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Conversion as an exemplary experience in the 14th century and today: narrative-comparative approaches to the Exemplum

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ABSTRACT

What should we learn from another individual's experience? What kind of narrated experiences become cultural masterplots and genres in different historical contexts? This article introduces an approach to medieval exemplary narratives of conversion that combines narrative theory and comparatist attention to the historical context and forms of narrative experientiality. We take two exempla from the sermon of the feast of the canonization of Saint Birgitta as our test case. The historical specificity of narrative didacticism is further highlighted by comparing medieval exempla with social media-fuelled stories of personal conversion-like transformation that gain representative and normative power in today's narrative environments. Who are the saints and sinners in today's social media didacticism? Our narrative-theoretical and comparative analysis focuses on conversion as a replicable model experience and a prototypical element of a shareable narrative. We also pay attention to the dynamics of narrative authorization in medieval and contemporary narrative environments and sketch an interdisciplinary synthesis of the genre of the exemplum as a narrative form.

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1. Introduction

Narratology was understood in its classical, structuralist form as a general grammar of stories, and much of the research material that gave rise to its 'universal' models consisted of literary fiction. Somewhat inversely, the contemporary, post-classical, and pronouncedly interdisciplinary field of narrative theory, shaped almost as much by a social scientific inquiry into storytelling as by literary narratology, mostly avoids claims to universalism but is nevertheless characterized by a methodology that yields itself to the analysis of various narrative genres and environments. A post-classical narratological analysis of historical materials should therefore go beyond much-rehearsed contemplations on the generally emplotted nature of history and increasingly focus on the functions and developments of narrative genres and environments in times past. Our article represents such an approach by demonstrating how certain classical and postclassical methods of narrative studies permit a comparative analysis of narrative exemplarity and didacticism in medieval and contemporary narrative environments.

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The genre of the medieval exemplum, used to recount and circulate moral tales of sinners and saints for didactic purposes and often grouped in large collections, is much studied yet little analysed as a *narrative form*.¹ We suggest an interdisciplinary approach to the medieval exemplum that combines the sensitivity of historical research for context and use with the text-analytical yield of both literary narratology and social scientific narrative studies. We focus on the trope of *conversion* as a narrative genre of rendering *experience*, rhetorically framed as *exemplary* and thus meant to serve as a model for a certain affect and behaviour for the audience. By bringing contemporary storytelling practices side by side with medieval exempla, we hope to shed light on both the prototype features of narrative exemplarity that travel through ages and the particular forms that narrative exemplarity takes with regard to individual and collective experience.

The contemporary exemplum is primarily shaped by the story logic of social media, where unverified or even falsified stories of personal experience tend to be elevated as exemplary through viral sharing and normative framing by the sharers of the story.² Our tentative hypothesis is that the use of teachable experiences in today's social media bears intriguing cultural, rhetorical, and social resemblances to the functions of the medieval conversion exemplum as a narrative form primarily used as argumentation for moral values through compelling stories of imitable behaviour.

As tempting as this analogy might be, we must however pay particular attention to the context and the process of *authorizing* the moral of the exemplum. The medieval exemplum rests on the moral authority of tellers and institutions. The exemplum as a narrative form saw a renaissance in the 12th-century monastic context, particularly among the Cistercians. The collections born within the monastic tradition utilized both exempla and *miracula* in their rhetoric. Exempla collections multiplied in the 13th century after the birth of the Mendicant orders and decisions of the IV Lateran Council, especially the regulation of the yearly confession of sins. This was medieval exempla's 'golden era', but exempla were still in use in preaching in the 15th century.³ Tales in didactic exempla collections were often quite generic, lacking specific details of time and place, making them a stack of useful tools for sermons on a European-wide scale. Re-use was typical; late Antique and early medieval narratives were used in slightly revised form (or even unrevised) centuries later. The circulation of topoi and the re-use of narrative formulae was also a way to claim an authoritative voice. Divine truth and moral codes were not expressed via novelty.⁴ Saints were also typical protagonists in moral tales, and miracles recorded at a shrine or in a canonization hearing could be later revised to be used in sermons in an exemplary form.⁵

In today's social media-fuelled storytelling economy, practically *anyone* can become a saint or a martyr – and indeed, a preacher – as narrative authority emanates from a collective yet uncoordinated co-telling to social media audiences.⁶ We claim that the institutional, hierarchical narrative authority of the Middle Ages has transformed into the authority of allegedly 'authentic' experiences in today's stories of transformation or epiphany that reappropriates the narrative rhetoric of conversion. The collective concerns negotiated in storytelling, while having become detached from religious authorities, remain moral at heart. The story logic of social media translates mere anecdotal evidence of social phenomena – such as injustice, cultural differences, or the functioning of institutions – into moral exempla; along the way, the experience and moral agency of individuals becomes foregrounded, while structural factors and supra-

individual moral questions fall outside the scope of these ‘compelling’ narratives of hardship, change, and individual triumph or tragedy. The crucial analogy with the medieval collective dynamics of storytelling lies in the ways certain cultural *masterplots*⁷ – particularly those having a Christian conversion story at the core – are recycled and thus become both detached from the original source or reference and universalized as moral lessons. Contemporary masterplots of conversion-like transformative experience form their own moral canon that storytellers may resort to in order to gain narrative authority for a story that would otherwise remain an anecdote about a random experience.

We will proceed first by sketching an interdisciplinary synthesis of the exemplum as a narrative form and rhetorical tool in order to reach beyond time-bound genre conventions and towards a definition that covers various instrumentalizations of stories of exemplary experience. Then we will move on to introducing our test cases. Medieval cases chosen for closer scrutiny are taken from the canonization process of St Birgitta⁸ (1374–80) and later sermons preached on her feast day. They were produced at Vadstena Abbey but followed general Christian conventions. We juxtapose these exempla with contemporary social media exemplarity: as the primary example, we use the Swedish case of the ‘Jimmie moment’, a viral story describing a transformative, conversion-like experience and political epiphany concerning the alleged Islamization of Sweden that aroused major controversy and generated a plethora of stories of transformative ‘Jimmie moments’ in the Swedish public sphere in 2019.⁹ The comparative analysis of these materials focuses on the representation of the exemplary experience of conversion, as well as its collective – and in the case of the medieval exempla, institutional – authorization as a repeatable masterplot and model experience. We will pay special attention to the trope of the conversion as an adaptable and shareable narrative frame for conveying experientiality and translating it as a collective tool for affirming beliefs and doxa. In juxtaposing medieval and contemporary conversion exempla, we will also consider how the story logic of social media transforms the Christian conversion proper – typically caused by an active converter – into an internalized, epiphany-like self-revelation (reminiscent of a psychological turning point in modern literary fiction) that permanently alters the subject’s thoughts and actions.

Both classical and modern theories of narrative highlight the elementary role of storyworld disruption, anagnorisis, epiphany, or breach.¹⁰ This element can be considered an experiential point of condensation and, as such, a key to the experiential logic of the narrative. We claim that the prominence of experiential disruption is best exemplified by conversion narratives, and the historical research on experience should therefore trace the analogies and differences in representing, replicating, and canonizing transformative experiences in different historical contexts. Moreover, conversion as a trope and a model can be considered an emblem of the collective and normative aspects of narrated experientiality in general, aspects that were perhaps better recognized among medieval than contemporary storytellers and audiences. We will conclude by first evaluating the analytical yield of our chosen narrative-theoretical methods for the analysis of medieval exempla. Then we will turn the tables once more to ask if the medieval narrative conventions of exemplary characters, conversion, and blatant didacticism might shed light on contemporary storytelling forms and cultures.

2. The Exemplum: towards an interdisciplinary synthesis

Like many elementary conceptual dichotomies underpinning Western thought, the twofold understanding of the exemplum as (1) an archetype emblemizing a standard or an ideal, and (2) a rhetorical gesture that merely hints towards a possible principle or conclusion, goes back to Plato and Aristotle, to the differing conceptions of *paradeigma*. Whereas the Platonic exemplum sets an unquestionable ideal, the Aristotelian exemplum merely illuminates a case with a better-known case.¹¹ As several theorists have pointed out, the twofold understanding of the exemplum appears intertwined in rhetoric, literature, philosophy, and law alike; in the words of Alexander Gelley: 'Is the example merely *one* – a singular, a fruit of circumstance – or *the One* – a paradigm, a paragon? The tactic of exemplarity would seem to be to mingle the singular with the normative, to mark an instance as fated'.¹²

Thus, the general logic of the exemplum, dating back to classical rhetoric, is that of an analogy becoming exemplary through repetition and imitation; as argued by Gelley, the essence of the exemplum can be found not in its form but in the action it generates, the 'ethical transformation' it propagates.¹³ The classical exemplum, as refined in the rhetorical schools and manuals of antiquity, was a part of the oratory art, a means of persuasion and demonstration; an argumentative proof rehearsed in judicial and political contexts or referring to mythological or historical figures. Classical Latin authors inherited the Greek concept, and Christian authors, in turn, utilized the earlier tradition in their works. The ancient exemplum was a form of moral didacticism designed to evoke a desirable collective affect that would then develop into a moral sentiment and *doxa*.¹⁴ According to classical rhetoricians such as Quintilianus, the authority of the exemplum should rest on established individuals or institutions; exempla consisted of historical, fabulated, and 'likely' events, the 'historical example' as derived from the documented or the mythical past being the most common type.¹⁵ In Roman antiquity, much of historical writing was exemplary by nature, by referring to historical (or fictional) exempla, like details of the life of Alexander the Great, ancient authors were actively creating the situational present.¹⁶

Medieval exempla took inspiration from the oratory and judicial exempla of classical antiquity and particularly from the early Christian hagiographic tradition. The historical exemplum was still in use in political rhetoric during the Middle Ages, but the exemplum's main use was homiletic. The *exemplum* was a specific form of text: a short educative tale filled with quotidian flavour to teach a moral lesson. The seminal definition of the exemplum by Bremond, Le Goff, and Schmitt is still valid in the medieval context: it is 'a short narrative given as truthful and intended to be inserted into a discourse, usually a sermon, to convince an audience by means of a salutary lesson'.¹⁷ These moral tales including entertaining, even amusing anecdotes, served an illustrative function within sermons; they were a mode of persuasion demonstrating veracity in the form of a narrative intended to generate preferred action.¹⁸ References to veracity could have been quite blunt, plainly stating 'this is true', or more subtle, like referring to authoritative texts, such as the Bible or earlier authors, be they theologians of the early church or one's own order.¹⁹

The dominance of the exemplum in Western storytelling cultures was confronted by what has been labelled the 'Crisis of Exemplarity' during the Renaissance. This change characterizes the work of writers such as Boccaccio, Petrarch, Montaigne, and Cervantes,

who problematized the relationship between moral reflection and particular cases.²⁰ In Western literary history, finally the birth of the modern novel, being more or less concurrent with the Enlightenment Project, marked a break from the logic of the exemplum and launched the era of the experiencing, idiosyncratic individual²¹; narratives of inimitable yet exemplary heroes and everyman sinners were mostly replaced by, in Catherine Gallagher's words, stories of 'nobody in particular'.²² This did not mean a complete rejection of narrative didacticism or the belief in storytelling's ability to reach for universals, only a change in the literary dominant and a differentiation of fictional and non-fictional genres.²³ Therefore, literary exemplarity has conventionally been associated with pre-modern times, whereas the modern novel is considered a form that problematizes narrative exemplarity by providing insights into the idiosyncratic experiences of psychologically verisimilar fictional characters.

The 'exemplum' also appears as an analytical concept in sociolinguistics to denote the use of anecdotal and experiential argumentative evidence in everyday speech. For Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou, the exemplum represents the 'messy' nature of everyday reasoning in speech, in contrast to the formal understanding of argumentation in logic, philosophy, or even rhetoric. According to De Fina and Georgakopoulou, in naturally occurring, everyday interaction, exemplary narratives provide experience-based evidence for or against a position, yet the argument tends to be circular: on the one hand, I have the experience of x, from which a general truth can be derived; on the other hand, there is a general truth about things, and I recount my experience x as an illustration or evidence of that truth.²⁴ A historical understanding of the exemplum as narrative rhetoric however attests to the long tradition of such 'messiness' also in institutional, didactic, and literary contexts: the argumentative power of the exemplary character, action, or experience has always been reliant on contextual factors and the dialogic relationship between the storyteller and the audience. The socio-linguistic approaches to 'naturally occurring argumentation' through storytelling foreground the exemplum's interactive and context-dependent nature, and therefore they are not wholly incompatible with historical approaches to the exemplum, while everyday interaction as such remains inaccessible to the medievalist. One takeaway for the historian is the rhetorical connection between experientiality and exemplarity.

3. Exemplary and imitable figures in Vadstena Sermons

In many respects, conversion is the most demanding and prominent religious experience. Etymologically con-version means a new orientation: a person turns towards a new ideal, leaving behind his or her old habits. The dramatic events on the road to Damascus and St Paul's transformation from a persecutor of Christians into an apostle of Christ were the seminal example. In the medieval context, conversion could mean conversion to Christianity but much more often *within* Christianity – that is, to penance, leaving one's sinful ways behind.²⁵ In *Dialogue on Miracles* (c. 1220) Caesar of Heisterbach²⁶ defined conversion in the following manner: '*Conversio est cordis versio*, conversion is the change of heart, from bad to good or from good to better, or from better to excellent'.²⁷ Therefore, it was present and even obligatory for all Christians. Often an outer intervention was required to cause the internal transformation.

Arguably the warning against sin and turning one's life from vile habits via penance to piety is one of the core messages of all educative narratives within the field of religion.²⁸ The chosen cases, exempla on Birgitta's virtuous life inserted into a 15th-century feast day sermon, enable scrutiny of the medieval transformation of exemplarity: from an *articulus* in a judicial hearing to an educational tale. Birgitta, as a mystic, prophetess, and thaumaturge, was a familiar figure in the whole of Western Christianity, but the Vadstena brothers deliberately shaped her image already when recording miracles for the canonization process.

Within the Nordic context, Vadstena was an important learning centre with a large library and active preaching agenda. Vadstena's library contained many popular exempla collections, for example, the collection *Copia exemplorum*, which was aimed at parish priests to provide accentuating anecdotes for their sermons. It was compiled by Matthias Ovidi, the first confessor of Birgitta.²⁹ Examples of earlier saintly figures depicted in *Copia exemplorum* may have had an effect on the conduct and religious practices of Birgitta – not to mention later Vadstena sermons.³⁰

As the mother house of the monastic order *Regula Sancti Salvatoris* founded by Birgitta, Vadstena held spiritual prestige, but it was an important centre within the social, economic, and political realms, too.³¹ Birgittine priest brothers spoke with a voice of authority while preaching – and preach they did. In addition to contemplation, preaching – also to the lay audience – was a crucial part of the Birgittine monastic idea. According to *Regula*, the priest brothers' task was to preach every Sunday and other important days, notably the three annual feasts of Saint Birgitta, making a total of a hundred preaching days per year. Birgittine priest brothers were successful in their preaching activities, as they were known for fervently attacking sins and vices; this gained them great renown among the public and incited envy in their rivals. The most popular days could attract an audience of thousands of pilgrims.³² The sermon was the mass media of the Middle Ages, and the Vadstena brothers mastered its use.

The manuscript under scrutiny here is from a collection of sermons for saints. The text is a sermon for the feast of the canonization of Birgitta (7 October), intended to be preached in the evening, *secundis vespers*. It is a preacher's preparation for a sermon, a thematically organized, hierarchical text written in Latin but delivered in Swedish.³³ The *thema* of the sermon *Hec vidua erat* (Luke 2:36) is an excerpt from the Gospel of Luke depicting the presentation of Jesus at the temple. The parable's reference is to the prophetess Hanna, a virtuous widow serving God to whom Birgitta is likened. In addition, the logic of the text follows the exegesis of the Gospel of Matthew (13:8), which argues that the seed of chastity yields a hundred-fold reward in virgins, a sixty-fold reward in widows, but only a thirty-fold reward in wives.³⁴ Obviously, praising Birgitta's virtue is a core element, but it also warns of vices typically seen as feminine, like *multiloquium* and *vagationis errore*, and stresses the importance of chastity. Birgitta excelled in all these things, but other women needed concrete lessons, which were delivered in the form of exempla. Examples taken from the canonization records illuminate this. They are marked in the margin of the manuscript (*nota exempla*) to stress their location and importance within the text and to underline the general message.

In this manner, she [Birgitta] served continence and chastity – not only in herself but by words and examples inviting other women as well. Indeed, a certain woman named Margarita, a public prostitute from the city of Stockholm, was by admonishments first led to a good life and self-restraint. Then this woman made a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. There, a crucifix on the wall talked to her, saying: ‘where you see this image talking to you again – there you should remain.’ The woman continued her travel to Rome, extending it to Montisflasconis. There she saw the image of a crucifix saying again: ‘here you will stay’. The woman entered a house and happily left this life.

Another woman, from the area of Alvastra monastery, serving Birgitta, was liberated from temptation. This woman was publicly separated from her husband by the bishop because of too close consanguinity. She was bitter about this and could not find peace. So it happened that one day, domina Birgitta had the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great read in front of the woman. She threw herself at Birgitta’s feet, telling her of her temptations and how she wanted to return to her husband. Birgitta was moved to compassion and begged on her knees that all those present would pray for this woman. They started to pray, The *Dialogues* were again read to her, and the woman seemed to fall asleep. When domina Birgitta got to her knees, a figure, like an Ethiopian with a horrible stench, emerged from between this woman’s breasts. The horrid stench woke the woman up and she was immediately liberated from her temptation. Afterwards, she was horrified to hear mention or even think of her husband.³⁵

The compiler of the sermon was Johannes Borquardi. He entered the Vadstena Abbey in 1428 and died in 1447, these years being also the terminus post quem and ante quem for this sermon. Johannes was a well-known and productive preacher, commenting on other brothers’ texts and compiling two large collections himself.³⁶

The aforementioned tales are not reworkings of traditional exempla – those are also present in the sermon – but can be found originally in the canonization process of Birgitta. Canonization was a papal privilege, and an official judicial inquiry into the life and miracles of a candidate was required before an official proclamation of sanctity. Canonization processes were opened by the pope, officially nominated commissioners of high clerical rank carried out the interrogation, proctors took care of the practicalities of the hearing, and notaries recorded the witnesses’ sworn testimonies. Canon law guided the implementation of hearings, but the actual organization was mentioned in the major rulings only briefly. Papal commissioners were in charge of the judicial reliability of the hearings, while local officials – the proctors – were active in forming the detailed questions, *articuli*, to be asked of witnesses. These questions could be details from the saint’s life or a well-known miracle.³⁷

Despite the shared background, each canonization process was unique, and Birgitta’s dossier in particular differs from many other medieval canonization processes. It was carried out in multiple places (Sweden and Italy), and it was not divided into parts concerning the life and miracles of the candidate. A considerable part of the dossier was recorded by the local clergy of Vadstena, who did not follow the regulations of canon law in a particularly meticulous manner. The office of public notary was not known in medieval Sweden, and the testimonies were recorded by the local clergy.³⁸

The first case for further scrutiny is the case of Margarita, a known prostitute. Her conversion ended up as *articulus* number twenty in the canonization process; therefore, the relationship between Birgitta and Margarita must have been quite widely known back

in their time.³⁹ This article is about the laudable life of Birgitta, how she practised charity by washing the feet of the poor and providing money for the dowry of poor girls. These themes come up in the sermon of Johannes Borquardi, too. According to the *articulus*, Birgitta was also active in admonishing prostitutes and turning them towards an honest life. Because of her instruction and teaching, they lived a chaste life; the most notable of them was Margarita from West Götaland, who lived as a public prostitute in Stockholm. Through Birgitta's mediation, she, through God's grace, turned to a praiseworthy life in 1355.⁴⁰

In the sermon, the conversion of Margarita has been more clearly formulated as a classical exemplum; the details of the pilgrimage and talking crucifix are not only later interventions, though. The narrative in the sermon was remodelled by combining two different cases, historical events referred to in the canonization process, into one exemplum to better suit the demands of an educative tale. The other case merged with the penance of Margarita was about an unnamed noble lady from Stockholm who embarked on a pilgrimage to Santiago, where she saw the talking crucifix uttering a prediction. She returned home but then travelled from Sweden to Italy. In Montisflasconis, she saw the crucifix again. In addition, before her death she saw a vision of Birgitta certifying her sanctity, but this part was not inserted into the exemplum version.⁴¹

A prostitute as a penitent sinner was a widespread and widely utilized topos during the Middle Ages. Mary Magdalen, *beata peccatrix*, was an emblem of the blessed sinner, a manifestation of the virtues of contrition and penance showing how a sinner could ultimately become a saint. Mary Magdalen was not the only harlot saint, but more typical for exempla was conversion only to a virtuous life.⁴² A prostitute dying happily after contrition and conversion is also a theme that can be found already in the early Christian *Vitas patrum*. This collection of texts was known and widely used in Vadstena; Birgitta herself proclaimed in her *Revelaciones* that *Vitas patrum* was one of the texts to be used as a source for the sermons of the priest brothers of her order.⁴³ The encounter of Margarita with the crucifix in the sermon lacks intimacy and emotiveness, unlike Mary Magdalen, who is often depicted as crying for her sins. Margarita's experience is not constructed according to the emotional mystical tradition of contemplation on the crucifixion, but more clearly shaped to follow the exempla where Jesus or the Virgin Mary admonishes, teaches, and sometimes concretely stops Christians from sinning.⁴⁴

The case of the unnamed libidinous woman did not end up as an *articulus* in the canonization dossier but is taken from the deposition of Petrus Olavi. Petrus was a subprior of the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra; he had been a confessor of Birgitta and written down her revelations during her visionary years in Sweden. The case of the involuntary annulment of marriage follows quite faithfully his deposition; many miracles in Petrus Olavi's deposition have a strong didactic flavour which is not typical for judicial testimonies.⁴⁵

If the theme in the case of Margarita fits well into the traditional parameters of medieval exempla, the unnamed servant follows more readily the script of inner contrition. She begs for Birgitta's help and confesses her sins. While exorcising the spirit of fornication from her, Birgitta resorts to tradition and authoritative figures; by reading the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, she posits herself in line with the saint – and possibly with Saint Benedict too, as in the *Dialogues*, there is a tale of Saint Benedict revealing a monk's sin: 'a black boy' was leading this monk out of church while others

were praying. The exiting demon in the libidinous woman's case is depicted as an 'Ethiopian'; Ethiopians representing alterity was a topos already in antiquity. They were typically depicted as young and sensual, and during the Middle Ages they denoted human-shaped demons and lust.⁴⁶ By this minor detail, Petrus and later Johannes emphasized the exemplarity of Birgitta by tying her to a long line of saints fighting against sin and demons.

Narratives of saints and miracles did not only belong to the realm of spirituality, as they were also carefully constructed propagandistic tools bound by the wider societal context. Characteristic of Birgitta as a saint was the fight against sinful people and demons; her acts in correcting the behaviour of fellow Christians made her an exemplary figure, and other people's conversions were crucial turning points in the narratives, be they miracles or later modifications of them.⁴⁷

Miracula and exempla were closely bound text types that affected each other's content.⁴⁸ The above examples were different from each other in regard to the background requirements. Offering judicial proof was the core function of canonization processes: *articuli* guided the interrogation, while depositions were more or less direct responses to them. Sermons, in turn, aspired to didactic influence. The intended use and audience varied greatly; canonization dossiers were aimed at curial scrutiny for the official proclamation of sanctity, while sermons, especially those delivered at Birgitta's feast day, were targeted at a wide lay audience. There are two different kinds of exemplarity. On the one hand, there is Birgitta's exceptional virtue: she is presented as a role model, but at the same time her position and behaviour remain an unattainable goal. She was only to be admired. On the other hand, the exemplarity of other protagonists was created by a particular experience: they may not have been virtuous to begin with, but a proper experience (conversion to penance) made them such. Exempla within a sermon provided an imitable example and attainable model: the experience of conversion.

4. Conversion as an exemplary experience: from personal to collective and authoritative

Why emphasize experience when discussing medieval exempla that hardly foreground the protagonist's interiority? We may find support for this approach from both narrative studies and recent theories of the history of experience. One of the most pivotal theoretical shifts characterizing the postclassical era of narratology concerns the definition of narrative: the work of cognitive narratologists in particular has moved the emphasis from temporal sequence to experientiality (see the Introduction to this special issue) – or, in cognitive theoretical terms, *qualia*, the 'what it feels like' element of a narrative.⁴⁹ Moreover, cognitive narratologists include the requirement of a 'storyworld disruption' in their definitions of a prototypical narrative-as-plot element that most often elicits the representation of an experience. In the words of David Herman, a prototypical narrative recounts 'an event that disrupts [the] storyworld, and the experience of what it is like for a particular individual to live through this disruption'⁵⁰; according to Marie-Laure Ryan, narrative is about 'conflict, 'problem solving', and 'human experience'.⁵¹ We may thus claim that postclassical narratology has crucially highlighted the interconnections of causal disruption and the foregrounding of a 'particular individual's' experience.

Yet the history behind such an understanding of narrativity and tellable stories is long, manifesting itself in both descriptive and normative accounts of narrativity. Already the key element of Aristotle's poetics was *anagnorisis*, a moment of recognition that changes the course of events irrevocably. The plot structures of modern fiction build on personal *epiphany*, a sudden insight that changes both the character and her destiny (e.g. Tigges 1999). Theories of narrative psychology and sociolinguistics from the 1970s to 1990s that shaped the emerging field of interdisciplinary narrative studies emphasize 'breach', 'trouble', or crisis as the catalyst for spontaneous storytelling,⁵² narrative sense making,⁵³ and the formation of a narrative identity.⁵⁴ It is thus a formal-historically and sociopsychologically established fact that a 'turning point' in one's personal life or other temporal sequence coincides with high narrativity and tellability. However, its repeatability requires closer attention to genre and changing narrative environments.

The above quoted and discussed conversion exempla build on the cognitive prototype elements of narrative, the storyworld disruption, and its transforming effect on the protagonist, an individualized experiencer. One such element is *particularity*: 'Indeed, a certain woman named Margarita'; 'Another woman, from the area of Alvastra monastery'.⁵⁵ The particularity of the protagonist, her experience, and the storyworld are further reinforced by temporal markers in the latter narrative. They fix the unknown woman as the experiential centre of the narrative, but instead of offering a modern internal point of view within the storyworld, the medieval exemplum conveys the woman's experience as if witnessed by a bystander, a model audience for this spiritual tutorial: 'So it happened that one day [...] Then the woman threw herself [...] the woman seemed to fall asleep'. The strong presence of the 'horrible stench' in the narrative anchors the events in a bodily sensation,⁵⁶ thus contributing to the audience's immersion⁵⁷ in the storyworld as witnesses to the event. However, the narrative does not lack concrete descriptions of the protagonists' emotions and experiences either: 'She was bitter about this and could not find peace [...] Afterward she was horrified to hear mention or even think of her husband'. Birgitta's emotional reaction is also recounted in this version of the story: 'Birgitta was moved to compassion'. The causal culmination of the narrative, the conversion, is pronouncedly experiential: 'she was immediately liberated from this temptation'. While allegedly arguing for a 'universal' spiritual script to be adopted and repeated by the audience, these exempla derive their argumentative power from particularized experientiality. It is precisely this narrative-rhetorical feature that ties the medieval tradition with the contemporary usage of the exemplum – in naturally occurring conversational storytelling, as studied by sociolinguists, as well as in social media, as demonstrated in the next chapter.

Attention to the prototypical elements of medieval conversion exempla – experientiality, storyworld disruption, and particularity – guide us in detecting the formal elements of this narrative genre that are 'portable' in the sense defined by the new formalist Caroline Levine⁵⁸ – elements that travel through the ages. A refined narratological analysis would retain its focus on the narrative form while also considering its collision with the religious, cultural, and societal forms of the given storytelling context.⁵⁹ The historical research of experience has been effective in calling into question the somewhat ahistorical and naïve understanding of 'immediate' and 'individual' experience that can be detected at least in some earlier forms of cognitive theories and their interdisciplinary applications.⁶⁰ The work of historians of experience implies a hermeneutic understanding

of narrative as a form of meaning-making and experience as culturally mediated.⁶¹ Narrative form, such as the conversion narrative, has thus been considered not only to communicate a particular experience – the conversion – but to *shape* this experience, which is ultimately a form of cultural mediation, regulated by more or less canonical scripts.⁶² Conversion as the archetype of Christian religious experience thus provides us with a prominent example of how a disruptive individual experience is conditioned by canonicity and at the same time, paradoxically, able to provide the audience with an inspirational, highly tellable narrative.

In the medieval cases discussed above, experiences of conversion were produced on multiple levels. In the background there was an actual historical event, an occurrence in the life of these women. It remains unknown if the participants would have agreed on Petrus' or Johannes' formulations of what had happened to them. Already the versions found in the canonization process were shared, interpreted, and formulated to fit the current needs: certification of Birgitta's sanctity. They were not a mere singular occurrence in an individual's life or an anecdotal happening – if a talking crucifix or human-shaped evil spirit can be rendered to such a category under any circumstances. These singular occurrences were shared with the surrounding community on several occasions, which gave them meaning and significance, making them a specific kind of experience: miracles and manifestations of sanctity. Part of the process of giving meaning is visible in the re-use and re-formulation of the past occurrences.

In the process of turning miracles into exempla, unnecessary details were stripped away to expose the moral lesson, and therefore medieval exempla were often shorter than the original miracle narration.⁶³ From this perspective, the re-working of Birgitta's miracles into exempla goes against the grain: the exempla versions are longer and filled with details that are missing from the original. Added details and emphasis on the agency of the sinful Margarita's actions after conversion, for example, were part of the model of experiencing proper conversion the Vadstena brothers intended to create in their sermons. Clearly, the demand for the identification of an individual was not as strict in an educative tale as in a judicial hearing. The particularity of exempla in sermons served a specific purpose: it made the protagonists sufficiently identifiable to make the tale credible, a 'true story'. Simultaneously, these women remained generic figures: the moral lesson of their experiences was comprehensible and internalizable to the whole audience – and particularly to its female members.

A considerable period had passed after the events by the time of the canonization interrogation. Johannes Borquardi wrote his sermon at least fifty years after the hearing. In the exempla versions, the experiences were no longer historical or individual; rather, they had transformed into tools to think with. In their exempla form, the miraculous experiences of these women became devices to create new, proper experiences for those listening to the sermon. Preachers had an authoritative position for sanctioning certain modes of behaviour as accepted experiences, especially creating religious exemplarity. This process of mediation, from judicial proof to a salutary lesson, created a model for experiencing, a context-bound way to understand – both to conceptualize and concretize – the conversion into penance.

Theological finesse and rhetorical elegance are not the details defining exempla as literature. Exempla as texts are by their very nature plain and simple; no defamiliarization or complicated rhetoric is used. Furthermore, Roger Andersson and Stephan

Borgehammar argue that Birgittine preaching was distinguished by plainness more than anything else. This does not mean that sermons and exempla were not effective in the process of creating experience. The preacher encouraged his audience to imagine and feel a change of heart, which was by its nature internal but expressible only by deeds. Exempla, as simple ‘true stories’, encapsulated mental images facilitating the comprehension and memorization of the moral message – the importance of penance and sanctity of Birgitta.⁶⁴ In other words, they created a model for an exemplary experience. The story logic of the medieval conversion exemplum thus provides us with a rich yet prototypical example of the nature of narrative experientiality as a multi-layered phenomenon where immersive storyworld particulars invite the audience to enact the experience. An ideal combination of experientiality enhancing prototypical elements and instrumental, collective sense-making value, the conversion exemplum highlights both the cognitive universality and the context-sensitivity of narrative as a tool for shaping and sharing experience.

5. The conversionists of our times and replicable experience in social media

It might be slightly misleading to speak of the *return* of the exemplum, as the didactic use of narratives of a particular experience or event characterizes all storytelling cultures, yet it is justifiable to argue that the contemporary storytelling boom, favouring the instrumentalization of narratives of personal (disruptive) experience, has rehabilitated the exemplum as a rhetorical dominant.⁶⁵ The affordances of social media in particular support the collective process of narrative interpretation whereby a random occurrence is elevated as a lesson to learn for everyone.⁶⁶ The spiritual logic of the conversion exemplum – of the imitable experience and action – of the Middle Ages finds its counterpart in the non-authorized yet authorial collective storytelling of social media, where an allegedly ‘authentic’ experience gains in representativeness and normativity through the viral sharing of the like-minded.

The dominant forms of contemporary exempla moreover transgress the very boundary between fact and fiction that once was decisive for the ‘crisis of exemplarity’. The ‘true stories’ used to convince the audience of a universal lesson need not be referentially true, and indeed, often they are just as unverifiable as the obscurest stories of saints and miracles. Yet another interesting feature arising from the juxtaposition of medieval and contemporary exempla concerns canonicity. Contemporary fragmented culture and publicity easily appear as the very opposite of the ecclesiastic authority characterizing the European Middle Ages and laying the foundation for the rhetorical power of the exemplum. What does the contemporary exemplary canon consist of? Narrative theory provides us with a useful concept, the *masterplot*, defined by H. Porter Abbott as ‘recurrent skeletal stories, belonging to cultures and individuals that play a powerful role in questions of identity, values, and the understanding of life’.⁶⁷ The concept of the masterplot directs our attention from fixed narrative authorities to dominant cultural forms of storytelling that gain authority through complex processes and emergent agency. The contemporary storytelling culture may lack shared narrative authorities such as the clergy, or canons such as the classics of antiquity, which would guarantee the moral of the story for the audience. There are other mechanisms of canon formation, and in contemporary storytelling cultures, the most notable is the story logic of social media. The dynamics of

sharing, liking, and virality,⁶⁸ together forming what social media theorists call ‘affective networking’,⁶⁹ generate and promote particular types of masterplot while turning a blind eye to other forms of telling. Collective social media storytelling tends to distil universal truths from arbitrary stories of personal experiences going viral. Not all social media activity is ‘narrative’ or ‘storytelling’; viral phenomena that are particularly narrative in nature build on strong moral positioning, transform experiential, particularized narratives into shared cultural stories, and emphasize the universal in the particular. Only by looking at this collectively produced narrative didacticism can we postulate a narrative agency and authority that is emergent in nature.⁷⁰ Respectively, the ‘moral canon’ formed by easily adaptable and shareable story types is not the product of a top-down institutional narrative didacticism but an emergent compilation of masterplots favoured by the story logic of social media. In this canon, a modern version of the conversion exemplum holds a place of honour.

The contemporary example we turn to is the viral story of the ‘Jimmie moment’ that shook the Swedish public sphere in 2019. Physician Kajsa Dovstad wrote a guest column to *Göteborgs-Posten* with the title ‘Har du haft ett Jimmie moment?’ (Have you had a Jimmie moment?), referring to the party leader of the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats Jimmie Åkesson and his political credo. Dovstad recounts her late-night experience of trying to buy ‘traditional’ Swedish food in Gävle, which is filled with Middle Eastern grocery stores. Dovstad writes: ‘Finally I find a store with Arabic signs outside. Inside the meat is marked “halal” in both Arabian and Swedish. [...] After a long search, I finally find something I can handle: instant macaroni. [...] I am in Sweden, in a Sweden that does not feel Swedish. And I don’t like it. A Jimmie moment, as my friend would say.’⁷¹ The piece can be read as an exemplum narrative of a conversion towards right-wing, conservative, and anti-immigration politics, yet the exemplarity was ultimately cemented in the narrative’s social media reception. The concise, storified neologism – the ‘Jimmie moment’ – went viral both in the anti-immigration and anti-racism camps of social media: the conservative and radical anti-immigrationists appropriated this novel and yet easily malleable masterplot to recount their own ‘similar’ experiences of culture shock and estrangement in their native country, whereas the anti-racists turned the masterplot around to recount their ‘anti-Jimmie moments’ of opening their eyes to the growing xenophobia in Sweden. In the social media-dominated narrative environment, Dovstad’s column was thus collectively elevated as an exemplum of a transformative epiphany and appropriated as a new subgenre of conversion narrative as well as an easily shareable model experience. The Swedish media quickly recognized the experience-shaping effect of this exemplum: the repeated recounts of ‘Jimmie moments’ were considered an emblem of the growing sense of insecurity as a collective experience in Sweden, allegedly caused by either immigration or the rise of right-wing populism and extremism.⁷²

When comparing this contemporary exemplum with the medieval conversion narratives, the first striking difference concerns the narrative didactic authority of the storyteller. Dovstad does not hold an institutional position comparable to the Vadstena brothers – instead, characteristically for contemporary storytelling, her narrative authority builds on an impression of an immediate, personal experience. Nevertheless, the narrative was not only canonized in the public sphere but immediately appropriated as a tool for political thinking and identity formation, with public figures as well as members of the general audience

posting their tweet-long conversion stories framed by the tag line: 'Mitt Jimmie moment' (My Jimmie moment). The replicability of this particular, narrativized experience results from the complex entanglement of the affordances of the narrative prototype, the affordances of social media, and the prominence of the Christian conversion as an ancient masterplot. Already some of the rhetorical choices made by Dovstad herself reinforce the interpretation of the narrative as an exemplum: not completely unlike a Christian preacher, she asks her readers in the column's title whether they have had a Jimmie moment as well. Yet it is the affective architecture of social media that ultimately transforms experience into an exemplum; what gets shared is not information on 'what happened', but a reaction – the audience's experience of someone else's experience.

A paradigmatic example would be the much-liked and shared tweet by Teodor Koistinen, a member of the Swedish Liberals party, assuming a confessional tone and highlighting one particular eye-opening moment of revelation:

My Jimmie moment was in the party leader debate in 2014. Åkesson said that extensive immigration could affect the housing shortage further, and all other party leaders glared and disapproved in chorus. Such a simple and completely unproblematic truth, so much denial.⁷³

Koistinen explicitly positions Åkesson as a converter of sorts and uses Dovstad's exemplum merely as a narrative shortcut in the rhetorical purpose of activating the masterplot of a transformative experience. Other types of approbative use include, for example, shares of images of police operations on the street with only the hashtag #jimmiemoment. Hence, the narrative agencies of both the converter and the exemplary convert remain elusive in this cycle of social media storytelling. It is obvious that the party leader Jimmie Åkesson is the ultimate source of narrative didacticism, but the original exemplum of Dovstad in the ethnic food store represents the moment of conversion as it is internalized, reminiscent of modern psychological realism and a phenomenological understanding of 'experience'; it is a sudden epiphany prompted by a collision with the outer world. The seeds of the narrative's virality are precisely in this recipe of experience-cum-conversion, as this emphasis on the private experience of the individual is precisely the kind of narrative supported and fostered by the story logic of social media.⁷⁴ Conversion understood in this way is not only typical but in fact a dominant story type on social media, used by ordinary citizens and professional storytellers alike, to dramatize issues ranging from social injustice to anti-vaccine activism. The 'Jimmie moment' as a viral social media exemplum highlights the contemporary narrative logic where 'true stories' are being transformed into collective doxa not unlike in the use of medieval exempla; the most crucial difference being the internalized nature of conversion, which is compatible with Western emotional capitalism where anyone's disruptive experience can be commodified and put to instrumental use.

The cases of 'reversed exemplarity' prompted by the Jimmie moment do not however have a straightforward parallel in medieval exemplarity characterized by conformity and strict authoritativeness. A case in point would be the much-shared column by journalist Daniel S. Ogalde, offering a counter-narrative to Dovstad's exemplum while also appropriating and reversing the narrative meme that had already taken off on social media:

My Jimmie moment: being nine years old and spat on by skinheads. The least you can do, Kajsa Dovstad, is to stop complaining that you don't like the food. [...] So yes Kajsa, I have experienced Jimmie moments and they have not been as funny as for you and your friend. And yes Kajsa, the 'immigration issue' is not black and white but I know that there is more at stake than just instant macaroni and meatballs.⁷⁵

Ultimately, #jimmie moment emblemizes the contemporary polarized political atmosphere of most European countries and the USA. The hashtag still emerges from time to time within the Swedish public sphere in polarized social media posts, shares, and memes – marking one's decisive conclusions against immigration, urging other users to adopt the same stance, yet still also in the reversed sense as signalling moments of experiencing and witnessing the destructive consequences of racism and right-wing extremism. Not surprisingly, social media platforms have seen the emergence of plainly parodic uses as well: there is an entire genre of #jimmie moment memes expressing longing for a simple and authentic way of life with only two television channels, now long lost.

From the perspective of narrative rhetoric and ethics, social media experientiality thus perhaps bears surprising similarities with the medieval notion of experience as mediated, collective, and shaped by exemplary models. Ultimately, the narrative didacticism characterizing viral storytelling is a result of an emergent collaborative narrative effort, where small narrative gestures such as short tags, framings, and reactions contribute to the claims for the representativeness and universality of the original material. Viral storytelling therefore relies heavily on presupposed narrativized knowledge, such as cultural masterplots enforcing pre-existing ideologies and opinions. In their black-and-whiteness, these viral narratives not only consolidate the affective consensus of the like-minded, but often place a loaded gun in the hands of one's political opponents, as simple positionings are easy to turn around. The exemplarity of experience as a narrative-rhetorical gesture and effect is thus intertwined with today's major epistemic challenges that have been lumped together under the term 'post-truth'.

6. Conclusion

An analysis focusing on narrative experientiality and authority sheds light on both the portable, time-transgressive formal features and the contextual conditions of the conversion exemplum. Obviously, both the context and the means of delivering one's message have changed profoundly, from medieval sermons to modern social media, and their detailed comparison as such is not fruitful. However, comparable elements reveal the persistence of exemplary experiences in demonstrating and persuading. The most notable universal features include the foregrounding of the disruptive experience, change of heart, or personal epiphany; the rhetorical value of experiential details, like bodily sensations and feelings; and the argumentative loop of the exemplum from particular to universal – the narrative needs to provide enough specific details to make the situation and feelings identifiable to the audience while remaining generic enough to be widely applicable. The purpose of exemplary experiences was to generate action, and a personal conversion narrative could gain representative and normative power when it was dressed up as a salutary lesson. The didactic message could be encapsulated within the audience's bodily immersion, whether it is a horrible stench or unsuitable food. The conversion

experience in both contexts contains a sudden, personal realization, and as a result, a sinner or a naïve citizen turns away from his or her vile or futile habits, changing his mind, heart, or opinion for the better. Inner revelation is central in the process, while conscious acts and outer signs (albeit of a different kind) are manifest in both contexts. Even if experiences are always situational, their mediated, collective, and shaped nature comes forth in both contexts.

Clearly, a major shift in the context concerns religion; it is no longer a significant framework, nor is spiritual benefit a goal. Nevertheless, similar rhetorical choices can be found: saints and sinners, the black and white counterparts, are the main protagonists. 'True stories' in social media aspire to if not a Messianic tone, then at least a prophetic one. If the 'preachers' of social media are not the Saviour on the cross both manifesting and suffering for our sins and predicting the future, they at least argue for a saintly position by admonishing others to turn to the right path. At the same time, demonizing 'the Other' is a persistent trait cutting across periods and cultures; this time it is not Christians' souls or salvation at risk as it was during the Middle Ages, but the fate of culture and society.

The most significant divergence concerns the construction of narrative authority: whereas the Vadstena brothers held the institutional and political power and established channels to shape the imitable model of religious experience, the authority of the 'Jimmie moment' as a model for political experience is the product of a complex and emergent interaction between the affordances of social media, the prototype elements of an experiential narrative, and the cultural history of tellable and shareable masterplots. Medieval and contemporary exempla are particularly well suited to a comparative setup, as both build on experience as being replicable and canonizable. Appreciated through the lens of medieval storytelling, exemplary story logic becomes prominent whereby contemporary 'true stories' of personal experience gain moral authority. From the perspective of the history of experience, conversion, as one of the elementary Christian masterplots travelling through time, is uniquely capable of highlighting the nature of experience as an analytical category and a vessel of cultural history.

Notes

1. See e.g. Mula, "Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Cistercian Exempla Collections," 903.
2. Mäkelä, "Lessons from the Dangers of Narrative Project," 182–184; Dawson & Mäkelä, "The Story Logic of Social Media," 28–33; Mäkelä et al., "Dangers of Narrative".
3. Louis *L'exemplum en pratiques*, 69–78.
4. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 8–39; Le Goff, "*Vita et pre-exemplum*," 115–120, Hanska, "*Miracula and exempla*".
5. Le Goff, "*Vita et pre-exemplum*," 119–20; Louis, *L'exemplum en pratiques*, 65. According to Louis, the difference between these two categories lies in the more limited argumentation, miracle exemplaire focusing only on an ideological highlight, the prestige of an institution, or a particular individual.
6. Dawson & Mäkelä, "The Story Logic of Social Media".
7. Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*.
8. Birgitta of Sweden (1303–73) was a member of a Swedish noble family. She is one of the most well-known and controversial medieval saints. The scholarship on Saint Birgitta is vast, but her miracles have aroused less interest and sermons on her feast day even less. See, however,

- Frjörmark, *Mirakler och helgonkult*; Myrdal & Bäärnhjelm, *Kvinnor, barn & fester*; Krötzl, *Pilger, Mirakel, und Alltag*; and Heß, *Heilige machen*. On the practicalities of Birgitta's canonization, see Nyberg, "The Canonization Process of St. Birgitta of Sweden," 67–85.
9. Dovstad, "Har du haft ett Jimmie moment?," *Göteborgs Posten* 15 June 2019. For examples of media coverage, see "'Jimmie moment' väcker stor debatt i sociala medier," *nyheteridag.se* 16 June 2019; "Kröniga om ett 'Jimmie moment' hyllas och hänas," *SVT Nyheter* June 18, 2018.
 10. E.g. Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality;" Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, 133–136.
 11. Gelley, "Introduction," 1–2; Viljamaa, "Kertomus puheen osana," 22–23.
 12. Gelley, "Introduction", 2.
 13. Gelley, "Introduction", 3.
 14. Viljamaa, "Kertomus puheen osana", 18.
 15. Viljamaa, "Kertomus puheen osana", 25–26.
 16. On the historiography of ancient tradition, see Peltonen, *Alexander the Great in the Roman Empire*, esp. 107–15, 168–69, 177, and 223.
 17. Bremond, Le Goff, & Schmitt, *L'Exemplum*.
 18. Smirnova, "Caesarius Heisterbach Following the Rules of Rhetoric", 79–98; Le Goff, "Vita et pre-exemplum", 119–20.
 19. E.g. Caesarius Heisterbachensis, *Dialogus Miraculorum* I, 7.
 20. Rigolot, "The Renaissance Crisis of Exemplarity"; Stierle, "Three Moments in the Crisis of Exemplarity".
 21. E.g. Mäkelä, "Exceptionality or Exemplarity?".
 22. Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality", 342.
 23. E.g. Bender, *Ends of Enlightenment*; Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*.
 24. De Fina & Georgakopoulou, *Analysing Narrative*, 97–98.
 25. Pinard de la Boullaye, "Conversion"; Muldoon, "Introduction", 1–10; Schott, "Intuition, Interpretation, Insight".
 26. Caesar (c. 1180–1240) was a Cistercian monk at Heisterbach monastery. He was also a prior of the monastery for some time. Caesar compiled altogether thirty-seven books; the famous *Dialogues on miracles* was written around 1219–1223. It was primarily intended to be a guidebook for the novices of the Cistercian order; it belongs to the monastic tradition combining miracles and exempla. However, it became quite popular and spread widely in circles outside the order – also among the laity. In the 15th century it was translated into German. Around sixty manuscripts have survived up to the present day. Polo de Beaulieu, Smirnova, & Berlioz, "Introduction", 1–29.
 27. Caesarius Heisterbachensis, *Dialogus Miraculorum* 1, II. See also Knight, *Broken Order*, 67 for 'conversio' as 'changing one's mind for the better', and 65–72 for other Latin verbs for change.
 28. <http://thema.huma-num.fr/>: *ThEMA: Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi* includes 11,537 exemplary anecdotes from the Middle Ages: the geographical area it covers includes the Medieval West and beyond, from Russia and the Middle East to China and Japan; it gives 579 hits for 'conversion'.
 29. Andersson & Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars", 209–36; Andersson-Schmitt, Hallberg, & Hedlund, *Mittelalterliche Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Uppsala*, Bd 8, 25. For copies of earlier exempla collections, see e.g. UB C 7, 38, 173, 282, 243, 415, 647.
 30. Wählin & Andersson-Schmitt, *Magister Matthias*; on Matthias' work's influence on Birgitta, see Salmesvuori, *Power and Sainthood*, 93–105; on Matthias' work's influence on later Vadstena sermons, see Andersson, "Magister Mathias och predikan i Vadstena kloster".
 31. Nyberg, *Birgittinsk festgåva*; Andersson, *De birgittinska ordenprästerne*; Berglund, *Guds stat och maktens villkor*; Gejrot, "Diarium Vadstenense".
 32. Andersson & Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars".
 33. UB C 33197v–103r.

34. 'Karissimmi, triplex status est in mundo in quo homines saluari possunt. Primus est status coniugalis. . Secundus status in hoc mundo in quo homines salvari possunt est status vidualis. Tercius est status virginalis'. UB C 33197v–98r.
35. UB C331 f 101v. 'Sic ipsa continenciam et castitatem servavit et non solum in se vero et alias mulieres ad hoc verbo et exemplo invitabat. Nam mulierem quandam Margaritam nomine que in civitate Stocholmum publica meretrix fuerat admonicionibus prius ad bonam vitam et contumenciam preduxit que mulier postquam peregriancionem faciens ad Sanctum Iacobum cui in Hispaniis esset in quadam civitate. Ymago crucifixi picta in pariete loquebatur muliere: "ubi suadario hanc ymaginem tibi loquentem videri ibi manebis." Dicta autem mulier postquam ad Romam tendens cum ad Montem Flasconis veniret ymaginem crucifixi ibidem vidit que dixit: "hic manebis." Que intrans domum diem feliciter clausit extremum. Sic et aliam mulierem area claustre Alvastro ei serviente et ab episcopo propter affinitem publice separatam a viro temptatione liberavit. Nam mulier ipsa amaritata propter divorcium quietari non poterat. Tunc contigit quod quadam die domina Birgitta fecerat legi ante se Dyalogium Gregorii tunc mulier illa proiecit se ad pedes domine Birgitte rogans se miserere ei narrans ei temptationem suam qualiter ad virum redire affectabat et beata Birgitta compassione mota flexis genibus rogavit omnes que aderunt ut pro illa orarent surgentibus autem illus ab oratione tunc iterum locoi legerent in Dyalogo. Mulier illa quasi obdormiens vidit quadam domina Birgitta flectebat genua quasi ethiopem unum de medio mamillarum suarum egredi cum fetore pessimo, cuius fetore etiam evigilans sensit et statim animus eius ab illa temptatione fuit quietatus et horror etiam videbatur sibi postea de marito mentionem facere seu etiam cogitare'.
36. Andersson, *De birgittinska ordenprästerna*, 207–10.
37. Katajala-Peltomaa & Krötzl, "Approaching Twelfth to Fifteenth Century Miracles", Katajala-Peltomaa & Kuuliala, "Practical Matters".
38. Instead of being divided into parts concerning the life and miracles of the candidate as was typical, Birgitta's process consisted of three parts: *Acta*, *Attestaciones*, and *Summarium*. *Acta* includes practical information about the process and miracles recorded by local clergy in Sweden as well as letters written by the Bishop of Linköping and the Archbishop of Lund, which also contain miracles. The depositions of witnesses interrogated in Italy were recorded in *Attestaciones*. *Summarium* is an abbreviation of the process made at the papal curia. Hess, *Heilige machen*, 111–12; Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 21–22.
39. Canonization processes were judicially a form of inquisition – meaning public renown was required – of the fame of the sanctity of the candidate and the general understanding of a certain incident as a miracle.
40. *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, 14–15.
41. A noble Swedish lady seeing the crucifix and vision of Birgitta is also mentioned in the deposition of Petrus Olavi; for the *articulus*, he replied referring only to prostitutes in generic terms. *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, 472–562, for these cases 496, 503.
42. Jansen, *Making of the Magdalen*, 206–24.
43. Andersson & Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars", 233.
44. See e.g. Caesarius Heisterbachensis, *Dialogus Miraculorum* VII, 32 for a nun planning to run away from her monastery; her plans were stopped by a crucifix appearing at every door and finally by the Virgin Mary slapping her face. See also Caesarius Heisterbachensis, *Dialogus Miraculorum* IV, 38. On the cultivation of emotional techniques in devotion, see McNamer, *Affective Meditation*.
45. *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, 535. On Petrus Olavis's rhetorical choices, see Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 144–45.
46. Patton, "Demons and Diversity in León", 171–200.
47. On the image of Birgitta as a saint in the canonization process, see Hess, *Heilige machen*; Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*.
48. Hanska, "Miracula and exempla"; Hanska, "The Hanging of William Cragh"; Smoller, "Miracle, Memory, and Meaning".
49. Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, 137–160.

50. Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, 14.
51. Ryan, "Toward a Definition of Narrative", 24.
52. Labov & Waletzky, "Narrative Analysis".
53. Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality".
54. Hyvärinen, "Foreword: Life Meets Narrative".
55. See Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, 75–88.
56. See Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 156–59.
57. See e.g. Caracciolo, *The Experientiality of Narrative*, 100–105.
58. Levine, *Forms*.
59. Ibid.
60. E.g. Jay, *Songs of Experience*, 3.
61. On narrative hermeneutics, see Brockmeier & Meretoja, "Understanding Narrative Hermeneutics".
62. Katajala-Peltomaa, Sari. 'From Lived Reality to a Cultural Script: Punishment Miracles as an Experience.' In *Histories of Experience in the World of Lived Religion*, edited by Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022 (forthcoming).
63. Hanska, "*Miracula* and *exempla*".
64. On *exempla*'s rhetorical aims, see also Polo de Beaulieu, Smirnova, & Berlioz, "Introduction", 26; Smirnova, "Narrative Theology in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*", 121–43.
65. Mäkelä, "Lessons from the Dangers of Narrative Project"; Mäkelä et al., "Dangers of Narrative".
66. See above, note 6.
67. Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 236.
68. By virality, we refer to the more or less uncontrolled and unexpected distribution of material over the social network with a high attention peak that however also dissolves rather quickly. See e.g. Sampson, *Virality*; Nahon & Hemsley, *Going Viral*.
69. See e.g. Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*; Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*; Page, *Narratives Online*.
70. See above, note 6.
71. 'Till slut hittar jag en butik med skyltar på arabiska utanför. Inuti är köttet märkt "halal" på både arabiska och svenska. [...] Så, längst in, hittar jag till sist något att handla: ett paket snabbmakaroner. [...] Jag är i Sverige, ett Sverige som inte känns svenskt. Och jag gillar det inte. Jimmie-moment, som min bekant skulle säga.' Kajsa Dovstad: 'Har du haft ett Jimmie moment?' *Göteborgs Posten* 15 June 2019.
72. E.g. Shabane Barot: "Högerns Jimmie-moments". *Tidningenbrand.se* 4/2019.
73. Teodor Koistinen on *Twitter*, 25 June 2019.
74. Mäkelä, "Literary Facebook Narratology".
75. Ogalde, "Mitt Jimmie Moment: Att vara 9 år och bli nedspottad av skinnskallar", *ETC.se*, 18 June 2019.

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