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# SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE VALUE OF LITERATURE

Accumulating narrative and digital capital  
in the case of Johanna Frid's  
*Nora eller Brinn Oslo Brinn*



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– Litterära värden och värderingar –

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This article presents a critical perspective on changes in literary valuation caused by the twenty-first-century story economy, and particularly by social media as its dominant storytelling platforms. We argue that these platforms, prompting *everyone to share their story*, have promoted the loss of autonomy of the literary field, previously identified as at least partly induced by digitalization.<sup>1</sup> This calls for critical attention from the sociology of literature, the study of the digital literary field, as well as narrative studies. The story economy, a branch of attention economy fueled by compelling narratives, puts a new strain on literary authors as they need to cope in an environment where personal stories of transformation and survival constitute the primary *narrative capital*.<sup>2</sup> Narrative capital, as previously used by Klarsissa Lueg in the context of organizational studies, refers to "the potential for a new idea to travel from one field to another" based on "the tellability of an idea, how well it resonates with the field's established nomos, how (un)thinkable it is, and finally, the position of those who tell the story".<sup>3</sup> We reconceptualize narrative capital within the story economy as (1) the mastery of a compelling story and (2) the teller's capacity to embody it, thus connecting narrative capital with an imperative to seek maximum attention in online environments. We argue that the platformization of storytelling and the focus on narrative capital impose an expectation of a consistent narrative ethos across storytelling platforms, from interviews and social media presence to literary texts, casting the author's personal story in the service of moral positioning and as a securer of values.<sup>4</sup>

Besides narrative capital, another key component is *digital capital*, which is defined as "the accumulation of 'internalised' digital com-

petences in relation to the availability of 'external' digital technologies".<sup>5</sup> It refers, in other words, to the abilities and opportunities to utilize, for instance, digital platforms. In this article, we reposition literary authorship within this platformized and commodified storytelling, in order to grasp recent changes in literary valuation. In addition, we hope to be able to open new avenues for collaborative research between literary sociologists, social media scholars, and narrative theorists. As a test case, we discuss the Swedish author Johanna Frid's debut novel *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn* (2018) and its media paratexts.<sup>6</sup> Paratexts are defined by Gérard Genette as the means and devices, both inside and outside the book, that shape relationships between the book, the author, the publisher, and the reader.<sup>7</sup> Paratext can be divided into epitexts, which are detached or distant from the form that supports the book or other work, and peritexts, which are placed in the immediate context and surroundings of the work. Epitexts often include reviews and author commentaries, while peritexts encompass elements such as typography, the author's name, cover design, the title of the work, front matter, dedications, and afterwords.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, the significance of paratexts has been emphasized in discussions about the so-called post-postmodern novel as well as multimodal and multimedia texts.<sup>9</sup> Both discussions are strongly related to the growing importance of the digital in defining the zeitgeist and the cultural environment. These new contexts have led to the modification and refinement of the concept of paratextuality and the increased prominence of paratexts from the reader's perspective. Despite several recontextualizations of the concept, there is a consensus in the discussion about its utility and descriptive power.<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of our analysis, the most essential ways of recontextualizing paratexts are highlighted by Dorothee Birke and Birte Christ who note the functions of paratexts, categorizing them as interpretive, commercial, and navigational.<sup>11</sup>

Our discussion of literary value and valuation, as well as narrative and digital capital, draws from Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of the literary field, and the role of different forms of capital in shaping it. In his theory of social worlds, Bourdieu outlines how specific domains of activities win their (relative) autonomy from social, political, and economic restraints. All social fields, including the literary one, are

objects to two opposing principles of hierarchization; an external one that applies to the hierarchy prevailing in the general field of power, and an internal one, that hierarchizes according to the values specific to the field. Within the field of power, two fractions compete with each other, an economic and a cultural one. These divisions constantly modify the power balances in the more distinct fields and translate into specific forms of capital, economic and cultural.<sup>12</sup> The field of power not only positions the literary field within the overall society, but also generates a division in "an autonomous pole (art for art's sake) and a heteronomous pole ("bourgeois art") within the literary field. When a field has achieved an autonomous state, it has its own specific form of accumulated symbolic capital (forms of recognition), and its main holders constitute the elites of the field. "The more autonomous a field, the less sensitive it is to the external principle of hierarchy", Mathieu Hilgers and Eric Mangez conclude.<sup>13</sup>

One of the characteristic features of an autonomous literary field is a reversed economy: the agents put a high value on field-specific capital, ignoring the material side of their activities and devaluing economic success and other "worldly" forms of triumph. The greater the economic value, the less aesthetic value a literary work has in an autonomous field, as Bourdieu states in *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*.<sup>14</sup> A book is both a signifier and a commodity, and has symbolic as well as economic value. However, the growth in the relative value of economic capital that characterizes our neoliberal societies tends to reduce the autonomy of the fields, Hilgers and Mangez note.<sup>15</sup> The profound transformation taking place from 1990's onwards with increasing economic pressure and a growing attraction of the economic pole leads also to an intensified commodification of literary publishing; it is evolving into "a sector of mass production (of profits) as any other", Bourdieu states in an article published in 2008. In this process, the literary work loses its aura of specialness, its inherent quality as something above the material and economic world, and becomes like any other commodity for sale.<sup>16</sup>

Bourdieu recognizes also a new category of "economic-literary agents who have become strong through familiarity with the literary field's previous, more autonomous states." This knowledge is then used as a strategy in the new situation at the end of 1990s.<sup>17</sup> In the

following analysis of Frid's *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn*, we also demonstrate how values signaling autonomy can be usurped by the story economy. Bringing Bourdieu's theory to the digital age, we trace the similarities between the emerging values in the literary field that he identified and platform values promoted by the affordances of shareability, replicability, scalability, searchability, and persistence.<sup>18</sup> We trace the dynamics whereby these affordances translate to both evaluative discourse, such as praising an author for her relatability, and narrative rhetoric and forms within a literary text, such as lack of ambivalence and the foregrounding of affective stances.

The study of the digital literary sphere, pioneered for example by Simone Murray (2018) who also draws from Bourdieu, forms an important emergent paradigm in the sociology of literature, with an increased attention to the digitally-induced parasocial relationships between authors and their audiences, erosion of traditional literary establishments, collaborative digital storytelling experiments, and commercially facilitated literary discussion. While this strand of research is well advanced as regards the social networks among authors, audiences, publishers, retailers, and media, one perspective that we still find lacking is that of platformized and commodified *storytelling* and its consequences for literary fiction as the *art* of storytelling. In order to cover this aspect of the digital literary sphere and its impact on literary valuation, we suggest a cross-analysis of literary texts and their digital paratexts with a particular attention to the authorial ethos formation and ethos attributions across storytelling genres and platforms. We understand the construction of authorial ethos as a negotiation between different actors within the literary field, a process that is becoming increasingly shaped by the affective publics of social media.<sup>19</sup>

We draw from the rhetorical theory of narrative to pinpoint intersections in narrative rhetoric across storytelling genres, from novelistic narration to social-media-induced public and institutional discourses. Moreover, the rhetorical theory of fictionality, a framework ultimately concerned with narrative ethics as a structuring principle, directs us toward the ethical and even didactic dominant in contemporary fiction, closely intertwined with the question of sustained and sustainable authorial ethos as a core literary value of the digital age.

Indeed, while the age-old didactic purpose of literature was downplayed in modernist poetics, in the twenty-first-century literary field we may consider *both* the aesthetic delight *and* the practical instruction value of literature. While exploring the epistemological questions concerning culture and society, contemporary fiction writers also search for new forms of didactic narrative, a mode that has traditionally been associated with pejorative connotations of authorial moralizing and teaching.<sup>20</sup> With this approach, drawing from several paradigms in literary studies, we hope to highlight the intersections of ethos, value, and platforms in the twenty-first-century literary field. Ultimately our aim is to demonstrate how digital platforms currently impose new values on literature, curating authorial storytelling across genres and platforms, guiding authorial ethos attributions by audiences, and reverberating in institutional discourses and practices, such as critique, interviews, and publishers' paratexts.

With the outlined approach, we wish to integrate questions of autonomy and value in the digitalized literary field. As many literary scholars today, we see values as relational, produced in evaluative acts and processes, and of many kinds, economic as well as cultural.<sup>21</sup> Whereas style and form have traditionally been the central forms of value within an autonomous literary field, literature can also have many other cultural values, such as knowledge value as well as emotional and social values.<sup>22</sup> What is more, the various categories of value are often intertwined. We propose that in the current digitized field of media and literature, the interrelationship between these values is changing, and they are connected in ways that partly differ from the past, regarding the relationships between various forms of capital. Next, we will move to our case study in order to explore the intersections of ethos, value, and platforms in the twenty-first-century literary field.

### **Johanna Frid's *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn***

We have chosen Johanna Frid's autofictional debut novel *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn* (2018) as our test case, because the novel and its paratexts offer a rich and varied contemporary material when it comes to literary value. A combination of an illness narrative, a

confession, and a critical analysis of the social media Zeitgeist, it is an emblematic product of the internet era and thus serves as an illuminating example of how social media affordances, literary texts, and acts of evaluation come together in the contemporary literary field. We first introduce this test case to provide a concrete point of reference for our following theoretical and methodological argumentation concerning the influence of social media affordances on literary valuation, authorial ethos attribution, and narrative rhetoric.

The novel is a dark comedy featuring a caricature-like protagonist who is also the namesake of the author; the plot is simple, mostly maintaining chronological order, yet repeatedly interrupted by jealousy-ridden scenarios and intense descriptions of the protagonist's bodily states. The story recounts a crisis in a romantic relationship as the protagonist Johanna, tortured by endometriosis, turns into a stereotype of a hysteric woman and develops obsessive jealousy toward her Danish boyfriend Emil's ex-girlfriend Nora who lives in Oslo and whose beautiful social media profile picture Johanna accidentally sees. The novel begins with the words: "Allt började i en bild", grounding the reading to the plot-driving picture, followed by a description of mental restlessness and bodily pain as they prepare to meet Emil's parents on the next day.<sup>23</sup> "Jag var nervös, med en rastlöshet och en molande smärta i kroppen."<sup>24</sup> The narration wastes no time in going to the core event as Johanna soon sees Nora's picture and the saga of jealousy begins. The gendered physical ailment, endometriosis, is thus juxtaposed with social media as the disease of our era, both themes resonating with topical debates and clickbait journalism revolving around women's reproductive health (such as overcoming menstrual shame) and social media as a threat to long-standing romantic relationships. The result is an affectively charged and utterly relatable setting, which projects social importance. This social importance adds to and combines with literary value, as is shown in the reviews of *Nora*, discussed in what follows.

The experiential focal point of narration remains fixed in Johanna, and the only driver of narrative progression besides her bodily and mental states is the addictive logic of social media that intertwines with the protagonist's mental dynamics:

Emil hade ingen smartphone – han bar omkring på en gammal kloss från Ericsson som hade klarat sig helskinnad om han så kastat den från toppen av Rundetårn. Han hade absolut inte hanterat situationen som jag. Jag visste det inte då, men den kvällen inledde jag ett internetbeteende jag skulle dras med länge, länge. Ett sjukligt mönster, ett tic, ett symtom som hörde hemma i DSM-V. Jag behövde veta mer om Nora. Jag behövde veta allt. Mobilen lyste i handflatan.<sup>25</sup>

The quoted passage features one of those rare incidences in the novel where the dynamics of plot and readerly interpretation are thematized in the sense foregrounded by the rhetorical theory of narrative, as a tension between the progression of events as represented and the progression of interpretations and evaluations as made by the intended audience.<sup>26</sup> This tension is thematized with a fateful prolepsis that highlights the interpretive distance between the narrated and the narrating self ("Jag visste det inte då", in the citation above), yet notably the model for interpretive dynamics comes from the consumption of social media: Johanna is determined to addiction, which in turn reflects the readerly engagement, thus juxtaposing literary suspense<sup>27</sup> and social media addiction. The narrative structure of the novel thus forms itself around the mind and the body of the protagonist, evoking exceptionally strong affective resonance, particularly in descriptions of endometriotic pain: "Jag kände hur kött slets från kött i nedre delen av buken och skapade gnistrande, vitglödande stråk av smärta".<sup>28</sup>

The reception of the novel was overwhelmingly positive: the style of the novel was characterized by the reviewers as sharp, entertaining and furious, accurate and extremely funny, and the novel was awarded the *Dagens Nyheter* prize. Autofictionality was immediately foregrounded as the primary interpretive frame; yet interestingly, while autofiction is almost synonymous with narrative capital in today's literary market, the novel was published by Ellerströms förlag, a small publishing house that proudly presents itself in terms of "Kvalitetslitteratur sedan 1983" and with a publishing profile focused on canonized European and Swedish literature. Ellerström thus frames itself as holding a considerable amount of literary capital. Autofiction is, however, a fitting generic denomination for *Nora*, not



only because it is named so in the publisher's description, but also due to it embracing typical traits of the genre.<sup>29</sup> First, there is little effort made to separate the author Johanna from the first-person narrator Johanna who is also the protagonist of the story. In interviews, journalists frequently pose questions about the similarities between Frid's own life and the story of Johanna in the novel. Frid's answers strengthen the connection in several ways. Indeed, she admits that jealousy is one of her characteristic features, and continues: "Det är en väldigt illegitim känsla som många gömmer undan, trots att den är så mänsklig. Det gör den intressant."<sup>30</sup> In a column Frid wrote in *Dagens Nyheter* in 2020, she calls her novel "en delvis självupplevd roman".<sup>31</sup> At the same time, *Nora* retains the ambiguity between fact and fiction typical of autofiction, exemplified already at the beginning by the subtitle "Saga," highlighting storytelling as a source of perennial truths that transcends the limit between factuality and fictionality. The subtitle relates to questions of narrative capital: fiction in the story economy can be more compelling than fact, as individual stories express not factual but experiential truths.<sup>32</sup> From the perspective of valuation, the play with literary value between autobiographical writing and high literary prose, and the play with perceived authenticity gained from the author "guaranteeing" the experiences of the protagonist, become crucial.

When interviewed about Frid's second novel, *Haralds mamma* (2023), the nearness of her own emotions to those depicted in her novels are once again emphasized. "Jag är en person med väldigt starka känslor. Och jag vill att det som känns för mig även ska kännas för läsaren," Frid says.<sup>33</sup> While making the most out of her own personal story, Frid nevertheless sows seeds of resistance to autobiographical interpretations in the interviews: "Johanna Frid understryker att hennes nya bok 'Haralds mamma' är en roman, en påhittad historia. Även om hon låter berättarjaget i boken får [sic] likadana anfall som henne själv."<sup>34</sup> "Jag har använt mig av mina egna erfarenheter och fikionaliserat dem [...]. Men jag hade aldrig som avsikt att berätta en sann historia [...]", she tells journalist Jenna Emtö in an interview.<sup>35</sup> The author's rhetorical acts of resistance toward the amalgamation of her own life story and narrative identity with her literary work in reception can nevertheless be considered

yet another strategy for increasing narrative capital, with the author positioning herself as a defender of literary autonomy. Literariness as an authorial position is further reinforced by the bookish lifestyle of Johanna and Emil, as well as frequent allusions to literary history and authors such as Maria Gripe, Henry James, Agneta Pleijel and August Strindberg, highlighted by critics.<sup>36</sup> The tension between art and the banal becomes clear at the outset, as when Johanna first accidentally sees the triggering image of Nora, she was supposed to be looking at an article about poetry.

What according to literary critic Anna Hallberg makes this novel stand out among the many contemporary novels depicting young, anxiety-driven, ego-centered women who have problems with love, is the way it is written. It is furious and sharp, Hallberg remarks, praises Frid's writing skills, and continues: "Satan vad snyggt hon slänger runt meningarna".<sup>37</sup> Aligning the merits of style with authenticity and affectivity, Hallberg notes how Frid digs deep into the painful moments and makes the novel grow into something more than a mere generation novel. It becomes, in her view, more generally relatable.

In addition to complying with the logic and values of the story economy by commodifying the author's personal story, the reception of *Nora* emblemizes the tendency to consider literary works as narrative positioning and experiential knowledge vis-à-vis topical debates within the public sphere.<sup>38</sup> Reminiscent of Frid's style of personal storytelling in interviews, the topics are taken up in the novel in a didactic style, hardly hiding the purpose of "lecturing" and "educating" the reader. Moreover, the author Frid serves as the guarantor of the authenticity of the experiences described in the novel. There is specific social and media circulation value for raising women's health issues ("kvinnosjukdomar", see below) into public discussion. Aware of the perceived importance of the topic, the publisher's promotional texts emphasize this: "I sin autofiktiva och svart humoristiska roman *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn* undersöker Johanna Frid med skarp blick två av vår tids stora kvinnosjukdomar – Instagram och endometrios."<sup>39</sup> Hanna Jedvik echoes the promotional message in close detail in Sveriges Radio: "Endometrios och Instagram, två fenomen som inte direkt skildras i överkant i den svenska litteraturen."<sup>40</sup> Jonna Sima goes further in her *Aftonbladet* article "Krävs en roman för att

lära sig kvinnokroppen” and declares that the whole female body is a blind spot in popular knowledge – ”Hela kvinnokroppen är i princip en vit kunskapsfläck!” – and therefore *Nora* makes an important contribution to educating the people: ”Folkbildning var nog inget Johanna Frid hade för ögonen när hon skrev sin debutroman, men det är faktiskt vad den är.”<sup>41</sup> Compressed messaging that resonates with topical issues, guaranteed by the authenticity of the author’s experience, represents a typical entanglement of narrative and digital capital in the story economy. In the next section, we explain how such constellations of capital affect literary valuation, and how platform values fuse with more traditional literary values.

## From literary to platform values

The digitalization of the literary field has only increased the interest in authors and accelerated the rise of autofiction, two developments which have gone hand in hand in the Swedish literary field since at least the 1990’s.<sup>42</sup>

Frid’s case directs us to the need to reconsider literary valuation in the digital literary sphere, with a particular focus on the author’s personal story as a primary source of narrative and digital capital. This reevaluation entails analyzing the ways in which social media as dominant storytelling platforms shape not only social forms but also affect the form of literary expression.<sup>43</sup> We can thus study the loss of the autonomy of the literary field not only as an institutional change, but as a clash between values related to form. The fact that the author Johanna Frid appears not to be actively engaging in discussion and debate on social media herself and explicitly and publicly frames her novel as a critique of Instagram culture makes it all the more interesting how the reception and public discourse around *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn* in many ways follow the logic of social media. The paratexts amalgamate the literary work as part of the author’s public story and construct her transmedial authorial ethos by seamlessly combining literature with opinions and life experiences. Next we outline an approach to literary value that takes account of digital platforms as norm-imposing forms that have an effect on all discourses and rhetorical domains, including literary ones.

The role of authors in the public sphere of the 2020s is undergoing significant transformation, particularly within digital and social media environments.<sup>44</sup> Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere is redefined by digitalization and media convergence, encompassing both traditional and digital media forms.<sup>45</sup> Digital platforms are pivotal in shaping public discourse, providing real-time interaction and personalized content. Authors' engagement with audiences through these platforms influences their self-presentation and work. Similar to politicians and influencers, authors use social media to extend their brand and interact with audiences independently of traditional journalism. This immediate interaction fosters a dynamic and participatory public sphere.

Digital platforms are, however, not neutral; they shape and define the discourse through their algorithms and user interfaces. This is often referred to as "digital environmentality," which influences both writing and reading practices. Authors now navigate a complex landscape of interactions between authors, audiences, and the user interface of algorithmic digital platforms.<sup>46</sup> The "black box problem"<sup>47</sup> refers to algorithms operating as opaque systems that gather user data and affect content visibility and reception, ultimately shaping human behavior and perceptions. The algorithms and AI that organize digital environments thus shape the expression and perception of content, creating forms that blend the perspectives of authors, audiences, and the platform itself. This is crucial in understanding how digital environments shape narrative and digital capital, since this dynamic influences literary discussions and the presentation of authorship.

In the complex interaction between authors, audiences, and digital platforms, literary sensibility – its expression and perception – is also constantly reformatted. Specifically, the habitual practices through which users interact with cultural artefacts create tacit expectations for what successful literary expression should be like.<sup>48</sup> Since the platform poses as neutral, these expectations remain mostly implicit and their consequent values go unnoticed. Antoinette Rouvroy and Thomas Berns call the creation of tacitly normative practices in digital environments "algorithmic governmentality".<sup>49</sup> Governmentality, in Michel Foucault's sense, differs from control in that control

is explicit, government is implicit.<sup>50</sup> The interface does not explicitly tell the user what to do, but the user quickly learns what kinds of action and shared artefacts become visible and what kinds do not. In short, the platform rewards certain kinds of activity with visibility and punishes others with invisibility.<sup>51</sup> But because the guidance of the interface is not explicit, it is able to pose as neutral, and its norms appear to "arise as if from life itself".<sup>52</sup>

Authors can use social media to engage with audiences and extend their brand, which can also be linked to discussions regarding the commercialization of literary culture and the impact of the attention economy on authorship. The logic of the platform influences the presentation of authorship, blending personal and communal voices to create attention-grabbing content. The role of paratexts in shaping the narrative is crucial, since these paratexts contribute significantly to the overall meaning and reception of the content, influenced by the algorithms of the platform.<sup>53</sup> In terms of the different functions of paratexts outlined by Birke and Christ,<sup>54</sup> the author's social media presence, their digital capital, can recontextualize the audience's paratextual reactions from interpretive to commercial, and vice versa. This shift of functions reflects in part the flux of different values related to literature and its autonomy. The values that arise from the platform include quick recognizability and strong affect, since the attention of the user should be captured quickly and intensely. The publisher advertises Frid's novel with the phrase "Hur svartsjuk får man bli?", exemplifying these two qualities in one sentence.<sup>55</sup> As we saw above, well-crafted and easily graspable paratexts can influence reception considerably.

The affective responses or emotional reactions in digital environments are of key importance in the attention economy. These responses are amplified by algorithms, which prioritize content that generates strong emotional reactions. This resonates with earlier observations of how Jedvik reiterates the publisher's communication points, emphasizing the significance of Instagram and endometriosis as pivotal issues of our time, alongside the use of dark humor. This social significance, combined with the charged affect, such as jealousy and bodily pain, aligns well with algorithmic preferences that favor strong emotions and easily shareable content. On the other hand,

another layer of storytelling presents itself on Frid's social media accounts that come across as pronouncedly literary, fragmentary, and satirical, evading any exchange with followers. She was exceptionally active on Twitter/X until July 2023 ("obs ska aldrig twittra mer, stoppa inte pressarna"), and published an online poetry collection of her tweets titled *bloggen är död* in 2016 (published by Fame Factory). Her tweets stay obscure and literary up until 2023, with very few likes and almost no commentary by followers. The account is clearly a literary experiment that does not serve as a platform for public discussion, and as historical, searchable online evidence it reinforces Frid's positioning as a literary experimenter rather than a spokesperson for common issues.

Simultaneously, Frid gives her readers an almost too explicit story about the protagonist learning the rules of social media. Johanna writes a witty but hateful answer to Nora's mother's post on Facebook. When Nora's mother likes Johanna's post, she describes her exaggerated reactions in the following way: "Och så hände det. Jag hade väntat på att det skulle ske och nu - [...] Noras mamma hade sett mig. Hon erkände min existens. Hon godkände mig på det mest fundamentala, grundläggande sätt man kan uppmärksamma en annan människa på. Like."<sup>56</sup> Like a Bildungsroman in the age of social media, the novel demonstrates (ironically) how Johanna has finally become a Real Person. This exemplifies how the author can accumulate digital capital, even while being present yet uncommunicative on social media platforms, by translating the accumulated capital in terms of knowledge and ability into a literary narrative that emphasizes the importance and value of such communication in social relations. However, the parodic style of narration simultaneously marks this kind of behavior and thinking as utterly laughable, while also signaling critical distance to the kind of attention economy social media feeds into. The value of the "like" is thus recognized and withdrawn at the same time. This highlights the different strategies that authors can use to balance different capitals.

## The transmedial ethos and ethical positioning of authors

One of the most notable consequences of platform values affecting the literary sphere is the elevation of the public author as a securer of meanings and values. While Michel Foucault's (1969/1998) concept of the "author function" partly explains this role given to the author as a discursive and heuristic tool in controlling interpretations, new theoretical and analytical frameworks need to be evoked in order to grasp the increasing importance of authorial ethos as a source of narrative and digital capital in the twenty-first century.<sup>57</sup> This challenge relates to the larger question of how social media elevates stories of personal experience as exemplary through the emergent, normative activity of affective publics.<sup>58</sup> Frid's autofiction feeds on this logic, as her illness story and confessional rhetoric provide readers with an appropriate narrative onto which values such as authenticity, relatability, representativeness, experiential and embodied knowledge, progressivity, and topicality can be attached. The previously discussed platform values of quick recognizability and strong affect often push the author, her habitus<sup>59</sup>, ethos, and affective stance to the forefront in the public sphere. Clickbait headlines referring to Frid's *Nora* illustrate well the entanglement of experientiality, representativeness, and normativity<sup>60</sup> supported by social media affordances as they position Frid as a fresh, brave voice disrupting the status quo. Moreover, Frid's narrative voice, authority, and ethos are pronouncedly transmedial; for example, the rhetoric of her columns forms a continuation with the affective, narratorial voice in *Nora*: "De [the Danes] ger blanka fan i mitt och andra svenskers författarskap"; "Alla som går på skrivarskola har inte fått en bostadsrätt av mamma".<sup>61</sup>

Early social media scholars list searchability, persistence, shareability, replicability, and scalability as key affordances of social media.<sup>62</sup> Searchability and persistence – the fact that "the internet never forgets" – may encourage authors to maintain a coherent narrative ethos across storytelling platforms, or, in some cases, urge authors to experiment with incompatible personae to perplex followers who try to cross-search them. Shareability favors ethically unambiguous content and affective chain reactions, prompting users to pass on relatable experiences and clear-cut lessons learned from them – such

as suffering from endometriosis or jealousy and finally finding confirmation and expression for these ailments. Replicability can be understood as an escalation of shareability: an exemplary story of endometriosis may quickly open up the public sphere for similar stories echoing the rhetorical and ethical positioning of the original teller. Frid's rhetoric in interviews where she repeatedly connects her experiences and her novel with common health and mental health concerns reflects this logic and makes her interviews shareable and replicable: "Det handlar om en smärta som är förbjuden och svår att prata om. Den är stark och privat. Det är kvinnligt kodade smärtor och jag tror det bidrar till att de blir förbjudna och inte får ta plats."<sup>63</sup> Scalability, in turn, materializes in the above quoted words of the critic Anna Halberg, praising the embodiedness of Frid's prose as a method for accomplishing something deeply relatable instead of local and particular.

The gravitation toward the author's personal story and digitally trackable ethos in literary interpretation presents a challenge to literary scholarship that identifies literary value in features immanent to fiction. The rhetorical theory of narrative, originating in the 1960s and still arguably reflecting twentieth-century literary values, maintains that an ethical literary text is one that offers multiple viewpoints on difficult matters presented with a sophisticated technique.<sup>64</sup> Henrik Skov Nielsen, James Phelan, and Richard Walsh argue that "fictionality is, among other things, a vehicle for negotiating values, weighing options, and informing beliefs and opinions".<sup>65</sup> From this perspective, sophisticated literature can "teach" readers, yet if it does, it is accomplished through complexity, multiperspectivity, and indirectness inherent to literary fiction.

Frid's novel *Nora* is one demonstration among many of how didacticism is making a return as the boundaries between authority, authorship, and expertise by experience become indistinct. Ethos attributions in the reception of *Nora* are unequivocal: this lack of ambiguity is reflected in the repetitive nature of the commentary on the novel, and the author not only confirms but prompts these attributions. The novel itself creates a hermetic, self-reinforcing, and obsessive ethos, which then becomes shareable, replicable, and scalable within the public sphere.



## Conclusion

The twenty-first-century story economy, driven by digital platforms and social media, has significantly reshaped the landscape of literary valuation. The autonomy of the literary field, once characterized by its distinct criteria for artistic value, is increasingly influenced by the affordances of digital platforms such as shareability, replicability, and scalability. These platforms impose new values on literature, curating authorial storytelling across genres and platforms, and guiding authorial ethos attributions by audiences.

As a case study, Johanna Frid's novel *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn* illustrates how contemporary literary works are intertwined with the author's personal narrative and digital presence. For instance, Frid's interviews often emphasize her personal experiences, such as her struggle with jealousy and endometriosis, the central themes in her novel. Digital platforms favor quick recognizability, strong affect, and clear moral signaling, which in turn influence literary expression and reception. Frid's personal story and confessional rhetoric provide audiences with values such as authenticity and relatability, and the publisher advertises Frid's novel in a way that exemplifies these qualities. At the same time, the author uses various different strategies to navigate between and transform different capitals, highlighting different ways in which it is possible for a writer to benefit from the platformized cultural environment.

On digital cultural interfaces, the default mode of attending is hyper attention<sup>66</sup> and the interfaces tend to favor quick recognition, discrete affective stance, and high compression – the "message" has to become clear immediately. In its most radical form, quick recognizability as a value implies that there is no time for complexity nor for interpretability in the classic modernist and postmodernist sense of there being multiple possible meanings, ultimately decided by the reader. Misunderstanding can lead to social controversy and shame, or simply downgrade the visibility of the cultural artefact. Quick recognizability as a value and shareability as an affordance impose an expectation on authors and their work to be morally supportable, although this means mostly that a clear affective stance should be communicated. The platforms and their surrounding cultures thus

tacitly promote clear signaling. The integration of narrative and digital capital is essential for contemporary authors. The personal story of the author, combined with their digital presence, significantly influences the reception and interpretation of their works.

Understanding the twenty-first-century digitalization and the story economy as megatrends intersecting the current literary field requires closer collaboration between sociologists of literature and narrative theorists. This interdisciplinary perspective is essential to fully understand the complex dynamics of the digital literary field and the evolving role of authorship in the public sphere. By examining the intersections of social, artistic, and digital forms, we can better appreciate the ongoing transformation and platformization of literature and the new opportunities and challenges it presents.

## Notes

- 1 See, e.g., Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing and Selling Books in the Internet Era* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018); Ann Steiner, "The global book: Micropublishing, conglomerate production, and the digital market structures", *Pub Res Q* (2018: 34), 118–132, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-017-9558-8>; John B. Thompson, *Book Wars: The Digital Revolution in Publishing* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2021).
- 2 See R. Lyle Skains, *Digital Authorship: Publishing in the Attention Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 13–14. See also Maria Mäkelä; Samuli Björninen; Laura Karttunen; Matias Nurminen; Juha Raipola & Tytti Rantanen, "Dangers of Narrative: A Critical Approach to Narratives of Personal Experience in Contemporary Story Economy", *Narrative* vol. 28 (2021:2), 139–159. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2021.0009>
- 3 Klarissa Lueg, "Storytelling and Narrative Capital in Organizations: Bringing Boje and Bourdieu into Conversation", in *The Routledge Companion to Narrative Theory*, Paul Dawson & Maria Mäkelä eds., 448–462. (London: Routledge, 2022), here 457. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003100157-42>.
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- 6 This article is written within the research project "Authors of the Story Economy: Narrative and Digital Capital in the 21st-Century Literary Field" (PIs Maria Mäkelä, Markku Lehtimäki & Kristina Malmio, the Research Council of Finland 2024–2028, decision 360931). In this project we study a pool of European authors, treated as test cases for developing theory and methods. Sweden is one of

our target countries.

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- 8 Genette, *Paratexts*, 5–6, 34.
- 9 Virginia Pignagnoli, *Post-Postmodernist Fiction and the Rise of Digital Epitexts* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2023).
- 10 Pignagnoli, *Post-Postmodernist Fiction and the Rise of Digital Epitexts*, 1, 18–21.
- 11 Dorothee Birke & Birte Christ, "Paratext and Digitized Narrative: Mapping the Field", *Narrative* 21 (2013:1), 65–87, here 67–68. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2013.0003>
- 12 Mathieu Hilgers & Eric Mangez, "Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields", in *Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields. Concepts and Applications*, Mathieu Hilgers & Eric Mangez eds. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 8.
- 13 Hilgers & Mangez, "Introduction", 6–11.
- 14 Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Éditions du Seuil, 1992).
- 15 Hilgers & Mangez, "Introduction", 10.
- 16 Pierre Bourdieu, "A Conservative Revolution in Publishing", *Translation Studies* vol. 1(2008: 1), 123–153, here 138.
- 17 Bourdieu, "A Conservative", here 145.
- 18 See danah boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications", in *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, Zizi Papacharissi ed., 39–58. (New York: Routledge, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203876527-8>  
See also Zizi Papacharissi & Paige L. Gibson, "Fifteen Minutes of Privacy: Privacy, Sociality, and Publicity on Social Network Sites", in *Privacy On-line: Perspectives on Privacy and Self-Disclosure in the Social Web*, Sabine Trepte & Leonard Reinecke eds., 75–89. (Berlin: Springer, 2011). [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-21521-6\\_7](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-21521-6_7).
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- 20 See Markku Lehtimäki, *Nature and Narrative: Rhetoric and Design in Contemporary Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2025), 198–201.
- 21 See Torbjörn Forslid, Jon Helgason, Christian Lenemark, Anders Ohlsson & Ann Steiner, *Litterära värdepraktiker: Aktörer, rum, platser* (Göteborg: Makadam, 2017), 19–22.
- 22 Besides the values presented by Forslid et al., there are many examples of slightly other kinds of categories. See for example Luc Boltanski & Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Catherine Porter trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), who write about artistic value, and split it into aesthetic, intellectual, social, historical, symbolic, and authenticity values.
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- 24 Frid, *Nora*, 7.
- 25 Frid, *Nora*, 30.
- 26 See James Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhe-*

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  - 29 See Ellerströms, *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn*. See also Dix, "Autofiction" in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (2022). <https://doi-org.libproxy.tuni.fi/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.1339>
  - 30 Mohamed Yussuf, "Johanna Frid: De ger blanka fan i mitt och andra svenskers författarskap", *Dagens Nyheter*, 2018-11-23.
  - 31 Johanna Frid, "Alla som går på skrivarskola har inte fått en bostadsrätt av mamma", *Dagens Nyheter*, 2020-2-4.
  - 32 See Mäkelä & Björninen "My Story, Your Narrative. Scholarly Terms and Popular Usage", in *The Routledge Companion to Narrative Theory* (Routledge 2023), 20–21.
  - 33 Ingall Mosander, "En svärmor är som en önskad extramamma." *Aftonbladet*, 2023-5-20.
  - 34 Mosander, "En svärmor".
  - 35 Jenna Emtö, "Svenska författare Johanna Frid skriver om brännande svartsjuka och svår smärta." Svenska Yle, 2019-9-23. Hämtad 2025-1-22.
  - 36 E.g., Hanna Jedvik, "Johanna Frid skriver träffsäkert om smärta och svartsjuka", Sveriges Radio, 2018-10-29; Victor Malm, "Johanna Frid skriver som August Strindberg", *Expressen*, 2018-10-31. <https://www.expressen.se/kultur/johanna-frid-skriver-som-august-strindberg/>
- On allusions to Nora in Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem*, see Tidigs 2024.
- 37 Anna Hallberg, "Bokrecension: Rasande, skarpt och roligt om ung ångest", *Dagens Nyheter*, 2018-11-16.
  - 38 See Odile Heynders, *Writers as Public Intellectuals: Literature, Celebrity, Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137467645>; see also Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008).
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  - 40 Jedvik, "Johanna Frid".
  - 41 Jonna Sima, "Krävs en roman för att lära sig kvinnokroppen. En av tio drabbas av den obotliga sjukdomen." *Aftonbladet*, 2019-3-31. <https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/K337Ay/kravs-en-roman-for-att-lara-sig-kvinnokroppen>
  - 42 See e.g., Christian Lenemark, *Sanna lögner: Carina Rydberg, Stig Larsson och författarens medialisering* (Hedemora, Möklinta: Gidlund, 2009); Cristine Sarri-mo, *Jagets scen. Själuframställning i olika medier* (Göteborg: Makadam, 2012).
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  - 48 See Matti Kangaskoski, "Digitaalisten kulttuurikäyttöliittymien piilevä normatiivisuus — Kirjallisuuden muuttuva poetiikka", *Kirjallisuudentutkimuksen aikakauslehti AVAIN* vol. 18 (2021: 2), 28–49. <https://doi.org/10.30665/av.107876>
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  - 54 Dorothee Birke & Birte Christ, "Paratext and Digitized Narrative: Mapping the Field", *Narrative* vol. 21 (2013:1), 65–87, here 67–68. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2013.0003>
  - 55 Ellerströms, *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn*.
  - 56 Frid, *Nora*, 180.
  - 57 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author", in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, James D. Faubion ed., Robert Hurley et al transl. Essential Works of Foucault, volume 2 1954–1984. (New York: The New Press, 1969/1998), 205–222.
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  - 60 Cf. Mäkelä et al, "Dangers of narrative".
  - 61 Yussuf, "De ger blanka fan"; Frid, "Alla som går på skrivarskola".
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