

# **Narrating Rape as a Collective Trauma: Collectivity, Dialogism and Heteroglossia in Monika Fagerholm's *Vem dödade bambi?***

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## **Abstract**

This article analyses Finland-Swedish Monika Fagerholm's novel *Vem dödade bambi?* [*Who killed bambi?* my transl.] (2019) as a postmodern, fragmented story where rape is narrated as a collective trauma. In Trauma Studies, collective traumas are studied in conjunction with either the Holocaust (Fareld 2010, Laub 1992) or colonialism (Forter 2014), while the trauma of sexual violence is considered an individual trauma (Brown 1995, Caruth 1996, Tal 1996). Contrary to this, in Fagerholm's novel, collectivity – both as theme and as form – permeates the novel on at least three levels: Firstly, as a trauma involving a whole small-town community, secondly as subjects constituted by their collectivity, and thirdly on a stylistic level through the use of intertextuality, fragments, dialogism, and heteroglossia.

In order to analyse how such a collectivity works in Fagerholm's rape narrative I turn to Michail Bakhtin's narratological concepts *dialogism*, how the novel as a narrative format consists of several voices; and *heteroglossia*, the idea of language as a process consisting of multiple layers and different narrative positions, combining future and former languages (Bakhtin 1981) as well as to Kristian Shaw's and Sara Upstone's use of the feminist narratological term *transglossic*, how multiple layers in a novel become meaningful in that they offer alternatives to established storylines, and the political aspects of such an approach to narrativity (2021). The article shows that rape is narrated as collective on three different levels in Fagerholm's novel: the collectivity of the small-town community, collectivity within individuals, and collective stylistics. Rape is narrated via Fagerholm's fragmented style, and this results in a complex narrative structure that

reveals how language is part of the collective structures that make rape possible.

## Keywords

Monika Fagerholm, rape narratives, Michail Bakhtin, collectivity, trauma studies

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Monika Fagerholm's awardwinning novel *Vem dödade bambi?* (2019) [*Who killed bambi?*] stands out as a collective rape story. The authorship is noticeably influential, not only in a Finland-Swedish context, but in contemporary Nordic and international literature overall due to its style and scope, as Fagerholm embraces fragmentation and repetition on multiple narrative levels (Malmio & Österlund 2016, 8). In her novel, rape is a collective traumathat involves the whole community over long time; the narrative structure builds on memories and repetition, where the actual rape, its victim and perpetrators are only one of several episodes iterated. The aim of this article is to analyse how the narrative of, as well as the literary form of, collectivity and rape are intertwined in Fagerholm's novel. This passage, where the all-knowing narrator combines storytelling and analysis, quotations and fixed expressions, is one example of how the rape is told, and how the telling of rape is dependent of the collective, as well as *one* example of how Fagerholm uses style:

En våldtäkt är en våldtäkt. Men att säga det, framförallt, ta bort garderingarna skulle bli ett långt projekt. Ställvis omöjligt. Eventuellt misslyckas. För garderingar var vad omgivningen ville ha, och ofta, beredvilligt, erbjöd. Särskilt de närmaste: överbeskyddande mammor och pappor, varav flera var, eller såg sig i egenskap av sina värv som företagsledare och företagsägare, "representanter för näringslivet", och politiker och dylikt, som stöttepelare. På olika sätt, men med bred täckning, i samhället och världen, både i det som kunde kallas den lilla världen (villastan, "våra sammanhang") och den stora.

[A rape is a rape. But to say it, especially to remove the guards, would be a long project. At times impossible. Possibly unsuccessful. Because guards were what those around them wanted, and often, willingly, offered. Especially those closest to them: overprotective mothers and fathers, many of whom were, or saw themselves as, business leaders and owners, "representatives of the business community," and politicians and the like, as pillars of support. In different ways, but with broad coverage, in society and the world, both in what could be called the small world (*villastan*, "our contexts") and the big one.] (Fagerholm 2019, 113–114)

As the quote shows the narrator's voice is strong and explicative. The phrase "But to say it" is central for how rape is narrated. The rape is a fact, but how it is handled, narrated, is a collective affair.

Michail Bakhtin's narratological concepts *dialogism* and *heteroglossia* allows me to explore how Fagerholm utilises language to create and re-create collectivity, on three different levels; group-level, individual level, and language level; while also suggesting this collectivity is closely related to the rape as a traumatic and political event. Bakhtin's concepts are further nuanced by the term "transglossia" which combines *trans*, to 'move across,' and *glossic*, which means 'to speak,' to evoke "an active and performative articulation across positions, both formally and thematically, which defines the peculiarities of contemporary literary expression" (Shaw & Upstone 2021, unpaginated), which I introduce later on to show how Fagerholm's use of a dialogic structure informs a postmodern political take on collectivity and society.

Largely *Who killed bambi?* is a novel about a society: it revolves around a brutal gang rape in the fictional suburb of villastan.<sup>ii</sup> The story is achronological, it takes place in several times and contains different types of texts, such as interviews and blog posts, mixed with an omniscient, but far from invisible, narrator. The cast of characters is considerable as each person is the bearer of their own stories and language. The effect of the threefold collectivity, I claim, creates an experience of Fagerholm's novel as a prism, or an organism that grows in many different directions.

The gang rape of seventeen-year-old Sascha Anckar by Nathan Häggert and Gusten Grippe (best friends and the same age as Sascha), and two other boys, is the crux of the novel. The rape takes place in a soundproof room in Nathan's home in 2008. One frame is socioeconomic differences as the novel makes clear that Nathan's family is well-off, while Sascha's class background is the complete opposite, and yet not. Sascha comes from an institution for at-risk-girls, Grawellska, and when she is introduced, it is through references to her mother, whose sex and love life Sascha comments on with brutal irony. The novel also stages another female from Grawellska, Nathan's mother, Annelise Häggert, who refers to herself as "alumni from Grawellska." She is a successful entrepreneur, founder of the Golden Fountain, with Gayn Hand as her role model. Gusten's mother, on the other hand, is the opera singer Angela Grippe. Both mother figures are central to the narrative, while Gusten's father is never mentioned, and Nathan's father, Albinus "Abbe" Häggert, appears sparingly, as an archetype for a family patriarch in the upper strata of class society. As I will argue, socioeconomic structures enable rape, as part of such a collective.

The story revolves around a plethora of characters, but Gusten and his thoughts about the rape shortly after it was committed (and his unsuccessful attempts to persuade Sascha to go to the police), as well as on the novel's second timeline, 2014, are foregrounded. This timeline presents Emmy as a central character. She has moved from the countryside, Gråbbo, to villastan, with her best friend Saga-Lill, and the three of them form an amorous triangle. The year 2014 also features Cosmo Brandt, who is in a relationship with Sascha, before she mysteriously disappears, (rumours say she dies of an overdose in the US, or is a competitive swimmer). He strives to make a documentary film about her with the working title "Who killed Bambi?". For his movie, Cosmo wants to interview Gusten, and photograph Emmy, then working in a pet shop, holding a rabbit, for the movie poster. Emmy also runs a blog and receives advice from internet guru Gunilla Gahmberg. Saga-Lill, for her part, also has her own story, which is portrayed through Saga-Lill as the first-person narrator, giving this otherwise peripheral digression a kind of extra weight and constitutes yet another collective context. To sum up there are two time frames 2008 and 2014, the time of the rape, and the time of the aftermath. The gallery of characters are partly the same in-between these time levels, but also differs. The effect is collective, a gang rape considering a handful persons proves to echo in the lives of both their later lives, and in the life of the small town as a whole.

The novel is a collage, the epicenter is the rape of Sascha, but the periphery is the most significant as the kernel event, thus placing the rape narrative within a broader context of a collective narrative, or a fragmented narrative about collectives. Furthermore, Fagerholm's novel depicts a distinctly patriarchal structure – Emmy has an older lover, and Nathan's father hovers like a ghost over Nathan's violent acts. The collectivity, community and power of (social) media discourses is a theme in novel; how rape is narrated in media and how the narration affects the characters is underlined, as social media and media are representants of collective voices. The story is told in flashbacks and recapitulations. Equally important as the content of the novel, is the style, which is distinctive for Fagerholm (cf. Tidigs 2019, Ingström 2014). She works with quotations, repetitions of phrases, strategic misspellings and anglicisms, as well as with italics and bold style, quotation marks, capital letters and parentheses, and mixing more traditional prose style with poetic line breaks (Dahl 2015, Lahdenperä 2021); this creates a collage, the tone mimics the media lingua, exaggerating it and creating an effect of absurdity. A reader familiar with Fagerholm's work will recognize her use of stylistic devices. As for the narrative structure (which is difficult to separate from the style of the language), the concentration on

retelling renders all first-hand perspectives absent. All that is left is narratives of narratives.

As pointed out, Fagerholm uses collectivity on three levels of the novel. First, actions and perceptions are narrated as grounded in a collective experience, thus decentering the rape and the following collective trauma. Second, individuality is narrated as dependent on collectives, as well as collective in itself. Third, collectivity underpins the narrative perspective and the literary style.

### **Previous views on collectivity in the works of Fagerholm**

Earlier scholarship has noted collectivity in Fagerholm's work. For example Julia Tidigs argues that "[Fagerholm] is influential but still has no successors – because her style is individual – paradoxically through exposing the language as borrowed, quoted, used, collective" (Tidigs 2019).<sup>iii</sup> Tidigs shows how multilingualism – a phenomenon pinpointing how languages exist in a collective context – jargon and music influences the characters' view of themselves (2021, 101). Hence, Tidigs' point is that Fagerholm's style documents how language per se is collective. Aligning with Tidigs, I consider Fagerholm's style – rich with paraphrases and intertextuality – collective, and thus a device that offers a multifaceted perspective on rape. My perspective differs from Tidigs' in that I do not focus on intertextuality but on the making of collectives through language.

Tidigs considers narrativity a central theme through which Fagerholm's novel is to be understood; that is, how narratives are constructed through multilingualism, quotations, and translations, creating stories and counter-stories related to Western society, capitalism, and violence (Tidigs 2021, 106–114). Instead, I turn to Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism to unlock ideas on language structures and develop a method for understanding the novel's groups and collectives created through language. I do not argue that Fagerholm depicts characters who feel they belong to a collective. Rather they feel lonely, but they do feel lonely because they belong to villastan, and because of the (social) media context, paradoxically described as a solitary collective. In my analysis, I demonstrate how such a collective narrative style renders rape as collective phenomenon. In order to show how this is done, I draw on Sorcha Gunne and Zoe Brigley Thompson, who claim that:

The rape narrative is not simply a private story, but a tale to be consumed and appraised in relation to the assumptions already harboured in the watchful audience. [...] 'public rape' [is] 'more than simply the publicized controversies

surrounding stories of sexual violence'; rather it is 'the idea of rape as an event that relates to the affairs of a community'. (2009, 7)

Tidigs identifies how central narrativity is for Fagerholm, as a narrative strategy, but also for the characters. This narrative strategy is manifested through multiple levels of metafiction. As Tidigs calls it, to "think about oneself as a narrative" – using a quote from *Who killed bambi?*, is both a survival strategy and a tool for violence (Tidigs 2021, 115). As I see it, Fagerholm's characters are *doing* story-telling; by that I refer to the act of telling as becoming, also associated with capitalist and commercial discourses. My reading is informed by Hanna Lahdenperä's analysis of Fagerholm's novel *DIVA* (1998) as a novel that *does* theory or philosophy, that is; on a surface level the novel refers to philosophy and almost parodies the concept, while at the same time the novel lays bare how philosophical concepts work in specific contexts (Lahdenperä 2021). In an overview of Finland-Swedish literature, Pia Ingström argues that Fagerholm challenges the novel as a format in order to expose the importance of style for the narration (Ingström 2014, 299). I align with Ingström in that Fagerholm uses style to introduce meta-fiction, exposing the narrative structures – most obviously through the repeated phrase "think of oneself as a narrative". I claim that as her novel *DIVA* *does* theory, *Who killed bambi?* *does* story-telling.

Previous research on Fagerholm has highlighted her intertextual work with language and genres, and her focus on girls' stories (Kåreland, 2016). Her work has been labelled gurlisque (Österholm 2012, 2016), postmodern (Kurikka 2005, 2016, Lahdenperä 2016, Malmö 2016, Helle 2016), and analysed through Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's ideas of assemblage (Österlund 2016, Kurikka 2016). The latter represents a literary work's combination of segments, territorial movements and viscosity. According to Rosi Braidotti, an assemblage constitutes of a process of unsettling binarism, linearity and other 'sedimented unitary habits', thus creating transformation (Braidotti 2002, 94). I read such an approach in line with the idea of collectivity as a way to unsettle unitarity. Special attention has been paid to Fagerholm's use of repetition (Holmqvist 2016, Lahdenperä 2021), **bold text** (Lahdenperä 2021) and interpunction (Dahl 2015). So far, no study has focused primarily on how collectivity works in Fagerholm's oeuvre. My contribution to the field is exploring collectivity in the context of sexual violence.

## **Collectivity through the concepts of *dialogism* and *heteroglossia***

In my reading, Bakhtin's view in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1930, 1981), that literary language in novels is not represented "as a unitary [but as] a living mix of varied and opposing voices" (1981, xxviii) is the starting point for my analysis. His concepts *heteroglossia* and *dialogism* are useful because he considers literature a possibility to create collectives. I, in my turn, use his concepts for a novel that utilises collectivity as its overarching structure. The collective as such is, according to Bakhtin, intimately related to openness, ambiguity, and the unfinished. He states: "all literature is caught up in the process of 'becoming'" (1981, xxviii, compare Kurikka below). Heteroglossia and dialogism, as well as his term polyphony have all been influential for later works on textual collectives (see for example Kristeva 1980, Deleuze & Guattari 1987). By polyphony, he refers to an inclusion of many voices in a novel, which creates a manifold collective. Heteroglossia is "*another's speech in another's language [...]* *double-voiced discourse*" (Bakhtin 1981, 304, italics in the original). Thus, language constitutes cohesion but also creates distance between different parts of the collective.

For Bakhtin, language itself is a collective process: "The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way" (Bakhtin 1981, 279). Even though dialogism is a term that originates from Bakhtin, he does not use it as an -ism but focuses on the dialogic tendencies of words and authors (Holquist 2002, 14). According to David Shepard dialogism refers to a narrative instance that exposes its own relation to other instances, and acts as an anti-authoritarian position through its dependence on these others (Shepard 2014, 74). This is relevant when it comes to rape narratives in general, since the juridical and ethical nature of such narratives includes witness statements and multiple versions of a story. Dialogism is relevant for understanding Fagerholm's novel, as she uses shifting focalisation and a prismatic style, where the story is built on fragments mirroring different views of the event. I will later return to how similar ideas of narrativity, ethics and fragmentation is central also for the telling and reading of rape.

The term heteroglossia encompasses that:

language is something that is historically real, a process of heteroglot development, a process teeming with future and former languages, with prim but moribund aristocrat-languages, with parvenu-languages and with countless

pretenders to the status of language which are all more or less successful, depending on their degree of social scope and on the ideological area in which they are employed. (Bakhtin 1981, 356–57)

Bakhtin argues for a language closely connected to the social status of that language, and how those particular languages (the stiff, formal but proper language, the mortal languages, the newly rich language, and other languages of different social contexts) always are combined and influenced by each other, creating wholeness as well as new fragments. In my understanding, he considers language as something that *is* not, but *does*. That, combined with the doing of language per se also does, or creates, its written and spoken contexts (the “social scope” and “the ideological areas”). Hence, language is not only made collective or made collectively; it *makes* collectives. The language collectives are essential for the collectives of characters and vice versa – which is the point of departure for my analysis of Fagerholm’s work with collectivity in *Who killed bambi?*

In the light of Bahtin’s theory, I now turn to analysing groups forming collectives in Fagerholm’s novel. The section ends with an overview how the reading of rape is tightly related to the collective.

### **Groups as collectives, naming and trauma**

As stated in the beginning, collectivity works on three different levels in *Who killed bambi?*: the group, the individual, and within style (the later also touching the collectivity of language as such). The first level concerns groups of people as collectives; by naming them, referring to their heritage, or situating them. The most obvious collective on this level is the teenage boys who rape Sascha, who are given names that render them a collective:

“De fyra förövarna, ‘gossarna’, ur samma gäng och skolkamrater alla”. [“The four perpetrators, the ‘boys’, from the same gang and schoolmates all”.] (Fagerholm 2019, 12)

“Skräckfyrklövern”, “Gossarna”. “De visade ingen nåd”. [“The Frightful Foursome”, “The Boys”. “They showed no mercy”.] (42)

Våldtäktspojkar (söndriga historier) [The Rape Boys (torn stories)] (113)

Here, the name-giving performed by media is a collective action within the community, paving the way for understanding collectivity via language. The fact that collectivity works on multiple levels, confuses the

understanding – this, I argue, is Fagerholm’s point; to show the complexity of language, actions and being. On the one hand, there is the “collective naming”, within the creation of the rape narrative: the names are given to the group by an instance that is not clearly defined but could be referred to as the media – which takes the role of the collective voice. The naming makes the group a group – “collective” then refers to this group. I suggest it is the naming, that makes the distinction. Naming the group as a collective with a range of given names, renders the group a unit. Reducing the individual rapists to a group where the individual names are erased for the benefit of the collective, the strategy of naming also places the responsibility for the sexual violence not on the individuals but on the collective. Mechanisms such as peer pressure are part of such a manoeuvre. In prolonging the mechanism of collectivity, and collective guilt, it further translates to the “collective” as the society at large.

The naming of the rapists consists of both individual, minor collectives, and the collective of rapists: “Cosmo, once the-least-likely-to-succeed-guy in this glorious golden youth gang at villa-town” (17).<sup>iv</sup> Nathan and Gusten are called BFFs (“Best Friends Forever”), “Two boys in identical caps” (14).<sup>v</sup> This information is told from the perspective of an all-knowing narrator, outside the collective. This narrator is not neutral either when characterising the individuals or the collectives. The narrator *knows* the past of the characters – their mothers’ friendship – and *evaluates* both individuals – Cosmo, the-least-likely-to-succeed guy – and collectives – this glorious golden youth gang. In the Swedish original, the narrator’s language includes English expressions, which ties the characterisation to an international context – as does his name Cosmo, short for cosmopolite. That connection points to Cosmo, as well as to the narrative and the situation, being part of a wider world where sexual violence flourishes, but also is discussed and condemned.

The role of the narrating instance is central to the understanding of the novel – yet it is not easy to grasp. The narrator of *Who killed bambi?* is all-knowing, non-neutral, and manifold – *at the same time*. The reader’s struggle with the perspective of the narration influences the reading experience in a most pervasive way. Constantly having to ask: *who says this?* is exhausting, but also rewarding since it finally destabilises the idea of a clear distinction between speaker and listener, writer and reader. Language and utterances infiltrate the mind and emotions and become internalised opinions that still chafe and gall the reader, who is left with the impression that nothing can be taken for granted or is ethically possible to grasp. Therefore, the all-knowing is partly a result of the manifold, and the

all-knowing instance is undermined by the notion of it being made up of fragments.

Nathan, the leader of the gang rapists, is described as:

som ledaren i en krets, ett litet crème-de-la-crème-schack,  
Being in a Band Called The Disciples, pojkar och flickor i  
villastan födda med silversked i mun. [as the leader of a  
circle, a little crème-de-la-crème-shaft, Being in a Band  
Called The Disciples, boys and girls in the villa-town born with  
silver spoons in their mouths.] (39)

Here, several words referring to groups or social constellations are used to *name* the characters of the collective in villastan. These words have different social connotations. The Swedish word “schack” is not easily translated. It has a specific Finland-Swedish context: “schack/sjack” is a colloquial word meaning “gång, sällskap, folk [gang, company, people]” and has its roots in the Finnish word “sakki”.<sup>vi</sup> The term points to a provincial and condescending context, which contrasts the expression “crème-de-la-crème” with which it is combined. The quote states that Nathan is the leader – which points to the hierarchical group. It also exposes the class structure – through the expressions “crème-de-la-crème” and “silver spoons in their mouths”; villastan is a wealthy place. “*Being in a Band*” – a quote from Prince’s song “Sign o’ the Times” (1987) here in italics as a way of pointing out that it is a quote or an echo – both as the soundtrack for the rape, but also of the way the boy gang is composed. Tidigs points out how Nathan has his “disciples”, who rape Sascha, a word used in Prince’s song (2021, 110). The collectivity of these disciples consists of a hierarchical structure of master-student relations – shown in the way Gusten follows Nathans initiatives. Here, language is used to create a feeling of multiple layers of collectivity within a group, which is also structured through class; Nathan is the wealthiest of the boys in “the band”. It is also *through* the words, the multiple names given to the group that the group is made a collective unit – both explicitly and implicitly connecting the created group to the rape.

On several occasions, the group is invoked as an instance that makes the narrative possible; it is through the multiple naming of the group that the group is constituted in the text. Moreover, it is through being a group that the rapists can be termed rapists (without further speculating on whether a single person would commit the rape or whether it is a result of group pressure). The narrator’s presence creates the feeling that nothing would happen if it were not *told* – which leads to the question of truth, is the truth what happens or what can be said? Language, as “a multitude of discourse practices that form in their totality a dynamic verbal culture belonging to the

society concerned” (Tjupa 2014, 124) thus works as a uniting force, that still use the uniting power to suppress counternarratives:

Outtalade frågor som ändå måste hemlighållas. Eller: hållas precis där, på den platsen. [Unspoken issues that still need to be kept secret. Or: kept right there, in that place.] (53)

The silence – which becomes part of a language discourse when mentioned by the narrator, and tautologically stressed since the issues are mentioned as both “unspoken” and “secret” – results from the collectivity and the silence around the rape is told as place bound, as is the possibility of telling about the silence. The physical space becomes a place where collectivity is materialised. This can further be related to the Finland-Swedish community and small town, within which the novel takes place; the local version of the #metoo hashtag is #dammenbrister an expression difficult to translate – the literal meaning would be “the dams are bursting”, but “dammen” refers to the expression “ankdammen” (“duck pond”) used about the minority community to indicate that it is a community where everyone knows one another; and also to the Finland-Swedish literature as minority literature (Malmio & Österlund 2016, 9). The silence, and the language around and about the silence, thus relates to both the physical place, and the social space, the collective.

In addition, the broader collective, the society, as an entity/discourse, is to be understood on multiple levels, for example as something to understand oneself through:

Jag döper den till “Ut ur Afrika”. Efter första meningen i den boken av Karen Blixen som mamma i guldåldern då allt ännu var bra alltid hänvisade till som “vår bok”, och den av alla fina böcker i världslitteraturen, som hon älskade allra mest.

Hon kunde då stå på typ torget i lilla Gråbbo centrum och hålla ett av sina smått malplacerade, glimrande föredrag för kreti och pleti om vilka “vi” var – inte alls överlägset eller med vilja att show off, utan presentera bara, i en ton som handlade så mycket om längtan, frihet och en väldig dröm om de vida, öppna vidderna. I once had a farm in Africa. Jag hade en farm i Afrika vid foten av berget Ngong...

[I call it “Out of Africa.” After the first sentence in the book by Karen Blixen that my mother in the golden age when everything was still good always referred to as “our book,”

and the one of all the fine books in world literature that she loved the most.

She could then stand in the square in the center of little Gråbbo and give one of her slightly misplaced, brilliant lectures to cretins about who “we” were - not at all superior or with a desire to show off, but just present, in a tone that was so much about longing, freedom and a huge dream of the wide, open spaces. I once had a farm in Africa. I once had a farm in Africa at the foot of Mount Ngong ...] (70)

“Hela vida kontinenten, det stora ljuset och de stora skuggorna – **ALLT är så stort där, i Afrika, också skuggorna.**” Mamma i sitt esse, i guldåldern, talade sådär efter 2–3 gin&tonic, i sällskap och i sammanhang med kreti&pleti i “småstadslivet”. Vilka också var hennes ord, med viss ton uttalat, efteråt, vid middagsbordet, bara med familjen och visst kunde jag ju, som den tillbakadragna, sarkastiska dotter jag var på den tiden, tycka det var löjligt men ändå också lite kul.

[“The whole wide continent, the big light and the big shadows – EVERYTHING is so big there, in Africa, even the shadows.” Mom in her prime, in the golden age, spoke like that after 2–3 gin & tonics, in company and in the context of cretinous life in the “small town.” Which were also her words, pronounced with a certain tone, afterwards, at the dinner table, just with the family and of course I, as the withdrawn, sarcastic daughter I was at that time, could find it ridiculous but still a little fun.] (88)

These passages stem from the part of the novel that are told by Saga-Lill as a first person narrator, and shows how Saga-Lill’s mother is narrating herself through the collective, by distancing and comparisons, and by referring to literature as a collective- and identity-making entity.<sup>vii</sup> The Swedish expression “kreti och pleti”, by Fagerholm transformed into “kretiopletivemsomhelst”, carries a class connotation. *Svenska Akademiens ordbok* (2015) defines it as “blandat sällskap, vem som helst”<sup>viii</sup> [mixed company, anybody] while *Nordisk Familjebok* (1911) more specifically points at an earlier understanding of the expression as “personer utan börd, bildning eller samhällsställning”<sup>ix</sup> [persons without birth, education or social status]. Thus, the expression can be said to echo of such class hierarchies. The “we”, which refers to Saga-Lills family, the family her mother talks about, becomes a collective within the collective, a smaller group within the larger,

through the speech act, and through the described relation to the broader world created by literature. Even though this is not explicitly related to the rape narrative, the social structures referred to are central to both, and placing the episodes next to each other indicates that the narrative of belonging to certain groups are not independent or unrelated to the narrative of rape, but that they both make each other possible or necessary. Later in the novel – through the same expression – it is clear that in the society depicted capitalism and commercialism has made it possible for these marginalised people to buy “luxury design and labels”, referring to the collective mentality and eagerness to consume the right goods in order to belong to a group. The depicted society, to a high extent driven by capitalism and commercialism, as well as digitalisation: anybody can buy anything, and seemingly, class has eroded, then again not:

Den där löjlga känslan av att “alla” kretiåpletivemsomhelst  
kunde shoppa sig till: Vad som helst.  
Lyxdesign och märken.

[The silly feeling that “everyone” whowhateveranybody  
could buy: Everything.  
Luxury design and labels.]  
(199)

Here, the narrator mocks capitalism, but also, the equalisation of class differences is scrutinised – the result is a position where markings of class are diffused and problematised with humour. The collective is thus made into a nameless mass, with social status changing – and the narration seemingly originates from “above”. This view of the collective society becomes a canvas against which individuals understand themselves. The combination of the three passages creates a view of the society as a collective to be talked about (the “we” and the “kreti & pleti” – the multiple spelling of the term indicating that it is a spoken rather than written expression, as well as creating a sense of multiplicity within even the word *per se*), but also talked to (the people on the square and the family at the table). The utterances as a way to create the different collectives through naming them. However, the multiple narrative levels create a complex view of talking: Saga-Lill as narrator mocks her mother for her von oben-attitude, thus blurring the later mocking of capitalism, through the narrative structure.

When choosing a narrative structure, the ethical aspects of the content are essential. Liisa Steinby understands this process as follows:

The same principle of dialogism, which determines the author's relation to the hero in a 'polyphonic' novel and therefore the structure (or 'architecture') of the novel as a whole, also determines the relations between the autonomous subjects in the world of the novel. (2013, 41)

Steinby who discusses the ethical aspects of the polyphonic novel, stresses how the relationships between individuals and collectives are created through dialogism, via utterances.<sup>x</sup> Fagerholm uses a narrator that, through the use of language, is to be understood as an intertextual instance – it is the narrator, as well as the characters, that quotes and refers to other works of art.

In *Who killed bambi?*, ethical aspects are *embedded* in the rape motif. Within Literary Trauma Studies, a field of study based on psychoanalytic theories of trauma, combined with poststructuralism and postcolonial theory, the emphasis has been on literary depictions of extreme events and how they affect memory and the perception of the self (Mambrol, 2018). Trauma is considered an event that divides and fragments consciousness and resists direct linguistic representation (Caruth, 1995, 1996). Much of the early scholarship on trauma narrative dwells on the impact of trauma on the *individual* psyche (Mambrol, 2018). Parallel to this is a tradition of focusing on *collective* trauma, primarily Holocaust survivors. Dominick LaCapra initiates a discussion of *how to talk about* victims and perpetrators. According to LaCapra researchers and writers often react with a form of moral impulse; one must feel horror and disgust at the crime – but this is simplistic (2001, 114). LaCapra argues that trauma is characterised by “attraction and repulsion”; as a viewer, reader, or writer, one is drawn to the horror, while at the same time repelled (LaCapra, 2001). Without making any claim to compare the acts of the Holocaust with the rape narrative in *Who killed bambi?* it is possible to note that similar reactions of attraction and repulsion is central to Fagerholm's novel. The media, and perhaps the public opinion, within the novel, finds a kind of gory pleasure in naming the rape and the perpetrators, pointing out the cruelty. Writings like “*The Frightful Foursome*,’ *The Boys*.’ *They showed no mercy*” (81) hint at the borderlands between moral judgement and imaginative naming in a way that combines distancing, through ethics, and attraction, through curiosity and intense interest in the crime.

Robin E. Field argues for a “participatory reading” of rape novels, a reading that “encourage their readers to become activists” (2020, 108). Field's study of rape in American novels from the late twentieth century thus takes a similar stance as Marinella Rodi-Risberg's analysis of incest and

intersectional trauma in American novels from the 1990's; that of theory propelling activism (2022, 4). For Field and Rodi-Risberg it is mandatory that fiction and reality are related (cf. Horeck 2004, Hogeland (1998)), and that the borders between literature and real-life experience, as well as language and the physical world, including its violence, are porous. This broadens the view on the collective in rape novels to include also the reader.

Rodi-Risberg further "stresses the significance of an intersectional approach within trauma theory, and argues that through an appeal to readers as witnesses, performed by belated witnessing in the here and now of the novels, staged by imaginative testimonial writing, the intersection of individual collective trauma becomes productive" (2022, 3). Sabina Sielke, notes that "talk about rape has its history, its ideology, and its dominant narratives – narratives that, as I argue, are nationally specific, even if they rely on widely established textual predecessors" (2002, 2), thus pointing at how discourses of and around rape are specifically bound to national, or local, contexts – a fact that is highly relevant for the reading and understanding of the rape in Fagerholm's novel; the Nordic discourse on rape is, as Sanyal notes, different from the US, on which most theory of rape narratives depend – while the feminist movement in US specifically pointed out rape as a feminist question, the feminism of Nordic countries were more interested in child care (2018, 309). Pamela Barnett's *Dangerous Desire: Literature of Sexual Freedom and Sexual Violence Since the Sixties* on the other hand situates rape, and narratives of rape, in a temporal context, focusing on the sixties. According to her, situating rape narratives within spatial and temporal contexts also functions as a way of contextualizing ideas of gender, race and class. Accordingly, not only the time or place affects the reading of rape, but the rape narrative also affects the understanding of time and place. Barnett notes that "rape is a gendering and racializing violence" (2004, xv). The phrase could also be paraphrased as "rape *narratives* is a gendering and racializing (and in other ways categorizing, structuralizing) violence". Sielke stresses that "the rhetoric of rape conduces not to rape but to readings, interpretations, a cultural literacy concerning matters of rape. These readings in turn determinate the signifying power of real rape" (2002, 11). Moreover, she argues for the need to "recontextualize and challenge readings of rape, paying close attention to the relation between rape and representation" (2002, 4), referring to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who has pointed out how "*rape and its meaning circulate in precisely opposite directions*" (1985, 10, italics in the original), and Mieke Bal who stresses that "rape is by definition imagined; it can exist only as experience and as memory, as *image* translated into signs, never adequately "objectifiable"" (1990, 142), in line with a broader idea that rape

in many ways resists representation. The “rhetorics of rape”, within a media discourse as well as a literary aesthetics is temporarily specific, as Field’s study of rape narratives during the seventies, eighties and nineties shows. The media as such – omnipresent in Fagerholm’s novel – also influences both the understanding of rape and the possibilities to write about it. Judith Herman notes about the debate on rape in the 1980’s that the media “seemed to be tired of hearing about victims and eager to take the side of those who insisted that they had been wrongly accused.” (1992, 246). Field then notes how,

[i]n the 1980s, traumatic realism proved an effective narratological strategy to portray rape and sexual violence, as sexual trauma and its physical and psychological symptoms of post-traumatic stress could be portrayed in minute detail or intuited from the gaps in the text. In contrast, the rape novels of the long 1990s rely far less upon realism to depict the story of rape, instead employing the rhetorical techniques of traumatic narrative in order to depict the experiences of victim-survivors. These novels are characterized by complicated narration, fragmentation, temporal discontinuities, and often a lack of tidy resolution. (2022, 152)

Even though Field does not specifically point to it, I suggest there is a (partly causal) connection between the media’s tendency to not believe victim-survivors stories, and to search for different narratives, and the literary aesthetic of discontinuity. Field argues that “a lack of narrative closure in fact offers readers a chance to create their own understandings—or “endings”—for these novels” (2022, 108), thus “encourage their readers to become activists who learn from this literary depiction of rape and go on to challenge the rape culture still at work in society” (2022, 108). Channette Romero argues: “Compelling readers to piece together disparate plot elements, debate unresolved issues, and question dominant worldviews, participatory reading positions readers actively to engage in creating knowledge, a necessary component of the public sphere.” (2012, 44) This points to a relation between the event of rape, the talking and writing about rape. It includes the actual words and whether it is possible to use language for the representation of rape *and* the ideological, mediated discourse that very clearly do use language – and the ethical and political aspect; and how all this is a matter of the individual-collective complex.

When it comes to trauma – which is part of the rape, and a category to which rape can be counted – Roger Lockhurst notes that “trauma, in effect, issues a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge. In its shock

impact trauma is anti-narrative, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma" (2008, 79). The idea that the traumatic experience cannot be narrated, thus, according to Lockhurst, creates an overwhelming amount of narratives. This relates in a complex way to Fagerholm's repetition of the phrase "to think of oneself as a narrative", in *Who killed bambi?*, where the narrative as a concept and as a word, is "manically" repeated in failed tries to reach *something*. The narrative in this aspect is an individual action – the thinking. On another level, the narratives are tied to media. Lockhurst describes it as "competing and contradictory accounts, obsessive repetition of the same, unedited footage, and a collapse of distinction between knowledge rumour and speculation" (2008, 79). According to Michelle Balaev, the idea of unrepresentability of trauma is relevant and complex, because it is linked to "larger questions about the relationship between violence experienced by individuals and cultural groups, or the relationships between victim, perpetrator, and witness" (2014, 5) – as I understand it, the silence occurs at the limit of understanding others, as well as the unwillingness to accept this non-understanding. Cathy Caruth argues that "trauma is never simply one's own," and that "we are implicated in each other's trauma" (1996, 24), and Balaev points to the problems with this, "involving the assignment of responsibility for violence as well as understanding the relationship between direct and indirect action", and notes that the "attempt to include everyone as victims of trauma runs the risk of including everyone as perpetrators" (2014, 7). In the case of Fagerholm's novel, this is certainly true – but perhaps even more so the opposite: the risk that when everyone is a perpetrator, they might also be included as victims.

Trauma, and specifically rape, thus is an event or a phenomenon (though these terms are rather trivializing), that lingers on the border between representation and real-life experience, between an acute now and a belatedness, between the local and global ideological structures, and finally; as a thing that structures ideas of language, silence, witnessing, understanding, individual and collective. Lockhurst, referring to the use of non-linear narratives and fragmentation, means, that "disorders of emplotment are read as mimicking the traumatic effect" (2008, 88). He then refers to Nicola King (2000), who suggest that the novel is particularly suited to a hermeneutic understanding of traumatic memory, because of possibility to linger on the belatedness of the experience. This might be compared with Bakhtin's view of the novel as the genre specifically open to dialogic structures. King's point draws on temporal aspects of the novel, which I argue, might be connected to the collective aspects that Bakhtin draws on,

thus suggesting that time and temporality are central to the understanding of the collective, as well as the violence, trauma and the language of these.

The collective, thus, has a complex ethical connection to the individual. In the next section, I analyse the relationship between the single characters and the collective, or the sense of collectivity, and the ideological implications of this relationship.

### **The individual as a collective**

Kaisa Kurikka, in her article “Becoming-Girl of Writing” (2016), discusses Fagerholm’s *DIVA* (1998) as a postmodern novel. Her understanding of the postmodern relies on Colebrook (2000), and is twofold. On the one hand, she considers postmodernism a movement that quotes and repeats styles without a sense of a proper or privileged style. On the other hand, she defines postmodernism as a chaotic production of sounds and voices (Kurikka 2016, 38; Colebrook 2000, 103). Read this way, Fagerholm’s postmodern style thus involves a production of voices, where chaos and lack of sense for the privileged is central, a characterisation supporting Fagerholm’s use of references to mainstream culture and philosophy. Kurikka builds on Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s term “minor literature” to describe *DIVA*, and she suggests that:

minor literature is closely related to its political nature. Deleuze and Guattari write that in it everything takes on a collective value, and that ‘the political domain has contaminated every statement’: becoming-minor is produced by a collective assemblage of enunciation. The answer to the question ‘Who is speaking in *DIVA*?’ appears to be manifold. (2016, 45)

To claim that there are many speakers in *DIVA* may seem absurd, since it’s a story told in the first person. Nevertheless, Kurikka argues that Fagerholm’s style in itself is collective and manifold, and – that this has a political aspect.

Comparing the works of Deleuze and Guattari, and Bakhtin, Fred Evans underlines that Deleuze argues that when we speak, we are passing on the way that language has already ordered a social situation: we implicitly transmit another’s voice or social discourse, one that provides us with our identity and our “social obligations” (Evans 2008, 182; Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 79). Language is thereby linked to order and conformation. Like Deleuze, Bakhtin emphasises the role of language in shaping reality, but Bakhtin’s view of language as an ordering instance is less strict. For him,

each social language or voice is reflexive and evaluative. Each is “a particular point of view on the world and on oneself, the position enabling a person to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality” (Evans 2008, 182; Bakhtin 1984, 47). According to Evans Bakhtin’s view on the relation between language and “reality” is more ambiguous than Deleuze’s – something which ultimately ends in a set of questions that Evans directs to Bakhtin, and that I would also want to direct to Fagerholm’s novel:

Are the forces dependent upon nonlinguistic structures and dynamics for their unitary status? And are these forces, whether linguistic or non-linguistic, intrinsic to human social and historical existence, or is the centralisation Bakhtin has in mind itself contingent on the changing desires or wills of the actors involved? (Evans 2008, 189)

The questions might seem – at least in my case – rhetorical; of course, non-linguistic forces and structures are at stake, such as patriarchy and class differences. Yet they are not. Language shapes these structures – but is it *the* shaping force or *one of* several? Roghayeh Farsi argues that “Bakhtin defines man in terms of language which is inherently dialogic; hence for him identity is defined in self-other relation” (Farsi 2015, 66), a statement that puts language at the centre of human existence, as well as arguing for the collective aspect of both language and subjectivity. When the self is so clearly defined through language and collectivity, the collective and its speaking position, can also be centred on one individual’s position:

Alla vet att han vänsterprasslar med sitt ex.  
“Alla, vem är det?”  
“En Gunilla Gahmberg.”

[Everybody knows he's cheating with his ex.  
“Everybody, who is it?”  
“A Gunilla Gahmberg.”] (103)

The named Gunilla Gahmberg is here literally suggested to be “everybody”. That indicates her status as *someone*: she is a famous blogger. Her way of being in the world is through the internet, social media, and through language. Her “knowing” is expressed through text and she becomes “everybody” through writing. This indicates that villastan is a society where the collective is a mass, channelled by one single person. That is, it is an unequal society; some people are more “everybody” than others are – though at the same time, this “everybody” position also reduces

the individual to a nameless person, a no one. Nevertheless, regardless of one's status, individuality is experienced through the collective. In this case, the everybodiness of one person also makes possible the rumour, which here is not referring to the rape, but to another sexual act, thus tying the different sexual encounters together. Later, something similar happens to Annelise:

Och den första kvinnan på den ena posten efter den andra.  
Och därtill förstås en historia man i villastan verkligen vill  
relatera till för att den säger en något om en själv som man  
gärna vill ska sägas om en, sättas fingret på. Något om  
öppna armar, storsinnet trots allt, ett sådant underbart  
visitkort för våran villastad och **de värderingar vi står för**.

A real sense of community.

Ja, kort sagt: Det är berättelsen om Godheten i villastan.

[And the first woman in one post after another. And, of course, a story that people in Villastan really want to relate to because it tells you something about yourself that you want to be said about you, to be put your finger on. Something about open arms, generosity after all, such a wonderful calling card for our town and the values we stand for.

A real sense of community.

Yes, in short: It is the story of the Goodness of the village.]  
(157)

Annelise, here mentioned as “the first woman”, becomes a person through which the whole community, and its values, its “Goodness” (which is the Goodness that also allows the rape and the following media debate to take place) is possible to understand – or rather, the desirable “sense of community” is possible to tie to the story about Annelise. In this relationship between individual and collective, they both create each other; Annelise as an individual is created through her connection to the society and the society's view of itself, while this self-view is made possible by the story of Annelise. According to Bakhtin, the subject “is not a unified whole, but always exists in a tensile, conflict-ridden relationship with other consciousnesses, in a constant alterity between self and other” (Gardiner 1992, 28). I have argued that the subjectivity depicted in Fagerholm's novel is narrated, through a complex language structure, as such a conflict-ridden

relationship. The feeling of being an individual “I” is dependent on a collective practice – Gunilla Gahmberg and Annelise become individuals through their public personas and their stories – she never becomes a character with whom the reader gets close. Still, as a semi-famous blogger, her individuality sets a standard for creating individuality in this fictional world through collective negotiation. The sense of self is, thus, established through the relationship with others and is depicted as multiple, and through the sense of memory obscured by the traumatic event. I argue that individualism in *Who killed bambi?* is portrayed as a form of collectivity: the characters are individuals, or struggle with a discourse of individualism within a language that makes this individualism a matter of collective creation. This pattern is taken to its extreme through the act of rape and the rape narrative. Being forced to view oneself in relation to sexual violence raises questions of agency, oppression, boundaries and voice(lessness).

Bakhtin’s, and Deleuze’s, view of language as created by, as well as the creator of, collectivity, and the subject as a consequence of collective practice, is in the context of Fagerholm’s novel possible to read as both a threat and a possibility. Dialogism is a way to resist monologism, singularism and dictatorship, and in the context of *Who killed bambi?*, and rape narratives more generally, this demands attention to the multiple voices in the story – including the victims voice; which does not always speak as a subject. However, it also demands the perpetrators’ stories – in Fagerholm’s novel these stories are semi-untold; Gusten is the one to confess to the police, but the confession in itself is never reported. Instead, the reader is left with a depiction of the relationship between Gusten and Nathan and how their friendship falls apart. Here dialogism works in both ways, from an ethical perspective – the multitude of voices makes audible both the unheard and silenced victim and the rapists – but also forefronts how media *creates* the narrative, the emotions and the subjects involved, through language.

The next section further analyses how language as such is collective, and how this assumption is central to Fagerholm’s novel and her literary style.

### **Collective language practices, public rape and transglossic understandings of texts**

In *Who killed bambi?* Fagerholm addresses the collectivity of literary language:

Det fanns inget språk. Annat än de andra författarnas.  
Andra författares.  
Vem är jag i gyllene september?

När våra föräldrar var döda fördes vi till Tornet.  
Böcker han plockat på sig på dårhuset (där fanns ett litet  
bibliotek med många konstiga romaner på hyllorna.  
Bokstäver, meningar som gick rakt in).

[There was no language. Other than the other authors'.  
Other authors'  
Who am I in golden September?  
When our parents were dead, we were taken to the Tower.  
Books he picked up in the asylum (there was a small library  
with many strange novels on the shelves. Letters, sentences  
that went straight in).] (2019, 192)

Her aphoristic expressions work on the verge of theory-making; they are also metafictional comments. Such metafictional statements can be read as if Fagerholm, or rather the unnamed and all-knowing but not neutral narrator, theorises language as part of the narrative. The novel repeatedly draws attention to language as collective. Quotes like the one above clarify that there can be no “language of one’s own”; language cannot be the property of a single author. Per definition literary language is part of other texts. The statement about language is followed by a quote from Ingeborg Bachmann’s short story “Das dreißigste Jahr” [The Thirtieth Year] from 1961, repeated previously in the Fagerholm’s novel. This way of quoting used by Fagerholm in several novels, illustrates how words are already used. The phrase has previously figured in passages related to Emmy’s blog; here it is re-used in the context of Gusten’s writing – the act of writing, within the novel, is therefore literally linked to the use of quotes, as repetition of other people’s expressions, where the words and phrases are what links people together through time and space. Gusten’s writing, quoting and repetition also takes place in the asylum, which he is placed in after the rape – where he is one of the perpetrators, thus further relating the sense of language as used to the rape and the following trauma.

Bakhtin stresses language as becoming (1981, xxviii). Literary language is one of several heteroglot languages, and it is in turn stratified into various languages, such as generic or tendentious (Bakhtin 1981, 271). Fagerholm elaborates on both literary language as such and with spoken language mimicked in literature. These multiple languages also exist parallel to a meta-text that comments on the language use. The “becoming” of literature, in Fagerholm’s case, is therefore spelt out and commented on as part of the narrative. Such a becoming is simultaneously uniting and fragmenting.

Hur allt som var – är – viktigt på något sätt ändå till slut blev ord och uttryck med citattecken kring.

“Förövarna.” “Förgrep sig på.” “Offret.”

[How everything that was – is – important in some way still ended up being words and expressions with quotation marks around them.

“The perpetrators.” “Abused.” “The victim.”] (155)

En sann berättelse förutsätter något slags **kitt** som håller ihop alltsammans – den där skröpligheten, alla bitar –

[A true story requires some kind of **putty** to hold it all together – that frailty, all the pieces –]  
(185)

Surely, Fagerholm uses language as both collecting and separating instances. Narratives are, according to the quote above, supposed to have some “putty” – whether this view of narrative applies to Fagerholm’s novel can be discussed, her novel is rather a collection of post-it’s, but this is how the novel itself argues; it is a meta-fictional and internal theory work within the novel. On the other hand, language risks reducing everything important to “expressions with quotation marks around them” – illustrated by an enumeration of “rape expressions”. Through these “rape expressions”, the rape becomes a public interest, organised into a language format.

Sorcha Gunne and Zoe Brigley Thompson claim that:

The rape narrative is not simply a private story, but a tale to be consumed and appraised in relation to the assumptions already harboured in the watchful audience. [...] public rape [is] more than simply the publicized controversies surrounding stories of sexual violence; rather it is the idea of rape as an event that relates to the affairs of a community. (2009, 7)

They consider rape a collective action, involving a whole community and specifically view the rape *narrative* as a collective story. As such, it involves the pleasure of consumption, the pleasure of moral dismay – and the disruption of the idea of the private. My understanding is that such a collectivity connects the specific rape story to a structure of narratives that, in turn, make rape possible. This statement might be simplistic; I do not mean that rape is only a result of narration, but that a complex structure of

silencing *some stories of rape*, while re-telling *others*, formulates a linguistic possibility for thinking that allows for violence in thought and action. Narrative and action are thus related and dependent on each other, as the specific rape is dependent on the structure of patriarchal sexual violence. The rape becomes public through narrative, but since the narrative also already exists, the rape is never private from the beginning. Rather it is involved in a public weave of negotiations about private and public sexual violence through language. Where does this argument place the role of language? Is language a tool for the patriarchal society to reproduce sexual violence, to make physical violence possible through linguistic violence?

Kristian Shaw and Sara Upstone argue for a way to find a possibility for resistance within collective language use. With the transglossic,

the multiple [is] deeply connected to the meaningful, so that dominant – western, heteronormative, neurotypical – frames of reference are decentred by extending concern to a broader range of perspectives and subject positions to present a counter-current that re-inserts explicit politics into postmodern discourse. (2021, unpaginated)

Shaw and Upstone aim to combine the postmodern language discourse – which *Who killed bambi?* is part of – with a political purpose which argues that the multiple, within language and voices, is a way to decentre the dominant narratives. Their “artistic responsibility” describes a “temporal relation between fiction and its contexts,” which explores how twenty-first-century modes of publication and dissemination, brought forth by digital media and increasing globalisation, influence a text’s reception and influence. Novels are forms of “outward-looking communication” implicated in, and proximal to, “the intimate realities of the other.” Here, they point to the use of literary language to complicate the relationship between fiction and context. In their view, the literary language is also multiple, and meaningful. I find the term *transglossia* useful for my analysis of *Who killed bambi?* Though often considered postmodern (and therefore, according to Shaw and Upstone, possibly apolitical), the novel is deeply political. The liaison of the multiple/collective and the meaning is key to my understanding of the novel. *Who killed bambi?* works as a cross-cutting between the rape story and other parts of the villastan discourse – like the mothers, the opera, and the moral duty of profit-making. This creates a statement about the collective – and relates all these other actions and events to the rape. A large number of characters and voices, all quotations- all circle back to the rape of Sascha, building the trauma into the collective, pointing at the

collective as both a public perpetrator and a witness – and the only possible way to resist.

Using the word “resistance” here might seem contradictory – and it is. Shaw and Upstone argue that collectivity is a possibility for resistance, and Bakhtin, though not directly saying so, points to the dialogic as a more democratic mode than the monologic because of the possibility for resistance when several voices are heard. Previous research on Fagerholm’s oeuvre, the reception of her novels, and her own media statements, ties her work to feminist ideology (Malmio & Österlund 2016, 17). Nevertheless, (affirmative) feminist readings of *Who killed bambi?* are hard to do. Being a woman in the novel’s setting appears to be almost impossible. The alternatives are: being raped; being viewed as rapeable; having unhappy relationships with (older) men; needing to label oneself as neoliberalist and an extension of patriarchal capitalism – and being mocked about this. Is there a place for resistance? Or does the novel tell the story of feminism’s failure? *Who killed bambi?* refuses to give hope or comfort, thus possibly leaving the feminist reader collective with emotions of sadness, despondency and doubt: *how to read this? how to read this and remain intact? how to read this and not act?* The collective (within the novel) is not an answer in Fagerholm’s novel but rather a question. However, neither is the individual, nor even the subject, an option. The only way out is to stay. And by staying, the collective can also be understood as opening up for the reader (cf. Field, Romero). By not offering a solution the reader might also feel forced through sadness to rage.

## Conclusion

In this article I have argued that rape and collectivity are intertwined in Fagerholm’s novel. Using Bakhtin’s heteroglossia and dialogism I have shown how collectivity in different forms – the group as collective, the individual as collective, and the language and style as collective – work as means of narrating rape. Fagerholm’s use of intertextuality is a means to form the text as a collective space in itself. In this space, narrativity is central: How individuals tell their stories and make them public is how they become agents in their world. Yet, the tellability of rape is complex. Sascha’s refusal to witness and speak about the rape opens up for a multitude of stories of the violent act. Her chosen silence, or her self-mutilation, relates to the questions of whether the silence is a form of resistance (a refusal to comply to “your justice” (Fagerholm 2019, 127)) or of being silenced (the narrative hints at an economic transaction, of parents paying Sascha to keep silent), thus making the silence a specifically collective question – pointing at how

the untellability of the rape is not (only) an effect of the trauma being impossible to tell or even imagine, but exist in the intersection of the (individually) untellable trauma and what cannot be told *in this specific context*. When Sascha does not speak, the stories of the surrounding community becomes even more dominant, turning the actual event into something that can only be thought of “as a narrative”, and as such, a highly moralized and dividing narrative. These stories affect the life of the characters years after the rape, thus making the repetitive structure of the traumatic experience a pattern that also influences the collective – and thereby further obscuring the line between direct and indirect victims and perpetrators.

I have turned to Bakhtin to unlock ideas of literary language structures in order to understand groups and collectives as created through language in *Who killed bambi?*, thus nuancing or countering the idea of rape as an individual trauma. Throughout the article, I have had Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogic as a point of departure for reading Fagerholm’s novel. The result is a reading that acknowledges collectives and collectivity within the novel, and how these are created, shaped, and formed through language – how they *become* through language (and partly, how language becomes through them). Reading the rape narrative this way, also focuses on how sexual violence is formed through language. The question of multiple voices, is complicated: is it possible to speak as a singular victim in a language that is never your own? where is the line between revolution and resistance, respectively oppression to be drawn? is democracy always sexist and patriarchal? what are the premises, possibilities and risks of language, in the proximity of a brutal rape?

Fagerholm’s way of making language visible as a structure one needs to (re-)consider – through phrases such as: “How everything that was – is – important in some way still ended up being words and expressions with quotation marks around them. ‘The perpetrators.’ ‘Abused.’ ‘The victim’” (Fagerholm 2019, 155), makes the reader aware of language as a violent instance in the rape narrative. An instance that defines groups as well as individuals, through words connected with the rape, thus pointing at language as both creating and blurring ideas of individuals, groups, and violence – and how these are connected. These philosophical statements about language work as a filter through which the rape is to be understood – through the *telling* of it. As a part of the rape, language and narrative affect the collective, tear it apart and force it together.

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<sup>i</sup> My translation. The novel has not yet been translated into English.

ii The name of the setting “villastan” could be translated as “small town”, but the specific reference to “villa-” hints at an upper-class context. Therefore, the Swedish word will be used throughout the article. The term “the small town” is a translation of the word “villastan” – a term close to a name, but written in minuscules, that specifies that the area is built up of villas, i.e. a rather wealthy area. Fagerholm’s naming of places is, in this as in other novels, rather particular; *The American Girl* is set in “Trakten” [the district], a swampy coastland on the rural outskirts of Helsinki, while *Lola upsidedown* takes place in “Flatnäs”, a fictional town that Fagerholm has stated “is and is not” equivalent to the real Ekenäs. The sliding between the specific and the general and the markings of class, wealth and ties to national identity are part of the literary style. (Kvarnström, *Västra Nyland*. 19.11.2013: [Ekenäs blir Flatnäs på film i Vastranyland.fi](#))

iii “[Fagerholm] är inflytelserik men har samtidigt inga efterföljare – för det är hennes stil för säregen, paradoxalt nog genom att exponera språket som lånat, citerat, använt, kollektivt”.

iv “Cosmo, en gång the-least-likely-to-succeed-guy i detta strålande gyllene ungdomsgång i villastan”.

v “Två pojkar i likadana kepsar.” The term “BFF” is more commonly used about girls, which gives the naming of Gusten and Nathan a slightly queer nuance.

vi [Finlandssvensk ordbok - schack \(kotus.fi\)](#)

vii The reference to Karen Blixen’s *Out of Africa* (1937) is complex and deserves a more in-depth analysis than what is possible here. Paraphrasing Blixen implies that an international (historical) colonialism is placed alongside contemporary events in the Finland-Swedish suburbs. Blixen’s novel is a complex one, and in many ways problematic. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has called it the most dangerous book ever written about Africa, because its racism is convincingly depicted as love (referred by Moa Matthis in a foreword to the Swedish 2022 edition of Blixen’s book (11)). Here, I will only note that this adds yet another layer to the discussion of language, collectivity and violence.

viii [kreti och pleti i SAOL i svenska.se](#)

ix [1271-1272 \(Nordisk familjebok / Uggleupplagan. 14. Kikarsikte - Kroman\) \(runeberg.org\)](#)

<sup>x</sup> Steinby uses concepts such as author and hero. I stick to narratological concepts such as narrator and character.