



Article

'As If There Was No Fear': Exploring Nostalgic Narrative in Bo Carpelan's Novel *Berg*

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Abstract: This article addresses nostalgic experience and aims at a definition of nostalgic narrative through textual analysis. The target text is Bo Carpelan's *Berg* (2005). The novel is analysed with narratological methods focusing on the narrative modes and the techniques of narrative mediation that invite a nostalgic experience in the reader. This side of the phenomenon—the textual aesthetics of nostalgia—has been explored by few scholars, whereas the contextual and cultural aspects of nostalgia have received a lot of attention. This article suggests further ways of analysing how a text evokes nostalgic experience, and thus considers the nostalgic experience of the reader as the definitive core of nostalgic narrative. The nostalgic experience in *Berg* is intense, reflective, and ambivalent. These qualities are produced on the level of both the narrative discourse and the story: by changes between the narrative modes and by the nostalgic and non-nostalgic content that builds and breaks the idealised narrative. The article suggests that more attention should be paid to the complexity of nostalgic narratives. Furthermore, it highlights that by creating reflectivity and contradictions, the non-nostalgic content also affects the nostalgic narrative.

Keywords: nostalgia; contemporary nostalgia; nostalgic experience; nostalgic narrative; narrative modes; narrative mediation; reflective nostalgia; idealisation; first-person narrative; Finland-Swedish literature

1. Introduction

In this article, I will demonstrate my own use and understanding of the concept of nostalgic experience, and suggest further ways of examining this concept. I will analyse *Berg* (Carpelan 2005), a novel by the Finland-Swedish author Bo Carpelan (1926–2011), which offers examples of the complexities of nostalgia. My analysis focuses on the narrative techniques that invite a nostalgic experience in the reader and the interaction between the nostalgic and non-nostalgic. Building on this, I suggest a definition of nostalgic narrative in the context of my target text. This leads to the following research questions: How does the narration of the novel *Berg* evoke nostalgic experience? What are the key textual features of nostalgic narrative?

In *Berg*, Mattias, the first-person narrator, is trying to recall his past and reflect on questions of ageing. Mattias has travelled to *Berg*, the house where he used to spend his childhood summers, because of a letter he has received. The letter is from Sonja, his childhood crush; she is dying and begs him to come to talk to her before it is too late (Carpelan 2005, p. 11). The novel is mostly structured around a childhood trauma caused by the Second World War and by a shooting episode in the family. Thus, the relationship with nostalgia is complicated in the novel. However, *Berg* also utilises many tropes that are typically considered nostalgic, such as the trope of the idealised childhood summer

(Salmose 2012, p. 274).¹ The key themes of the novel are memory, remembrance, and the identity processes of the first-person narrator. They create the grounds for the nostalgic experience, although memory as such is not necessarily nostalgic. Nostalgia, in turn, always deals with memory in one way or another (ibid., p. 121). The analeptic structure of the narration distinguishes late adulthood and childhood, building an essential dichotomy for nostalgia (ibid., pp. 287–88). This evident but also problematic relation to nostalgia is the target of my analysis.

Bo Carpelan made his literary début with a poetry collection in 1946. He is best known for his poetry, but his novels have also received many literature prizes.² During his long career, Carpelan developed a recognisable style with imagery and themes that recurred in both his poetry and his prose. Most of his late novels have an elderly male first-person narrator who is looking back on his childhood and youth, trying to understand the effect the past has had on his present self as an ageing man.³ The narration contains changes between different modes; the language is lyrical with many metaphors and wordplays that question different oppositions and categories.⁴ In many ways, *Berg* can be seen as representative and typical of this style. In the next section, I will define my approach to the three key concepts at hand: nostalgia, nostalgic experience, and nostalgic narrative. After this, I will analyse my target text.

2. Nostalgia, Nostalgic Experience, and Nostalgic Narrative

To analyse a nostalgic narrative, it is important to map the essential qualities of the phenomenon of nostalgia, which in everyday speech—and also in critical writing—is often defined broadly and loosely. Svetlana Boym (2001, pp. XIII–XIV) defines nostalgia from a cultural perspective as a ‘longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed’ and as a ‘sentiment of loss and displacement’. Longing for something lost is clearly the feature tying the different theories of nostalgia together.⁵ Boym’s understanding of nostalgia reveals the tension between the yearning to reach back in time and the impossibility of reliving lost moments. From the stylistic point of view, Niklas Salmose (2012, p. 156) defines the crucial features of nostalgia as ‘the dichotomy of now and then’ and a connection to universal grief.⁶ This tension or two-sided nature is what makes nostalgia an interesting phenomenon, albeit one that is generally hard to grasp.

The nostalgia in Carpelan’s works has been addressed before in Anna Hollsten’s (2004) dissertation, in which she focuses on Carpelan’s poetry and the novel *Urwind*. Hollsten (ibid., pp. 271, 274) understands nostalgia as remembering the golden times of the past, as an emotional memory. She writes that the target of nostalgic longing is hard to identify in Carpelan’s (lyrical) work because he often describes childhood with rather dark imagery. Although Hollsten has identified some of

¹ Merete Mazzarella (1993, p. 38) states in her essays on the Finland-Swedish memoir and life-writing tradition that the idealisation of the childhood summer is a typical feature in the Finland-Swedish nostalgia. Carpelan seems to utilise this tradition but, as I will show in my analysis, he also rewrites it.

² For example, Finlandia prizes for *Urwind* (Carpelan 1993) and *Berg* (Carpelan 2005).

³ E.g., *Urwind* (Carpelan 1993), *Benjamins bok* (Carpelan 1997), *Berg* (Carpelan 2005), and *Blad ur höstens arkiv* (Carpelan 2011). The novel *Barndom* (Carpelan 2008) also shares many stylistic qualities with the other late novels, but has a third-person narrator who tells about a boy, Davi, who grows up in Helsinki during the Second World War. *Axel* (Carpelan 1986), on the other hand, can be seen as a precursor, where many of the elements of the author’s late prose are developing. Unlike the other novels, it also uses documentary material.

⁴ See, e.g., Jolma (2018).

⁵ This can also be seen in two Finnish anthologies on nostalgia: one edited by Riikka Rossi and Katja Seutu (*Nostalgia. Kirjoituksia kaipuusta, ikäväästä ja muistista* (Rossi and Seutu 2007)), and the other by Pentti Grönholm and Heli Paalumäki (*Kaipaava moderni. Nostalgian ja utopian kohtaamisista Euroopassa 1600-luvulta 2000-luvulle* (Grönholm and Paalumäki 2015)): both have the word ‘longing’ (*kaipuusta/kaipaava*) in their titles.

⁶ Salmose (2012, p. 382) defines universal grief as the ‘nihilistic feeling that the laws of life are grieving and bleak; that our time on earth is very short, and an awareness of the teleological and entropic aspects of life’.

the characteristics of Carpelan's nostalgia, my theoretical perspective of nostalgia differs from her contextual and thematic view.⁷

In my approach, I want to outline nostalgia as a complex experience that includes a wide range of feelings, such as happiness, sadness, and bitterness or even melancholy. Salmose (2012, pp. 93–95) points out that it is more accurate to define nostalgia as an experience rather than a singular emotion or feeling. This perspective indicates that the complexity of nostalgia also stems from different social and cultural meanings.

In this article, I will analyse the nostalgic experience evoked in the reader by the features and strategies of narrative discourse.⁸ In this way, the focus is placed on the private and subjective nostalgic experience and its textual representation, in contrast to the public and cultural context of nostalgia (Salmose 2018a, p. 128). This emphasis is also demonstrated by the distinction between art about nostalgia and nostalgic art, which was recently suggested by Salmose (2018a). Art about nostalgia concerns forms of art that represent nostalgic content, such as characters that are feeling nostalgic. The nostalgic nature of this first category is explicit and easy to recognise. Nostalgic art, in turn, is defined by the nostalgic experience that can be evoked through art, e.g., when reading a novel. This means that in this less-explored category, the focus is on the aesthetics of the text and the distinct experience that it potentially produces. When approaching nostalgic art, it is important to note two things: firstly, the narration does not have to be explicitly nostalgic in its content to trigger a nostalgic experience in the reader, and secondly, an explicitly nostalgic work of fiction can even be 'less prone to evoke true nostalgic experience than nostalgic aesthetics' (ibid., pp. 129–30). Although critical writing on the narrative techniques of nostalgia are sparse, Salmose (2012) presents some results that work as tools for my analysis. Different modes of narration can work nostalgically depending on their role and aim in the context of the narrative whole, but some are more likely to intensify nostalgia (ibid., pp. 203–4).

When building my interpretation of the quality of the nostalgic experience in *Berg*, I will reflect on Boym's work on nostalgia. Boym (2007, pp. 13–16; see also 2001) divides nostalgia into restorative and reflective longing. Restorative nostalgia attempts to reconstruct the lost home—be it actual or mental. It does not regard itself as nostalgia, and justifies itself as 'truth and tradition'. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, reflects on longing itself and recognises 'the ambivalence of human longing and belonging'. Boym's theory gives an insight into the functions and aims of nostalgia. I find that there is a point of connection between these different approaches, namely the stylistic and the cultural perspective. As one looks closely at narrations, it is also worthwhile considering where the use of certain techniques may lead.

Focusing on either the nostalgic content or the textual form also implies a certain stance with respect to the basic concepts of narratology, such as the dichotomy of story and discourse. As Porter H. Abbott (2008, pp. 17–20) summarises it, story and narrative discourse are the parts that construct a narrative. A story is something that one does not have immediate access to because it is always mediated by the narrative discourse. Monika Fludernik (2010, p. 106) points out that in many of the (classical) narratological models, the story is understood as something that exists first and is then turned into discourse by different narrative techniques. This view can also be connected to the restrictive focus on art about nostalgia, which presupposes the content that makes the story nostalgic. Abbott (2008, p. 20) also notes that the pre-existence of a story is only an illusion: the story is what the reader constructs from the narrative discourse that she picks up when reading. In the case of the category of nostalgic art, it is the narrative discourse that offers the ingredients of the story to the

⁷ E.g., Hollsten (2004, p. 274) writes that in Carpelan's poetry, nostalgia is most evident in connection to the theme of homecoming. My analysis shows that this is problematised in Carpelan's late prose. In *Berg*, homecoming is a central motif, but the childhood home is a traumatic space rather than the idealised home.

⁸ When analysing the reader's experience, I am not referring to actual readers, but to a construction that can be interpreted from the text itself—the reader that understands the text. On the one hand, this is a structuralist way of approaching the concept of the reader. On the other hand, the reader is understood in both classical and cognitivist narratology, as Maria Mäkelä (2012, p. 140) claims in her article, as a construct and a hypothesis 'of the actual reading process'.

reader as the focus of the textual features. What this story is like depends on the construction of the reader's nostalgic experience.

With the concept of nostalgic narrative, I aim at a comprehensive analysis of the complexities of nostalgia in *Berg*. I understand nostalgic narrative as a broader structure that includes the nostalgic experience and consists of the interplay of the narrative discourse and the story.⁹ In a narrative whole, in this case the novel *Berg*, the nostalgic narrative can work in dialogue with other narratives, such as the traumatic. Although my starting point is the analysis of narrative discourse, it is important to emphasise that the nostalgic form and content are in many ways absolutely intertwined. Even if a character's nostalgia does not necessarily cause nostalgia in the reader, the connection between the character's and reader's experience should not be ignored either. My hypothesis is that in highly self-reflexive texts such as *Berg*, the mediation of the characters' experience should be considered a central part of the aesthetics of nostalgia that form the nostalgic narrative.¹⁰ In the next section, I will therefore analyse how (nostalgic) experience is mediated by different narrative modes in *Berg*, and thus invited in the reader.

3. The Retrospective Frame and Leaps into the Past

In *Berg*, Mattias, the first-person narrator, travels back to his childhood both in his mind and by visiting the house called Berg, where he used to spend his summers as a child.¹¹ The very beginning of the novel creates a retrospective frame of remembrance with the use of the past tense and a sense of past progressiveness: 'For many years, we used to hike every summer from Berg to the cemetery in the village to visit the dead Bergmarks' (Carpelan 2005, p. 9).¹² The narrator looks back to the summer activities of his family and creates a distance between the moment of narration and the past events. The arrow of time is also emphasised by mentioning a specific year, 'the war summer of 1944' (Carpelan 2005, p. 9),¹³ when Mattias was eight years old, and later by the narrator's exclamation: 'Fifty-five years ago!' (Carpelan 2005, p. 11).¹⁴ The opening sentence of the novel is followed with details of a 'high sky' and a walk on 'the winding road under friendly clouds' (Carpelan 2005, p. 9),¹⁵ which gives the impression of a happy memory. These details can also be interpreted as working towards the idealisation of a childhood memory. Considering these details, the beginning of the novel can be seen as representing the nostalgic experience of the first-person narrator in a very traditional and romantic way. It uses the nostalgic trope of the childhood summer as well as the retrospective mode and an anachronic structure that typically also invite a nostalgic experience in the reader (Salmose 2012, pp. 274, 288).

The first sentence of the novel presents death as something natural and ambivalent, as hiking to the graveyard is part of an iterative routine. The narrator's description of the excursion to the ancestors' graves, as if it were an ordinary visit to some relative's home, creates an odd and carnivalesque atmosphere.¹⁶ The reference to the war immediately after this also contributes to the theme of death, which is constructed through many different motifs in the novel. According to Salmose (2018b, p. 2)

⁹ Salmose (2012) writes about nostalgic narratives referring to complete novels and the typical features of nostalgic narration. In his glossary (ibid., p. 379), he defines narrative as 'how the plot is narrated'. Although my understanding of narrative differs from this, I still find the features he proposes applicable for my analysis.

¹⁰ From this aspect, my understanding of narrative resonates with Fludernik's (2003, p. 246) definition of experientiality as the core and subject of narrative, which is then mediated through different cognitive frames.

¹¹ In English "berg" is a mountain or a large rock.

¹² 'Länge hade vi för vana att varje sommar vandra från Berg till kyrkogården i byn för att hälsa på de döda Bergmarkarna'. All the excerpts are translated from the original Swedish text by Nanny Jolma.

¹³ 'Krigsommaren 1944'.

¹⁴ 'Femtiofem år sedan!'.

¹⁵ 'hög himmel', 'den slingrande vägen under vänliga moln'.

¹⁶ Later in the novel, the narrator describes a group of dead relatives sitting around a table, smiling and nodding to him (Carpelan 2005, p. 60). The presence of the previous generations is also emphasised by references to family portraits (Carpelan 2005, pp. 42, 167).

the universal grief and the fear of or resistance to death relate to the ways in which nostalgia functions; he therefore describes modern literary nostalgia as death mood. The theme of death can be seen to intertwine with the nostalgic narrative of *Berg*, but not just in terms of universal grief, melancholy, and the modern resistance to death. Already in the second paragraph of the novel, the theme evolves further, representing a traumatic memory, fear, and horror:

En lätt vind blåste genom mig och förde bort minnen av de tre stora bombardemangen i stan den våren. Där i källaren, hade dammet virvlat upp. De smala bjälkarna i taket rörde sig som rädslans maktlösa armar. Människor satt tysta och lyssnade. Det luktade murbruk, jord, rutten potatis. Något av det mörkret föreföll att följa mig, i nacken, på ryggen, genom doftande ängar och sädesfält med vågor från junivinden. (Carpelan 2005, pp. 9–10)

A slight wind blew through me and carried away the memories of the three great bombings in the city that spring. There, in the cellar, the dust had whirled around. The narrow beams moved themselves like powerless arms of fear. The people sat silently and listened. It smelled of mortar, soil, rotten potatoes. Something from that darkness seemed to follow me, by the neck, on my back, through the sweet meadows and fields with waves from the July wind.¹⁷

The narrator's project of idealising the memory of the summer hike does not seem very successful. Although in his memory he is walking with his family through a beautiful summer landscape, the experiences of the horrors of war still inhabit his flow of thought. The narrator describes paradoxically that the wind blows away the traumatic memories, but in the next sentence he is still immersed in them. The traumatic memory is very descriptive and vivid, and the grotesque imagery here contrasts with the nostalgic tropes of the childhood summer. The excerpt can be interpreted as utilising the grave motif already familiar from the very start of the novel. The cellar is represented as a grave-like space, underground and dark, capturing the people with the fear that death will come as the bombs strike. In this way, it presents another aspect of the theme of death contrasted with the familiarity and ambivalence mentioned before. The last sentence summarises the quality of Mattias' experience of the past: there is a traumatic undertone to the nostalgic experience that reminds one of the complexity of life.

Although the retrospective frame of remembrance is partly used to represent the traumatic content, it also opens up possibilities for the reader to experience nostalgia. It indicates a look backwards, and is a convention typically used for representing nostalgia (Salmose 2012, p. 183). In addition, the narration varies between the retrospective mode and sections where childhood experience is mediated with the present tense:

När hon log mot mig lystes jag upp. Kom hon inte cyklande från Rantala där vi långsamt promenerade fram? Stannade hon inte bredvid mig i sin lottauniform, med den vita kragen lysande mot den brunbrända halsen. Håret flyger för vinden, allt är i rörelse inom mig, fåglar, humlor, moln! Kriget är bara ett skrån från kråkor. (Carpelan 2005, p. 12)

When she smiled at me, I started to beam. Did she not come biking from Rantala as we slowly walked ahead? Did she not stop right next to me with her Lotta uniform, with the white collar shining next to the suntanned neck. The hair flies in the wind, everything is in movement inside me, birds, bumblebees, clouds! The war is only a cry from the crows.

This excerpt starts with the retrospective mode, picturing Mattias' reaction when his childhood crush, an older girl called Sonja, shows him some attention. This is followed by two questions that thematise

¹⁷ The historical context of the events in the novel is the Finnish war with the Soviet Union in 1944. Civilians tried to lead normal lives despite the distant noises and news from the battlefield. The narrator mentions the Great Bombings of Helsinki in the spring, and the moment of the past is mainly located in the following summer when Finland was still at war. The narrator frequently refers to the war, either explicitly or implicitly.

the vagueness of memory and emphasise memory as interpretation and action in the present (see, e.g., Brockmeier 2015, p. 99). These kinds of questions can also be interpreted as reminders of the presence of the narrating self and typical features of dissonant self-narration, where the narrator draws attention to the distance between the narrating and the experiencing self (Cohn 1978, pp. 143, 151). This notion of time, and comments by the narrating self, add a reflective quality to the nostalgic experience.

In the latter interrogative sentence, one can already see the slide into a different narrative mode: after the reference to the Lotta uniform, the tempo slows, as the narrator lingers over the different details of Sonja's appearance.¹⁸ This is also emphasised grammatically, since there is no question mark at the end of the sentence. This gives the impression that the narration has already changed from the reflective question mode towards something else.

In the next part, the change from the past tense to the present tense creates a vivid and idealised moment that intensively invites a nostalgic experience. The present tense can also be interpreted as slowing down the tempo of the narration and creating a sense of timelessness (Salmose 2012, p. 184). Furthermore, the voice of the narrating self diminishes, creating a mode of consonant self-narration in contrast to the previous dissonant mode (Cohn 1978, p. 143). It creates an illusion of immediate access to the childhood experience.

The last sentence marks yet another slight shift in the narration. The fear of war is made into something small and negligible. The sentence, however, can be interpreted as serving several functions. Firstly, it can be seen as a statement of happiness that is so strong the war is only a murmur in the background, something one does not have to care about. Secondly, it tragically reminds the reader that the war is nevertheless something present in every single moment. Thirdly, one could also read this as a technique of representing the complexity of past experience: the fear creates its own imaginary landscape that the narrator is trying to disregard. In this mental landscape, the crows caw ominously, as in a horror film, increasing the unpleasant feelings also in the reader. In fact, the repetitive attempt to overlook the fear of war emphasises and underlines it, making the reader problematise the nostalgic signals in the narration.

The juxtaposition of the present and the past is thematised in the narrator's comments and questions: the narrator does not have direct access to the past and must narrate the past moment using vague fragments and interpretation. The vagueness of memory contrasts with the illusion of immediate experience. This radical change in the narration, I would argue, emphasises the action of the temporal leap that is the desire and goal of the nostalgee.¹⁹ As can be seen here, the essential features of the nostalgic tension and temporal problematics are established in the different levels of the novel.

A similar leap in time and narrative mode is present in the following excerpt:

Som om jag ännu hörde hennes röst, hörde pappas harkling och Jonas vilda rop, och såg allt det minsta som rörde sig: myrornas väg, ödlan som snabbt försvinner i gräset, molnskuggorna som lugnt rör sig över fälten och över mig. Var finns den tid som skiljer oss? (Carpelan 2005, p. 11)

As if I still heard her voice, heard Papa's hawking and Jonas's wild cry, and saw all the smallest things that moved: the trail of ants, the lizard that quickly disappears in the grass, the shadows of the clouds that move themselves, relaxed, over the field and over me. Where is the time that separates us?

¹⁸ Lotta Svärd was a Finnish voluntary paramilitary organisation for women, originally founded in 1918. During the Second World War, the volunteers, called Lottas, cooperated closely with the army, and helped with different tasks. In *Berg*, Sonja and Elna, another character, work at a hospital caring for wounded soldiers.

¹⁹ Nostalgee, as introduced by Salmose (2012, pp. 94–95), is the term for the person or character who is 'the nostalgic subject', the person experiencing nostalgia.

This passage—as with the previous one—can be interpreted as an attempt to catch lost time. According to [Boym \(2007, pp. 7–8\)](#), nostalgia is, besides a longing for a lost home or a general sense of belonging, also a yearning for a different time, ‘the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams’. In the example, the nostalgia is the narrator Mattias, who is longing for a precious moment from his childhood and trying to recall it. For him, this memory is full of details observed with different senses, and he feels ‘as if’ he could still hear his mother’s voice calling to him.

This resembles the phases of a typical nostalgic reaction as defined by [Salmose \(2012, p. 95\)](#): motivation, nostalgia, and reflection. The memorative sign that motivates the nostalgic experience is the landscape of the nostalgia’s childhood summers, to which he has just returned after many years. The actual phase of nostalgia is the joyful recalling of the details of the voices and nature around him as a child. The last sentence, then, would be the reflective phase of the nostalgic experience, which includes sadness and the consciousness of the irreversibility of time, and is again anchored to the ‘now’ moment of the narration.

The narrator’s question is used to break the illusion of reliving the past just created in the narration before it. Reminders of the presence of the narrating self and the later moment of narration also interrupt the experiencing of the past, where the narrative mode could be called consonant self-narration, as in the previous excerpt ([Cohn 1978, p. 143](#)). In *Berg*, this kind of re-experiencing of the past is often represented in the present tense. Immersive changes from a retrospective representation of the past (‘all the smallest things that moved’) to the present tense (‘disappears’ and ‘move’) can be interpreted as demonstrating the narrating-self sliding down the axis of time closer to the experiencing-self ([Cohn 1978, p. 145](#)). In this passage, the memory of the voice from the past is vivid, and it leads the narration to slide to a fleeting moment of re-experiencing the past childhood in the present tense.

Coming back to [Boym’s](#) theory, the excerpt can be interpreted as an example of reflective nostalgia. However, this does not mean that it is not immersive. On the one hand, it utilises natural tropes that idealise the moment of Mattias observing the ants, lizards, and clouds. On the other hand, the narrator Mattias—who is mediating the experience—shows his awareness of the idealisation and the illusive nature of reaching the past. This structure is already built with the ‘as if’ at the beginning, which is finally emphasised with the reflective question at the end. The question highlights the intensity of the immersion in the past: the narrator is conscious of the temporal distance but expresses his experience of the illusion of the past and the present merging into each other. [Boym \(2007, p. 7\)](#) refers to this nostalgic illusion as the ‘double exposure [. . .] of past and present’.

The irreversibility of time is also emphasised at the very end of the first chapter of the novel: ‘Mama calls my name, she has worry in her eyes. Now she does not turn back anymore. I sit down on the car seat. The road, the white sandy road, is gone. The asphalt is glimmering. It aches in the eye.’ ([Carpelan 2005, p. 13](#))²⁰ The shift to the reflective phase is marked by the adverb ‘now’, which is the signal for the retrospective frame and the moment of narration. At the same time, it thematises the consciousness of time that is essential to nostalgia, especially in the context of modernism ([Salmose 2012, p. 101](#)). [Carpelan](#) clearly reinforces subjective time in *Berg*.²¹ This is also a defining feature of his other prose works and non-fictional essays, in which he defines his poetics of openness.²²

²⁰ ‘Mamma ropar på mig, hon har så oroliga ögon. Nu vänder hon sig inte mera om. Jag sätter mig i bilen. Vägen, den vita sandvägen, är borta. Asfalten glänser. Den skär i ögat.’

²¹ In my forthcoming article, ‘Between now and then: The experience of time in Bo Carpelan’s novels *Urwind* and *Berg*’ (under peer review), I analyse the structure and the experience of time in more detail.

²² In my articles, ‘Det groteska och öppenhetens poetik i Bo Carpelans roman *Benjamins bok*’ (2018) and ‘Muistojen arkisto ja muistelun kertomus. Muuntuva arkistometafora Bo Carpelanin romaanissa *Blad ur höstens arkiv*’ (to be published in 2018 in the anthology *How to Communicate Meaning? Linguistic, Literary, and Translational Perspectives in the series Tampere Studies in Language, Translation and Literature by the Plural Research Centre at the University of Tampere*), I analyse and reflect on the connection between [Carpelan’s](#) poetics of openness and his novels. The poetics of openness has been researched before by [Hollsten \(2004\)](#) and [Hellgren \(2014\)](#).

As [Salmose \(2012, p. 157\)](#) points out, the moment of narration in nostalgic narratives is often a time of decay and the physical absence of childhood dreams. Something similar can be found in the narration of *Berg*, such as in the image of the sandy road. The narrator also refers to the present with images of irreversible change and decay.²³ However, it is crucial to note that the relationship between the past and the present is more complicated in this novel. As I have shown in my analysis, the past is also a time and landscape of war, death, fear, and anxiety—it does not only picture the dreams of childhood. In addition, the present appears rather ambivalent. On the one hand, it is the threatening time of modernity and ageing. On the other hand, it is also a time of relief, wisdom, and some sort of catharsis that takes place in the city, not in the idyllic countryside that represents pre-modern values. In the final chapter of *Berg* (201–204), Mattias returns to the city, and Berg, which he has left behind, is torn down at the same time.

In the next section, I will focus on how the nostalgic narrative is produced with the idealising tropes and the cracks that question and interrupt the idealisation.

4. Cracks in the Idealised Nostalgic Narrative

‘Lugnet’, the name of a chapter in the fourth and final part of *Berg*, means ‘the Calm’ or ‘the Quiet’. It is also the name of the rowing boat in which Mattias, his father, and a farm worker go on a fishing trip one early summer morning. ‘Lugnet’ is an analepsis to the narrator’s childhood, written only in the present tense. In the context of the whole novel, it has a retrospective frame around it, but the moment of narration and the process of remembering are not mentioned explicitly. I will analyse how the choice of words and imagery work together with the narrative level of the text to create—or try to create—an idealised nostalgic narrative.

Vassen står hög, grön med guldgul kjol mot vattnet. Det hörs ett svagt dån i luften. Med plötsliga kväkanden störtar ett andpar ut över fjärden och försvinner in i ljuset. Lugnet, vår eka, ligger uppdragen utanför båthuset. Arvi stöter ut, pappa vadar till aktertoften och kliver snabbt i, Arvi sätter sig vid årorna, jag ger Lugnet en liten knuff och klättrar ombord, sitter i fören och ser vattenvirvlar, moln, allt stilla som om ingen rädsla fanns. ([Carpelan 2005](#), p. 187)

The reeds stand tall, green with the golden yellow skirts towards the water. There is a quiet rumble in the air. With a sudden croaking, a pair of wild ducks land on the open water and disappear into the light. *Lugnet*, our rowboat, is lying on the bank next to the boathouse. Arvi pushes it into the water, papa wades to the back of the boat and steps in, Arvi sits down at the oars, I give *Lugnet* a small push and climb on board, I sit in the front and look at the eddies on the water, the clouds, everything quiet as if there was no fear.

A boat gliding into the lake through the reeds is an image that typically evokes a nostalgic experience in the reader. Descriptive expressions like ‘the golden yellow skirt’ and the reference to the different parts of the boat make the image even more vivid. Another crucial ingredient in the nostalgic imagery is the triggering of different senses in addition to the visual. This is something that [Salmose \(2012, p. 248\)](#) notes intensifies the temporal leap of the nostalgic experience. In this excerpt, many of the details are visual, but the quiet rumble and the sudden noises of the birds engage the sense of hearing. The text continues after this with descriptions of warmth and the smell of clay.

The great detail and the descriptive choice of words also slows the tempo of the narration. This mode of narrative duration points to Genette’s concept of the descriptive pause, which, according to [Salmose \(2012, pp. 203–4\)](#), is the most common mode for creating the nostalgic experience (compared to scene and ellipsis). It is typically used to idealise a moment and to encourage the reader to identify

²³ E.g., ‘The time cuts its furrows in the skin’ ([Carpelan 2005](#), p. 12) and ‘We have all changed. The whole Berg has changed. We decay slowly, and the house with us.’ ([Carpelan 2005](#), p. 124)

with the nostalgic experience produced in the text. This idealisation is even more evident in the following excerpt: ‘everything has stopped for a blink of an eye as if there was no war, everything is like those summers when *Lugnet* is in the water and we are fishing: the clearest silence, deepest peace’ (Carpelan 2005, p. 188).²⁴

There are parts in ‘Lugnet’ that seem to aim not only to idealise a certain moment from the narrator’s past, but also to describe childhood as an idea—the phenomenology of the childhood summer. The descriptive pause in the narration is also explicitly emphasised in the choice of words that describe the pause in the flow of time. A moment when ‘everything has stopped’ creates a feeling of being somewhere outside of time as a dimension always moving forward. As Boym (2001, p. XIII) puts it, nostalgia is the longing for a particular, different time, which is often the mythical or idealised time of childhood. This points to a mythical and culturally shared space, a highly idealised image of childhood that is also constructed momentarily in the text. The generalisation and exaggeration of the memory blurs the frequency of the event: the narrator states that ‘everything is like those summers’, but he is then describing a specific moment or his ideal of a fishing trip on a summer morning? The non-specific and vague nature of this nostalgic memory differentiates it from pure memory, which has a specific target (Salmose 2012, p. 205).

Although as a chapter ‘Lugnet’ is mostly highly descriptive, it does also play with the duration of the narration. In the next excerpt, the tempo increases and the focus shifts from the description of nature to the action:

Nu nappar det! Nu guppar flötet till, försvinner, stiger, går åter under vattenutan, jag drar försiktigt, reven spritter för abborrens knyckar. Den landar i gräset, den kröker rygg, jag slår den mot en sten, den darrar och är stilla. Min egen fångst! (Carpelan 2005, p. 188)

Now it bites! Now the float bobs, disappears, rises, sinks under the surface again, I pull carefully, the writhing of the perch startles the fishing line. It lands on the grass, arches its back, I fling it towards a stone, it shakes and stops moving. My own catch!

The faster tempo reflects the excitement of the child as one action follows another, as if the narrator was out of breath trying to keep up with the story. This breaks the dreamy feeling of the descriptive narration, but it can still be interpreted as working towards the idealisation. It pulls the reader closer by creating the illusion of narrating and witnessing the events simultaneously.

The analysis shows that the ingredients of an idealised picture are evident. The interesting thing is, however, that their true existence is questioned. It is only ‘as if’ the fishing trip was a perfect place of nostalgia that one could long for. The conditional structure is repeated in the novel, as one can note from the cited excerpts. In the two previous excerpts (‘as if there was no fear’ and ‘as if there was no war’), this can be interpreted as thematising the fragility and artificiality of the idealised past. The fear of the war is always present. It also works as a slight reminder of the narrating-self adding an upper level of consciousness to the analeptic chapter. In the excerpt analysed in the previous section (‘As if I still heard her voice’), it more explicitly reminds one of the retrospective position of the narrator, but also indicates that re-experiencing the moment is only an immersion in interpretations and constructions of time past. Overall, the ‘as if’ ruptures the idealised nostalgic narrative and transforms it into a more reflective discourse.

There are also other kinds of cracks in the idealised narrative: in the context of the whole novel, the ‘quiet rumble’ in the description of the fishing trip works as a reminder of the ongoing war and the distant noises of the battlefield. It distracts one from the idealisation and creates an underlining experience of uncertainty, uneasiness, and repressed fear. This rumble is repeated again at the end of the chapter ‘Lugnet’:

²⁴ ‘allt har för ett ögonblick stannat upp som om inget krig fans, allt är så som somrar är när Lugnet är ute och vi fiskar: klaraste tystnad, djupaste ro’.

Där är ett avlägset dån. Det är bara jag, ensam, som ser det, känner det. Det känns nästan som en sorg, att dagen redan har kommit så långt. Berg skymtar mellan träden. Om allt jag ser skulle försvinna, skulle jag då alls finnas kvar? Om jag går med slutna ögon? Om jag dör? (Carpelan 2005, p. 189)

There is a distant rumble. It is only me, alone, who sees it, feels it. It feels almost like a sorrow that the day has passed already. Berg peeks out between the trees. If everything I see disappeared, would I exist anymore? What if I walk with my eyes closed? If I die?

This time, the 'distant rumble' does not merely create uncertainty about the ideal nature of the source of the nostalgia, the childhood summer. Here, it also starts the reflective ending of the chapter. The character knows that what he has just experienced will be a nostalgic memory in the future, and he already enters a mode similar to the reflective phase of nostalgic reaction.²⁵ Mattias as a child is aware that the fishing trip is ending, as he can see the house behind the trees. He ponders on existential questions of living and dying as well as the realness of his observations and sensations. His reflections relate to the questions made by the narrator that I have mentioned above. The ending creates an impression of accessing the mind of Mattias as a child, but also the illusion of the character stepping into the narrator's position for a moment.

The cracks and reminders do break the ideal of childhood summer. At the same time, they also break the illusion of direct access to past experience and the exactness of memory. However, my interpretation is that the cracks and reminders do not disturb the leap in time and the immersive quality. On the contrary, they potentially intensify the immersion in the past by arousing the reader's suspicions about the perfect ideal and creating an interest in finding out what is behind it. The cracks thematise the threat that makes the boat ride special. They also question the meaning of the title 'Lugnet'. Rather than being a reference to an ideal calmness that could function as a source of restorative nostalgia, 'Lugnet' resembles the calm before the storm—or the calm despite the distant storm.

The contradictory nature of the nostalgic experience that the chapter 'Lugnet' and also *Berg* as a whole invite in the reader also resonates with Boym's (2007, pp. 13–16) distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia. The nostalgic tropes of childhood, summer, and nature in 'Lugnet' prove reminiscent of restorative nostalgia; they build up the story of a childhood that one is supposed to have had. The repetitive cracks, in turn, can be interpreted as signals of reflective nostalgia. The tradition of restorative nostalgia in the form of the strong idealisation of childhood and the home can be seen as a grand narrative in the canon of Finland-Swedish literature (Mazzarella 1993, p. 38). In *Berg*, the thematisation of the fragility—or even artificiality—of the ideal of childhood can be interpreted as a comment on restorative attitudes towards the past, on their impossibility and disadvantage. The reflective nostalgia is conscious of the non-nostalgic qualities of life. It acknowledges the darker side of the past, the war that was always present, even though the adults did not speak of it. The war and the fear could not be fully forgotten, even when one went on a fishing trip on an apparently perfect summer morning.

The chapter clearly contains several elements that work towards idealising the moments of the childhood summer. The chapter also summarises the problematisation of nostalgia, which is characteristic of the novel as a whole. Salmose (2012, p. 176) compares nostalgia to a dream and a bubble that breaks when something sharp comes too close. With the metaphor of sharp objects, he refers to irony, sarcasm, graphic eroticism, and a high degree of self-reflexivity or experimentality. Nevertheless, a text that contains these disruptive qualities can include 'shorter, episodic moments of nostalgia'. In my analysis, I have pointed out several elements that break the bubble of the dream of restorative nostalgia and the idealised nostalgic narrative. In the context of the whole novel, there are also several parts where the traumatic narrative, with its grotesque imagery, is dominant. This evokes

²⁵ This is reminiscent of Salmose's (2012, p. 135) category of hypothetical nostalgia.

the question of whether *Berg* is actually a work of art that only includes glimpses and short episodes that evoke nostalgia.

My claim, however, is that *Berg* constructs and utilises a nostalgic narrative. Even though negative feelings and trauma are emphasised in the novel as a whole, the nostalgia still goes much deeper than the episodes separated from the dominant atmosphere of the novel. In fact, the nostalgic narrative can be interpreted as creating the retrospective frame and the reflectivity that tie all the chapters together.

5. Conclusions

In this article, the nostalgic experience of the reader is understood as the definitive core of nostalgic narrative. My focus was on the analysis of the narrative discourse, the aesthetics of nostalgia, as Salmose's (2018a) category of nostalgic art suggests. However, my analysis shows that the nostalgic content—the focus on the category of art about nostalgia—cannot be ignored, especially when it comes texts like Bo Carpelan's *Berg*. The qualities of the character's experience and his/her narrative mediation are the central means of triggering the reader's nostalgic experience in the self-reflexive first-person narration of *Berg*.

The nostalgic experience in the novel is intense, reflective, and ambivalent. These qualities are produced on the level of both the narrative discourse and the story of the nostalgic narrative. On the one hand, the use of the self-reflexive first-person narrator and the play with the different narrative modes problematise the categorial distance between the past experience and the present narration. On the other hand, the idealised narrative is both built and shattered. This is reinforced by the rich use of nostalgic tropes and the repetitively intruding cracks, such as the narrator's reflective comments and the reminders of the ongoing war.

The nostalgic narrative in *Berg* also intertwines with the traumatic narrative that builds on the fear of war and death. Both narratives mediate a strong sense of experientiality by using the different senses, tropes, and narrative techniques that I have pointed out in my analysis. In the case of *Berg*, I argue that the intensity of the nostalgic experience represented in the narrative discourse and invited in the reader is created by the changes in the narrative modes and quality of experience. This narrative structure creates a vividness that challenges the traditional idealised nostalgic narrative. As can be seen in my analysis, the non-nostalgic content can be used to produce reflective nostalgic narration by creating tension, contradictions, and ambivalence. Finally, I claim that more attention should be paid to the narrative techniques that produce the ambivalence and contradictory nature of nostalgia.

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