

# **Making Fun of Make-believe: *How The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* Takes Revenge on the Discourse of Power**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the courtroom section of Stieg Larsson's *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* to explore how the discourse of power is exploited to privilege some and exclude others, and to explain how such institutionalised power can be mimicked, ridiculed and ultimately made irrelevant through cunning courtroom strategies and shifty postmodern theories. The results reveal that scientific knowledge is essentialised and monopolised by the state through practices that brand the female protagonist as insane and deprive her of the most basic form of legal rights. In addition, sanity and insanity alike are shown to be mere representations of the imaginary as they are both mimicable; the sane can act as insane and vice versa. Their truth value, consequently, becomes indistinct and unjustifiable. Essentially, the truth that the trial has set out to justify remains as elusive at the end as it was at the beginning of the novel.

**Keyword:** The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest<sup>1</sup>, Michel Foucault<sup>2</sup>, discourse of power<sup>3</sup>, Jean Baudrillard<sup>4</sup>, mimicry<sup>5</sup>

*The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*, first published in Swedish in 2007 and in English in 2009, is the third book in the famed *Millennium* series and the last novel completed by the Swedish writer Stieg Larsson before his unexpected death in 2004. The novel sheds light on the political intrigues and psychological complex surrounding and emblematising the series' female protagonist, Lisbeth Salander, who previously helped expose two serial killers in the first book, was wrongly accused of triple murders in the second book and is

finally revealed, during a riveting court trial in the final novel that completes Larsson's original crime trilogy (subsequent *Millennium* novels were written by David Lagercrantz after Larsson's death), not only to be innocent of the crimes for which she has been arrested but also to have long endured multiple forms of sexual, social and mental abuse inflicted by the twin dominions of science and the state. Salander's legal acquittal in the end, therefore, suggests a victory both personal and public and of both (the narrative's) past and present. Her innocence serves not only as the result—the end—of the investigation but also retrospectively as the reason—the beginning—of the trilogy's investigative narrative. It also promises that with a cunning scheme of counteraction, ingrained prejudices can be recanted, history re-written and justice redeemed. The popularity of Larsson's trilogy has been credited for initiating global readers into the world of Scandinavian crime fiction and has inspired widespread scholarly discussions on diverse topics ranging from the trilogy's generic attributes as crime fiction (Nestingen, 2012; O'Donoghue, 2013; Padgate & Padgate, 2020, 2021) to its social and moral contributions, especially in the context of the display of violence and its justification (Beckmann, 2016; Benyahia, 2013; Grodal, 2011; King & Smith, 2012; Vaage, 2019). Larsson's 2007 *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* and its 2009 cinematic avatar have warranted context-specific studies pointing to parallel challenges that are in existence in Sweden; for example, Domoracki et al.'s (2011) criticism of the Swedish public administration, Moore's (2013) defence of Swedish inquisitorial criminal justice, and Padgate's (2023) investigation of the Swedish post-colonialist mindscape.

Given that Scandinavian crime fiction as a genre, to which Larsson's novels belong and contribute, famously aims to reflect and reform social ills (Creeber, 2015; MacDougall, 2010), the eventual 'justice' in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* can be seen as both the end and the means of such reform. As the end of this strand of the novel's storyline—the total collapse of a corrupt governmental section—is characteristically dramatic, gratifying and expected, it can be presumed to be an ideal result—a promise—of the social reform aspired to and advocated by the author, who was himself a left-wing, anti-extremist activist (Forshaw, 2013). The novel can thus be read as a rallying cry, presumably Larsson's own manifesto, against corrupt authorities. The strategic plan devised by Salander's defence team, nicknamed "The Knights of the Idiotic Table" (Larsson, 2010, p. 425), then serves as a compass for those whose romantic idealism (i.e., the knights) spurs them on courageously (i.e., idiotically) to fight enemies far mightier than themselves.

To explore the 'means' whereby the promise of justice can be fulfilled is, therefore, the focus of the present study. With this end in mind, two procedural objectives are proposed: firstly, to investigate how the discourse of power in such institutions as the law, science and medicine is used to oppress and

marginalise vulnerable individuals in Stieg Larsson's *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* and, secondly, to demonstrate how such discourse is unmade and ridiculed by the oppressed and the marginalised in the novel. In order to fulfil the first research objective, Michel Foucault's concept of the discourse of power is employed to reveal the institutionalised grip extended over the judicial process by various authorities in the novel. In order to achieve the second research objective, Jean Baudrillard's concepts of simulacrum, representation and hyperreality are applied to explicate the ideological collapse of those hegemonic powers as exemplified by the reversal of fortune at the end of the court trial when members of an unconstitutional government unit are arrested and Salander is freed.

In terms of the analytical perimeter, the present study concentrates on the courtroom section (page 670-750) of Stieg Larsson's *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* (first published in 2007 and referenced in this study based on Vintage's 2010 English-translation paperback edition). When necessary, references are made to incidents and circumstances described in other sections of the novel and in the other two novels of the trilogy, namely in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (first published in 2005) and *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (first published in 2006).

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

The following literature review gives relevant information pertaining to Michel Foucault's conceptual tools for the analysis of the discourse of power and Jean Baudrillard's theoretical frameworks for the analysis of simulacrum, representation and hyperreality. In addition, a summary of Stieg Larsson's storyline leading and pertaining to the trial of Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* and a brief background to the Swedish welfare state are provided to ease fresh readers into the dense plot and the social context of the *Millennium* trilogy.

### **Foucault's Discourse of Power**

The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power not relations of meaning. History has no "meaning," though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible to analysis down to the smallest detail—but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. (Foucault, 1984a, p. 56)

Foucault's interest in history, as seen in the above statement, does not lie in its supposed meaningful linearity but in its conflictual forces and mechanisms that create supposed 'truth' and 'knowledge,' which he perceives as essentially man-made: "the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge" (Foucault,

1981, p. 67). Foucault calls these forces and mechanisms ‘discourse’ and names the tracing of such discourse to unpack underlying structures of knowledge formations ‘genealogy’ (Nayar, 2009, pp. 50-53).

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972) defines ‘discourse’ as “the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements” (p. 80). In “The Order of Discourse,” he encourages us to “conceive of discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them” (Foucault, 1981, p. 67). Accordingly, discourse is dictated by sets of rules and practices which influence how certain statements and utterances are distributed, circulated, restricted and excluded. In other words, discourse is a set of statements and representations which are kept in circulation by complex sets of practices which simultaneously keep other statements and representations out of circulation. For this reason, discourse, in Foucault’s view, is associated closely with power relations that inform what is perceived as scientific and objective, thus allowing certain things to be said and practised while disallowing others (Mills, 2005, p. 69; Nayar, 2009, p. 51).

In this age of science, discourse formed under the pretext of scientific inquiry constitutes ‘knowledge’ which can be seen as an exercise in power wielded by some authorities who proscribe certain conditions as diseased, deviant, immoral or irrational. The discourse of law, for instance, allows logic and rationality, not anger or hysteria, as evidence and seeks to control those considered ‘deviant’ or ‘immoral’—an angry and hysterical mob, for instance—by means of punishment enforced by institutionalised authorities such as the police, the courts of justice and the prisons. The discourse of health, likewise, determines certain conditions as ‘diseased’ and certain expressions as ‘irrational’ and labels them with physical or psychiatric disorders to be cured by physicians and psychiatrists and to be contained in hospitals and asylums. Asylums become, in Foucault’s words, “the instrument of moral uniformity and of social denunciation” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 149). Psychiatric rationality as commonly practised in the West is, thus, shown to display “epistemological, ethical and political limitations” (Iliopoulos, 2013). Similarly, the discourse of patriarchy enables male authority to dominate and maintain its dominion over countless traditional social structures such as marriage, religion and politics (Nayar, 2009, p. 52). Chastity and obedience, for example, have long been promoted as valued and desirable female virtues, all for the benefit of husbands and husbands-to-be. The discourse of power, therefore, suggests tensions that are simultaneously covert and overt and, despite practices aimed to normalise it, unnatural and unscientific.

### **Baudrillard's Simulacrum, Representation and Hyperreality**

This imaginary of representation ... disappears in the simulation whose operation is nuclear and genetic, no longer at all specular or discursive ... no more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensivity: it is genetic miniaturisation that is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturised cells, matrices and memory banks, models of control – and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal ... (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 632)

Whereas Foucault's interest in tracing the formations of knowledge lies in unraveling the masked systems of representations in order to expose the power struggles that vitalise such systems, Baudrillard's intention, as quoted above, is to shatter those systems by illustrating that nothing exists beyond those representations. Even though Baudrillard, in his 1977 book *Forget Foucault*, (in)famously describes Foucault's "analytical chronicle of power" as "too beautiful to be true" and calls Foucault's discourse "a mirror of the powers it describes" (Baudrillard, 1997/2007, p. 30), both ultimately contend that 'reality' as perceived as 'truth' or 'knowledge' is constructed, hence imaginary.

Based on the prevalence of modern theme parks and media such as television and photography, Baudrillard suggests that images conveyed through these media are copied, reproduced and circulated endlessly, thus serving as 'original' sources for further reproductions and representations and saturating our knowledge of 'reality,' beyond which we have no access. These representations, termed 'simulacra' by Baudrillard, constitute hyperreality or "models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 631). According to Baudrillard, simulacra are beyond imitations and parodies since they substitute "the signs of the real for the real ... via its operational double" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 631). Simulation, therefore, is different from pretension since the latter "leaves the principle of reality intact" whereas the former "threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false," the "real" and the "imaginary"" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 633).

With this concept of simulation, the authority of sciences such as medicine, among others, could be interrogated and even subverted. According to Baudrillard, if a person who simulates an illness can produce psychosomatic symptoms, "then every illness can be considered as simulatable and simulated, and medicine loses its meaning since it only knows how to treat "real" illnesses according to their objective causes" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 633). In view of this line of thought, any knowledge serving as points of reference is stripped of its

truth value. The authority of psychiatry based on psychoanalysis which “transfers the symptom of the organic order to the unconscious order” that is “new and taken for real” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 633) suddenly becomes questionable. In other words, there is no longer any definite distinction between sane and insane individuals. A Baudrillardian line-by-line logic could look something like this: Crazy people are good at acting crazily because they are crazy. Therefore, crazy people simulate. If crazy people simulate craziness, are they ‘really’ crazy? In Baudrillard’s view, “this lack of distinction [between the truth value of sanity and insanity] is the worst kind of subversion” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 633). As one of Stieg Larsson’s major villains in the *Millennium* trilogy, a psychiatrist by trade and training, says in defence of his own practice, “Psychiatry is not an exact science” (Larsson, 2010, p. 724).

### **Larsson’s *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest* and the Swedish Welfar State**

He [Prosecutor Richard Ekström] had also leaked information indicating that Salander’s mental state was cause for alarm. He cited first the forensic psychiatric report by Dr. Jesper H. Löderman ... and second, a report which, in accordance with a decision by the district court at a preliminary hearing, had been written by Dr. Peter Teleborian. Since the mentally ill girl had, true to form, refused categorically to speak to psychiatrists, the analysis was made on the basis of “observations” ... Teleborian ... had determined that Salander was suffering from a serious mental disturbance and employed terms such as *psychopathy*, *pathological narcissism* and *paranoid schizophrenia*. (Larsson, 2010, p. 671)

In the 1970s Sweden implemented “progressive welfare state policies” (Bergh, 2014, p. 3) which combine “a high living standard with a strong social security net” (Sanandaji, 2018) in the forms of generous systems for health and education funded by public organizations and provided significantly by private firms. The Swedish welfare state was admired for its seemingly apt handling to balance capitalism and socialism and became a political and economic model for many other governments around the globe. Nevertheless, since the 1970s the country has faced ongoing challenges concerning currency devaluation, immigration, inequality, unemployment among young people and, almost inevitably, rising crime due to a number of fiscal, political and constitutional miscalculations (Bergh, 2014, pp. 1-2, 38-39; Sanandaji, 2018), and it is now well documented that “in practice the cash benefits fall considerably short of the levels intended by the designers of the plans” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020, para. 2) and that “the model is already a thing of the past” (Sanandaji, 2018, para. 1). The picture of Sweden and the Swedish welfare state is then mixed and the tension between what is and what could have been

provides a backdrop for Larsson's crime trilogy, most evidently in the storyline involving the (lack of) social well-being and the legal struggles of its female protagonist.

Lisbeth Salander's trial in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* is the result of a large-scale (fictional) conspiracy resting securely for decades on the welfare-state mantle of "equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). Unfortunately, in Salander's case, the legislative and medical systems that have been put in place to protect and promote the 'provisions for a good life' have been abused to prevent her from achieving just that.

When she was twelve, Lisbeth Salander threw gasoline on her father, a defected Russian spy selling espionage secrets to the Swedish government, and set him on fire after he had savagely beaten up her mother. The ex-spy survived the burns but the incident became national news. To protect the identity of Salander's father, a unit within the Swedish Secret Police, nicknamed 'The Section', decided to lock Salander up in St. Stefan's Psychiatric Clinic for Children with the full compliance of prominent psychiatrist Dr. Peter Teleborian. After her discharge from the children's hospital two years later, the Section kept a watchful eye on her through periodical interventions in the government's welfare system. When Salander's second guardian, appointed by the Section, and two other individuals were murdered, Salander was implicated, arrested and put on trial. The culprits, however, were Salander's estranged father and his son, Salander's half-brother. The Section, in an attempt to cover up its many unconstitutional operations that were under threat due to the murder scandal, killed Salander's father and tried, once again, to seek a court order to institutionalise her. To this end, they recruited the help of Dr. Teleborian and prosecutor Richard Ekström. Salander, on the other hand, was backed by her former lover (journalist Mikael Blomkvist), her former boss (Milton Security's CEO Dragan Armansky), her former guardian (Advokat Holger Palmgren), her lawyer (women's rights attorney Advokat Annika Giannini) and her underground network of "the world's foremost hackers" (Larsson, 2010, p. 353), Hacker Republic. The narrative is thus brought up to the courtroom section of Larsson's *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*.

### **Results: Making and Unmaking the Discourse of Power**

This section proposes to investigate how, in Larsson's novel, the discourse of power embedded in the social institutions of law, science and medicine is exploited to marginalise the novel's female characters, mainly the female protagonist and occasionally her female lawyer, and to demonstrate how such a discourse is unmade and ridiculed by the marginalised in the book. Foucault's concept of the discourse of power and Baudrillard's concepts of

simulacrum, representation and hyperreality are applied to bring these premises into focus.

### **Making the Discourse of Power**

In many ways, the trial of Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* is microcosmic of the tensions between the powers that be and the struggles against them. On one side, the state accuses one of its wards of serious criminal offences, using medical authorities to support its legal claims and enforce its institutional discipline. On the opposite side, the accused—Lisbeth Salander—and her lawyer fight not only to prove Salander's innocence but also to annihilate the default credibility of institutionalised powers and send the crooked authorities to prison. Incidentally, the prosecutor and his key witness—a renowned psychiatrist—are both male, and the accused and her lawyer are both female. It is then possible to read this also as the faceoff of a gender struggle in which science and the state exercise a patriarchal control, and those in need of defending themselves are feminised, disenfranchised and victimised. This first part of the results of the analysis examines how the discourse of power in such institutions as the state, law and science serves to control the hegemonic powers in Stieg Larsson's *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*. The examination is carried out based on the terms and tenets of Foucault's discourse of power.

With the novel's plot going back to the wrangling of the 1970s Cold War, national security is foregrounded as the common concern of many Western countries, Sweden included. Privileges are granted to those who contribute to the security of the state and punishments are given to those who threaten it. As Salander's father, a Russian defector, possesses political intelligence valuable to the success of the Swedish Secret Police, he is protected and empowered by officials of the Swedish government, if not officially by the government itself. Salander, on the other hand, rebels against her father—a wife beater—on behalf of her abused mother and, subsequently, finds herself to be the enemy not only of a vicious father/assassin but also of the Swedish state.

Throughout the trilogy, the state, in the guise of a guardianship agency, sets rules and practices to restrict and exclude Salander from the mainstream, respectable and 'competent' population by falsely declaring her 'incompetent,' assigning her legal guardians and stripping her of financial freedom as well as many social duties and rights, as Larsson explains with palpable passion at some length in the first book of the trilogy:

*Guardianship* [emphasis in the original] is a stricter form of control, in which the client is relieved of the authority to handle his or her own money or to make decisions regarding various matters. The exact wording states that the guardian shall take over all of the client's



*legal power* [emphasis in the original]. In Sweden approximately 4,000 people are under guardianship. The most common reason for a guardianship is mental illness or mental illness in conjunction with heavy abuse of alcohol or drugs ... Taking away a person's control of her own life ... is one of the greatest infringements a democracy can impose ... It is an infringement even if the intent may be perceived as benign and socially valid. (Larsson, 2008, pp. 210-211)

The declaration of incompetence is used by the state to set a default on Salander's supposed lack of intellectual aptitude and, subsequently, moral judgment. It serves less as her protection than an invitation for others to exploit her vulnerability, as when her new guardian, Advokat Bjurman, believes he can sexually abuse her and get away with it because she is a social outcast with no moral credibility: "There are documents stating that you're non compos mentis. It would be your word against mine. Whose word do you think would carry more weight?" (Larsson, 2008, pp. 208-209).

During Salander's trial in the final book of the *Millennium* trilogy, the declaration of incompetence is referred to repeatedly by the prosecutor and his witnesses to belittle and dismiss Salander's judgment: "Your client has been declared incompetent and has no right to make any such decision for herself" (Larsson, 2010, p. 708). Through such a discourse of power, the state entitles itself to keep a close eye on Salander through the work of the guardianship agency and make sure to keep its political priorities—such as its domestic and foreign spies—intact, regardless of the toll it takes on innocent citizens. A guardianship agency staffer "strongly" denies Salander's assertions of aggravated sexual assault against her last and deceased guardian—Nils Erik Bjurman—calling the claims "defamatory" and "ridiculous" (Larsson, 2010, p. 689) not because she knows the 'truth' of this matter but because, influenced by the systemic perception of respectability, she believes she has the 'knowledge' of what a respectable government agent should be like. To her, "[h]e was a conscientious person who evidenced a deep commitment to his wards" and who "had been active on behalf of the guardianship agency for almost twenty years before he was so shockingly murdered" (Larsson, 2010, p. 689). Also, to the guardianship agency staff, Salander is guilty by default. With or without the trial, Salander's innocence has already been cancelled: "She gave Salander a withering look, despite the fact that Salander was not accused of murder" (Larsson, 2010, p. 689). The guardianship agency, despite its philanthropic philosophy, like several other welfare state policies, inevitably falls short of "the levels intended by the designers of the plans" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020, para. 2). Instead of guaranteeing equality of rights and access, guardianship, as a legal delegation, officialises the division between the powerful and the powerless by valourising the guardian as 'respectful' while

vilifying the ward as ‘ridiculous,’ subsequently prioritising prescribed knowledge over truth.

Unfortunately, such handling of power is not an isolated occurrence, in fiction or in fact. The discourse of law in the power relation is generally straight forward. Those who make the law, by right, have the power to enact it (e.g., the legislature), to regulate it (e.g., the police) and to penalise people who go against it (e.g., the judiciary). Law-abiding citizens are seen as moral and respectful while deviants are condemned as wicked and dishonourable. With the guardianship agency (i.e., a regulator) safely in their corner, the Secret Police seek to convince the district court to penalise Salander on the grounds of unrestrained (i.e., deviant) behaviour, a sign of moral deficiency intolerable in law. To this end, prosecutor Ekström, enlists the expertise and prestige of famed psychiatrist Dr. Teleborian, who provides a forensic medical assessment of Salander’s actions and mental condition and promptly asserts his authority over Salander’s defence lawyer: “If you don’t mind my saying so, Fru Giannini, I am actually a physician. I suspect that my medical expertise is rather more extensive than yours” (Larsson, 2010, p. 715). When he is confronted by Salander’s account of his strapping her to a hospital bed as a way of punishment to keep her ‘in restraints,’ he dismisses it as “nonsense” (Larsson, 2010, p. 714) and reminds himself that “It doesn’t matter what she says. It’s my assessment that counts” (Larsson, 2010, p. 723). In this instance, the discourse of medicine, similar to the discourse of law, is shown to be man-made and self-important. Truth (‘what she says’) is subordinate to and sidetracked by knowledge (‘my assessment’). By keeping the knowledge in circulation, in this case through medical malpractices and legal manipulations, Salander’s version of her own story is restricted and then excluded. In the end, only ‘scientific’ discourse is allowed to be practised, normalised and propagated while ‘deviant’ others are disallowed, marginalised and obliterated.

In sum, the first part of the analysis emphasises the essentialization of ‘knowledge’ by tracing the formation of its underlying structure—its genealogy. The analysis points out, by referencing Foucault’s discourse of power, how the authorities in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest* exert their jurisdiction over an individual’s rights through the default ‘knowledge’ constructed by and embedded in the clout of science and governance. The result of this exertion is, on the one hand, the perpetuation and valourisation of the existing power and, on the other hand, the continued victimisation and vilification of the vanquished other.

### Unmaking the Discourse of Power

Following Baudrillard's projection that the discourse of power merely mirrors the power it describes (Baudrillard, 1977/2007, p. 30), this second part of the analysis aims to demonstrate that power in all its guises can be regarded as representational and operational, rather than real and rational. The analysis illustrates how Salander and her defence team challenge and then subvert the discourse of power asserted by legal and medical authorities that attempt to silence her into perpetual psychiatric incarceration. Baudrillard's concepts of representation and simulation are employed to illustrate the defence's strategy in court as well as the possibility for such strategy to backfire on all forms of power assertion. The analysis first explains how Salander simulates the representation of her public image, thus reaffirming the public knowledge of herself and acquiring credibility as 'herself.' The analysis then explores how Salander makes use of this simulacrum to defy the knowledge that others have of her and to present her side of the story, hence threatening "the difference between the "true" and the "false," the "real" and the "imaginary"" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 633).

Prior to the trial, the case's prosecutor has been giving daily interviews and leaking information about ongoing police investigations as well as Salander's past and present psychiatric reports. By so doing, he makes sure of generating steady media interest and the public perception of Salander as dumb and disturbed. On the other hand, Salander has been characteristically silent through all the police interrogations: "She had not even bothered to clear her throat" (Larsson, 2010, p. 672), and her lawyer, Advokat Annika Giannini, has not given a single statement to the press. By the time of the trial, the representation of a mentally ill, empty-headed public enemy suffering from "psychopathy, pathological narcissism and paranoid schizophrenia" (Larsson, 2010, p. 671) has become Salander's sole public image.

On the first day of the trial, contrary to the general practice of observing a formal dress code in court to effect respectability and appeasement, the defence team elects to dress Salander "in costume" (Larsson, 2010, p. 675) to accentuate the vulgarity of "the scandal-ridden young woman" (Larsson, 2010, p. 674) and satisfy the expectations of the reporters. Usually dressed with no taste and much hostility, Salander's attire in court exaggerates her style "to the point of parody,"<sup>1</sup> (Larsson, 2010, p. 675) with "a black leather miniskirt with frayed seams and a black top—with the legend I AM ANNOYED—which barely covered her many tattoos ... ten piercings in her ears, and a ring through her left eyebrow ... grey lipstick and ... black mascara" (Larsson, 2010, p. 674). In essence, in all appearances Salander's Goth look in court is a simulacrum of

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<sup>1</sup> Larsson's use of the word 'parody' in this quotation is essentially non-technical. It almost certainly does not contextualize Baudrillard's idea of simulacrum. If anything, it refers to the imitation of Salander's public image, which only stresses its representational aspect.

her public persona. The operational function of this simulacrum is to claim the credibility of her perceived ‘authenticity’—to declare that she is not pretending to be someone else, nor is she ashamed to be herself. The fact that the persona she puts on is not really who she is, is, according to Baudrillard’s projection, strategically irrelevant. By now, the imaginary of representation has morphed into a simulation that “no longer needs to be rational ... it is no longer really the real ... It is a hyperreal” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 632). In other words, by living up to the ‘reality’ expected of her, Salander proves that reality in the forms of what one knows (knowledge) and what one is (truth) are essentially constructed, hence imaginary.

With the hyperreality of an insane, slow-witted, wicked criminal in place, Salander then moves on to unmake it by proving not only her innocence but also her rationality and intelligence. To convince the judge to revoke Salander’s declaration of incompetence, which has subjected her to the care of the guardianship agency, the defence team must prove first that Salander is competent, that the psychiatric assessments condemning her as incompetent are false and that, essentially “the prosecutor’s assertions are flawed” (Larsson, 2010, p. 676). Shortly into the court procedure, both Salander and her lawyer are shown to be precise, sharp and very capable. As opposed to the prosecutor’s long-winded twenty-two-minute introductory remarks, Giannini’s last a mere thirty seconds. Within that time, she manages to surprise the audience by defying both the public perception of her client and the prosecutor’s legal assertions: “It was obviously not what the reporters had been expecting. Most had speculated that Giannini would in some way exploit her client’s mental illness to her advantage” (Larsson, 2010, p. 677). Giannini then goes on to show the court that what the prosecutor presents as facts are indeed opinions and speculations, thus representational and inconclusive. In one question “Were you in Advokat Bjurman’s bedroom on the night of March 7, 2003?” she shows that the guardianship’s rejection of Salander’s “preposterous” claim of rape by her guardian is just a biased viewpoint against her client (Larsson, 2010, p. 687). In a similar fashion, Giannini, by asking a police witness “Can you prove that she went there with the intention of murdering her father?” convinces the court that the projected intent of murder with which Salander is charged is the prosecutor’s “eloquent and extensive ... speculation” (Larsson, 2010, p. 689).

Salander, in addition, can very well hold her own. From the beginning, she shatters the prosecutor’s serene façade and unmask his bias by refusing to respond to his ‘question’ saying “That was not a question. It was a general assertion in which you anticipated my answer. I’m not responsible for the assertions you are making” (Larsson, 2010, p. 681). Through their verbal and logical precision, the defence team subverts the gender expectations which stereotype men as calm, collected and sensible and women as hysterical, frivolous and irrational. The opposite seems to be true in this trial, as Giannini

derisively concludes: “he [prosecutor Ekström] has a great many opinions but a woeful shortage of evidence” (Larsson, 2010, p. 704). The tone of subversion is then set and will not be broken throughout.

When Dr. Teleborian steps forward to give his statement in support of the prosecutor’s case, he adduces his medical jurisdiction to overrule Giannini’s legal counsel for the defence: “If you don’t mind my saying so, Fru Giannini, I am actually a physician. I suspect that my medical expertise is rather more extensive than yours. It is my job to determine what medical treatments should be employed” (Larsson, 2010, p. 715). The defence team counters the psychiatrist’s assertion by means of mimicry firstly to probe his ‘medical treatments,’ then to prod at his ‘medical expertise,’ and finally to prune his credibility and reputation as a medical professional. Promptly mimicking Teleborian’s claim to superior medical ‘knowledge,’ Giannini informs the court of her background as a trained psychologist (Larsson, 2010, p. 715). By simulating the display of medical professionalism, the lawyer presents the doctor with “a mirror of the powers it describes” (Baudrillard, 2007, p. 30), showing that the defence team is aware of the supposed authority of ‘knowledge’ and is making use of this awareness to fight back, thus making fun of such supposed knowledge and those who embrace it. On the practical side of social perception, she also makes herself the doctor’s equal and ready to question his professional (mal)practices: “Is it not correct that your methods of treating my client eventually resulted in serious disagreements between you and your superior, Dr. Johannes Caldin, head physician at the time?” (Larsson, 2010, p. 716). Teleborian, pressed with incontrovertible evidence, comforts himself with “in spite of everything, he *was* an authority” (Larsson, 2010, p. 723, emphasis in original) and uses this ‘authority’ to label Salander with paranoid schizophrenia, citing her encounter with the police at the age of seventeen due to drunkenness. Giannini matches the case with her own drunkenness at the age of sixteen and Teleborian’s arrest at the age of seventeen after a drunken rampage about town (Larsson, 2010, p. 729). Through this gesture of mimicry, Teleborian’s ‘professional’ forensic assessment of Salander’s sanity is shown to be at best questionable since it is inconsistent with his assessment of his own and Giannini’s mental health, as Giannini poignantly asks: “But that doesn’t lead you—or anyone else—to believe that you have a serious mental illness?” (Larsson, 2010, p. 729).

Resorting to logocentric terminologies such as “reason” and “assessment,” Teleborian attempts, in vain, to revamp his medical credibility by shifting the spotlight to the public image of Salander’s psychopathy through the perpetuation of her “multitude of tattoos and piercings” as “a manifestation of self-hate” (Larsson, 2010, p. 709). Giannini reveals that this ‘expert’ assessment is a biased accusation that cannot be objectively quantified: “At what percentage of tattooed body surface does it stop being fetishism and become a mental

illness?” (Larsson, 2010, p. 710), and subsequently that his diagnosis is statistically insufficient and unscientific. Through this strategy of cross-examination, the doctor’s medical assessment is revealed to be highly constructed and his medical ‘knowledge’ is exhibited to be almost blindly arbitrary.

On a larger scale, however, questioning the rationality of science threatens not only Teleborian’s exertion of his medical judgment but also Giannini’s own claim to the authority of her medical training, as well as other such claims to the mantle of knowledge. The defence’s strategy, in other words, unmakes the overall power of science by showing it to be what it claims it is not—self-serving, biased and subjective.

The idea of the nonexistence of reality is further emphasised when, on the last day of the trial, Mikael Blomkvist, with the help of the network of Hacker Republic, publishes Salander’s autobiography in his magazine *Millennium* and exposes the Section as a criminal unit and Teleborian as a paedophile, leading to multiple arrests including the doctor’s, right at his seat in the courtroom. The autobiography, however, is “a fiction in the sense that she had not, of course, told the *whole* [emphasis in the original] truth” (Larsson, 2010, p. 512). For this reason, the autobiography is a representation of Salander’s version of ‘the truth.’ As has often been said, a half-truth is a whole lie. Salander’s autobiography can, therefore, be viewed according to Baudrillard’s tenet of hyperreality as yet another representation of the real, hence a hyperreal that is not to be taken as rational but operational. Its objective to serve is by and large similar to the objective of the version propagated by the prosecutor and the media. The only difference is that the autobiography serves Salander herself, not the state. In the end, the public persona of a criminal previously proscribed to Salander is reversely prescribed to the disgraced doctor, hence affirming that a persona, like other forms of representation, is inconstant and imaginary.

Although the court sequence of *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest* ends with Salander’s acquittal and the revocation of her declaration of incompetence—a satisfying victory as the result of clever strategic moves and careful planning—and offers what the narrative suggests as ‘the truth’ of the matter, the most that can be said about the verdict of this trial, when discussed through the lens of Baudrillard’s hyperreality, is that in this battle of the simulacra what has won the day is not the truth, as such a thing does not exist, but Salander’s “operational double” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 631) in the form of her autobiography.

In short, this second part of the analysis explains how *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest* subverts and ridicules the concept of power by pointing out its inconstancy and irrationality. Based on Baudrillard’s concept of simulacrum and hyperreality, both sanity and insanity are revealed to be mere

representations of the imaginary; if insanity is, as Salander has shown, simulatable, then psychiatric diagnoses lose their authoritative relevance since the truth value of sanity and insanity can no longer be differentiated. Truth, consequently, becomes irrelevant—something that is constantly sought after but never found.

## Conclusion

This study of the courtroom section in Stieg Larsson's *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* proposes to explore how 'justice' is executed in two steps. Firstly, based on Michel Foucault's concept of the discourse of power, the study investigates the ways in which the discourse of law, medicine and science is exploited by institutionalised authorities to deprive individuals of their rights and independence. Secondly, using Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation and representation, the study explains the ways in which such institutionalised powers are mimicked and made fun of by the book's narrative and, subsequently, made irrelevant by the relevant theories.

In "Making the Discourse of Power", the analysis focuses on the essentialisation and monopolisation of knowledge. Based on Foucault's tenet concerning the discourse of power, Lisbeth Salander's declaration of incompetence is shown to be a manifestation of the discourse of power exercised by the state's need to contain its political secrets through its trusted Secret Police, Guardianship Agency and medical professionals. With the pretext of supposedly objective scientific knowledge, Salander is labelled deviant and immoral and ordered to be strictly controlled by a legal guardian or to be confined in an asylum or a prison. By keeping such knowledge in circulation via normalised practices, the state succeeds in excluding Salander's version of her life from its official records, thus disallowing and obliterating her legal rights for independence.

In "Unmaking the Discourse of Power", the analysis progresses to discuss the nonexistence of reality whether in the form of knowledge or truth. Based on Baudrillard's tenets concerning simulacrum, representation and hyperreality, Salander's defence team is shown to deploy mimicry—in both costume and rhetoric—to satirise the practices of the media and medicine as well so as to satisfy the defence's operational goal. The result is the narrowing of the gap between the real and the imaginary. From this viewpoint, the authority of a powerful institution, such as science, is rendered irrelevant since its existence is no longer real. The truth that the trial in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* has set out to warrant, therefore, remains as elusive and unjustifiable as ever, if not even more so. Justice, it seems, lies not in the democracy of inclusion but in a democratic distribution of irrelevancy. This, in itself, is sweet revenge on the powers that feed on exclusivity.

As Hansen and Waade (2017, pp. 111-113) suggest, the international phenomenon of Larsson's literary success has amplified the ambivalent Nordic self-image motivated by the unique history of Nordic colonisation that aims not to alienate the colonised but to imitate them (Hauge, 2004 as cited in Hanssen & Waade, 2017, p. 111). Such idealism, ideologically and contentedly incongruous, gives a distinct flavour to Scandinavian crime fiction as a genre and makes it palatable to both modern readers and postmodern scholars. The victory of "The Knights of the Idiotic Table" at the end of Larsson's last novel is a romantic result promised by a practical operation in a world where truth is all but constant.



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