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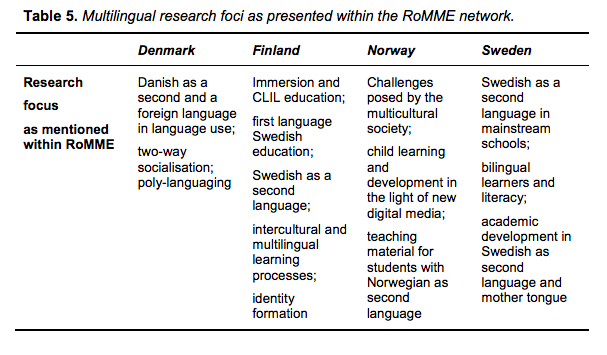
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Developing Nordic Humor for an American Audience

**Background:**

The Northern European countries of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland are known for many cultural phenomenons from successful incorporations of Democratic Socialism to being in the top nine happiest countries in the world (“World Happiness Report 2018.”) Most strikingly, they are known for their tragicomedies, or sad tales told in a humorous way (Jones). Is it plausible that Nordic nations’ dark sense of humor contributes to their overall happiness? Scandinavian author John Louis Anderson accredits the persistent cold and seasonal pitch black skies for his culture’s roots in tragedy as a means of laughter (Anderson). The Nordic countries are by no means a monolithic entity and each have their own distinctive cultures. This study uses films, plays, and television shows from each of the nations in conversation with one another, and because multilingualism is a major emphasis across the Nordic governments, their media is often intermingled. The table below was crafted by researcher Mikaela Björklund in her study with Researchers of Multilingualism and Multilingual Education or RoMMe (Björklund):

**Proposal:**

Media from Scandinavia only shows me comedy that had the ability to get published or produced into films and television shows. Well-known movies only cover a small amount of what is a collective sense of humor. I propose to travel to Northern Europe going to comedy festivals as well as meeting everyday people and finding out what makes them laugh. When I arrive in Denmark, I plan to meet with a Danish professor in television writing Soren Kjellberg, who I have gained contact with through my research mentor Professor Dan Watanabe. The goal would be to talk to as many people as possible whether they are media makers or consumers. I want to bring all I learn back to the United States. Many British television shows and movies have been developed for American audiences, but I think basing an American show in Nordic gallows humor would bring something new to American television. I think combining lessons in comedy from Scandinavians with the traditional film education I am receiving here at Loyola Marymount University would give me the full ability to do this. The end goal is a pilot script that pushes the envelope.

**The Trip:**

There is a comedy festival, with some hours entirely in English, called Lund Comedy Festival. It is the largest festival of its kind in the entire Nordic region and lasts for a full three-day weekend at the end of August. The festival brings in comedians from all over Europe and the world and I could potentially see acts from each Nordic nation in one week. This trip would only require that I go to Sweden for the weekend of Lund Comedy Festival and return home to compile my research. With this plan, I will not have time to go to Denmark and meet with Professor Kjellberg. I instead will have to make connections before getting to Lund with the festival’s organizers or performers in attendance and interview them (Lund Comedy Festival.) Lund is also home to Lund University which has a faculty and department in Scandinavian and European Film Culture. All of their classes are taught in English, and I can reach out to educators there for help with my research. I think learning from professionals with doctorates on Nordic media will give my research more than enough ethos to be taken seriously. It is harder to study such things in the United States with poorly translated texts that I have to decipher before getting to the comedic level. If I can talk to someone who already understands the cultural context and how to read the text’s original language, they will help me immensely.

**Budget:**

All flights from my hometown of Boston, Massachusetts to Lund, Sweden stop at both Copenhagen and Stockholm before getting to Lund. The round trip ticket for this is currently priced at $830, with a likelihood to rise up to $1000 if purchased one to two months before the travel date. Hotel rooms in Lund, Sweden range from $100-$300 a night. If I am there for most of the festival, three days and three nights perhaps, the hotel expenses could reach $900. Travel articles about Sweden recommend a person has $70-$100 a day for living expenses that go mostly toward food and transportation. The Lund Comedy Festival has several stages with shows that occur at the same time. When the schedule for the 2019 Festival is released, I will be able to buy tickets by which shows I want to see. I would only have time to see three shows a night and each show ranges from $12-$30. One day at the festival can cost between $36-$90, and the full schedule amounts to $108-$270. The total cost of the trip has a budget range between and $1618 $2470.

**My Research:**

I have read, viewed, and laughed at a lot of Scandinavian media. Consuming as much Nordic culture as possible helped shape my current understanding of *gálgahúmor,* the Icelandic word meaning “gallows humor,” and the concept which I plan to base my pilot episode in. I also made a point of finding preexisting works by other people who may have attempted the same feat as I am now. The most similar project to mine that I could find was an NBC sit-com titled *Welcome to Sweden*. The show ran from 2014 to 2016 and was based on the real life of its creator Greg Poehler who moved to Sweden for his wife and had to adjust to Scandinavian culture.

The more I watched Poehler’s show, the more I realized what my pilot would need and how I should avoid the problems I found in *Welcome to Sweden*. The sit-com did not capture Swedish comedy. It was a typical, American-style television show set in a foreign country. Even if the show properly attempted adapting gallows humor for an American audience, the cast was not relatable to Americans because it was all white, Swedish people. If I am going to introduce a style of comedy which is foreign to Americans, I have to make it accessible by making it inclusive. More than that, the show needs to star and employ people of all demographics as to really be moving forward. Progressive comedy needs to work in conjunction with progressive business ideals.

**Conclusion**

I am beyond excited to write the pilot episode I have in mind which properly merges American sit-com form and the dark sense of humor which somehow lightens the lives of Nordic nations. While I believe my current research has already sent me in the right direction, I do not think I can be fully confident in my interpretation of Scandinavian gallows humor without first experiencing it in real-life interactions. All I know so far is how Nordic humor looks in Nordic media, and media is not always accurate to everyday life. If I am able to go to Sweden and learn the conversational humor of Scandinavians at Lund Comedy Festival, I think my writing will represent *galgahumor* more accurately.

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