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## Gossip as Journalism and Journalism as Gossip

### A Cultural History Investigation of Two Royal Sex Scandals in Sweden 1890 and 2010

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# Gossip as Journalism and Journalism as Gossip: A Cultural History Investigation of Two Royal Sex Scandals in Sweden 1890 and 2010



Mia-Marie Hammarlin and Lars-Eric Jönsson

## 1 Introduction

In 2010, the Swedish King Carl XVI Gustaf became the protagonist in a massive media scandal. It all started off by the reportage book *Carl XVI Gustaf: Den motvillige monarken* [The Reluctant Monarch], which claimed that the king and his upper-class male friends for some decades had been throwing wild parties, involving criminals, and maybe also prostitutes, so-called “kaffeflickor” (coffee girls), at the time undoubtedly crossing the line for what was considered as acceptable political behavior.<sup>1</sup> That the king enjoyed partying hard when he was young was a well-known fact among Swedes but this disclosure was different, evoking the following critical questions: What did this story say about the king’s ideas of women? What did it say about his views on equality between the sexes? Did the king cheat on Queen Silvia? And what would Crown Princess Victoria, a young modern woman, think about her father’s behavior? All the juicy scandal ingredients were in place: forbidden sex, royalty, political bedroom antics, money, class, criminality, silence, and an agglomeration of gossip. Ever since, the word “kaffeflickor”—which the Swedish Language Institute put on the so-called new word list in 2010—is inscribed in the Swedish collective memory, giving rise to sayings, idioms, and endless amounts of satiric jokes. All in all, the scandal had an indisputable impact on Swedish cultural debate, albeit the will of many citizens to forgive the king and forget all about the affair came into the light.

In this chapter—which draws upon a vast material from an externally funded 1-year full-time research project—we take as our starting point the assumption that this particular modern media scandal exists in relation to other, historical Swedish

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<sup>1</sup>Further on, the book will be mentioned as “the book” or as *The Reluctant Monarch*.

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sex scandals with kings at their center.<sup>2</sup> Royal scandals with sexual connotations are not a new phenomenon, so to better understand their formation, development, dissemination, and cultural value, we need to place them side by side. They belong to a tenacious news genre that takes place in the bedrooms of those in power, examining the limits between what is considered to be acceptable or unacceptable behavior, private and public sphere, personal and political (Hartley, 2008, p. 679–91). We do not believe in any supra-historical phenomena; each time period has to be investigated on its own premises. However, this belief does not hinder us from using scandals from different time periods as contrast fluids to each other. Our purpose is to investigate the mediated scandal as a phenomenon with historic power, which is created and communicated through a vast range of media. To do this, we critically challenge the narrow focus on traditional media (press, radio, television) and digital social media, when studying modern mediated scandals. The cultural history approach in this chapter is mainly inspired by book historian Robert Darnton's studies (see Darnton, 1982, 1996, 1997, 2004, 2005, 2010), and will provide the reader with new knowledge about 1. how the intrinsic relationship between journalism and gossip—between text and talk—during a public scandal come into play; 2. the staying force of gossip and rumor as communication means for citizens to critically discuss power-related issues and politics, i.e., how they can be understood as both old and new; and lastly 3. how the mistresses in these affairs were described by the media and its audiences, and what role they were attributed in the public. This approach to some extent questions John B. Thompson's presumption that mediated scandals can, and should, be considered distinct from what he calls "localized scandals" (Thompson, 2008, p. 61), "commonly linked to the kinds of gossip and rumor, which are spread by word of mouth" (2008: 62). The medium of disclosure and disapprobation in so-called localized scandals is face-to-face communication, Thompson states. The vehicle of the mediated scandal, on the other hand, is by definition mediated communication (Thompson, 2008, p. 62–3). Many media scandal scholars during the last decade have relied heavily upon Thompson's definitions. For example, Steffen Burkhardt (2018) underscores the importance of differentiating between a scandal and a mediatized scandal. We do agree with him and others who adhere to the argument that there is a difference between the "localized" and the "mediatized" scandal. But what would happen if we, in line with Darnton, considered gossip and rumor as mass media, not only in the past but also in today's media environment? When we use the concept "media scandal", we dovetail with the seminal, rich work of Thompson and others but also seek to challenge some of the premises on which it is based. We do this

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<sup>2</sup> For example, yet another large sex scandal is included in the research project, which we investigate elsewhere. It is widely known as the Haijby scandal, and took place in the 1950s with King Gustaf V and the businessman Kurt Haijby in its epicenter. The king was alleged of having a homosexual relationship with Haijby and other men, causing extensive public debates at a time when homosexuality was criminalized. This scandal never fully dies: new facts, gossip, and rumors are still presented through different media, as, for example, in the book *Ers Majestäts olycklige Kurt: En roman med verklighetsbakgrund* [Your Majesty's miserable Kurt: A novel with reality background] (Ebervall & Samuelsson 2021). We would like to take the opportunity to thank Ridderstads stiftelse for the funding of the project.

by expanding media environments to include all kinds of communication forms and sources, such as news items, pictures, songs, poems, chapbooks, rumors, and verbal as well as written gossip.

## 2 Methodology

The late nineteenth century showed a plethora of new newspapers and weekly magazines, some widely spread, some with a more limited distribution, some long-lasting, some with a lifetime of a few months or years, some serious, and some popular. In this sense, there are obvious parallels to the early twenty-first-century social media and Internet forums. Faster and wider distribution and higher speed are two such parallels. In the late nineteenth century, new printing technologies and new infrastructure of communication in the shape of railroads made distribution of printed media faster. The accelerating speed of speech (telephone) and messages (telegraph) gave text and the spoken word unseen connections over long distances (cf. Kern, 2003), with parallels to the Internet and social media. In this context, literacy increased in all segments of society. This is one of the fundamental conditions for mass media. Therefore, together with a growing literate public, mass communication in the late nineteenth century was established (Nordmark et al., 2001:181 ff., 238). Another such parallel is how older media coexisted with new. Asa Briggs and Peter Burke (2009) observe how the history of mass communication involves the multi-mediality of images, texts, and spoken words, and how older means of communication interact with new. This goes for, not the least, oral expressions and printed words and pictures.

These temporalities of the late nineteenth century and the early twenty-first century are, of course, not identical. But they may serve us to analyze both time periods. Contemporary experiences may help us to understand the historical equivalents, and vice versa. Generally, we investigate the popular press and other entangled media as a prolongation and development of French scandal journalism during the eighteenth century, sometimes called the *chronique scandaleuse*—a broad genre within printed and oral news distribution. Darnton describes it in the following way: “A muckraking and mudslinging journalism, which built up an account of contemporary history by tearing down the reputation of public figures, beginning with the king” (Darnton, 2005, p. 23). Moralizing and entertaining drawings, songs, verses, leaflets, and pamphlets told compromising stories about the people closest to the French king, usually ministers, noblemen, and society ladies with alleged or real connections to the libertines and their scabrous way of life, all intended to annoy and belittle George III. The purpose of this vigorous literary genre, argues John Brewer from a British lookout point, was to expose political intrigue—whether true or false—which had previously been hidden from the public, putting these revelations to use in attacking the personal moral standards of the country’s leaders and, by extension, their power and influence (Brewer, 2005). In mid-eighteenth-century Sweden, there were similar periodicals which produced person-orientated sensational journalism, one of which bore the telling title *Stockholms Sqwallerbytta*

(“The Stockholm tattler”). Some scholars maintain that the purpose of these publications was mainly financial gain; scandals sell, then as now (Holmberg et al. 1983, p. 26). However, Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy’s (2015) research on British tabloids during the era of journalism’s professionalization—connecting Darnton’s work with modern popular journalism—shows the tabloids’ importance for public discussions about class, gender, and sexuality. They underscore not only the viability of the popular press but also its inherent value for public political debate.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter—on a broader level, and in line with Conboy’s (2010) suggestions—we wish to shed light on popular journalism’s meaning; the popular discourse in relation to the political discourse; and journalism’s active audiences, then and now.

## 2.1 Two Cases

Empirically we depart from two sex-related scandals defined by the presence of kings and female artists. Even if the cases are fixed to specific time periods, we would claim that they contain meanings that extend beyond these periods. It is a hypothesis that the past is made active in the present, regardless of whether this present is located in the late nineteenth century or in our own time (cf. Jönsson, 2013). The two cases serve us well since they have—despite their temporal and cultural differences—certain common denominators, the royalty and female artists are already mentioned.

Our first case is based on the small weekly news magazine *Breflådadan/Gamla Breflådadan* [The Letterbox/The Old Letterbox], which belonged to the less famous section of the popular press, published in Stockholm 1888–1892. This magazine was chosen since it was obviously driven by the urge to expose the societal elite, not the least the royalties and their presumed immoralities, decadence, and double standards. The journalistic methods of research were to a high degree based on listening to gossip and rumors. The editor Olof Roth (1854–1911) was what seems to be an ill-seen gossip journalist<sup>4</sup> at the time, who claimed to be a left-wing radical and a friend of the workers but at the same time was critical toward the labor movement. Arguably, Roth was a modern, innovative journalist who relied upon both desk work and the physical hunt for the street talk when gathering news material for his sheet. He appears to have run the business mostly on his own, encompassing journalistic roles such as reporter, columnist, short story writer, translator, editor, and advertising salesperson. *The Old Letterbox*’ years of publication coincided with a scandal with the renowned actress Ellen Hartman at its center, who was surrounded by rumors of being mistress to king Oscar II. With *The Old Letterbox* as our point of departure, we follow the spreading of these sex rumors in the news sheet, and in multiple other

<sup>3</sup> Even though focusing a slightly different genre, and different research questions, media historian Erik Edoff’s dissertation *Storstadens dagbok: Boulevardpressen och mediasystemet i det sena 1800-talets Stockholm* [Big city diary: The boulevard press and the media system in late nineteenth century Stockholm] is an instructive historical introduction to the popular press in Sweden.

<sup>4</sup> See further ahead in the chapter how Roth was described by the more respected newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* at his death.

media forms, such as the more respected newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* (*The Daily News*), chapbooks, and novels commentating and adding stories and rumors to the case. These sources will be mentioned and commented upon as they are presented and analyzed.

The initially mentioned king and the coffee girls scandal is our second case. As stated above, the scandal was triggered by a best-selling reportage book. Its authors, three Stockholm-based journalists, had collected and published talk that had surrounded the king for many years but had not reached a wider audience. When published in 2010, the book rapidly generated a media scandal with the king and his close male friends and their alleged women's affairs at its center. The book was based on anonymous interviews that critics dismissed as slander. But it would have been unequivocally burdensome for the king *if* the information in the book was found out to be true. The book itself was thus surrounded by intense rumoring and gossiping through face-to-face meetings, journalistic coverage, and conversations in digital forums. In this case, it was necessary to limit the investigation to a defined time period, whereupon we decided to study 1 week during the scandal's intensifying dynamic, November 2–8, 2010. From a digital archive, we collected 181 text items—news articles, columns, and debate articles—published in four well-established and nationally spread Swedish newspapers: *Dagens Nyheter* (independent liberal morning newspaper), *Svenska Dagbladet* (independent liberal conservative morning newspaper), *Aftonbladet* (independent social-democrat evening newspaper), and *Expressen* (independent liberal evening newspaper). Additionally, we have studied 1727 comments at a digital open forum discussion thread, presented in more detail below.

Altogether the two cases bridge more than a 100 years, from the late 1800s to the early 21st century, encompassing Sweden's development from a regime ruled by Oscar II, King by the Grace of God, to a modern democracy with a constitutional monarchy with no direct political impact. Censorship laws and regulations of the press have gone through radical changes during the modern era, which affect our possibilities to study the scandals in question. In the first case, the king's sexual affairs were talk-of-the-town but at the same time thoroughly hidden, not least in the press due to the fact that it was a violation of the law to openly criticize the monarchy. Olof Roth and his radical press colleagues were used to being sent to prison now and then because of crimes committed against the freedom of the press, such as desecration of societal decency and morality. The penalties were something that Roth bragged about in his news sheet as it underscored his radicalism and elite questioning mission. In the latter case, the king was the protagonist in a massive, protracted, media scandal, which involved national television, radio, press, and social media. It speaks volumes that Carl XVI Gustaf is Sweden's sitting king and did not hinder journalists from publishing innumerable pictures of the monarch on handbills and first pages, side by side of photos of alleged mistresses. Thus, finding enough data concerning the first scandal has sometimes provoked the feeling of searching for a needle in a haystack. In comparison, the subsequent case has provided us with oceans of easily retrieved media material.

## 2.2 *Listening to Text—A Methodological Experiment*

A starting point for this study is that speech in the form of gossip and everyday oral exchanges of information constitutes, and has always constituted, a significant proportion of journalistic sources, even in respect of journalism of the more serious kind. We have developed a method we call “listening to talk in text” to delve into this piquant area (Hammarlin & Jönsson, 2017, p. 93–115). By way of this method, we want to draw attention to and investigate the relationship of gossip to journalism and its methodological foundations in a manner that is rarely encountered in journalism handbooks and notably rarely in research on journalism and media studies.<sup>5</sup> In our research, we have been especially interested in how such hot topics move between speech and writing and are interwoven with other kinds of communication, as well as in how newspaper journalists use them in their work, not least when royals are being discussed (Hammarlin & Jönsson, 2017, p. 93–115). As mentioned above, we have been inspired by book historian Robert Darnton’s many studies, particularly the method he uses when mapping the borderland between written and oral materials. He has devoted a large part of his research to precisely this intractable borderland, starting out from the French media landscape of the mid-eighteenth century. How, then, does Darnton locate the remnants of talk in his material? In his book *Poetry and the Police*, he notes how written poems and songs were modified by the people who recorded them (Darnton, 2010a, 2010b, p. 75). There are comments on how such a writer, having heard a song, wrote it down from memory. Minor adjustments then created different versions of the same song or poem, as a kind of whispering game. Darnton takes these changes as evidence for oral communication, extracting new knowledge about the media circuits of the time by means of listening (Darnton 2010a, 2010b, p. 76ff). Following written-down versions of talk and dialogue, he is able to describe the murmur of all these voices that together formed the sound of the people and simultaneously made up the framework for the news distribution of the time. Our methodological point of departure in this chapter is that we also listen through reading, in the process of which we do not only use our eyesight but also hone our hearing—metaphorically speaking—in order to pay attention to linguistic constructions that testify to a kind of union between talk and text. We also pay attention to flows, media transfers, tones of voice, and moods in the texts. This taps into the methodological advantages and challenges of seeing media as entangled and interlocked with each other, rather than seeing them as separate entities, especially when analyzing media scandals, where many different media simultaneously report about the same issue. This in turn leads to reflections about the difference between text and talk. For example, social media shine a light on the idea of solid boundaries between oral tradition, written text, and mediated communication. For how should one regard the special language forms of the Internet, which some linguists have

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<sup>5</sup> Science has, according to media researcher John Hartley, consciously or unconsciously adapted itself to the desire of journalism to be seen as a serious activity, a desire which has resulted in some unflattering journalism and less than rigorous journalistic methods ending up under the radar (Hartley 2008:679–91).

classified as hybrids of speech, conversation, and writing?<sup>6</sup> Oral and written forms of expression have been entangled—over the centuries, fertilizing one another, or as philosopher Paul Ricoeur claims: writing is an activity that runs parallel with speech, but occasionally writing takes the place of speech and appropriates it (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 35f). Attempts to construct a boundary where oral tradition ends and print begins—or where conversation face to face is seen as something completely different from conversation via computer programs—appears to be fruitless (see Stephens, 2007, p. 7–47).

The traditional daily newspaper, which has gone through a metamorphosis over the past few decades can serve as an example. Transformed from print into a complex multimedial meeting place, where the Internet, television, radio, and telephone converge, it is a typical example of communicative development in our time, where conversation, talk, writing, images, and actors blend into an unorthodox mixture. Today's journalists talk intensively during their working hours, both with one another and with other people. When focusing on the journalistic methods of today, it becomes clear that the hunt for news springs from a continuous flow of communication by way of face-to-face meetings, emails, text messages, chat messages, tweets, and phone calls. And there is quite a lot of gossip going on even in the most prestigious newsrooms. This is not intended as a critique of journalism. The point is that the connection between everyday small talk, gossip, rumor, and news lives on. For instance, a professional local reporter knows that it is the proprietor of the local grocery shop one should call in order to find out if something interesting has happened. The exemplary grocer overhears what newsroom staff usually refer to as hot topics; what people are talking about.

### 3 Analysis: Following Royal Mistresses in the Media

#### 3.1 *The Coverage of the Hartman-Case: Journalistic Genres and Practices*

Stockholm was a rather small but growing capital in the late nineteenth century with approximately 170.000 inhabitants in 1880 and 300.000 in 1900. This was a period when technological and political circumstances paved the way for a number of small newspapers, not the least weekly tabloids with a certain weakness for scandals and rumors. *The Old Letterbox* was one of these tabloids run by the journalist, hack writer, and editor Olof Roth. There is little known about how these small tabloids were run. A major part of the journalistic work was performed at the desk with pencil, paper, scissors, and glue (Jarlbrink, 2015). However, when reading *The Old Letterbox* as well as other tabloids and newspapers at the time, it is obvious that the journalistic

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<sup>6</sup> A few years ago, the periodical *language@internet* devoted a special issue to investigations of the conversational and oral features in the type of communication encompassed by CMC, Computer-Mediated Communication, which is text-based (Herring 2011).



work also consisted of presence in the urban public and semi-public spaces. Streets and squares as well as coffee shops and theaters were arenas for rumors and chit chat but also offered information for listening and attentive journalists. For this purpose, the editor and “proper” journalist also recruited so-called item hunters (translated from Swedish “notisjägare”), low regarded freelance workers who made a living from collecting news of the city life, selling them to the editorial offices. These blue-collar “journalists” made a trade of gossip, rumors, and information from not only the public sphere but also from contacts with, for example, downstairs servants in the homes of the elite and celebrities (cf. Johannesson et al., 2001, p. 228). They were the editors’ ears and eyes in the streets and may in a sense be understood as a forerunner to the twentieth-century reporter who, rather than sitting by his or her desk, was out there in the vibrant city, searching for news. When trying to understand such journalistic practices one must consider the small size of the public sphere in a city like Stockholm in the late nineteenth century. It was obviously hard to retain one’s anonymity for the public elite, or for public professionals, such as artists and actors. For journalists who were looking for well-known faces or wanted to overhear chit-chat there were a limited number of places to go.

### 3.2 *Communication Flows*

When investigating our case from the late nineteenth century, it is clear how tabloids like *The Old Letterbox* relied on several sources. It is also obvious how different media interplayed, more or less explicitly, to make sense of rumors and scandals. A tabloid with a low reputation could, without the risk of losing much, spell things out, mention people by their names, exaggerate and add things to make rumors even more interesting. More reputable news media were discrete, publishing smaller news items without much meat on the bones. Let us give an example of how different media, serious and less serious, interplayed, and how the newspapers relied both on each other and on the pre-understanding of the reading public.

In May 1891, *The Old Letterbox* published an illustration, namely, a portrait—a new media form in the press during the nineteenth century—of three celebrities in Stockholm: The actor and husband Victor Hartman, the actor and wife Ellen Hartman and the well-known unmarried Lieutenant and noble man Reinhold von Rosen. She, Mrs. Hartman, was the most famous actress in Sweden by the time. As such, she was surrounded by rumors and slandering concerning different intimate affairs in general, but specifically her alleged intimate relation with the king. Now, both Hartman and von Rosen had disappeared together. It was a sensation and a scandal (Fig. 1).

*The Old Letterbox* told a story built upon a mix of facts, rumors, uncertainties, claims, hints, and assumptions about the whereabouts of the two lovers as well as the actress’ connections not only to the king but also to others standing in line for hinted relationships where money, jewellery, and other expensive articles were exchanged for intimacy. The two lovers were well known, but the rumors surrounding the actress and the king gave the story its basic value and meaning.

No 20 Lördagen den 16 maj. 1891

Gamla

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Innehåll. Ur dagens sensationskrönika. — Olof! Hvi lofar. —  
Bref till fater Malin. — Stockholmskorrespondens. — Lackdroppar.  
— Nöteborgs mysterier. — Karl XV:s piprensare. — Korrespon-  
denser från Söderwall, Söderhamns, Linköping, Västernorrby och Bra-  
silien. — Obefärlig lekonskränning. — Korta svar. — Annonser

Redaktör O. Roth's adress för bref och meddelanden är till  
vidare Långbotens kranshäkte, Stockholm. Korrespondens och  
ekonomi rörande skrifvelser adresseras direkt till redaktionsbyrån,  
Barnhusgatan 6.

## Ur dagens sensationskrönika.

### Enlevering eller ...?





Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

**Skådespelerskan vid Dramatiska teatern fru Ellen Hartman** (fig. 2.) afvek förra söndagen plötsligt från scenen. Vissa tidningar ha velat bortförklara hela saken med uppgiften, att fru H. handlat under inflyttandet af öfveranställning och nervositet; men det hela torde i själva verket vara en äktenskapsskandal af både dyster och vidrig art. Långt har det förnimmits, att en yngre militär på senare tider varit fru H:s försvilladt enträgne ridare, till den grad ifrig och enträgen, att de bådas förtärligheter utanför Dramatiska teatern ej skett med tillbörlig försigtighet. Ryktet har äfven berättat, att den unge officeren, ett rof för sin (tillävidare) outsläcktliga passion, länge sökt med fru Hartmans make, skådespelaren vid Dramatiska teatern **Victor Hartman** (fig. 1.), arrangera en öfverenskommelse på pekuniär grund. Vår löjtnant, själf utan förmögenhet, skall genom en för saken sympatiskt stämål aldre qvinlig anförvandts försorg slutligen hafva sett sig i tillfälle ett vederlag af, som det säges, 40,000 kronor. Samtidigt med fru H:s försvinnande, som förordade konungen till en förfrågan hos hr H., förmal-

**OBS! Telefonbudet om greffe Rosen och fru Hartman å följande sida!**

Fig. 1 The Hartmann case in The Old Letterbox (1891)

Tabloids and daily newspapers were not the only mass media concerned with the scandal. From the same print shop where *The Old Letterbox* was printed, we found—in the National Library of Sweden—a chapbook from 1891 commenting on the scandal, and intended to be sung with a familiar and widely known melody. The chapbook had basically the same moralizing message as the tabloid portrait. However, it added a few “interiors” from the assumed private life of Ellen Hartman. One of the seven strophes took the reader into these private spaces.

Little Ellen was the most beautiful actress  
 that existed in our Stockholm  
 more loved she was after each whimsicality  
 that was spoken every now and then  
 Barons and counts and small 'directors'  
 courted her with flowers, jewels, liqueurs  
 and in small 'Cabinets particulier'  
 privately, she was known as 'sweet ma chère'<sup>7</sup>

This chapbook ballad is not to be seen as an index of what was going on in the streets. The point here is rather to show how rumors, gossip, and obvious fiction were not only printed at the same office but also offered to the audience, that is, to the interested reader to perhaps sing, and to build a personal picture of the scandalous actions, true or false, as well as disseminating the song among acquaintances and friends; a circulation of mediated printed expressions of slandering, partly coming from the streets, partly returning to the readers and the streets, reminiscent of the *chronique scandaleuse*. In our case, these semi-fictional pieces were supplemented with a novel with the title “Art and love”, a contemporary story from the artist and “upper world” of Stockholm (‘Konst och kärlek’, en nutidshistoria ur Stockholms artist- och ’högre verld’) (1891), written by the still enigmatic *nome de plume* ‘L. von H...’, a story derived from “authentic sources”. In this novel, the real names of the protagonists were slightly changed. For example, Hartman was mentioned with a French pronunciation, “Artman”. Like in other depictions of the story, it circulated around money, forbidden sexuality, an obsolete social order, and dissolving ethics.

The portrait, the chapbook, and the novel are three different yet entangled media where the public could collect more or less trustworthy information and speculations about the scandal and its main characters. Except for one: the king, Oscar II. His presence was seldom explicitly mentioned but could be addressed as a “princely” admirer (Beda, 1898, p. 6, 10–11). The royal connection was the reference that made the scandal something more and beyond a common celebrity scandal. The connection did not only give a certain flair and exclusivity to the scandal but also a political touch to it. In Sweden as well as in many other countries in Europe, the

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<sup>7</sup> Our translation from Swedish.

late 19th century saw a budding movement toward democracy, which intensified after World War I. Monarchy and particularly the king were, of course, two of the main targets of this movement. And if one could show that the main upholder of the hereditary monarchy was incapable of monitoring his lower abdomen, exercised moral indecency, and sexual behavior risking children out of wedlock, then not only common decency and morals were challenged but also a fundamental condition of the monarchy.

In the tabloids and chapbooks slandering, gossip and news met in a mix of infotainment. For obvious reasons, it is very hard to say anything about how the audiences met, understood, and circled these texts. But it is just as obvious that these media had a commercial base of buyers. However, it was not only dubious journalistic and popular media who dealt with the scandal. The more elevated and ambitious newspapers reported on the case but in more subtle and laconic ways. *Dagens Nyheter*, one of the still most respected newspapers in Sweden, shows, in short, how gossip and rumors played a vital role even in the most serious journalism of the time. Without referring to any rumors the newspaper reported, on the same page, one day in May 1891, that:

- (A) Mrs Hartman had left Stockholm without telling whereto, and that she according to a medical certificate was supposed to be weak and nervous.
- (B) Lieutenant Reinhold von Rosen had signed and delivered his resignation from the army.<sup>8</sup>

These two tiny news items did not seem to be connected at all. They did not say much. But if you knew the background, if you listened to the gossip, the songs and/or read the popular press, you knew how to connect and relate. These small pieces belonged together, they were two sides of the same coin. In this way, the respected newspaper could feed its readers' curiosity without, as it seemed, being part of the slandering.

Our point here is to show how rumors and slandering, talk and whispering, turned into cultural expressions like songs and novels, journalistic portraits, and items that circulated in the press, both informing its readers and taking for granted that they already were informed. Another point is to highlight the political meanings of rumors and slandering. Some parallels with eighteenth-century France and Darnton's investigations are obvious (also cf. Farge, 1994; Habermas, 1989). The connection to the royal family was a strong generator in this scandal. Mrs. Hartman was already well known in this respect and the affair with von Rosen added details to her royal affair, which seemed to add arguments not only against the monarchy but the alleged hypocrisy of the upper class and social elites in Stockholm at the time.

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<sup>8</sup> *Dagens Nyheter* May 6, 1891, p. 2.

### 3.3 *The Henemark Case: Gossip and Rumors Moving Between Reporters and the Audience*

With the gossipy albeit hidden journalistic Hartman material in mind, the media production during the king and the coffee girls scandal 119 years later seems like a veritable tsunami. At a first glance, everything appears to be outspoken. No one held back, especially not journalists. But, when delving into the text production more closely, we managed to track down a certain vagueness in this modern media scandal, especially in the tabloids. For example, a linguistic form that characterized the evening newspapers' rich retelling of *The Reluctant Monarch*'s content was that someone "claimed" something. Another insisted that the king and his mistress "should have" (conditional mood) "is said to have" (present passive) or "must have" (modal verb) done one thing or another. Generally, these linguistic constructions are used to make guesses or deductions about an action in the past that we believe has definitely happened, has definitely not happened, or has possibly happened, based on our knowledge, information, or evidence—or lack of it for that matter. To clarify, in a single article in *Aftonbladet* the reader could find the following source references: "Swedish artist is alleged to have had a relationship with the king", "the artist did not want to confirm or reject", "an alleged relationship between the artist and the king", "the artist was, according to the book, to have been invited to dinner", "the king is said to have been childish in love", "the Swedish king must have visited the club", "he should, according to information, have spent 100 000 Swedish crowns, on the club".<sup>9</sup>

In regard to this style of writing, which we consider as a professional method, we would like to claim two things. Firstly, this journalistic ingenuity can be seen as normal scandal reporting, i.e., as non-confirmed or anonymous information circulation, which is possible to print as long as journalists critically distance themselves from it. Secondly, this kind of linguistic obscurity is, in itself, a sign of gossip and rumor, communication forms which are intimately connected to scandals but seldom studied as such (Hammarlin, 2019, 2021). This style of writing also indicates something important about the role of the scandalizer that some journalists seem—consciously or unconsciously—to take on; they not only report about the event but also spread rumor and gossip, which might add fuel to the fire.

### 3.4 *Scandal Haze*

We would like to propose the term *scandal haze* to describe this phenomenon, which captures how gossip and rumors are spread by multiple actors simultaneously, i.e., professional storytellers as well as members of the multifaceted and active audiences through a vast range of media channel: print, radio, television, digital forum threads,

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<sup>9</sup> Mattias Carlsson, "Känd artist pekas ut: Kungen var förälskad", *Aftonbladet* November 3, 2010. Our translation.

and the mouth—the “talking out loud”. The accumulation of scandal haze, we argue, is not solely caused by actions by media professionals, but by *people*, who go on with their everyday businesses in newsrooms, staff rooms, digital forums, living rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens. The scandal haze triggers the will to “sort things out”, straighten the question marks, i.e., to enter into a dialogue with others to explore what can be seen as acceptable or unacceptable behavior, true or false information, etc., where the “no smoke without fire” idiom captures at least some of the willingness to talk (Bird, 2003; Hammarlin, 2019, 2021). Similar to the Hartman case, the audiences were cordially invited to speculate, subtract, and add as they themselves preferred.

The scandal haze may be understood as a consequence of *media convergence*, that is, how talk, picture, and text amalgamate, when a scandal is at stake. Henry Jenkins (2008) relates this phenomenon to digital cultures (cf. Blank, 2013) but we would argue that media convergence also applies to pre-digital media. In our first case, we gave examples of how the printed press were intertwined with novels and chapbooks, especially the latter pointed toward orality with its instructions for singing. By convergence, Jenkins means the “(...) flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 2). It is not primarily a question of technologies but how different media interact and entangle. Digital media facilitate interaction, but as we may observe from history, interaction and entanglement are not dependent on digitalization. Oral communication and its mediation into different text genres are obviously interactive, as well as long-lasting.

### 3.5 Audience Participation and Scandalized Women

At this point, one important question needs to be answered: who was the female artist on everyone’s lips, claimed to be King Carl XVI Gustaf’s mistress? During the coffee girl era in the 1990’s Camilla Henemark was an internationally established artist, mostly known for her role as a singer and front figure in the pop group “Army of lovers”. During the intense scandal week that we have studied, Henemark was placed in the center of attention, side by side with the monarch. When we studied the reporting about Henemark we assumed that the scandal audience activities at Flashback forum—a Swedish version of Reddit—are, in some way or the other, interconnected with the activities performed by professional storytellers. This premise is based on the fact that the journalists who wrote *The Reluctant Monarch*, which contains a long chapter about Henemark, openly announced that they had bumped into each other at the open digital forum in question, where they both had investigated the gossip surrounding the Swedish king. There, they could, among other things, study a lively discussion thread called “Den stora skvallertråden om H. M. Kung Carl XVI Gustaf” [The Big Gossip Thread about H. M. King Carl XVI Gustaf], which started in 2004 and consists of 9562 comments, written by anonymous members with usernames such as Rost\_Biff [Roast\_Beef], TröttSvensk



[TiredSwede], and Farbror Sven [Uncle Sven]. The interconnections between the book and the digital open forum were also confirmed by other actors, such as Martin Kaunitz, publisher at Albert Bonnier's publishing house. Kaunitz said in an interview in *Svenska Dagbladet*: “– (...) this book may be the first to press down a Flashback thread between two binders”.<sup>10</sup> The statement was ambiguous. It underscored the fierce competition, and possibly envy, in a pressured book industry.<sup>11</sup> It pointed toward the influence of Flashback on the book, but at the same time took honor and glory from it. It also hinted at the news media's indirect dependence on Flashback as they, especially the tabloids, repeatedly published long excerpts from the book while at the same time distancing themselves from it.

In connection with the publication of the book and the massive media reporting about it, the presence on the Flashback thread increased significantly.<sup>12</sup> Exclamations in the style of the following occurred frequently.

I'm drooling. This will be really yummy!

My God, what a wonderful farce this develops into – just sit back and enjoy.

Undisguised scandal and gossip greed of the raw kind was expressed in many comments, paired with *schadenfreude*. During the studied week, Henemark was explicitly mentioned 582 times in the gossip thread. Most of what was written about her is impossible to reproduce, the language is too crude and racist, and reveals the dark side of the digital community. We can, however, take note of some general impressions, such as how she was reduced to her body, that is, the comments tied her to the female body. Body parts and other physical attributes were mentioned repeatedly. Lips, hair, legs, buttocks, breasts, the lush, and the dark skin color. According to the Flashback members, “La Camilla” sought spotlight and attention. She was a “star”, a “bride” who loved “scandal parties”, glitter and glamor, but she was also a “liar” and a “golddigger” who partied in a decadent way. She had “bad taste”. For a while she was rich, but now she was poor. She was a brilliant woman who turned into a notorious and promiscuous—perhaps even prostitute—addict, who ended up in the gutter, and therefore sold her story about the king to the evening papers. A sad figure. A victim. A manipulative, sinful seducer who needed psychiatric help. She was probably not completely healthy, maybe crazy. She was “a diva” and as such

(...) high strung, self-centered and emotional, covered with a fragile shell. She can be an opera star, but also an actress or a<sup>13</sup> dancer, a movie star, a club queen, a drag queen, a dandy, a sucking center of social life. (Johannisson 2015, p. 11)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Lina Kalmteg and Johan Hellekant, “Kungaboken delar branschen”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, November 3, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> It was another firm, Lind & Co., that published the book. The first edition was sold out in a week. The book was reprinted twice and sold approximately 80.000 copies, which is a lot for non-fiction literature in Sweden.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, the week we study represents 18% of the total Flashback thread material, which spans over 17 years.

<sup>13</sup> Our translation.

<sup>14</sup> Our translation.

This was the brighter side of the diva at the beginning of the nineteenth century, writes idea historian Karin Johannisson (2015). The negative meaning of the word included connotations such as manipulative, erratic, domineering, and easily offended. Also, hysterical and paranoid. “(...) how much headstrong, introverted or outgoing femininity can a contemporary tolerate?”, Johannisson asks (2015:13).

### 3.6 *Gender Roles in Royal Sex Scandals*

The parallels to Ellen Hartman are obvious. Even though more than a 100 years separate Hartman from Henemark, the alleged royal mistresses were publicly described in similar ways, not least in terms of their physical attributes and personal characteristics, such as extraordinary, charming, unpredictable, luck-seeking, plebeian, seductive, and manipulative. By being eccentric, an anomalous identity was built up. As divas, they were almost masculine in their urge to rule and climb, yet vulnerable in the role of victim. The diva's body is just too much and is dressed, as if to underscore this, in fur, wig, and swan's-down. It does not fit into the gender contract. Extraordinary, radical, and intelligent, the diva raises a crucial question: Is she in fact a male (Johannisson, 2015:40)? And in relation to the kings: Of all women, why did they fall in love with *them*, such ambiguous and tragic figures? It is not unimportant that both Ellen Hartman and Camilla Henemark were described as mentally unstable. As such, they were placed outside of the acceptable and rational, they became representatives of the Other, in several senses. By the first decades of the twentieth century, they had perhaps been labeled by the authorities as “table ladies” [bordsdamer in Swedish], that is, a kind of geishas “who were employed in private clubs, attractive and multilingual, divided into types such as the ‘demonic’, ‘exotic’, ‘Scandinavian’, or ‘aristocratic’ (Johannisson, 2015, p. 27). In *The Reluctant Monarch*, Camilla Henemark is the only woman who appears with her real name in the book, as the protagonist in the most notable chapter called “The Courtesan”. The term places Henemark hovering just above the mentioned categories. A courtesan is a “woman belonging to the finer demimond”, a person who courts someone, flirts, and pretends.<sup>15</sup> The Swedish phrase ‘att bedriva kurtis’ simply means having sex with someone.

If trusting in the press, Henemark was not formally interviewed by the book authors. The main author Thomas Sjöberg said in an interview in *Expressen* that he had compiled “things she has told me over the years”, that is, at various gatherings, such as private dinners. Undocumented private conversations without Henemark knowing about the book project, critically remarked the newspaper, thus once again succeeding in circulating the rumors *and* keeping a critical distance to them.<sup>16</sup> As in the thread, Camilla Henemark was palpably exposed in the press, especially in

<sup>15</sup> SAOB, search word: “kurtisan”.

<sup>16</sup> Christian Holmén, Andreas Johansson, and Diamant Salihu, “Henemark pekas ut av författarna”, news article in *Expressen*, November 3, 2010.



the tabloids. The journalists repeated the same narrative about her but in less harsh wording, focusing on the huge success that was exchanged by misery and depression. It's a *fall from grace* story that is supposed to touch the readers' hearts, and make them both feel sorry for and distrust Camilla Henemark.

### 3.7 Reputation Management

This unusually long-lasting scandal drama's peripeteia took place on May 30, 2011, more than half a year after the book was published, when the king accepted an interview with TT News Agency to comment upon the revelations and accusations in the book—a reputation management act by the Swedish Royal Court Information Department, which caused much bewilderment and dark humor among Swedes.<sup>17</sup> The interview was massively reproduced by multiple media genres and actors and caused yet another storm in the storm. We investigate this scandal's momentum thoroughly elsewhere. The reason why we mention it here is to underline a particular circumstance: King Carl XVI Gustaf could *not* remain in the shadows, like his great great grandfather Oscar II, hoping that the storm would abate—because it didn't. By way of perseverance, the media, professional storytellers, private gossipers, and all forced the king to respond.

## 4 Conclusions

Even though technology has transformed the opportunities for communication in such a comprehensive manner that it is difficult to draw any parallels, people are still alike in some senses, i.e., they are cultural and political creatures, regardless of whether they live in the 1890s or the 2010s, and as such they are the same in some respects. For example, people's need to both convey news and inform themselves of what is going on appears to be comparatively constant over time, and so is the way by which this is achieved: through communicative exchange via the available means and channels (Stephens, 2007, p. 7–16). In addition, gossip and scandalous news appear to be persistent phenomena that have a particularly marked effect on the audience, regardless of whether this audience was alive during the late 1800s or lives in the digital era.

Journalism's and the public rumor's dynamics have changed radically since Olof Roth's days. The possibility for journalists' to read hybrid gossipy conversations in online forums is a twenty-first-century phenomenon. The power of the monarchy in Sweden has successively decreased while journalism's power and societal influence have increased. The perceived meaning of a division between private and public

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<sup>17</sup> TT News Agency is a national wire service in Sweden, its history dating back to the 1920s (<https://tt.se/en/about-us/>).

life has been culturally negotiated, moved, and transformed. In the late nineteenth century, journalism held back because of fear of reprisals. Oscar II's presumed bedroom antics gave rise to marvel and curiosity among people, especially when it was possible to detect the thrilling scent of scandal, but the reporting about the Hartman affair was conscientiously covered in satiric language in such a way that it has been a challenge during the research process to both find and analyze the scandal narratives.

Libels, chapbooks, satirical drawings, couplets, poems, and also seemingly innocent news items published in a vast range of media presupposed the audience's prior knowledge of the Hartman affair, and played on it. The same can be said about the Henemark affair, which took place in both old and new media environments. In addition, an old medium as gossip was reintroduced during this period of time in new digital media environments. Without having to mention Hartman or Henemark by name, the desire to gossip was aroused through an unspoken familiarity between journalism and citizens, like a tacit agreement. In fact, the scandals grew out of *vagueness*. We have pointed out how such vagueness had several causes that changed over time. Restrictions in the Freedom of the Press Act, the desire to protect the royal family, and poor access to information are some examples. At each editorial office, assessments were made of what was possible to publish. In other words, hazy, dubious statements, and obvious untruths should not be perceived as inherent weaknesses in this kind of journalism. Rather, we have shed light on how such "knowledge gaps" invited the creative and informed reader to actively form an individual opinion, not of what had happened but of what could *possibly* have happened, and what to think of this—a kind of grammatical conditional on which some media scandals rest.

To gossip and spread rumors about kings and their alleged mistresses is neither innocent nor insignificant. Although often taking place unreflectively in everyday life, partly hidden behind a curtain of laughter, this particular talk about Oscar II and Carl XVI Gustaf both entertains, questions, and criticizes, and has as its very purpose to circulate. Our study shows the intrinsic relationship between "the street talk"—irrespective of if this takes place in digital or physical forums—and professional journalism, pointing toward journalism's, and especially popular journalism's, inherent sensitivity to its audiences, which in turn sheds light on media audiences' power.

We claim that listening to gossip and transforming it into journalistic features, through all sorts of professional tools, is an important yet understudied journalistic method, which is used systematically rather than haphazardly by reporters, both then and now. This is not something that just happens because journalists lack credible sources, rather gossip and rumors are, and were, important means of finding hot news for many editorial offices, especially the popular press, where—through their linguistic ingenuity—reporters both critically distance themselves from and benevolently circulate gossip. In accordance with this view, gossipy popular news journalism—by press historian Mitchell Stephens categorized as harmless *fait divers* (2007:94ff)—ought to be taken seriously, especially when it identifies and challenges power relations.

Perceived immorality and demands for gender equality in the twenty-first century had its counterpart in allegations of indecency and demands for democracy in the late nineteenth century. Gossip and political change were closely connected then, as it is now. Intimate, popular journalism was, and is, a convergence of several communicating technologies where the written word has met the spoken word. This, in turn, has, and had, a tendency to bring down the royalty to a metaphorical street level, a downward movement stressed by bodily practices with a certain abdominal focus as well as the sexualized mistresses' alleged commercial use of their sex.

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