themes and characters found in earlier ideological and political uses of history. No wonder, then, that Klas-Göran Karlsson in his latest revision of his typology subordinates the commercial use to other uses.⁴⁵ Still, Capistrano is an exception. And, more important, there is a difference, I would argue, in using an historical theme with ideological and political purposes, or with the purpose of presenting an exciting character for commercial uses. If the purpose – that is, what need the specific use of history answers to – is the important factor, then, the commercial use deserves to be a category of its own in Karlsson’s useful typology of the uses of history.

A consciously applied commercial use of history has contributed to the successes of *Fantomen* in recent decades. The comics’ creators have effectively addressed a common interest in history in modern-day Sweden and, more important, by doing so, they have also helped enhance this interest in history. I hope that the Phantom, the Ghost Who Walks, continues to go north, in the past and in the future.

⁴⁵ Karlsson, “Historia, historiedidaktik och historiebruk,” 72, 78. Zander also makes the commercial use a subordinate category, in Zander, *Fornstora dagar*, 57.



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