

ARTICLE

Lost in Thought: Authenticity in Rap and Literature – A Swedish Case Study

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This article explores the notion of authenticity as expressed in literature and in rap. In order to do this, I have chosen two texts that were produced in similar time periods and take as their subject similar conditions and locations. I show how authenticity can be both recreated and destabilised, with the help of two Swedish texts: a rap, and a short story. The two texts in question are The Latin Kings' *'Borta i tankar'* ('Lost in Thought'), and Alejandro Leiva Wenger's *'Borta i tankar'* ('Lost in Thought'). Both texts engage with social conditions in Sweden at the turn of the millennium. The two texts are connected by more than just their name, with the most obvious intersection being the themes they both address. The lyrics of Dogge Doggelito (The Latin Kings' frontman) depict the struggle of a young man seeking to make something of himself in difficult circumstances. Similarly, Leiva Wenger relates the story of a young man attempting to come to terms with his own abilities, tolerances and opportunities, and the expectations of those around him. However, as I will argue, there are aspects of both texts that make their relationship to authenticity more complex.

Rap, literature and authenticity

The connections between creative works of all kinds and concepts such as authenticity, reality and truth are as complex as the concepts themselves. Some works claim to be authentic; others refute authenticity, embracing artifice or fantasy. However, the degree to which authenticity is expressed in works by their creators, and required of them by their audience, tends to vary depending on the conventions of the art form (as does the form any such authenticity is expected to take). For example, a work of visual art is likely to be perceived as authentic if it is not a forgery. It is less likely that we would question whether the artist was accurately depicting the subject of the work or their own experience of the world. In rap and literature, however, the focus is more likely to

be concentrated on the perceived faithfulness of the subject matter to reality. The degree to which authenticity is called for also varies enormously depending on genre, with literature often perceived to be primarily an imaginative, rather than a documentary, form. The two texts I have chosen, The Latin Kings' *'Borta i tankar'* ('Lost in Thought'), from their 1997 album *I skuggan av betongen* (*In the Shadow of the Concrete*, 1997), and Alejandro Leiva Wenger's *'Borta i tankar'* ('Lost in Thought') from his 2001 collection *Till vår ära* (*In Our Honour*), raise interesting questions about the nature of authenticity and the creative representation of contemporary issues in Swedish society. It is therefore important to explore the complexity of these works as reflections of the social and creative environment in which they are conceived and received.

The idea of authenticity, of 'keeping it real', is historically central to rap music and has spread with hip hop culture as that

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culture has found new audiences, performers and scenes around the world. But, as Alastair Pennycook states: 'the culture of authenticity, which indeed is one aspect of hip-hop culture that has spread globally, becomes, by its very nature, something different in each context in which it is taken up' (2007: 93). So how is this 'culture of authenticity' expressed in the context of Swedish rap? First, it may be helpful to look at the ways in which authenticity is defined in rap in general.

For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to define authenticity primarily as the personally accurate representation of the self, one's surroundings or one's experiences, or, to borrow the terminology of hip hop: 'keepin' it real'. There is another interpretation that has also been important in hip hop culture and rap music, which is that authenticity requires the recognition of, and faithfulness to, the African American roots of the form. If held up alongside one another, these two interpretations appear contradictory. This suggests that to rap 'authentically', a rapper must either retain closeness to their local origin and their own background, or to the 'origins' of rap.

Alastair Pennycook unites these two contrasting principles as he contends that '[k]eeping it real in the global context is about defining the local horizons of significance while always understanding the relationship to a wider whole' (2007: 104). Speaking from a sociolinguistic perspective, he refers to the way authenticity in hip hop is replicated in the 'ways in which English and hip hop become intertwined as local cultural and linguistic formations' (2007: 104). However, he still perceives English to play a major role in helping its users to 'claim greater global authenticity' (2007: 104). The presence of the 'hip hop English' terms that have become common in Swedish hip hop, and the slang that has developed on suburban estates in Sweden, are evidence of this. The word *fet* (very/cool), is a simple example of this which features in the lyrics of many Swedish rap-

pers, including those of The Latin Kings' '*Borta i tankar*'. It is derived from 'phat', a term popularised by American hip hop culture. The use of this term, and others like it, is an indication of the way marginalised communities in Sweden have appropriated the terminologies of marginalised communities in the US, thereby connoting an affiliation between the two groups. This is not to say that the word has any express meaning associated with black urban communities in the US. The simple fact of its being 'translated' and naturalised into Swedish via rap and hip hop culture is evidence of the changing parameters of authenticity in Swedish society, the imagined connections between marginalised communities across national borders, and the role of hip hop in this.

Imani Perry presents a further perspective, which presents a variety of ways to understand the concept of 'keeping it real'. She shows that there are differing, but not always contradictory ways to read authenticity, including: 'celebrations of the social effects of urban decay and poverty', 'assertions of a paranoid vigilance in protecting one's own dignity', or a 'device responding to the removal of rap music from the organic relationship with the communities creating it' (2007: 103). Although the latter point in particular relates to the perceived commodification of rap by external agents, a subject I do not touch on in any detail here, all three points have resonance for the relationship between authenticity and place, a subject I turn to later in this article.

In contrast to rap, literary forms such as verse and narrative prose have tended to be treated more straight-forwardly as expressive art forms. Their potential for representing real-life situations has been seen as secondary to their artistic and imaginative style. For example, in the mid-2000s there was a debate in the Swedish media in which critics, authors, academics and others took part. The debate focused on a number of texts, including Leiva Wenger's stories, all written by young men and women who were said to fit

into the category 'second-generation immigrant' (i.e. at least one of their parents had migrated to Sweden before they were born, or when they were very young). The language used in the texts came under particular focus, along with their representations of ethnicity and identity in contemporary urban and suburban Sweden. As Roger Källström states: 'both authors [Leiva Wenger and Khemiri, a contemporary of Leiva Wenger's] rejected all claims that they represent young people in multiethnic suburbs, and Khemiri repeatedly stressed that his main character's language was representative only for the character himself' (2011: 142). While it is dangerous to attempt to read these literary works as documentary representations of life in the suburbs, it seems disingenuous to deny that the works are informed by the social and media landscape in which they were produced. The texts demonstrate an engagement with social, political and personal realities. Interestingly, critics appear to have found it difficult to dissociate this engagement from the rap music that had previously been the only creative engagement with Sweden's 'concrete suburbs' that had any impact in the mainstream media:

[...] [in *Till vår ära*] riktas strålkastaren mot betongförorten på samma självklara sätt som inom svensk hip hop, vilket för övrigt är den konstnärliga uttrycksform som ligger närmast till hands om man vill beskriva Leiva Wengers skrivsätt, mättat som det är med en förortsslang som är obegriplig för folk över 30.

([in *Till vår ära*] the spotlight is directed at the concrete suburbs in the same natural way as in Swedish hip hop, which is, moreover, the form of artistic expression that comes to mind if one is describing Leiva Wenger's writing style, stuffed as it is with a suburban slang incomprehensible to anyone over thirty) (Lundgren 2001).

Lundgren's comments are problematic for a number of reasons (not least the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy set up by the assertion that nobody over thirty would understand the slang Leiva Wenger employs). However, what he says does contain a grain of truth: even though Leiva Wenger depicts an individual's personal experiences rather than portraying an authentic representation of an imagined 'them', he is commenting on the social and political circumstances that contribute to those personal experiences. It is troubling, though, that literature cannot be seen to speak to these circumstances without reference to hip hop.

The poet Johannes Anyuru wrote the foreword to a (2004) volume of The Latin Kings lyrics. In it, he warns that:

Latin Kings texter tillhör naturligtvis en tradition av poesi skriven för munnen och mikrofonen snarare än för boken och alla försök att placera in dem i ett skriftligt litteraturhistoriskt sammanhang är kanske snarare ett uttryck för ens egna preferenser och tankar än för verkliga samband

(Of course, The Latin Kings are part of a tradition of poetry written for the mouth and the microphone rather than for the pages of a book, and any attempt to put them in the context of written literary history is perhaps more an expression of one's own preferences and thoughts than of actual connections) (Anyuru 2004: 8).

There is truth in what Anyuru says here, and it would be foolish to treat the two texts as identical documents. Perhaps even using the word 'text' is questionable in the case of rap lyrics – they are generally performed and consumed as a set of sounds that connote meaning. In Graham Chia-Hui Preston's words, 'rap is meant to be heard, not read' (2008: 261-2). Rap is a lyrical constituent of, and accompaniment to, music, in which the music both informs and is informed by

many aspects of the rap. The music dictates or interacts with the rhythm, word choice, and mood. The text should not be separated from the rhythmic and melodic environment of which it is a part, and its own rhythmic and prosodic features should be considered. Adam Krims, for instance, argues that: 'identity in rap music indeed has its poetics, and that poetics is partially – and crucially – a poetics of musical organization' (2000: 3).

A rap is also essentially a performance. Although this is complicated by the way rap (and other music) is listened to – frequently in private, via a pre-recorded medium – the performer is still necessarily present in the listening experience. However, if one assumes that a rap cannot be considered a text because it is also a performance, then one must also question the notion that a short story is 'only' a text. Just as rap is generally listened to in the form of a musical recording, a story is generally read in printed form, which has visual and textural elements. Thus, a short story has a materiality: the visual aspects of the printed form in which most of its audience will encounter it plays a role in how it is interpreted, just as the aural components of a rap will affect its interpretation. As long as both '*Borta i tankar*' texts are analysed in a way that takes into account their respective forms, the problem can be overcome.

For the purposes of this article, I think it important to consider the two texts on the basis of their textual characteristics. This means isolating Dogge's lyrics from the accompanying instrumental track, although not necessarily from the more musical and formal elements of his delivery. In fact, my argument is based on form alongside the texts' narrative content. This naturally includes the rap's rhythmic elements, and visual aspects in the case of the short story. I argue that these factors are as important in shaping the reader's understanding of the text (though perhaps in a subconscious way) as the narrative context, the sociocultural context of the works, and the use of linguis-

tic register (or style). For example, I explore the visual construction of Leiva Wenger's text as both integral to its meaning, and also, at times, a conflicting factor in the work's communication.

Of course, visual elements play an important role in the packaging and communication of rap. The material or digital imagery of video and packaging is an integral part of the musical experience for a vast percentage of listeners. However, in order to limit the scope of this article, I have chosen to focus on factors that are directly relevant to the texts as verbal entities. Musical, or aural elements may likewise play a part in the live readings or audio recordings of literary texts, but as with the visual elements accompanying rap music, I am treating these elements as secondary to the texts themselves.

Texts in outline

Before I move on to more in-depth analysis of the two texts, I outline here the ways in which the texts both consciously and unconsciously confound claims of authenticity while simultaneously validating them. In The Latin Kings' '*Borta i tankar*', the primary barrier to an interpretation of the text as authentic is a combination of the formal restrictions of rap as a genre, and the naivety and hyperbolic imaginativeness of frontman Dogge's particular rap persona. Persona also intervenes in Leiva Wenger's story, as the narrative is broken up and rendered unclear by the narrator telling two versions of the story to different interlocutors. While these versions are similar in content, the narrator uses them to represent himself in different ways according to his relationship with the dialogist. Moreover, the formal expression of these narrative threads results in a complex, and at times confusing, reading experience. These features are problematic for claims that the texts have an inherent authenticity, because both works create space for confusion, hyperbole and shadow-play. In the following section, I examine the texts to substantiate these claims.

The Latin Kings' *Borta i tankar*

The track '*Borta i tankar*' was released as a single on The Latin King's own record label Red-line Records in 1996, as well as featuring on their second album, *I skuggan av betongen*, which was released in 1997. I have included here the first verse of the lyrics, with a rough literal translation:

*Ibland vill man bara försvinna
man mår keff, att aldrig få vinna
lägga sig ner & aldrig mer vakna
man tänker här på jorden finns inget
jag ska sakna
men efter regnet så kommer solsken
även om mitt hjärta e hårt som sten
två personligheter som en schizofren
aggressivitet sviker som frustration
Greppar mikrofon, exploderar som en
kanon
Det finns inga vänner när man ligger
slagen på botten
vännerna kommer när du närmar dig
toppen
precis som när man var liten ville alla
ha största biten,
istället e alla skit len
ormar, vesslor, gamar och as
varje gång ni dyker upp så blir det knas
slingrar er iväg, stick iväg, schas
jag greppar mikrofonen åh sätter er på
plats
som Rocky Marciano i en tolv ronders
match
det enda jag hör i mitt hjärta som
bankar
jag e för långt borta i mina egna jävla
tankar*

Sometimes you just want to disappear
You feel bad that you never get to win
Lay right down and never wake up
You think here on earth there's nothing I'll miss
But after the rain, out comes the sun
Even if my heart is as hard as a stone
Two personalities like a schizophrenic
Aggression betrays you like frustration

Grip the microphone, explode like a
canon
There are no friends when you're
down at the bottom
The friends all come when you reach
the top
Just like when you were young,
Everyone wants the biggest chunk
instead everyone's shit, man
snakes, weasels, vultures and corpses
every time you come around trouble
starts
slither away, go away, get lost
I grip my microphone and put you in
your place
Like Rocky Marciano in a twelve
round match
The only thing I hear is my heart
pounding
I'm just too lost in my own damn
thoughts.

One of the dominant formal features of rap, alongside flow (the rhythmic and prosodic delivery of lyrics), is the use of rhyme. Unlike poetry, which may or may not be structured around rhyme, it is rare to hear rap that does not feature at least line-end rhymes. The Latin Kings' '*Borta i tankar*' is no exception. Coupland states that 'the semiotic resources available to speakers and singers are radically different, with singing having both more restraints (e.g. the general need to follow a melody line and a rhythm, prosodically) and more affordances (e.g. the general freedom to repeat sequences [...])' (2011: 575). Although rap is not directly comparable to singing, many of the 'restrictions and affordances' presented by song are also true of rap, meaning that the restraints of the form shape the possibilities available to the composer of the lyrics. Whether one hears Dogge's lyrics performed¹ or sees them on the page, Coupland's comments are relevant – lyrics differ significantly from everyday spoken language.

In using rhyming couplets, Dogge is forced to exclude or select words on the basis of their suitability for the rhyme scheme and his unique 'flow'. If the meaning of the words

cannot be fitted into the formal structure, it must be adapted, or excluded in favour of something that can be tailored to the aural pattern dictated by the form. The very best lyricists turn this restriction to their advantage, and many rappers have developed strategies that enable them to rap on almost any theme while still adhering to the strictures of the form. An example is US rapper Nas, whose 'gripping narratives and rhymes are a virtuosic example of the possibilities of heard rap through their intricate uses of interior rhyme, complicated rhyming patterns, and enjambment' (Preston 2008: 262). Nas is famous for the dexterity and complexity of his rapping and the imaginative and diverse themes he encompasses in it.

Even so, there are many rappers who are successful despite their lack of lyrical virtuosity, and Dogge would most likely be included among this latter group. Many of Dogge's lyrics were '*enkla som dagboksanteckningar*' ('as simple as diary entries') rather than technically virtuosic and intricate (Strage 2001: 339). The clumsiness of Dogge's rhymes indicates that he at times falls short of expressing himself fully within the constraints of the form. This may not impair the overall effect of the rap; indeed Patrick Turner finds that in Grime, a form of UK rap/dance music, many rappers willingly subjugate lyrical content to rhythm and flow, as these latter considerations are more integral to Grime MCing (2010: 144). Turner's claim that content can be subjugated in order to achieve formal effects has implications for any association between rap and authenticity. If the content can be twisted to suit the form, any authentic 'message' contained therein can just as easily be sacrificed. The presence of any 'authenticity' in rap is thus contingent on this authenticity being adaptable to rhyming conventions and other formal restraints, and therefore cannot be taken for granted.

As previously mentioned, Perry has underlined the role of authenticity in the self-representations of marginalised community experience (2007: 103). With this in mind,

it is important to think about the context in which both texts emerged. Both the members of The Latin Kings and Leiva Wenger grew up in and around Norra Botkyrka, a high-rise suburban housing estate built as part of Sweden's post-war '*miljonprogram*' ('million project'), a drive to build one million homes during the period 1965-1975. Following initial enthusiasm for these estates, they have come to be heavily stigmatised in Swedish media, political and public domains (cf. Ristilammi 1994, Pripp 2002, Dahlstedt 2006). They continue to be associated with poverty, unemployment and crime, although this association is not always grounded in fact. Many of the estates have a higher proportion of residents who were born outside, or whose parents were born outside, Sweden and Western Europe.

The Latin Kings, as the first rap group in Sweden to rap in Swedish about these suburban estates and their experiences of living in Norra Botkyrka, could be seen to produce rap that represents what Perry calls a '[celebration] of the social effects of urban decay and poverty' (2007: 103). Although their lyrical content varies from song to song, Dogge Doggelito has rapped a good deal about the experience of being a young man growing up on a suburban estate and encountering prejudice and discrimination from outsiders. In this sense, '*Borta i tankar*' encourages a reading that anticipates authenticity. Its portrayal of a young man, struggling to break free from his own internal barriers and those presented by society, is typical of much discourse around marginal and stigmatised communities. The rap's authenticity is marked in specific ways: the description of certain experiences of starting out with nothing, in an environment in which little is expected of you, and its use of an accent and words characteristic of the 'concrete suburbs'. Yet the way in which it does this also contradicts the idea of 'keeping it real'. Rather than describing things directly to convey his message, Dogge uses copious metaphor, which is often clumsy, in terms of

both the metaphor's salience, and the way the lyrics fit rhythmically (all four quotes The Latin Kings 1997):

*'Aggressivitet sviker som frustration/
Greppar mikrofon, exploderar som en
kanon'*
(Aggression betrays you like frustra-
tion/
Grip the microphone, explode like a
canon').

At times, Dogge's use of metaphor is apt (in terms of the metaphor's 'fit' in the flow, and the added meaning it conveys in this context):

*'Betongen runt omkring mig, den tog
mig på djupet/
Det blev bara början på livet inte slutet'*
(The concrete around me, it got to me
deeply/
It became the start of my life, not the
ending').

Dogge's rap also relies on cliché:

*'Lägger sig ner och aldrig mer vakna/
Man tänker här på jorden finns inget
jag ska sakna'*
(Lie right down and never wake
again/
You think here on earth there's noth-
ing to miss'),

and hyperbole:

*'Det finns inga vänner när man ligger
slagen på botten/
Vännerna kommer när du närmar dig
toppen'*
(There are no friends when you're
down at the bottom/
The friends all come when you reach
the top').

I mention these aspects of Dogge's rapping style because they highlight the distance between an authentic retelling of everyday experiences, and rap as a creative, expressive

art-form. The use of devices such as metaphor and hyperbole is not consistent with the straight-forward approach that authenticity suggest. The song is built around a central theme: being 'lost in thought', and revolves around an imagined escape from the realities of life, which could be interpreted as being the opposite of 'keeping it real'.

Alejandro Leiva Wenger's 'Borta i tankar'

Alejandro Leiva Wenger's short story 'Borta i tankar', was published to critical acclaim in the short story collection *Till vår ära* (2001). It was hailed as '*en i långa stycken lyhörd och språkligt uppslagsrik framställning, där Rinkebysvenskan förs in i den svenska skönlitteraturen*' (an on the whole perceptive and linguistically ingenious portrayal, in which Rinkebysvenska² is brought into Swedish literature') (Lundgren 2001). The story draws on the theme of The Latin Kings' track, as well as its name. It depicts a young man's frustration with his surroundings and his uncertainty about where his allegiances lie through a complexly woven narrative with diverse perspectives and interlocutors. The story goes even further in its references to The Latin Kings, quoting lines from the group's songs. In doing this, Leiva Wenger alludes to the multisensory environment of the late 1990s suburban estate, creating a mood of young male sociability that is closely tied to that time and place. This is coupled with the narrative of the story, which depicts a young man, Felipe, struggling against the prejudice he encounters as a result of where he is from. The idea that his place is in the suburbs, and the suburbs only, is expressed both by outsiders (the middle-class students of the prestigious city centre school he is transferred to), and by the friends he has grown up around. The prejudice also comes from within Felipe, in his inability to reconcile himself to the high expectations others have of him. His nickname, *Fällan* (literally, 'the trap', although this meaning is left implicit in the text), references this self-

fulfilling position. As with The Latin Kings' portrayal, this is consistent with many representations of 'real life' experiences of young men growing up in marginalised communities, thereby suggesting an engagement with high-profile social issues in contemporary Sweden. In rooting his story firmly in a specific time and place, Leiva Wenger ensures that it resonates with contemporary debates, adding a comment on social issues from a new quarter, literature.

However, it would be wrong to read Leiva Wenger's story as a simple tale of youthful confusion. The difficulties experienced by Felipe are personal and complex, and the story portrays this with sensitivity. One of the most striking aspects of the story is the frequent change in narrative voice. Although the story focuses on a single protagonist, the perspective from which it is told varies depending on whom the narration is directed toward. At times, the protagonist narrates, defending his betrayal of his girlfriend to that girlfriend:

'Alla är falska ibland, jag vet nu alla är, dom blir typ tvungna fast dom inte vill. Jag med, jag var också ('Sometimes everyone's fake, I know now that everyone is, they're like forced even if they don't want to be. Me too, I was as well') (2001: 25).

At other times, a third person narrator relates this betrayal, and the events leading up to it, to the reader. This narrator also identifies directly with the protagonist, as in the following sequences:

'Då fick han alltid lust att vända om eller gömma sej bakom någon annan så dom inte skulle se mej' ('Then, he always felt like turning around or hiding himself behind someone else so they wouldn't see me');

'– Ja, vi får – säger jag, säger Felipe, säger han, säger Fällan' ('– Yeah, we can – he says, Felipe says, he says, Fällan says') (2001: 12, 20).

In some cases, the two (or more) narratives occur in the same sentence, leaving it to the reader to figure out who is speaking to whom, as here:

'– Du vet jag är kär i dej – sa jag. – Lägg av tjockis, klart jag inte är kär i henne' ('– You know I'm in love with you – I said. – Get lost fatso, course I'm not in love with her') (2001: 19).

The shifts between narrative voices are compounded by certain typographical features. The following is an approximation of a section of the text as laid out in the hardback edition of the collection:

Abo, abo, få kolla len, är det deras andra?, Nico visar och dom
 VÄNTA JULIA, LÄGG INTE PÅ. DU MÅSTE HÖRA FÖRST. JAG VET JAG VAR
 kollar, sen dom går hem till Nico och lyssnar, eh håll
 FALSK MEN DU VAR OCKSÅ. JO DU VAR. IBLAND ALLA ÄR, JAG MED. MEN
 käften, höj, vad säger han, Dogge och Boastin i den fetaste [...]
 (Oi, oi, pass it over mate, is it their second one? Nico shows it and
 WAIT JULIA, DON'T HANG UP. YOU HAVE TO LISTEN FIRST. I KNOW I WAS
 they look, then they go back to Nico's place and listen, eh shut
 FAKE BUT YOU WERE TOO. YOU WERE. SOMETIMES WE ALL ARE, ME TOO. BUT
 up, turn it up, what's he sayin, Dogge and Boastin in the phatest [...])
 (2001: 15)

This example, which continues for several pages of text, demonstrates how the two narrative threads are interwoven, forcing the reader to adopt complex reading strategies in order to follow the narrative.

This kind of creative engagement with the formal structure of the text is not alto-

gether uncommon in literature – Nørgaard finds evidence of similar typographic play in the works of Dan Brown and J. S. Foer, among others (2009: 149-57). I interpret the structure of Leiva Wenger's text as serving two purposes. First, it confuses the reader, thereby drawing attention to the protagonist's confusion and replicating this experience 'authentically' through its immersive qualities. Second, it enables the author to demonstrate, through typographical metaphor, the ways the context and interlocutor can influence the very substance of a story, altering its relationship to reality (2009: 146-7). A series of events can thus be interpreted in a certain way in one version, and in a different way in a second version. These two interpretations are closely interwoven and inseparable from one another. The structural and typographic play of Leiva Wenger's story indicates the power of the author's creativity and imagination. The author is in control of the reader here, delimiting the boundaries of the reader's understanding of the text by moving away from conventional techniques. The reader's complacency is thereby pushed aside; they are encouraged to examine their understanding of what is being presented to them. Nothing can be taken as read; nothing is authentic.

Authenticity and ownership

This article originated in a conference paper. During the session, one attendee suggested the possibility that there may be a connection between notions of authenticity and ownership. This intrigued me, and I have considered it at length with reference to the two works I focus on here. Ownership is here taken to mean the possession of knowledge and the right to expression of that knowledge, as well as the right to decide how a particular location, social group or mode of existence is represented.

One of the most interesting responses to rap has been the unquestioning association of rap with marginalisation and the suburbs (this despite the fact that many

rappers in Sweden are white, middle class and urban). But there is an assumption that goes back to the roots of hip hop culture that hip hop and rap were something, often the only thing, that marginalised (and primarily black) communities had ownership over: it was 'their' mode of expression. In his 2007 study *Etnotism*, Aleksander Moturi problematizes the assumption that marginalised communities have a privileged position when it comes to representing the 'realities' of suburban life. He satirises the perception that '*det är dem [nya/annorlunda] svenska röster*' som kan skildra den sanna verkligheten i förorten' ('It's they [new/different] Swedish voices' who are able to portray the true reality of the suburbs) (2007: 63). Furthermore, he asserts that it is often such marginalised groups themselves who claim the exclusive right to represent that marginalised position (2007: 63). This resonates with the perception, both among insiders and outsiders, that hip hop is the expressive preserve of marginalised groups, and, in particular, African Americans. Tricia Rose states that '[t]he drawing power of rap is precisely its musical and narrative commitment to black youth and cultural resistance [...]' and that '[rap] is black America's most dynamic contemporary popular cultural, intellectual, and spiritual vessel' (1994: 19). In this, Rose indicates the importance of black Americans' ownership of the 'vessel' through which they can both define and refine their identities, as well as communicating to those inside and outside the community. In Rose's words, rap represents 'a powerful conglomeration of voices from the margins of American society speaking about the terms of that position' (1994: 19).

This assumption that rap is essentially 'owned' by the black communities from which it originated poses interesting challenges for studies concerning rap produced by marginalised communities other than black Americans. In Sweden, for instance, many of the rappers

that made their names in The Latin Kings' generation are of immigrant background, but very few of them can claim any African American or African heritage. But Pennycook broadens the scope, by noting that:

The identifications with American and African American culture by hip-hop artists around the world are embedded in local histories of difference, oppression, class and culture, often rejecting aspects of American dominance while identifying with forms of local struggle. [...] an identification with hip-hop may indeed be centrally an identification with urban poverty, racism, drugs and violence, though this will always also be about local issues, conditions and themes, and will contain local musical and lyrical influences (2007: 91).

However, this does not negate the fact that hip hop is not, or is no longer, a mode of expression reserved for 'marginalised' groups.

If we turn to the concept of ownership and authenticity in literature we can see that the parameters are somewhat different. That literary and media worlds are dominated by the white middle classes suggests that there is little doubt as to the right of this group to represent themselves. There is thus little mention of 'authenticity' until it comes to the question of the 'Other' entering the literary sphere. This was exactly what happened when the work of authors who were deemed to fit into the category of the 'Other', such as Leiva Wenger, started to be published in Sweden. Malte Persson commented on this in *Expressen* newspaper (2003):

'En gång i tiden fantiserade man om den ädle vilden. Denna självföraktande längtan efter äkthet gick aldrig riktigt över' ('Once upon a time, people fantasised about the noble savage.

That self-contemptuous longing for authenticity has never really passed') (Persson 2006: 219).

Authenticity, language and place

In discussing authenticity in this article, I have specified the effect authenticity has in terms of lyrical and narrative structure and content, but I have not made significant reference to verbal style and register. One of the salient features of the work of The Latin Kings and Leiva Wenger (or at least those that have attracted the most public and critical attention) is the indexical relationship between language and place. It is in this relationship that the complex interplay of authenticity in both texts can be located. The Latin Kings became famous throughout Sweden for their own brand of rap, in which they portrayed the conditions in suburban estates in the slang spoken on those estates. Their rapping is thus strongly influenced by the environment in which they grew up, and by the multi-ethnic, multilingual character of the communities that inhabit that environment. This made then both a curiosity and a valued commodity to outsiders who knew little of the environment they were portraying. Strage argues that:

För många svenskar blev Latin Kings den första kontakten med förorten och en tillvaro som de knappt hört talas om. Vita medelklassungdomar som aldrig satt sin fot i Fittja eller Rinkeby lärde sig att kalla tjejer för 'gussar' och polisen för 'bengen'.

(For many Swedes, The Latin Kings were the first contact they'd had with the suburbs and an existence they'd barely heard of. White middle class young people who'd never set foot in Fittja or Rinkeby learnt to call girls 'gussar' and police 'bengen') (2001: 341).

As previously stated, Leiva Wenger was brought up in the same region of Stockholm, and his text also bears traces of this slang (especially in dialogue between members of the circle of young male friends on whom the story focuses). In drawing on this slang, Leiva Wenger brought it into yet another sphere:

that of literary fiction, thereby partly answering literary critic Clemens Altgård's plea:

[...] var finns då det Sverige som håller på att växa fram, det land som beskrivs på Latin Kings CD Välkommen till förorten, och där man talar Rinkebysvenska? Jag tror att den första romanen om den verkligheten kommer att dyka upp ganska snart – i varje fall före år 2000. Låt oss i alla fall hoppas det.

(Where is the Sweden that is emerging, the country described on Latin Kings' CD *Välkommen till förorten*, where people speak Rinkebysvenska? I think the first novel about that reality will turn up soon – in any case by the year 2000. Let's hope so, anyway) (1995: 17).

Both texts position themselves as authentic, indicating their affiliation with, and knowledge of, a real location and a real speech community. But as I have explored, the matter is more complex than this. They are not simply 'keeping it real' and authentically reproducing the language of the streets around them. They are performing this belonging, emphasising or selecting certain aspects of this style of speaking for creative purposes. They draw attention to the 'place' of their texts, thereby making it appear more authentic to insiders and outsiders. The Latin Kings recognised the marketability of their style even before their first album was released: '*Under inspelningar var de rädda för att någon skulle stjäla deras idéer och ge ut en hip hop-skiva på svenska om livet i förorten*' ('During the recordings they were afraid someone would steal their ideas and put out a hip hop record in Swedish about life in the suburbs') (Strage 2001: 340).

The notion of performativity (i.e. '[...] that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' is one picked up in Pennycook's study of language and hip hop (Butler 1993: 2). He states that an understanding of performativity is fundamental to an appreciation of 'the ways

in which both language and identity are produced in the performance [of hip hop]' (2007: 58). But how does this relate to Leiva Wenger's text? I suggest that the protagonist Felipe's performance of his own self complicates the reader's understanding of the text as a representative portrayal of young suburban masculinity. Felipe is conscious of the insincerity of his own actions, but fails to 'keep it real' either for those he is closest to, or for himself. He acts according to the regulations imposed on him by the expectations of others and in doing so he reproduces their expectations. There are moments when he breaks free of this, but he is still constrained by the structure of the text, which performs the confusion and frustration he feels. His switching between different registers, narratives and relationships is also a complicating factor in the issue of authenticity. He has multiple realities to stay true to, and must perform his own self in accordance with the widely varying expectations of his environment.

In my analysis, I have argued that the relationships between the two '*Borta i tankar*' texts and authenticity are complicated by the texts' existence as creative, expressive forms, which prevents them being merely documentary. A failure to acknowledge both the authentic and the imaginative in these texts has the potential to undermine the impact of both forms - for rap, its potential to be taken seriously as a multi-layered means of creative expression, and for literature, its potential to offer unique perspectives on complex social questions.

Notes

- 1 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mb6mgzdj1hg> for a video version of *Borta i tankar* [accessed 30 August 2012].
- 2 *Rinkebysvenska* refers to the Swedish spoken in the suburban estates of Stockholm and other large Swedish cities, where high linguistic diversity has provided fertile ground for young people to develop a way of speaking which reflects the multilingual character of their environment.

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