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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Three burglars, a friendly police inspector, and a vegetarian fox: Scandinavian exceptionalism, children's literature, and desistance-conducive cultures

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ABSTRACT

This article draws connections between cultural criminology, the Scandinavian penal exceptionalism literature and desistance research by taking a close look at two Norwegian children's books published in the 1950s. I argue that both books are fundamentally desistance stories and that their enduring success should be seen, at least in part, as a result of their articulation of broader cultural values that Norwegian parents have seen (and continue to see) as important to communicate to their children. Both books highlight redemption and forgiveness as important values. I also argue that because they have become part of the Norwegian literary canon, they continue to act as arenas for the reproduction of these values. These books may, therefore, be seen as both exhibiting and reproducing what we may call a desistance-conducive 'culture of second chances'.

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Introduction

According to Pratt's original formulation of the so-called Scandinavian/Nordic penal exceptionalism thesis (Pratt, 2008a, 2008b; Pratt & Eriksson, 2011, 2012), Scandinavian societies exhibit a 'culture of equality'. Historically, these countries were relatively small, sparsely populated Lutheran societies with little class difference, a high level of interpersonal trust, and no real aristocracy, all of which contributed to equality becoming a deep-rooted cultural value. More recently, this culture has been embedded in and reproduced through the idea of universal welfare provisions, which continues to have a strong standing in Scandinavia (PS Smith and Ugelvik 2017a). Andersson (2017) has argued that Scandinavian societies are also characterized by a paternalistic 'culture of intervention' where state representatives have a low threshold for radical interventions into the lives of individuals.

Nevertheless, empirical research on the specific makeup and substance of the Scandinavian penal culture is yet to feature prominently in the exceptionalism literature. In what follows, I seek to move the debate surrounding the cultural foundation of Scandinavian exceptionalism forward by connecting it to cultural criminology (Bevier, 2015; Ferrell, 1999; Ferrell et al., 2008). This is not an entirely novel mix of perspectives. In

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the most advanced version of the Scandinavian exceptionalism argument, Pratt and Eriksson (2012) do include broader cultural differences between the Nordic countries and what they call 'the Anglophone cluster', including a few references to the role of media and popular culture. There is a brief mention of the historical importance of publicly owned cinemas and how the structure of Nordic media has helped communicate social democratic values. Pratt and Eriksson also see fictional stories by Charles Dickens and J. B. Priestly as typical of a more general antipathy towards the state and its organizations, which has been characteristic of English culture. Furthermore, Pratt and Eriksson suggest that the ascendancy of Nordic noir crime fiction narratives (Hayward & Hall, 2020) – where protagonists, often in many ways troubled and unheroic individuals, have to work outside of and frequently in conflict with government systems in order to solve crimes – may signal a reconfiguration of Nordic penal cultures. The exceptionalism literature has, then, ever since Pratt's (2008a, 2008b) original formulation, included what we may call a cultural element. This promising analytical path has, however, been poorly travelled from the start and largely neglected by other scholars contributing to the exceptionalism literature.

This article revisits the cultural backwaters of the exceptionalism argument and tries to venture further. The aim is to provide a small but important piece to the puzzle through a close reading of two of Norway's most memorable children's books. One is a story about a physically imposing and violent stickup artist who threatens to kill (and eat!) his random victims if they do not surrender all their belongings. The other is a tale about a trio of scruffy housebreakers that prey on the surrounding area, seemingly with impunity. The police have not been able to intervene because the gang uses a dangerous wild animal for protection. From this short introduction, Norwegian readers will already have recognized that I am talking about *Claus Climbermouse and the Other Animals in the Huckybucky Forest* (Egner, 2018 [1953], hereafter *Huckybucky*), and *When the Robbers Came to Cardamom Town* (Egner, 1993 [1955], hereafter *Cardamom Town*), two of Norway's most endearing and best-loved children's books, both written and illustrated by Thorbjørn Egner (1912–1990).

Below, I argue that both books are fundamentally stories of desistance and forgiveness. In both books, serial offenders go through a process of change and end up as valued members of their local communities. Both books, therefore, teach small children that positive change is possible and that communities should acknowledge change and welcome desisters back into the fold. They both highlight and, arguably, reproduce redemption and forgiveness as important cultural values. The aim of this article, then, is to contribute to three separate research literatures: (1) the cultural criminology of children's literature; (2) the study of Scandinavian penal exceptionalism and, more specifically, the cultural element that is a largely neglected part of the exceptionalism argument, and (3) the study of desistance processes in the context of Norwegian culture.

The talented Mr Egner

An artist, author, playwright, actor, scenographer, composer, songwriter, translator, educator, art director and broadcaster – few Norwegians have embodied the notion of the Renaissance man like Thorbjørn Egner. From a contemporary perspective, it is difficult to grasp his position in Norway in the first three decades following the Second World War.

His primary school textbooks shaped the minds of generations of Norwegians. His first fictional children's books, published in the 1940s, were seen as groundbreaking reinventions of the genre. His growing success in the 1950s was closely tied to the development of radio broadcasting. According to Heger (2012), 94% of Norwegian children tuned into the national broadcaster NRK's children's programme on Saturdays in 1953. Even more remarkable, 47% of adults also listened in. All of Egner's major works debuted on radio, which contributed to their instant success. Later, adaptations of his works played a major part in the introduction of television. A theatre version of *Cardamom Town*, with Egner himself playing two of the leading roles, was among the earliest content to be broadcast in Norway when television was introduced in the 1960s (Heger, 2012).

Egner also enjoyed considerable international success in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Heger (2012), no Norwegian playwright, bar Henrik Ibsen, has had the same level of international impact. The theatre productions of *Cardamom Town* and *Huckybucky* were hugely successful not only in the other Nordic countries (*Cardamom Town* sold 50,000 tickets in Reykjavik alone, then a city of 70,000 inhabitants) but across Europe, from north to south and on both sides of the Iron Curtain. On just one occasion, 350,000 copies of the Russian language version of *Huckybucky* were given to members of the Young Pioneers, a Soviet mass youth organization. According to Heger, there is no authoritative account of exactly how many copies have been sold internationally, but it is safe to say that millions of children have been exposed to Egner's work.

Of all his forays into children's literature, the best-known works today, in addition to *Karius and Baktus* (a gripping tale of a little boy's struggle against the tooth trolls living in his own mouth), are *Huckybucky* and *Cardamom Town*. These books have been read and re-read ever since they were published in the 1950s. Theatre productions have regularly been seen all over the country and on national television. One of the features that make them so popular is that both books are filled with songs that kids of all ages (and their parents) know by heart. An animated film version of *Huckybucky* was released in 2016, and a *Cardamom Town* film is in the works with a planned release later this year (2022). Fans can even visit both places physically as both the Huckybucky forest and Cardamom Town have been recreated full-scale at Dyreparken, a combined zoo and entertainment park just outside of Kristiansand in the south of Norway.

In sum, these books are more than just light entertainment for kids. They are part of the core of Norwegian culture, the canon you would assume that everybody who grew up in Norway would be familiar with. In the other Nordic countries, Astrid Lindgren's Emil of Lönneberga and Pippi Longstocking books and the Moomin books by Tove Jansson enjoy a similar ubiquitous position. Unlike Lindgren's and Jansson's works, however, Egner's works are today less well known outside the national context, but in Norway, he is still undoubtedly a household name.

In what follows, I argue that the extraordinary success that Egner's children's books continue to enjoy almost seventy years after they were first published is connected to the fact that they resonate with cultural values and sentiments that remain important in Norwegian society. At the same time, they arguably play a role in reproducing these values and sentiments, given their very central position in the lives of most Norwegian children.

Children's literature, cultural criminology, and desistance-conducive cultures

The viewpoint that popular culture not only reflects but also reproduces social reality is at the core of cultural criminology (Bevier, 2015; Ferrell, 1999; Ferrell et al., 2008; Hayward, 2012, 2016; Hayward & Young, 2004). Analytically, this idea has deep and far-reaching roots. According to Durkheim (1912/1995), 'collective representations' – the images, symbols, myths, and stories through which society comes to understand itself – are instrumental in the reproduction of society. From this point of view, there is no hard line between the 'real' and the 'ideal' (P Smith, 2008); ideas and values have very real consequences and should, therefore, be studied empirically, as social facts.

The field of cultural criminology has largely focused on connections between the concept and phenomenon of 'crime' and the wider cultural context and has attempted to move discussions surrounding crime causation beyond traditional criminological aetiologies that focus on a strict, linear causality (Frederick & Larruskain, 2016). Following Geertz's (1973) understanding of 'culture' as 'webs of significance' that are continuously re-spun through collective meaning-making processes, cultural criminologists have advanced an understanding of outputs of popular culture not as causes of crime in the direct sense but as part of a wider tapestry of contextual factors that should be included in a big picture understanding of human actions (Hayward, 2016).

With a few exceptions, cultural criminologists have yet to investigate the constructions of crime and punishment in children's books. This reflects a broader tendency; children's books are often seen as less serious and less worthy of analysis than 'quality literature' aimed at adults. Furthermore, social scientists, in general, have rarely felt the need to focus on cultural products aimed at children (with the obvious exception of the burgeoning research literature focussing on how violent content – usually videos or video games – might or might not affect the actions of children).

Notable exceptions are Phillips and Strobl's (2006) analysis of the portrayal of crime and justice in comic books, Jewkes (2012) analysis of the film *Kung Fu Panda* and Kennedy's (2021) analysis of the television programme *PAW Patrol*. The most obvious exception of direct relevance to this article, however, is Brisman's (2013; Brisman and South, 2015; 2019a; b) series of analyses of how climate change is being communicated in children's books. His analyses incorporate elements of traditional Marxian ideology critique (Herzog, 2018), understood as a form of hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1970) that seeks to uncover underlying and more fundamental truths. Brisman (2013) reveals that beneath their apparent climate-friendly message, the children's stories analysed 'reflect the ideology of the current global political economy that by its very nature has exacerbated climate change, environmental degradation and planetary harm' (Brisman, 2013, p. 265). According to Brisman, stories that focus almost exclusively on the role that individual children can play in the so-called 'global green shift' underemphasize important systemic factors and the role that international bodies and national and local governments have to play. In this article, I aim to supplement Brisman's critical analysis of children's literature by developing a more appreciative Durkheimian analysis with a stronger focus on the social production and reproduction of collective meaning.

According to Durkheim (1893/1989), without some set of common values or shared sentiments, no society would continue to exist for very long. The idea that societies presuppose a set of beliefs and sentiments that are more or less common to the average member is fundamental to his sociology. For him, societies recreate themselves partly through the punishment of criminals. Law-abiding members of society come together as a collective through a shared 'reaction of passionate feeling' (Durkheim, 1893/1989, p. 52), which culminates in the punishment of offenders. In his comprehensive discussion and reformulation of Durkheim's 'collective consciousness', K Smith (2014) argues that in complex modern-day post-industrialized societies characterized by what Durkheim called organic solidarity, this platform is less uniform and more loosely organized, multi-faceted and flexible than in traditional societies characterized by mechanic solidarity. In such societies, according to K Smith (2014, p. 8), 'punishment does provide people who otherwise have very little in common with each other a rare opportunity to come together in opposition to the criminal and hence to reassert moral norms'. At the same time, punishment expresses this shared cultural platform of values and sentiments and recreates it. From a Durkheimian perspective, this communicative function of punishment is a fundamental part of the ties that bind us together as a society.

When it comes to the connection between cultural factors and desistance processes, what we might call the cultural criminology of desistance is rather underdeveloped. There is a growing literature on the role that the creation of cultural products (especially music) can play in processes of desistance and reintegration (Hjørnevik et al., 2022; Kennedy, 2021), but less has been written on the influence of the wider cultural climate of these processes. A notable exception is Segev and Farrall (2019), who found that forms of social capital that strengthen desistance processes are mediated through and shaped by wider cultural values and norms.

A number of tangentially relevant studies have analysed state punishment practices as part of wider cultural contexts, however (Garland, 2001; Hudson, 2004; P Smith, 2008). According to P Smith (2008), practices of punishment cannot be understood without reference to the cultural meanings that overlap and intersect in partly intended, partly accidental and often obscure and intangible ways: 'In short, there is a substantial body of literature suggesting that meanings within and without the penal system influence the quantity and quality of punishment' (p. 6). I would argue that cultural meaning-making processes also influence what happens once punishment has formally ended and the punished is supposed to deal with its aftermath and return to some sort of post-release normality. If, following Durkheim, 1893/1989; K Smith, 2014), the emotional reactions that drive and shape punishment are underpinned by 'defined cultural systems' (P Smith, 2008, p. 15), then the same is probably true of emotional reactions to the previously punished and the climate into which they are released. From this perspective, a society's 'penal imaginary' (P Smith, 2008) may include cultural ideas and values surrounding redemption, forgiveness, and the importance of second chances, which can be more or less conducive to desistance processes. In what follows, I argue that *Huckybucky* and *Cardamom Town* may be connected to the Norwegian penal imaginary in the sense that they simultaneously express and contribute to the reproduction of values that may affect penal practices and the wider penal cultural climate.

In the Huckybucky forest

Huckybucky tells the story of a community of anthropomorphized forest animals. The book begins with a conversation between Morten Woodmouse, a 'good and diligent mouse who kept busy and left others in peace'[1] (Egner, 2018 [1953]: 5) and his cousin Claus Climbermouse, a devil-may-care kind of rodent who enjoys singing frivolous ballads more than he likes filling up his larder with nuts in preparation for winter. Claus gets by on charm alone. When he wakes up in the morning, he never knows where he will get food that day, but he inevitably finds himself being invited – or he invites himself – to supper somewhere. From time to time, he also breaks into Pa Squirrel's basement to help himself to a few nuts, but this is a secret.

All would have been just fine had it not been for the predators of Huckybucky. The smaller animals live in constant fear of Marvin Fox, a violent robber who preys on those weaker than himself. Robberies sometimes turn into homicide when his victims refuse to immediately turn over the cake or sweets they are carrying. He readily admits as much in his introductory song:

> My name is Marvin Fox,
> check out my foxy locks!
> On pointed toes I chase my foes;
> they tremble in their socks.
> I'm hiding everywhere
> and prey on those who dare
> to leave their house.
> Oh, little mouse,
> I'll find you anywhere!
> I tell them BOO! Come hand over your basket!
> The ragged mouse should do just what I ask it!
> See, if the mouse says no
> and wants to have a go,
> then one and-a-two and-a-three and-a-SNAP!
> The rest you surely know.
>
> When I go out to eat
> a tasty furry treat,
> the little mousy mouse should know
> just how to use his feet.
> For I'll be on the trail,
> snapping at his tail.
> He'll cry, oh please, please let me go
> Alas to no avail!
> But shush! What is that awful sound I'm hearing?
> That's Morten! Well I better be preparing!
> Be quiet over there,
> for he will soon be here.
> I'll curl up right behind this tree
> –poor mouse, your end is near. (H13)

Morten is lucky. Mister Crow, high up in a tree, decides to help him and cries at the top of his lungs 'Watch out, fellows! There's a hunter right behind that tree!' (H14). Marvin jumps into the bushes in an attempt to flee the non-existent hunter, and Morten makes his escape.

Later, in conversation with his grandmother Grandma Woodmouse, Morten vents his frustration:

> 'Darn it, that awful fox!' . . . I think it's sad that it has to be that way, that they eat each other in the forest.'
>
> 'You might say so,' said Grandma, 'but that's the way it has always been. They eat each other – and that's that!' (H45).

Morten is a conscientious collector of nuts and a dependable member of the Huckybucky community, but he is also a reformer and a visionary. When Grandma leaves, he sits down and drafts the Law for the Animals of the Huckybucky Forest:

1. All animals in the forest shall be friends.
2. You are not allowed to eat one another.
3. He who is lazy and can't find his own food must not take food from others. (H47-8)

Morten is Huckybucky's codifier, but by himself, he is just a small mouse with big dreams. He needs to put significant force (and brute strength) behind his law for it to become a reality. Together with Claus, he recruits Father Bear to the cause, who promptly calls a meeting of all the animals in the forest. Here, they all vote in favour of implementing Morten's law. Even Marvin, after significant pressure from Father Bear, grudgingly raises his paw. Thus, the rule of law is implemented in Huckybucky.

Without access to his usual diet, poor Marvin does not know how to feed himself and soon finds himself starving. Faced with this predicament, he finds a loophole in the law, which clearly states that he is not allowed to eat animals *in the forest*. He then decides to go hunting around the neighbouring farm and finds the storehouse. He gets away with a cured ham and runs off to his foxhole to feast.

Then, tragedy strikes Huckybucky. When the farmer and his wife realize that their biggest ham is missing, they fetch the hunting rifle to go fox hunting. Marvin is, of course, long gone, but the farmers stumble upon little Bruin Bear, the toddler son of Father Bear. They kidnap Bruin and take him back to their farm with the intention of selling him to the circus. When Mother Bear realizes that Bruin is missing, she asks all the animals of Huckybucky to join her in the search. When they discover that Marvin, too, is missing, they all rush off to the foxhole, where they find him sleeping with a huge bone lying next to him. At first, they think that Marvin, mad with hunger, has reverted to his old ways and eaten Bruin for dinner. He soon explains that the bone is from a ham he had stolen from the farm, and that, strictly speaking, was not against the law. Father Bear, relieved that Bruin has not been eaten, agrees.

Marvin then joins the search, and his fox-specific skills soon prove invaluable. He tracks Bruin's scent back to the farm. Morten and Claus volunteer to go in after him because, as very small animals, they might be able to sneak in unnoticed. They find Bruin locked in the storehouse. However, with the farm dog Hannibal sleeping just outside, there is no way an animal as big as Bruin can get past without waking the dog. Risking his own life, Marvin volunteers to try to draw Hannibal's attention away from the storehouse so that Morten and Claus can free Bruin. The plan works, and Bruin is soon reunited with his parents. After a moment of suspense, Marvin manages to outfox the dog and doubles back to his friends:

> Everybody cheered him on when he came running: 'Go Marvin, go Marvin, go Marvin!' they cried.
>
> Marvin was so out of breath that he almost lost it.
>
> 'I've never been in such trouble before,' he said. 'That horrible mutt nearly chased me all across the country! – But I finally got rid of him down by the old fox's den, because I slipped *in* one way and *out* the other way, but the stupid dog didn't see it, so he's still standing there barking away!'
>
> Father Bear and all the others laughed. 'Ha ha ha!' and Mother Bear gave Marvin a great big hug. 'Oh Marvin! You are just such a . . . yes, *that* you are!'
>
> 'And now we all will have a real celebration party in the forest!' said Father Bear, 'and celebrate that all turned out well and that we are all such good friends.' (H88)

United against a common enemy, all the animals of Huckybucky came together as a community. Marvin's leading role in the rescue operation where he was willing to risk his own life to save Bruin makes a big difference for him. He changed in the eyes of the others; once a dangerous menace, he is now fully included in that community.

Cardamom Town

A similar story can be found in *Cardamom Town* (Egner, 1993 [1955]). Cardamom is a small town 'so far away that almost nobody knows about it' (CT5). The main protagonist is Police Inspector (sometimes also referred to as Police Superintendent) Bastian. Dressed in a smart red uniform jacket with gold epaulettes, Bastian represents the rule of law in Cardamom. As police inspectors go, however, he can be found at the 'softest' and least operative end of the spectrum. The book opens with the following self-presentation:

> I am Superintendent Bastian
> and am a friendly man,
> for I think a man should be that if he can.
> And I walk about and see that all
> Are happy and are free,
> for I think that is how everyone should be.
>
> I have made up a law for Cardamom
> and posted it around.
> And in this law the following words are found:
> You shall never bother others,
> you shall be both fair and kind,
> and whatever else you do I shall not mind. (CT5)

By and large, Cardamom is a peaceful town. Bastian's law seems to work. His main concern is the upcoming Cardamom fête, for which he doubles as event planner. Everything would be just hunky-dory if it were not for the three robbers:

> On a remote plain beyond Cardamom Town stands a tall and peculiar old house. That's where Casper and Jesper and Jonathan live. Casper is the eldest, Jesper the most handsome, and Jonathan the greediest, when it comes to food. The three of them are robbers, but they're not quite as bad as many other robbers, and they spend most of their time at home in their house. (CT13)

As a combined pet and watch 'dog', the robbers keep a lion. They have to feed it regularly to avoid being eaten themselves (he once ate Jesper's big toe when he was particularly hungry). Apart from that, they do not seem to do much of anything. They just stay at home and eat and drink until they are all out of food, at which point they head off to Cardamom in the dead of night to steal what they need:

> We sneak on tiptoe as we go
> so stealthily to steal-o.
> We take just what we need and know
> where we can find a meal-o.
> Now darkness lies upon the town,
> Asleep beneath its eiderdown.
> We're off with our bag and our bucket and pan,
> Both Casper and Jesper and Jonathan.
> (Yes, that's what we do).
>
> The baker shop is where we stop,
> we shan't pinch much from there though,
> just bread and cake and soda pop
> enough for us to share-o.
> It's true that sometimes Jonathan
> will grab himself a gingerman.
> But then we make do just as best as we can,
> both Casper and Jesper and Jonathan.
> (CASPER: Yes, Jonathan, he always has to have something to bite into.)
>
> The butcher smokes a hock of ham
> and cervelat and bacon;
> loin of pork and rack of lamb,
> to feed the lion, we've taken.
> A rib of beef for roasting rare,
> and sausages are spicy fare.
> But then we make do just as best as we can,
> Both Casper and Jesper and Jonathan.
> (JONATHAN: Yes, we do that. But one needs a little something to live.) (CT17)

The next morning, the pork butcher, realizing that he has been burglarized, again, goes off to find Inspector Bastian to report the crime. Bastian is saddened by the news and agrees that something has to be done: 'I shall note it down in my book ... The first thing to do is to write it down, and then give the matter careful consideration'. (CT 21). The pork butcher is not impressed. He had something a little more decisive in mind: 'The robbers have to be arrested! ... [They] should have been arrested ages ago' (CT 21)! Inspector Bastian's reply leads to one of *Cardamom Town's* most memorable passages:

> 'Listen here, my dear pork butcher! Have *you* ever arrested folk who keep a lion?'
> 'No', said the pork butcher. 'But I'm *not* a Police Inspector'.
> 'I won't be a Police Inspector either – by the time the lion has eaten me up', said Bastian.
> 'My apologies, Mr Bastian', said the pork butcher, 'I hadn't thought of that'. (CT21-22)

Everyday life then continues in Cardamom Town without much hope for change. A few individuals are frustrated, notably the small business owners who are

repeatedly targeted by the three robbers. However, the situation appears completely beyond Bastian's control.

Frustrated by Bastian's poor policing skills, the pork butcher, the baker, and grocer Hill decide to take matters into their own hands. When the three robbers visit the bakery one night, they are caught in the act. The three vigilantes tie the robbers up with a long rope and march them off to the police station in the middle of the night, where Bastian sentences them to prison for forty-eight days.

> 'That's a long time!' said Casper.
> 'Yes, but you'll get a comfortable room'.
> 'Is it warm in there?' asked Jesper.
> 'Cosy and warm', said Bastian.
> 'Do we get food as well?' asked Jonathan.
> 'You'll get that. Three times a day'.
> 'Then it's not so bad', said Jonathan.
> And the case was closed. (CT102-4)

Once the robbers are in custody, Bastian wastes no time. The next morning, Mrs Bastian brings them breakfast and coffee, which is 'delicious' and a pleasant surprise. She returns later with flowers for their table. Bastian buys a washbowl, a scrubbing brush, and some soap for the robbers. After a few initial groans of protest, they get into it – as Jesper puts it: 'I'm beginning to think it feels great to be clean, after all' (CT109). Bastian then invites barber Patterson to come and cut their hair. A member of the Town Orchestra, Patterson also brings his clarinet. He is pleased to learn that the robbers were once buskers, playing the flute, the bassoon, and the drums on the streets for money before a bad turn forced them into a life of crime. The enterprising Bastian seizes the opportunity and arranges a charity concert in the town square featuring the three robbers.

Then, just as in *Huckybucky*, tragedy strikes. The tower of old Tobias, Cardamom Town's resident meteorologist and old wise man, catches fire. Tobias himself is safe (he was out running errands at the time), but his pets – a puppy and a parrot – are trapped inside.

> Then Police Inspector Bastian thought of Casper and Jesper and Jonathan. Robbers were bound to be experts at climbing up the outside of a house. He ran back to the police station, unlocked the cell door, and shouted to the robbers: 'Casper, Jesper and Jonathan – Hurry – up – quick, quick – the tower house is burning, and we need your help!'
>
> 'Depend on us, Mr Bastian,' said Casper.
>
> 'We'll do our very best to help,' said Jesper and Jonathan. (CT123)

The three robbers – and Casper in particular – take charge of the situation. They rescue Tobias's pets, and with the help of the townspeople, they soon have the fire under control. In a moment of crisis, the town has come together under the competent leadership of Casper. When the fire is out, all three robbers are pardoned, and Casper is made the permanent fire officer of Cardamom Town right there on the spot.

> 'Are we *completely free*?' asked Jesper and Jonathan.
> 'Completely free', said Bastian, nodding and smiling.
> Can we walk down the street like other folk?' asked Jesper.

> 'Just like other folk', said Bastian.'We ought to try that', said Jonathan, 'come on lads, let's take a stroll'.
>
> And so the three friends took a little jaunt round the square. They greeted everyone they met: 'Good day, good day!' they said. – And everyone was friendly to them in return.
> 'This is a treat', said Casper.
> 'Yes – this is what it's like to be ordinary people', said Jesper happily. (CT129)

And so, as the book comes to an end, the former robbers' new status as 'ordinary people' is cemented. Casper the fire officer is soon joined by Jesper the circus ringmaster and Jonathan the apprentice baker. No longer outsiders living on the periphery of society, the three ex-offenders are fully included members of the community of Cardamom Town.

Discussion: desistance stories and desistance-conducive cultures

According to De Leeuw and Buijzen (2016), research on children's television has been overly preoccupied with studying the harmful effects of programming while neglecting any potentially positive effects. The limited cultural criminology research on media products directed at children has also largely focused on negative effects. For example, Kennedy (2021) maintains that *PAW Patrol* reproduces problematic cultural narratives that contribute to legitimizing surveillance and state violence. This critical perspective has produced interesting results, but the overall emphasis on potentially adverse effects seems unbalanced. An exception is Jewkes (Forthcoming) analysis of the *Mr Benn* books and television show and, in particular, the book where Mr Benn goes to prison, which, according to Jewkes, shows that humanity, hope and rehabilitation are possible, even under very difficult circumstances. What are the main messages communicated to readers of *Huckybucky* and *Cardamom Town*?

A critical analysis focussing on the ideology inherent in these two stories might conclude that the kind of unreserved forgiveness and re-inclusion described by Egner is a fiction and that his books teach children conformity and that formal state social control is important and should be respected. From such a perspective, both books could even be described as social control technologies in their own right. Swedish theatre director Sofia Jupither created a storm of outrage when she published such an analysis in 2013 (Jupither 2013). Her argument was that *Cardamom Town* is harmful to children because it teaches them that conformity is good and that people should stay in their place – ideals she explicitly connected to the political far right. She concluded that Egner should now be buried once and for all. Predictably, Norwegian academics and intellectuals turned out *en masse* to defend Egner with a strength that is characteristic of Norwegian–Swedish sibling rivalry at its most intense. Unlike my compatriots rushing to Egner's defence back in 2013, I am not saying that such an analysis is completely without merit. Several scholars – myself included – have argued that there is a dark side to Scandinavian societies and that liberal values and ambitious welfare regimes in practice may lead to paternalism and intrusive social control interventions (Ugelvik 2011; Barker, 2012; Smith, PS and Ugelvik, 2017b; Todd-Kvam 2019). I do believe, however, that a more appreciative Durkheimian reading focussing on the social production and reproduction of collective meaning has more interesting insights on offer in the case of these two books.

In my view, the *leitmotif* of both *Huckybucky* and *Cardamom Town* is the importance of being part of a community, not repressive conformity in the sense that people should all

be and act the same. Both books are stories of exclusion from being followed by inclusion in communities; they are both fundamentally what we may call desistance and reintegration stories. Unlike Egner's contemporary Lindgren, who unambiguously celebrated outsiders and 'freaks' in all her most famous books – it is enough here to mention Pippi Longstocking and the utter lack of respect she exhibits in all her encounters with the local constabulary – Egner clearly emphasized being part of a community. Lindgren's Pippi is a perpetual outsider. The narrative in the Pippi books often centres around various attempts at including and normalizing her and how they inevitably fail. Unlike Marvin and the three robbers, she has no real character arc; she is the same subversive troublemaker at the end of the books that she was at the beginning. Her great appeal consists in the fact that she, as an outsider, is larger-than-life, unchanging and unchangeable, unaffected by the world of grownups. It should be said that Egner also clearly did have a soft spot for outsiders. Claus Climbermouse does not work a day in his life, yet he thrives in Huckybucky because of his charms and gifts from his good friends. Despite pilfering the odd nut, he is relatively harmless. Conversely, Marvin and the three robbers prey on the community and, therefore, have to come back into the fold. Arguably, one might say that Egner's vision is more realistic than Lindgren's in this sense at least: In his stories, as in the real world, there are ways of being an outsider that put unacceptable strains on other people. Where Lindgren's Pippi books highlight the contrast between the unique individual Pippi and the local community that tries (and fails) to turn her into a normal child, Egner balances individualism with the importance of solidarity and acting as part of a community. In general, then, his works can be seen as a celebration of community and society and the importance of finding a way to express oneself within the bounds of social expectations.

In *Huckybucky*, Egner showed that he was very much a believer in the law as an instrument for social and individual change. Marvin was never really punished in the strict legal sense (although he undoubtedly initially saw his enforced vegetarianism as a cruel form of punishment). What happened, rather, was that a legislator stepped in to fill a legal void. When Father Bear decided to lend brute force to Morten's legal innovation, legislative (Morten) and judicial and executive power (both, presumably, Father Bear) joined hands. However, the law in and of itself was not enough. At the beginning, Marvin never really wanted to stop eating other animals. He very reluctantly, and only after considerable peer pressure, agreed to adhere to the new law. Chance then provided him with an opportunity to prove his worth to the local community, when his fox-specific qualities made him instrumental in the rescue of young Bruin. It was only when the force of the law was conjoined with feelings of being part of a community that Marvin went through a change process that culminated in the post-rescue mission celebration party, which acted as a strong ritual of inclusion (Maruna, 2011). Differently put, in *Huckybucky*, Egner demonstrates progression towards tertiary desistance and the importance of relationships and a sense of belonging for desistance processes (McNeill, 2015; Weaver, 2015).

In *Cardamom Town*, the inclusion of the three robbers in the town community seems much more like the result of a deliberate plan. Inspector Bastian, who was useless when it came to arresting the robbers, turned out to be smart, flexible, and resourceful when it came to their reintegration. He understood that punishment by itself is never enough and wasted no time involving the local community in the everyday lives of the robbers. He

must have known exactly what he was doing when he invited barber Patterson to the prison as a representative of the local community. The robbers soon saw the advantages of conformity, and they soon *wanted* to conform. Again, chance provided an opportunity for the robbers to prove themselves, as they were recruited to aid with the fire. Presented with new, law-abiding jobs that suited their individual preferences, they leapt at the opportunity. Again, Egner described rituals of inclusion and tertiary desistance as important (Maruna, 2011). Casper, Jesper, and Jonathan's little walk around the town square at the end of the book seems particularly significant: Being greeted and acknowledged as 'ordinary people' made them understand that change was possible. Egner's message seems clear: If given a second, or third, or fourth chance, most people will eventually change their ways. Therefore, benign and easy-going policing should be combined with a belief in the capacity of individuals to change for the better.

As children's stories, *Huckybucky* and *Cardamom Town* both fail to fully capture the real-life complexities of crime, justice, and redemption as sociocultural phenomena. Both stories, for instance, feature victims in need of saving (Bruin bear and Tobias' pets) who – weak, respectable, and blameless – unambiguously exhibit the characteristics of 'ideal victims' (Christie, 1986). In both books, a single act of unselfish heroism is enough to wipe the slate clean and bring the former offenders back into the fold. Real-world change processes are much less straightforward. I would argue that their enduring success is connected not to their realism, but to the fact that both books invite children into a collective process of forgiveness. Through the consumption of Egner's works, Norwegian children have, for generations, participated – and they will, by all accounts, continue to participate – in the re-inclusion of deviant outsiders. This collective fictional re-inclusion process can fruitfully be connected to Nussbaum's (2008) concept of the 'narrative imagination', which highlights the role literature can play in allowing us to imagine the world from different perspectives. Literary imagination, according to Nussbaum, refers to the ability to see others not as abstract entities, but as fellow human beings who share a common vulnerability and similar weaknesses, needs, hopes, and aspirations. Literature might therefore strengthen the capacity in readers to put themselves in other people's shoes. This imaginative capacity is important, Nussbaum argues, not least because it may shape the way we view social outsiders. Again and again, children exposed to Egner's work have learnt to accept Police Inspector Bastian's *laissez-faire* and high-trust attitude to policing and to tolerate Claus Climbermouse's bohemian lifestyle and minor infractions. They have also welcomed Marvin and the three robbers back into the fold as valuable members of society. At the same time, they have, one might argue, participated in the recreation of an inclusive society and, in the process, turned themselves into people who choose to include. If, following Katz (1988, p. 70), we see the consumption of fictional and mass media representations of crime as a 'daily moral workout', Egner's books can be described as one-pound dumbbells made for beginners.

At any time, there is a dominant cultural pattern of widespread values and ideas that form part of what Durkheim (1893/1989; K Smith, 2014) referred to as the collective consciousness of a society. However, culture is never – not even at its most monolithic – just one single thing. Culture is a process, always evolving and in flux, constantly in the process of reinterpretation and re-enactment. This instability may be balanced by cultural manifestations that can be said to form intersections or junctures, connecting different parts of the web and making it more structurally sound overall. Following Geertz's (1973)

analysis of the cultural significance of the Balinese cockfight, Carrabine (2016, p. 254) claims that 'culture', from one perspective, is just another word for 'a complex assembly of texts to be read'. If this is true, I think that it makes sense to say that some texts are more centrally located in cultures than others. Such texts exhibit and reproduce values that resonate with a wide range of other texts and perhaps with the web of significance as a whole. I believe that Egner's classical contributions to children's literature have been successful for many different reasons, but not least because they articulate broader cultural values that Norwegian parents have seen, and see to this day, as important for children to internalize. These texts can, therefore, be said to reflect and function as arenas for the reproduction of important values that form part of the Norwegian 'collective consciousness' (K Smith, 2014), namely that people who behave badly can change and become valuable members of their communities if they are treated well.

My claim in this paper is that Egner's two desistance stories remain important parts of the Norwegian cultural web of collective representations formed around ideas and concepts such as crime and punishment, atonement and forgiveness and the possibility of moral development and positive change. Is this a fair reading? If children's television programming contributes to the spread of a certain penal culture (Kennedy, 2021), the same can probably be said of children's books. Egner's books mirror the fledgling social-democratic society of which they were part at the time of publication, but they continue to reproduce what we might call a desistance-conducive culture whereby people are seen as changeable, where there is potential in even the worst amongst us and where strong and inclusive communities trump self-centred egotism. Arguably, just like comic books for older children, for young children, Egner's books 'provide an entertaining vehicle for readers to symbolically and vicariously experience the moral and philosophical questions sparked by criminal justice themes' (Phillips & Strobl, 2006, p. 307). This is arguably a large part of their enduring appeal.

Conclusion

Norwegian criminologist Nils Christie was once asked in an interview to comment on the similarities between his own penal philosophy and Police Superintendent Bastian's *laissez-faire* rule in *Cardamom Tow*n. The subtext was that Christie's ideas, like Bastian's policing strategy, were naïve, utopian and unfit for modern society. His response was quintessential Christie: 'Yes, I'm proud of that similarity. Thorbjørn Egner was a very insightful criminologist' (as cited in Lied, 2007). At the time of publication, Egner himself highlighted the similarity between the make-believe world of Huckybucky and the real world. In a brief foreword, he wrote that in Huckybucky, 'just as in our world, there is a longing for peace and security and mutual respect between people' (Egner, 2018 [1953]: 4). What can we take from Egner's works if we want to understand contemporary Norwegian society?

Does it make sense to speak of a Norway-specific 'penal culture' (Smith, P, 2008) or a Norwegian 'culture of control' (Garland, 2001)? From the Scandinavian penal exceptionalism perspective, researchers have argued that a 'culture of equality' (Pratt, 2008a) is typical of these countries. Others have pointed to a 'culture of intervention' (Andersson, 2017). In this article, I have sought instead to highlight what we might call a desistance-conducive 'culture of second chances'. Whether this is an expression of a more general

reintegrative cultural climate[2] characteristic of Norway or even Nordic societies more broadly is a question for further empirical research. A proper exploration of the collective consciousness of a particular society and whether and how it might create such a climate would need a much broader interdisciplinary approach (see, McNeill & Urie, 2020, for an attempt at outlining such an agenda). More research is also needed to explore how such cultural values, if they are common, impact specific desistance processes. I would hypothesize that a 'culture of second chances' would be conducive to actual desistance processes, but substantial research resources would be needed to demonstrate this kind of impact in practice.

The question of how literature and society are connected has been debated for centuries. Art and life imitate each other in complex and always ongoing cultural processes that are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to entangle empirically. Connecting cultural criminology with the Scandinavian exceptionalism literature, this article has just made the tiniest of preliminary scratches on the surface of such an undertaking. It is important to note that children, like adults, are active users, not passive consumers of media content. A more comprehensive analysis of the role Egner's books play would warrant empirical studies of children's reactions to these and other media products and the role they may play in the crafting of personal narrative identity (Loseke, 2007).

The extent to which cultural values and sentiments connected to forgiveness and second chances, if found to be a commonality in Norway or the Nordic countries in general, are *exceptional* is necessarily also a question for further comparative studies. This article is based on a close reading of just two specific children's books, and its aims have necessarily been more modest. Why have Egner's books enjoyed continuous success to this day? Children's books are part of the cultural maintenance of core values and ideas. When they are very successful, it is for a variety of reasons, but one reason could be that they incorporate values and ideas that we as a society deem commendable and preservable. According to P Smith (2008), punishment invariably has a mythological element. *Cardamom Town and Huckybucky* are not just light entertainment for children. They are part of the mythological cultural underpinnings (Barthes, 1973) of Norwegian society. They are an arena for the cultural reproductions of values and sentiments surrounding crime and punishment, forgiveness, re-inclusion, and positive change. I would argue that these stories not only mark but also actively contribute to the re-creation of the moral boundaries of society.

In saying this, I do not claim that every member of Norwegian society shares such values or that Norwegians always act in accordance with these values in every situation; this is categorically not the case. Following K Smith (2014), the collective consciousness of modern-day societies should be seen as much less uniform and monolithic than Durkheim suggested. My claim is simply that these ideas seem to make collective sense to many Norwegians and that they are validated and reproduced through the endless everyday bedtime story reiterations of Egner's works across the country.

Notes

1. I rely here on the English language versions of Egner's classics, translated by Anthony Barnett (*Cardamom Town*, first published in 1993) and Heidi Sævareid (*Huckybucky*, first published in 2018).
2. A term suggested by Fergus McNeill, personal communication.

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