REGENERATION:
Environment, Art, Culture

Ritson, Katie and Nicole Seymour. "Anti-Pastoral Allegory: The Nature of State Care in Ali Abbasi's Film *Border* (*Gräns*)." *Regeneration: Environment, Art, Culture* 1, no. 1–2 (2024): pp. 1–18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/regeneration.16507

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Anti-Pastoral Allegory: The Nature of State Care in Ali Abbasi's Film *Border* (*Gräns*)

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The 2018 Swedish cult film Border (*Gräns*) has plenty of scenes that one might label as pastoral: protagonists walking barefoot over forest moss, bathing in a pond, and communing with wild animals. In this article, however, the authors take up a sometimes-overlooked gloss of the term "pastoral": related to care or tending, as in the pastor of a church. We argue that *Border* indicts through allegory the supposedly benevolent acts of care enacted by the Swedish welfare state—but unfortunately repeated throughout the world—in relation to Indigenous populations, LGBTQI+ people, and various sociocultural Others. These acts of supposed care range from forced linguistic assimilation to forced sterilization. Drawing on Indigenous studies, intersex studies, and ecocriticism, we explicate the film's powerful allegory and offer an expansive delineation of the "queer anti-pastoral."

The 2018 Swedish film *Border* (*Gräns*), adapted from a short story by *Let the Right One in* author John Ajvide Lindqvist and directed by Ali Abbasi, garnered worldwide acclaim after its release, including a nomination for Best Makeup and Hairstyling at the 91st Academy Awards. But for as much as viewers buzzed about it, they spoke little of its particulars. For instance, critic Siddhant Adlakha called it "a film ideally watched with little prior knowledge"[1] (n.p.) while a Reddit commentator dubbed JMaesterN counseled, "Don't watch any piece of promotion of it [ahead of time] and just watch it. It'll be worth it:"[2] These comments might remind some of the hush-hush marketing campaign for another Academy Award nominee from Europe, Neil Jordan's 1992 film *The Crying Game*—and indeed, *Border* can likewise be read as a transgender text in ways we touch on below. But they speak less to the idea of a "plot twist"—the two major reveals in the film are played for empathy and emotional depth rather than audience shock—and more to the pleasures of discovering a singularly original film, one that both invites and subverts allegorical readings and that blends dissimilar genres: "romance, Nordic noir, social realism, and supernatural horror,"[3] to name a few.

At the risk of spoiling, then, we nonetheless offer a brief plot summary: Tina—played by Eva Melander, in an extraordinarily affecting performance—is a border customs agent at a Swedish port of entry. She is marked out as a solitary figure, appearing alone looking out at the sea ferries in the first frames of the film. Her Neanderthal-esque features and awkward manner present her as "ugly" alongside her more conventional-looking colleagues. But Tina is respected: gifted with the ability to smell "shame, guilt, rage," she is an ideal employee, able to detect those smuggling illegal goods across the Baltic Sea with just a twitch of her nostrils and hand them over to colleagues to be searched. One passenger confounds her olfactory talent, though; bearing a marked physical resemblance to Tina, Vore (Eero Milonoff) carries maggots and greenery in his bag, nothing illegal; a strip search that occurs offscreen apparently reveals female genitalia and a scar on his tailbone similar to the one Tina has. Eventually, Vore reveals to Tina that she is, like him, descended from trolls who were incarcerated by the Swedish state and subjected to medical experiments, while their children suffered medical procedures—including the removal of their tails, hence the scars—and forced adoption. Tina's assimilation into Swedish society has left her with gaps and questions; Vore, who knows his past and is in touch with a small community of trolls living in Finland, is an outsider, constantly on the move and never staying long in one place. While Tina discovers her own identity as a troll and grows closer to Vore, experiencing a sexual awakening in the process, a plot strand sees her use her ability to literally sniff out criminals to assist local police in cracking a child sex trafficking ring.

Nordic mythological creatures such as trolls are part of Swedish landscape folklore and their appearance in *Border* is "part of a current trend of troll fiction in Nordic Gothic literature and film," as Johan Höglund has pointed out.[4] And indeed, the film foregrounds themes of Swedish nature and the pastoral in a number of ways. Tina and Vore display pleasure in their relationship in the wooded environment of the countryside, walking barefoot on the damp moss, bathing naked in a pond, eating mushrooms, and—after Vore convinces Tina to overcome her learned disgust—maggots. This vivid and sensual iconography, which contrasts with the sterile, depressing interiors in which most of the film takes place, plays on a number of deep-seated ideas about the role of nature in Swedish society. Iconic nation-building poems and songs seen as quintessentially Swedish, such as Erik Gustaf Geijer's "Manhem" and the unofficial national anthem "Du gamla, Du fria, Du fjällhöga nord" ("you ancient, free and mountainous north") celebrate the pastoral nature of Swedish life in the sparsely populated, thickly forested, and often harsh northern landscape.[5]

Just as "nature" and "the pastoral" are key terms for engaging with *Border*, so is "queer." On a broad level, we could say that Tina reads as queer due to her ugliness and her sensory abilities. Queer theorist Yetta Howard explains the first idea, claiming that "the category [of ugly] is bound up with resistance to the frameworks that govern acceptable modes of representation and, by extension, dominant modes of embodied identity;"[6] she also notes "queer female sexuality's symbiotic relationship with ugliness."[7] In other words, female ugliness is a threat to the dominant order of cisheteronormativity, within which women are prized for attractive, feminine appearance. And indeed, one could argue that the film at first relies on a reading of Tina as a butch lesbian. "Ugly bitch. I can't stand that kind," spits a teenager whom Tina has clocked as smuggling booze in one of the film's first scenes. And while sensory abilities are not as closely linked to categories such as gender and sexuality, they certainly map on to hierarchies

and binaristic ways of organizing the world; to quote a conversation from Jenny Offill's cli-fi novel *Weather*, "the only reason we think humans are the height of evolution is that we have chosen to privilege certain things above other things. For example, if we privileged the sense of smell, dogs would be deemed more evolved."[8] Tina's sensory abilities thus queer distinctions between human and nonhuman and their attendant values. The film plays to this privileging of non-dominant sensory processing; dialogue is minimal and often mumbled, and exterior scenes often take place at night or dusk, making color harder to discern. And besides Tina's sense of smell, which drives the plot, the senses of touch and taste are central to her awakening. The texture of bare feet on forest floor, the touch of Tina's fingers on Vore's scarred skin, and the taste of the maggot he places in her mouth for her are rendered in detail. In its representation of these sensory processes, the film expands the sensory repertoire beyond the dominant filmic elements of sight and sound.

But perhaps the most obviously queer aspect of the film is the resonance of Tina and Vore's experiences with those of groups such as asexual people, intersex people, and transgender people—in addition to disabled people, ethnic or social "outsiders" (in the Swedish context, so-called "*tattare*") and Indigenous people (again in the Swedish context, Sámi). These allegorical experiences, as we will discuss throughout this essay, range from social ridicule and ostracization to medical violence and normalization.[9]

Curiously, though, while *Border* engages extensively with issues of nature/the pastoral and queerness, it fails to neatly map onto any of the related genre categories that film scholars Rosalind Galt, Karl Schoonover, and Cameron Clark have outlined. Galt and Schoonover distinguish between the "homoerotic pastoral" and the "queer eco-critical pastoral;"[10] as Clark summarizes in the call for this special issue, "the former generally portrays white male same-sex eroticism in positive spaces of reprieve and pleasure, while the latter depicts queers as environmental stewards who aim to collapse racial, gendered, and sexual hierarchies, as well as foster non-dominant connections with nonhumans." Clark has argued for the existence of an *anti*-pastoral queer filmic mode—"a recurrent genre that expresses pessimism and negativity to limn the dire links between capital accumulation, labor alienation, and environmental destruction." *Border* flirts with all three modes at different points, but never commits to one. For example, when Tina and Vore first have sex in an idyllic forest setting—at which point we see that she possesses penis-like genitalia—the film aligns itself conceptually with the homoerotic pastoral; it seems to suggest, idealistically, that these sexual/anatomical outsiders belong together in nature. At other moments, the film seems like more of a queer eco-critical pastoral; Tina communes with the local animals, including a fox and an elk, displaying both empathy and interspecies understanding. But the film has a

dark undertone that is established quite early on, making it also appear akin to a queer anti-pastoral. For one thing, Tina's creepy roommate Roland keeps vicious dogs for show money, and their incessant barking behind a chain link fence disrupts the tranquil shots of forest. ("Peaceful, you said?" Vore jokes as Tina brings him to her house for the first time.) Further, while trolls are associated with natural landscapes, mythology also has them cursing unbaptized babies or replacing them with "changelings."[11] And of course, the film's subplot about child sex trafficking is as pessimistic and negative as it gets: as Vore notes on this topic, "Humans are parasites that use everything on earth for their own amusement. Even their own offspring."

But the film's contributions to the latter genre, the queer anti-pastoral, become clearer once we move away from the strictly *environmental* connotations of the word "pastoral"—which idealizes the countryside as an antidote to modernization—and toward the *social* connotation: that of institutional care. "Pastoral" comes from the classical Latin word *pāstōrālis*, in reference to tending livestock, and it has taken on those environmental connotations referenced above in aesthetic realms, especially poetry. And in fact, our goal for this essay is to focus on the wider implications of the "pastoral" in the concept of the queer anti-pastoral. What cultural assumptions are implicated in the idea of the pastoral as a benevolent mode of care? How have institutions violently enforced ideologies around the "natural" or the "normal" under the banner of pastoral care?

We think that this swerve is permissible on at least two grounds. First, as Terry Gifford—perhaps the foremost scholar on the pastoral—points out, "[t]he link between pastoralists as shepherds and pastoral concerns for well-being, as in the term 'pastor,' is not accidental. Pastoral concern might be for human life or the life of the environment … or both"[12] The pastoral carries connotations of stewardship and care, as with the "pastor" of a church who serves as a moral guide to his parishioners—echoing earlier Scriptural references to Jesus Christ as a good shepherd who tends to his flock. Moreover, Gifford observes that the pastoral has transformed from a genre "into a concept."[13] Thus, while we will discuss various filmic elements throughout this essay, our interest is less in how *Border* relates to the aesthetic or formal elements of the pastoral (environmental) genre, but in how it speaks to pervasive and normative concepts of care, including what counts as care and who needs it. Here, we will focus not (just) on religious institutions but on the Swedish welfare state—a secular institution of care that has been heralded by the media as one of the strongest and most comprehensive in the world (*The Economist* proclaimed the Nordic countries as the "next supermodel" in 2013, for example) but which has also entailed biopolitical violence against, and trauma for, many of the aforementioned groups. In the interest of space, we will focus

primarily on the constructed and overlapping categories of *tattare*, Sámi, intersex, and trans people. *Border*, as we will see, highlights that violence and trauma through its allegorical character, showing how the benevolent concept of the pastoral is precisely what has made those experiences difficult to articulate. Thus, while we are offering readings of a particular film vis-à-vis its specific national context, these readings provide the opportunity to think through a broader notion of a queer anti-pastoral.

The Swedish Pastoral: Troubled by Trolls

The appearance of trolls in the film draws on a specifically Swedish history of mythological others and their treatment. During the medieval period when Sweden was christianized, trolls and belief in trolls signalled reluctance or resistance to abandon pagan practice; moreover, trolls were often associated with Finland, thought for a long time to be a place of heathen beliefs and wizardry. Parts of Finland were subsumed into the Swedish state under the banner of christianization (e.g. during the Second Swedish Crusade in the thirteenth century). Trolls have also been associated with supernatural or demonic activity in Sweden's far north. Höglund also draws our attention to the conflation of trolls and Sámi in terms for Sámi rituals ("*trollmesser*," or "troll-Masses") and belief in historic miscegenation through the moniker "*halvtroll*," or "half-troll," for a mixed Sámi/Swedish person.[14] Further, Sámi in Swedish-claimed Sápmi were the targets of conversion by Lutheran missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Trolls thus have a history as subversives and bogeymen operating on the fringes of mainstream Christianity.

This premodern Sweden, in which a central, state-sponsored Christianity is troubled by trolls at its borders, is updated in *Border* to the contemporary world. Sweden is secular and its power is enacted through its welfare state, its chief instrument of pastoral care, concerned with the wellbeing of its citizens. We see this, for instance, in the exemplary concern of the state prosecutor with tracking down the child sex trafficking ring and bringing the perpetrators to justice. As the film indicates through its references to troll folklore, however, the welfare state—like the medieval church—has a dark history in the way it has dealt with those on or beyond its borders. The lives of Vore and Tina, respectively, represent two modes that the Swedish welfare state has historically employed to deal with outsiders: exclusion from the community through modes of fear or disgust, and (forced) assimilation into it.

Vore's awareness of his troll biology and heritage lead him to behave in ways that invoke revulsion or angst in mainstream Swedish society, and thus require him to keep a certain distance from it. We see this early in the scene on the ferry, when Vore serves himself from a buffet by tipping the whole tray of smoked salmon onto his

plate and eating noisily with his fingers, eliciting censure from a fellow passenger and provoking disgust from the viewer. We learn that Vore's lifestyle is itinerant and that he has no fixed address, although he has links to Finland. He seems to have no friends. When, after the strip search, Tina asks him who he is, he answers, "What can I say? I travel. I stay in a place for a short while. And then I move on." Vore's lack of an address or paid work invokes the discourse around *tattare* in the middle decades of the twentieth century in Sweden. *Tattare* is analogous to the British "tinker," "vagabond," or "gypsy," and could be both a social and racial descriptor of someone considered outside the norms of Swedish society.[15] *Tattare* were most often associated with Roma ethnicities, but occasionally conflated with Lapps from the north or Finns from the east—but, importantly, the term was also used describe people with no fixed abode, intermittent employment, and various problems associated with low income (poor health, alcohol dependency, etc.): the term has thus both racial and social applications.

While Vore's troll-ness is obvious and generates reactions in those he meets (varying from the confusion of the border guard who strip searches him, to the censure of the buffet customer, to the politely disguised fear of Tina's neighbours), Tina's surgery and adoption have allowed her to become assimilated into Swedish society. She has a Swedish name and she is trusted both professionally by colleagues and by her Swedish neighbours. It is an ironic commentary on the success of her assimilation that her work is in law enforcement—the policing of the borders that keep the community safe from outside influences.

Swedish state policy has a history of assimilating those considered to be problematic, and has used both persuasion and force in order to do so. As the Swedish welfare state grew rapidly through the twentieth century, intellectuals hotly debated assimilating or eradicating "unhealthy" parts of the population that were considered unable or unwilling to contribute to Swedish society. Discussions around eugenics concentrated on stemming the reproductive potential of *tattare*, and from the 1940s, sterilizations were regularly performed on those deemed "feeble-minded" or unhealthy (mostly women), including those unable to consent to the procedure. The fuzzy border between social outsider status and racialized/genetic outsider status is seen in the sterilization policy introduced in 1935, which laid out the conditions for sterilization on social *or* genetic grounds and demonstrated the way in which limiting reproduction—by force if necessary—was to be a system of reducing the perceived influence of both ethnic and cultural outsiders.[16] The sterilization movement drew adherents from social reform groups (even including the famous women's rights activist Elise Ottesen-Jensen in the 1930s) and genetic science communities.

The processes of demonization and assimilation also played out in Sweden's northern borderlands, the site of the country's modern colonial expansion: the region known as Sápmi that spans what is currently Norway, Finland, and parts of Russia, in addition to Sweden. Indigenous Sámi people who live in the region migrate with their reindeer or live off fishing on their coasts, practices that have come increasingly into conflict with Swedish industrialization, in particular in the development of forestry and the reconfiguration of waterways to provide hydrological power for the urbanizing south of the country.[17] Like many similar initiatives in the colonial world—including residential schools in Canada and the United States and forced adoption in Australia—the Swedish welfare state forced assimilation by giving Sámi children Swedish names and insisting on Swedish language and customs.

Social, medical, and cultural interventions were all ways of dealing with the "problems" of those marked as outsiders, whether social outcast, ethnic outsider, or colonial other. Höglund notes that the colonial expansion of the Scandinavian nations in Sápmi has only recently—since the turn of the millennium—become a part of mainstream historical understanding; as he puts it, "the Nordic nations have rarely been perceived as having anything to do with colonialism."[18] The alignment of Tina and Vore with historically undesirable ethnic and social categories highlights a postcolonial revision of the myths of Swedish nation-building, producing a new critique of the Swedish welfare state in the twentieth century that we read as anti-pastoral.

"There's No Flaw in You": Transgender and Intersex Resonance in *Border*

The characters of Tina and Vore further extend the film's critique of the welfare state's execution of care by invoking transgender and intersex experiences alongside those of *tattare* and Indigenous people. The trans resonance comes about, first, through the appearance of Vore; the dialogue between Tina and her male colleague after the latter performs a strip search on Vore is worth repeating in full here: "Nothing?" she asks when he returns from the back room. "Nothing that's any of our business anyway," he replies, standing under the harsh fluorescent lighting that appears throughout the film's many other institutional spaces (police station, hospital, and even Tina's own kitchen). "You should have been the one doing it, not me. To put it in scientific terms, she…he…she has a vagina, not a penis. And it was rather embarrassing." We recognize trans resonance here not in the supposed "mismatch" between gender presentation and sex characteristics, but rather in terms of "border control": the state's investment in policing the borders between male and female, just as it (literally) polices the geographical border. And indeed, border security is fraught for trans people the world over, thanks to this state investment.[19] More specifically, the way in which Tina's

colleague settles on female pronouns for Vore despite his overtly male presentation echoes the ways in which current transphobic discourse takes biological sex as one's "true nature"[20]—not to mention the fact that it invokes that old chestnut about trans people as deceptive. All of which Tina's colleague softens with a gesture of liberalism: "Nothing that's any of our business, anyway."

We read this encounter as an allegory for the Swedish's welfare state's treatment of transgender people—especially considering that troll mythology has historically focused on the general aesthetic otherness of trolls, rather than details of sex or gender. That is to say, in addition to contributing to the (re)conceptualization of Sweden as a settler-colonial society, the film also uses the updated figure of the troll to critique Sweden's historic enforcement of sex and gender normativity. While the country likes to boast of its status as the first in the world to allow transgender people to change their legal gender (in 1972), that "permissiveness" has a darker side. First, until 2013, one could only change one's legal gender after so-called "sex reassignment surgery." No wonder, then, that Tina's colleague cannot conceive of Vore as male; for 41 years, the state edict was that one's documents and one's body must "match." Further, transgender individuals seeking such surgery were required to undergo sterilization during that period—an injustice for which many are currently seeking compensation.[21] Like forcing Sámi children to speak Swedish, requirements around medical surgery and forced sterilization for transgender people are institutional mechanisms of normalization undertaken in the guise of benevolent care. But perhaps most interestingly, such gestures of "care" nonetheless demonstrate the anxiety of those in charge. That is, enforced sterilization of transgender people seems to suggest not (just) fears about the ultimate malleability of human binary systems of sex and embodiment, but also fear of "unnatural"—and yet perfectly biological—things happening with reproduction. To be even more specific, such sterilization requirements seem aimed at preventing scenarios in which, say, men could give birth—which is the very phenomenon that *Border* later dramatizes with Vore.

In contrast, when it comes to intersex people, we are not aware of any *uniquely* problematic history on the part of the Swedish welfare state. However, it is worth noting that Sweden does not currently prohibit "medically unnecessary sex normalizing treatment or surgery on intersex minors," according to an OECD report.[22] (As of 2019, Sweden ranks at 0/100 on this measure, as compared to a 24/100 for all OECD member countries—100 being the maximum ideal for "LGBTI inclusivity.") And in fact, *Border* seems to make its strongest statement against institutional intervention through its resonance with intersex issues. First, when Vore mourns his and Tina's "cut off, discarded, poor little tail[s]," we hear echoes of the fact that

"unnecessary medical interventions"—from gonad removal to clitorectomies—"are a core part of the experience of many intersex people," according to scholar Chris Breu. As he continues, "Many of them undergo [these] surgeries … during infancy or early childhood"—recall Vore's use of the adjective "little"—"where there is no realistic ability for the intersex person to consent to the procedure. [O]ften [this approach] produces … lasting trauma."[23] We read such trauma in the scene where Tina drops off her pregnant, laboring neighbor and her partner at the hospital. Tina accompanies them but then suddenly pauses outside the automatic glass doors to the building, jerking suddenly backwards as they begin to close. Staring into the hospital, she begins to breathe shakily. Sharply poignant music plays as the camera zooms in and then cuts to an extreme close-up of her trembling, tearful face. Importantly, this nighttime scene is framed such that Tina's reflection is captured in the glass doors, making it appear as if she is simultaneously inside and outside of the building—which is perhaps exactly where she is, emotionally speaking.

Compounding the trauma of unnecessary medical intervention for intersex people is the "legacy of isolation, secrecy, and shame" that often surrounds it.[24] As Breu reports of his own childhood experience, "What I needed was knowledge of what had happened to my body and why. I also needed the ability to talk about what I had experienced, not only in private settings…but also in a public forum."[25] These points certainly hold true for Tina, whose elderly father lies about the origins of her scar, as well as her adopted status, even after she has learned the truth from Vore. In the scene just preceding the one discussed above, she inquires about the scar, only to have her father tell her she fell on a rock. A personal passage from scholar Hil Malatino's *Queer Embodiment: Monstrosity, Medical Violence, and Intersex Experience*, released a year after *Border*, bears striking resemblance to that filmic sequence:

> a child is born in a small-town hospital … They have no idea how the medical professionals responded to their birth or whether they appeared of indeterminate sex at the moment of birth. Their parents both deny having any knowledge of an intersex condition before their teenage years. They know that there is a mysterious scar on their lower belly, just above where the pubic hair begins to grow; their parents say it is from a hernia operation they underwent at the age of three. This same scar is reopened at the age of sixteen, when they have their gonads removed from their abdomen. They are told that this is necessary.[26]

When Tina asks her father if she was hospitalized, musing that it was strange that she could not remember this incident, he responds, "You were three. How could you remember?" But as we see in the proceeding scene, the trauma of the incident nonetheless remains, as does the fresh trauma of knowing definitively that her father is lying to her face. Perhaps not coincidentally, this familial discussion also takes place in an institutional setting and site of state-funded pastoral care: the father's nursing home.

In contrast to the institutional status quo, the character of Vore parallels contemporary intersex activists in his rejection of isolation, secrecy, and shame. "There's no flaw in you," he tells Tina after she confesses her lifelong belief that she is an "ugly, strange human with a chromosome flaw." This scene, like many of those in the film set outside, features only diegetic sound—in this case, running water, rustling leaves, and murmuring birds—which serves to underscore Vore's suggestion that Tina is not "unnatural." He even goes so far as to argue that, "If you're different than others, it's because you're better than them"—a reframing that reminds us of how intersex activists have begun to use terminology such as, "intersex people are born with physical or biological sex characteristics … that are *more diverse* than stereotypical definitions for male or female bodies,"[27] in contrast to the predominating, pathologizing institutional phrase, "*disorders* of sex development."

Of course, doctors who perform intersex interventions believe themselves to be "doing the right thing." Similarly, when Tina's father finally confesses that he and his wife adopted her when he was working at St. Jörgen's, a psychiatric hospital where her parents and many trolls were imprisoned and died, he seems to deflect responsibility by insisting on the ethos of care: "all we wanted was a little girl to care for. … I was just the caretaker. But I offered to care for you." It is here that the welfare state gains its unimpeachable emotional sway. As Malatino argues, "medical practitioners able to green-light gender reassignment technologies" are regularly characterized "as saviors, beings capable of bestowing life to people in dire existential circumstances, often

shaped by grappling with suicide, poverty, social disenfranchisement, and significant quotidian violence."[28] And yet such life-bestowing care is intimately intertwined with death and destruction; we learn not only that Tina was stripped of her original name, Reva, but that her parents and other trolls are buried under scattered boulders behind the hospital—echoing the recent, horrifying discovery by the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation of the remains of 215 Indigenous children, "'Some … as young as three years old,'" buried in unmarked graves at a former residential school run by the Catholic Church in what is currently British Columbia, Canada.[29]

Interestingly, given the focus of this special journal issue, Malatino understands that supposedly benevolent, yet ultimately violent, medical gaze in ecological terms. They describe a doctor who insisted that,

> given the relative rarity of my condition, it was important that I allowed other physicians access to both my case history and, well, my body. He explained that today the goal was to get "the lay of the land"—a metaphor that I found really poorly chosen. I wasn't a territory to be discovered and colonized. I wasn't the mute terrain on which some doctor-explorer got to adventure alongside his brothers-in-arms. Or was I? Years later, I read Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, the first chapter of which is entitled "The Lay of the Land." In it, she writes, "all too often, Enlightenment metaphysics presented knowledge as a relation of power between two gendered spaces, articulated by a journey and a technology of conversion: the male penetration and exposure of a veiled, female interior; and the aggressive conversion of its "secrets" into a visible, male science of the surface.[30]

Malatino doesn't mention it, but a generative work in ecocriticism/ecofeminism is, likewise, titled *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*; Annette Kolodny's 1975 book explains how dualities such as Indigenous/nature/female versus European/civilization/male shaped and justified processes of settler colonialism. Here we can see again how the constructed categories of *tattare*, Sámi, trans, and intersex people overlap.

The anxiety of the welfare state authorities around those categories finds strong expression in *Border* through its portrayal of reproduction and intergenerational continuity. We see no children and, aside from the rude teenager smuggling booze, no young people in the film—only adults and babies, including that of Tina/Reva's neighbor; the unseen baby at the center of the child sex trafficking ring; an embryo that Vore produces; and a troll baby that, as we will see, Tina/Reva finds at the end of

the film. The importance of reproduction and intergenerational continuity is a source of fear, both to those reproducing (might have to face the loss of their infant child) and those from whom the right to reproduce and raise a new generation has been forcibly withdrawn (Tina's/Reva's birth parents). Doubling back to the discussion of trolls as racialized outsiders calls to mind the aforementioned residential schools as well as the Australian "Stolen Generations"; a key strategy of settler-colonial authorities has been to break the cycle of social and cultural reproduction by removing Indigenous children from their birth parents and placing them with foster families or in church- and/or state-run educational institutions. Further, the film's focus on babies echoes the idea that medical intervention for intersex people typically takes place at a very young age and therefore without conscious consent—sometimes even before they leave the hospital.[31] Perhaps then there's another way to read the hospital scene cited above: standing fretfully outside, Tina/Reva may be thinking not only of the medicalized violence she herself experienced after birth, but also that which her neighbor's arriving baby could experience.

A history of reproductive anxiety is implied through another echo from Swedish folklore, drawing on medieval concern around baptism, in the concern in *Border* around the naming and registering of infants. When Tina/Reva hears an infant crying in the apartment where she detects the smell of child abuse, the detective reports to the state prosecutor, "if there was a baby, it's not registered anywhere." Registration is the means by which children can be protected/tracked by the welfare state. Shortly afterwards, when Vore shows a sinister interest in the newborn baby of Tina's/Reva's neighbours and asks after the name of the child, the mother hesitates. The father answers him, "Elsa," but adds, "we think…." Their reluctance to reveal the name of their daughter plays with medieval worries about the dangers inherent in the liminal "rites of passage" such as naming that accompany her arrival in the world.[32]

Registration, like baptism, represents the threshold for membership in the community; another border in a film concerned with gatekeeping, with the integrity of borders and attempts to uphold or transgress them. The anxiety about the integrity of the next generation, their membership (or not) in the intergenerational community, and the liminal states around birth and registration is carried through to the final frames of the film.

Conclusion

In the film's last sequence, we find Tina/Reva walking barefoot on the ground outside her house, with only diegetic sounds such as bird calls, blowing wind, and crunching

snow audible. She returns to the house to find a box on her doorstep. She takes it indoors to open it and finds a baby troll, replete with hairy body and posterior tail, accompanied by a "Welcome to Finland" postcard. At first perturbed, she carries the baby outside and feeds it a cricket—providing a bookend to the film's initially inexplicable first scene, in which Tina/Riva picks a cricket up from the ground and then puts it back down. The infant smiles in pleasure and Tina/Reva does as well, then the film cuts out.

We believe this conclusion is worth discussing in *our* conclusion, not because we are uncreative in our argumentative syntax, but because it provides perhaps the most important opportunity to consider how *Border* pushes us beyond easy queer readings. To begin with, those steeped in what some have called "white queer theory" might critique this ending for engaging in something like Lee Edelman's "[hetero]reproductive futurism."[33] That is to say, one could argue that, troll ontology notwithstanding, this ending is too pat and sentimental. Further, it seems at this point that the film has denounced its most darkly radical character, Vore, by having revealed him as part of the child sex trafficking ring (he steals infants and replaces them with the embryos he produces). Vore's unfertilized embryos will die within a few weeks; the trafficked infants, meanwhile, have moved outside the system, where they cannot be policed. Wibke Straube suggests an alternative angle with "the ambivalence of revenge" as a possible reading for the film,[34] focusing our attention away from the possible sentimental outcome for Tina/Reva and lingering on Vore's callousness in perpetuating cycles of injustice.

But when we read this film through the concept of the queer anti-pastoral that we have proposed—including through the lenses of Indigenous studies and intersex studies that inform our thinking—it looks rather different. For one thing, we see that parenthood (social and cultural, if not actual biological reproduction) has been restored to a group from whom it was taken away. Tina/Reva receives the child "outside," both in the sense of being out of doors and being outside normative biological and cultural structures; this child of ambiguous provenance, who has arrived in an unmarked box, clearly has not been registered with the state, but in a much more positive sense than the trafficked child invoked earlier. The care that Tina/Reva extends to the infant is a horizontal rather than paternalistic form of care, one not defined by the power of institutions, lack of consent, or traumatic secrecy. Finally, the threat of medical intervention is nowhere to be found. In fact, in this scene the infant plays with one of the dangling strings on Tina/Reva's sweatshirt, which evokes its twitching tail—a very subtle imagining of bodily integrity restored.

This moment of reproductive restoration makes clear the limits of the pastoral mode. Far from being a benevolent form of stewarding a community, it depends on a centralized and monolithic power structure and a normative and heterogeneous "flock." The experiences of Vore and Tina reveal the violence and trauma at the heart of pastoral systems and the abilities of queer agencies to disrupt and subvert them. Returning to the term "pastoral" in its more standard literary context—a bucolic pasture, contented sheep, and a benevolent human or two watching over it all—we might consider the violence and normativity that it depends on.

Notes

[1] Adlakha, "'Border," non. pag.
[2] JMaesterN. "Has anyone seen," non. pag.
[3] Simon, "Film Review," non. pag.
[4] Höglund, "Revenge of the Trolls," 117.
[5] See Felcht, "The Aesthetics and Politics," 7–14; also Hennig et al., *Nordic Narratives*, 7.
[6] Howard, *Ugly Differences*, 10.
[7] Howard, *Ugly Differences*, 11.
[8] Offill, *Weather*, 46–7.
[9] We are inspired here by the Darlington Statement, a joint comment from intersex communities of Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, that pointedly acknowledges "intersectionalities with other populations, including same-sex attracted people, trans and gender diverse people, people with disabilities, … and Indigenous … racialised, migrant and refugee populations." Black et al., "Darlington Statement," 2.
[10] Galt and Schoonover, *Queer Cinema*, 246.
[11] Lindow, "Rites of Passage," 42.
[12] Gifford, "Pastoral," 18.
[13] Gifford, "Pastoral," 17.
[14] Höglund, "Revenge of the Trolls," 121.
[15] Broberg, *Eugenics*, 125.
[16] Lennerhed, "Sex Reform," 397.
[17] Svensson, "Industrial Developments."
[18] Höglund, "Revenge of the Trolls," 119–20.
[19] While Sweden does not employ full-body scanners, trans passengers have complained for decades of the discriminatory nature of such technologies: https://www.propublica.org/article/tsa-transgender-travelers-scanners-invasive-searches-often-wait-on-the-other-side.
[20] Of course, there is another possible interpretation here: the colleague could be reading Vore as a "postoperative" transgender woman. But we would nonetheless say that his automatic equation of a vagina with female pronouns indicates the rigid binaristic thinking that defines the state institutions in question.
[21] See https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sweden-transgender-sterilisation-idUSKBN16Y1XA.
[22] See https://www.oecd.org/sweden/OECD-LGBTI-2020-Over-The-Rainbow-SWEDEN.pdf.
[23] Breu, "*Middlesex* Meditations," 106.
[24] Black et al., "Darlington Statement," 6.
[25] Breu, "*Middlesex* Meditations," 102.
[26] Malatino, *Queer Embodiment*, 77.
[27] Black et al., "Darlington Statement," 2 (our emphasis).
[28] Malatino, *Queer Embodiment*, 27.
[29] Dickson and Watson, "Remains," non. pag.
[30] Malatino, *Queer Embodiment*, 125–26.
[31] Black et al., "Darlington Statement," 5.
[32] See Lindow, "Rites of Passage."
[33] Edelman, *No Future*, 2.
[34] Straube, "Ecological Aesthetics," 86.

Acknowledgements

We thank Julia Leyda for first thinking through this film with us, and Cristina Richie for citation suggestions.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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