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Normal Cars and Queer Driving: Or, Why Charlie Loved to Speed

Today's private automobiles are, in a manner of speaking, moving miniature parlors, equipped with almost every modern convenience. Volvo has now turned the miniature parlor into a "convertible" bedchamber. ("Volvo och camping" 1930, 8)¹

She increased her speed once, and then once again, bending with taut muscles over the wheel. The gravel spattered in all directions under the wheels; on a curve, the back wheels skidded, but righted themselves in the middle of the road – the car lay like a red streak along the road. (Suber 1934, 47)²

A CAR CAN be seen as both safe and dangerous, a sheltered room on wheels and a speed machine at the same time, enabling performative acts of the most private and public nature. In 1932 Volvo chose to celebrate, above all, the virtues of safety and comfort, describing their latest dark blue station wagon as a “convertible’ bed-chamber,” perfect for the modern camper. In the same year, novelist Margareta Suber explored the thrill of accelerated motion in her novel *Charlie*, featuring a young female protagonist and her beloved sports car, a red “little Midget,” used not for camping, but for competing. As Charlie enters a women’s car race, she sets out to win not only the race but also the heart of someone special – beautiful Sara. In short, automobility has always been a matter

of more than transportation. As Mimi Sheller (2004, 221) writes, “cars are above all machines that move people, but they do so in many senses of the word.”³ This article will explore the meaning of a *queer* automobility, where the car operates not only as an *object* of desire, but as a *site* of desire – disturbingly charged with the promise/threat of losing control.⁴ By focusing on queer narratives in this context, I will argue that the cultural history of automobility is more diverse and complex than the mold of heterosexual masculinity perhaps has allowed us to see. By exploring literature rather than film, and female drivers rather than male, I will present examples that are rarely discussed in automobile contexts, examples that fit uneasily within the analytical binary of masculinity and femininity, speaking instead, as I will argue, to a spectrum of normality and queerness – from Volvo to Charlie and back.

Choosing the interwar novel *Charlie* and Volvo’s early marketing campaigns as the dual focus of this investigation is motivated by several factors. First, *Charlie* is considered the first Swedish novel with a lesbian protagonist,⁵ and her passion for driving has been noted but not further analyzed. Second, in Sweden a domestic auto industry with its own driving visions emerged contemporaneously, which in this article will be described in terms of an increasing automotive hetero-normalization. Published at a time when Volvo set out to construct a Swedish *normalvagn*, an ideal car for “everyone,” *Charlie* presents, more specifically, an opportunity to investigate what happens when an ideal becomes connected with the concept of “normal.”

In this context, it is important to remember that the history of “the norm of ‘normal’” is both more complex and shorter than is often assumed. As Laura Doan (2013, 168–73) has pointed out with regard to British and American public discourse, it was only in the late 1920s and early 1930s that the category of “normal” started to “gather momentum” and began to be known and used not only as a statistical “average,” but also as a reference to all things “healthy” and “good.” In the Swedish source materials that I have studied from the same time, “normal” is used as both a reference to an average, a common practice, an ideal or a standard, but also in relation to moral and medical value

statements, oftentimes with a large degree of conceptual overlap. For instance, the Swedish review of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), published in the feminist periodical *Tidevarvet* in 1932, noted that "homosexual development," as opposed to "normal development," could be understood simply in terms of statistical variations, but since the same review suggested that a sexually "normal development" was preferable from an individual as well as societal point of view, the notion of "normal" was inevitably associated with *good* and *healthy* (Nilsson 1932). Studying in some detail how the norm of "normality" at this time became superimposed on different regulatory systems, whether ethical, statistical or prescriptive, will illuminate, I believe, what is at stake when "normal" become equivalent not only to *hetero-normal* but also to "good," "healthy," and the "ideal."⁶

While Volvo's *normalvagn* referred initially to a technical solution described as affordable and reliable, Volvo's ideas about who would drive this car (and how) suggested, as I will argue, the beginnings of a wider automotive "normal," shaping not only technological but also cultural ideals. Focused on fun and the/her- self, rather than Volvo's emerging visions of functionality and family, the character Charlie was in this context bucking the trend. To some extent, Suber's depiction of Charlie as a dashing, sports-loving young woman carries an echo of the 1920s discourse of the "modern" or "new" woman, enjoying her cars as well as cigarettes (Sølund 2000; Fjelkestam 2002; Tinkler and Warsh 2008). Yet, as revealed by the tomboyishness of the character Charlie – and her lesbian desires – the audacious female driver was already during the early 1930s on her way to being configured as queer more than modern. An analysis of *Charlie* in this culturally complex context thus requires a consideration of several historical as well as theoretical frameworks: a feminist perspective on interwar gender negotiations, a queer theoretical eye on the sexualization of driving and desire, and, finally, a critical engagement with recent cultural theory and speed theory dealing not only with cars and driving but with narratives and fantasies of cars and driving. In the following section, I will briefly outline how these frameworks intersect with each other and how they contribute to the analysis.

Critical Frameworks

In examining the “normal” cars of Volvo’s rhetoric and the “queer” driving of Charlie as well as the wider meaning of “queer automobility,” this article will bring together several critical frameworks. Historically, I will argue (in the case of Sweden) that the cultural suppression of female automobile agency and the related disregard of female driving-related narratives can be traced to the interwar years when the number of cars as well as female drivers increased rapidly.⁷ As discussed by Julie Wosk (2001, 128), and others in a wider European and American context, the opposition to female drivers was relatively mild as long as few women were driving, but as women behind the wheel became a more common sight – thus disproving stereotypical ideas that women were unfit to drive – campaigns of ridicule and scorn also gained in strength. Following the steady spread of not only motor vehicles but of driving schools and new drivers in Sweden during the 1920s and 1930s, the practice of driving became, as I will argue in this article, increasingly (hetero)-normalized. Certain drivers and driving practices, such as the once-celebrated adventurous and independent female sports or race car driver, began to be questioned and were eventually, with a few exceptions, left out of the annals of automobile history (Wisaeus et al. 2000). Female narrations of driving in fiction have likewise received relatively little attention, causing doubts whether speed-loving women in literature exist at all and even whether women have the same capability as men to enjoy speed (Tengström 2009, 43, 122–3). However, feminist cultural historians have convincingly shown not only that numerous female authors have addressed themes of speed and driving (Inness 1996; Clarke 2007), but also that the expectation that men and women enjoy cars differently has its roots in a culturally constructed gender binary, designed to preserve an order of masculine agency and feminine domesticity, even in a brave new world of motorized mobility (Scharff 1992; Wosk 2001).⁸

From a queer theoretical perspective, I will explore the car as a complex emotive arena, from which queer desires have always “leaked” (Rosenberg 2002), whether in narratives of escape, intimacy, excitement,

independence, adventure, death or desire (Clarke 2007; Berglind 2009). However, when cultural theorists have turned their attention to driving as an emotional experience, they have, as Doan (2006, 29) points out, rarely discussed issues of gender or sexual difference. Yet, it can be argued that queer and speed theory address similar issues – human experience beyond the imposed, familiar or expected. When, for instance, speed theorist Paul Virilio (1991, 112) describes movement as a series of “traumatizations” and “slow caresses,” he discerns in the end a potential for “*a different mode of being*” (emphasis in the original). This different mode of being may arise from speed itself, as vehicular speed “allows us to think of nothing, to feel nothing, to attain indifference” (Virilio 1991, 111), or it can be related to the car, as driver and machine rush forth as one, seemingly merging in a curious “meta(l)morphoses” (Braidotti 2002, 215).

Regardless of speed the secluded space of a car cabin can induce “different” modes of being too, transcending modernity’s heteronormative car cultures. In Jane Rule’s lesbian novel *Desert of the Heart*, published in 1964, featuring two women’s long desert drives outside Reno, Nevada, queer car intimacies in fact need no speed at all:

She took me for a moonlight ride, parked, and then sat, waiting. I was terribly embarrassed. [...] Then finally I thought, “Oh, what the hell” and kissed her. It shocks you, too, doesn’t it? (Rule 2005, 66)

Whether speed-induced or space-induced, these kinds of queer car intimacies have received relatively little scholarly attention, especially with regard to representations of women’s automobile experiences and desires.⁹

In the context of interwar automobility, the novel *Charlie* presents an especially multilayered exploration of queer driving, played out in an emotional landscape filled with “queer feelings” as well as Charlie’s own experiences of “feeling queer.” The difference is more than semantic. As suggested by Sara Ahmed (2014, 146, 154), “feeling queer” presumes, albeit in complex ways, the (identity) category of queer, whereas “queer

feelings” do not necessarily hinge on identity but may arise more vaguely in a context of failing to “fit” into heteronormative society, causing discomfort and anxiety but, potentially, also opening for new possibilities. As an enabler of mobility and escape, the car has often functioned as an arena for such queer feelings in modern culture, causing anxiety – and opening up possibilities – on many levels.¹⁰

Cars also have the potential to induce “queer feelings” more concretely in the form of bodily sensations, strange, bewildering, exhilarating or intoxicating, stimulated by speed or spatial confinement.¹¹ In the case of Charlie, such feelings become entangled with an ongoing personal struggle to come to terms with her own sexuality – feeling queer. I use the phrase “feeling queer” here not as a straightforward exchange for a lesbian identity but as a reference to what happens beyond Charlie’s “discomfort” with norms (Ahmed 2014, 146). On the one hand, Suber’s novel explores Charlie’s desires as complex and different, leaving them unnamed and undefined, but on the other hand, Charlie also acknowledges and even fights for her feelings (for Sara). As Kristina Fjelkestam (2002, 112) points out, there is, in the end, a significant difference between Charlie and Radclyffe Hall’s protagonist Stephen: While Stephen *asks* for her right to exist, Charlie in the end *takes* it.

In examining the meaning of “queer automobility,” I will first consider how the growing use of cars in interwar Sweden both disturbed and reaffirmed gendered norms. I will then consider in some detail the specific driving scenes of *Charlie* from a queer theoretical perspective. Last, I will discuss what “normal” driving might have entailed in an interwar context, looking at the ideals and images of Volvo’s blue *normalvagn* as well as Charlie’s red roadster.

Charlie in Context: Chauffeuses, Motormen and Female Race Car Drivers

The first generations of female motorists in Sweden have received little scholarly attention, even though mobility has been recognized as an important feminist tool for increased independence and equality (Scharff 1992).¹² By overlooking this part of our history, we neglect not only an

aspect of early Swedish emancipation efforts but also a cultural history, where women's *enjoyment* of cars continues to be ignored. In my own readings of Swedish interwar motorsports magazines (a decisively male arena) I have come across the voices of many female drivers eager to express their love of driving.¹³ These women narrated a range of driving experiences, from the harmony of cruising on winding countryside roads in the summer breeze to the fun and excitement of pushing their car to high speeds. Others emphasized how driving worked as meditation, relaxing stressed nerves, while still others expressed a fondness for tinkering with the oily mechanics of the engine. Swedish print media also reported on automobile races with daring female participants, noting in particular the inception of an all-women's race, *Dambiltävlingen*, in 1926 (Ströman 1994).

When Margareta Suber in her 1932 novel allows her protagonist to enjoy fast driving, tuning up her car and finally entering a women's automobile race, she thus presents a character that was not entirely unfamiliar to the Swedish public. However, fast driving was not only tomboys' turf; the 1920s saw a number of fashionable upper-class women participating in motor races, a circumstance related to the fact that automobiles were still quite expensive. One of the emblems of this independent "modern woman" was her car, which she was expected to drive confidently and with style (Tinkler and Warsh 2008). As prices went down and sales increased in the Swedish market, Volvo, founded in 1927, saw an opportunity to make an affordable and yet dependable high-quality car, a Swedish *normalvagn* ("Kritisera Volvo" 1932, 3). Envisioning an automobilized Sweden, Volvo's marketing section worked in confluence at this time with a number of future-orientated observers, who recognized automobiles as a sign not only of progress and modernity but also of a new, more democratic era. As remarked by one reporter in 1928, Stockholm's many driving schools could take no heed of their students' background, class or gender, since men and women, young and old, rich and poor, all arrived "equally stupid and inexperienced" ("Hur det går till att få körkort" 1928).¹⁴

Despite such speculations about a new kind of automobile equality,

expectations and norms were already developing very differently with regard to male and female drivers. Whereas men were generally *expected* to embrace a range of technical as well as emotional aspects of auto-mobility, women tended to be met with surprise or suspicion when doing so, even in the heyday of female motoring in the 1920s. Following the lead of their American, British, and French peers, Swedish auto as well as fashion experts relied on traditional stereotypes of female vanity and technical incompetence when emphasizing women's special needs for beauty and cars that were easy to drive, while ascribing technical know-how and the appreciation of power and speed as masculine.¹⁵ Suber's choice to depict Charlie as a tomboy thus corresponded not only with associations at that time of female masculinity with homosexuality but also with a solidifying connection between masculinity and motor-sports.¹⁶

While Suber's empathic depiction of Charlie's sexuality appeared at a time when public awareness of matters of "sexual deviance" was slowly increasing (Lennerhed 2002), this was also a time when the visual culture of print media and advertising, particularly motor-related ads, was refining its heteronormative imagery (Scharff 1992; Behling 1997). When, for instance, the department store NK in Stockholm featured a camping equipment ad in 1928, the camping woman was characteristically depicted on her knees, cooking for her adventurous (but idle) motorman ("Motormän!" 1928, 794). Volvo's company vision of a practical and affordable car was in this context connected to a Swedish romanticism of nature as well as emerging ideals of how a modern, healthy family should spend their holidays (Hagman 1999). As explained by the company magazine in May of 1930, a spacious Volvo car with an attachable tent would enable the whole family to enjoy motorized camping, far away from cities and stony streets ("Volvo och camping" 1930, 8–9). Adjustable seats and removable cushions were the secrets to Volvo's "'convertible' bed-chamber," and for the comfort and privacy of sleeping campers, Volvo had even equipped all rear windows with curtains. However, the amount of work needed to care for family members in the great outdoors, in terms of planning, cooking, washing and other daily

tasks was rarely mentioned by male camping enthusiasts, as this was not part of their responsibility (Scharff 1992, 137–8).¹⁷

What we have here, in other words, is a solidifying hetero- and “auto-normative” gender system that essentially configured female automobility as domesticized while mobile, centered on service and the home more than independence and liberation – a discourse that many female novelists since then have pushed back against (Clarke 2007, 79).¹⁸

The vacationers of *Charlie*, dwelling at a seaside resort located at the peninsula of Hangö, once a cosmopolitan “Nordic Saint Tropez,” as one recent reviewer of the book aptly describes it (Born 2005), had very little in common with these contemporaneous visions of heteronormative camping bliss. As noted by previous scholarship, the novel does not, in fact, show one single happy heterosexual relationship (Lindeqvist 2006, 19). The novel was published by Bonnier with minimum advertising and promotion on account not so much of Charlie’s love of cars, but her love of women (Suber 2005, vi). The topic was sensitive: four years earlier the British novel *The Well of Loneliness*, telling the story of the sexually deviant Stephen Gordon, had resulted in scandal and was banned from distribution by a court ruling (Doan 2001, 1–30). As noted by Swedish scholars, *Charlie* can in many ways be read as a response to *The Well of Loneliness* (Björklund 2014, 50–2).¹⁹ Unlike Radclyffe Hall’s protagonist Stephen, portrayed as a soul in distress, Charlie’s desires are explored less as a tragic abnormality and more as an uncharted – but also terrifying – territory.

The Transactions of *Charlie*

The novel *Charlie* is set in a seemingly classic *fin de siècle* milieu, characterized by stillness and slow routines more than anything else: a seaside resort, frequented by well-to-do European crowds, spending their summer on the beach, dining, socializing and relaxing whilst still observing the rules of high society. However, sporty automobiles appear as reminders that the setting is not, in fact, turn of the century but, rather, post-First World War. Shooting through the sleepy scenery of the resort, open-top cars operate as fast-moving stages, creating a narrative dynamic with regard to the main characters. As events unfold, motion becomes

increasingly intertwined with emotion, induced not only by speed but also by changing constellations of passengers, as people are split up or brought together, get picked up or are left behind. The narrative thus combines the tranquility and languor of the seaside resort with the excitement, restlessness and dangers of modernity. Within this conflicted interwar setting, the author sets out to explore the emotional landscape of Charlie, a young and tomboyish modern woman driving a red sports car, a “little Midget” (74), which she enjoys pushing to high speeds.²⁰

Several key scenes in *Charlie* involve, more specifically, a linking of driving with desire and/or anxiety: Charlie gives a distressed female friend a lift – a ride her friend will not forget; Charlie enters a ladies’ automobile race to win the heart of Sara, a young widow at the resort; and a jealous Charlie later drives off with Sara, leaving a male competitor behind (Charlie’s own brother). As the narrative progresses, anxiety levels are both raised and lowered by motorized speed. Taking a queer theoretical approach to the driving episodes of *Charlie*, the following tripartite analysis will explore different car-enabled modes of being, focusing in turn on unexpected transmissions, divine transfigurations, and strange transcendences. These themes should not be seen as strictly compartmentalized from each other, as they indeed overlap in many ways. Rather, they represent different perspectives on what queer auto-mobility might entail. The first theme, *transmissions*, focuses on queer relations and desires played out in the space of a car; the second theme, *transfigurations*, focuses on the perspective of the driver and her or his sense of empowerment behind the wheel; the third theme, *transcendences* explores speed and car travelling as a means for momentary escapes from reality’s “normal” dimensions.

transmissions (I)

transmission: The action of transmitting or fact of being transmitted; conveyance from one person or place to another. (Oxford English Dictionary)²¹

Every car is a vehicle of and for desire. (Schnapp 1999, 5)

A car is essentially a small room with two chairs in the front, both facing forward, enabling conversation without eye contact, and, possibly, a sense of intimacy. When Charlie discovers her friend Elisaweta standing alone by the road one day, tired from walking, she jams on her brakes and offers Elisaweta a lift: “Lovely lady, here comes your knight to loose your chains with a stroke of his sword – jump in!” (46) Charlie is in a splendid mood, “clad in a leather jacket of sealing-wax red, an unlighted cigarette between her lips.” Elisaweta, on the other hand, is subdued with thoughts of life’s disappointments. When noticing Elisaweta’s state of mind, Charlie lays off her mischievous style and throws an arm about her friend. Resting her head on Charlie’s shoulder, Elisaweta gives her friend “a light kiss” on the cheek but then begins to weep despairingly. In response to this unexpected development, Charlie begins to increase her speed, “once, and then once again.” Finding the frenzied speed “wonderfully soothing,” Elisaweta ceases sobbing and turns all of her attention to the road. Charlie, too, becomes immersed in the present: “You must admit it takes the curves beautifully, said Charlie, who was now thinking only on her driving.” (47)

Speed thus defuses the previous emotional tension, which Charlie is unable or unwilling to resolve in any other way. However, the experience of the car ride leaves Elisaweta in a thoughtful mood. When on the beach later, she eagerly watches for Charlie, and when she finally appears, Elisaweta waves her hand eagerly, which causes Frank, her lover and a self-proclaimed expert of matters relating to “human nature,” to scorn Elisaweta for encouraging “that little...” (64).

Ranging from tender intimacy to speed-induced exhilaration, Elisaweta’s queer car feelings are in the end both reinforced and distracted by Charlie’s acceleration. However, speed is not the only source of queer transmissive effects in literature. Cars move at very different speeds in *Charlie* while always offering the same intimate *space* for their drivers and passenger(s). A brief diversion to another literary example, contemporaneous with *Charlie*, brings light to this spatial dimension of queer car feelings. In one of her rare automobile scenes, Agnes von Krusenstjerna, author of the novel *Kvinnogatan* (part two of the *Fröknarna von*

Pablen-series, first published 1930), placed two young women, Angela and Stanny, in an abandoned – and completely immobile – car (Krusenstjerna 1944–1946, Part II, 110). As Krusenstjerna was reluctant to include motorcars in her world of country estates and pastoral sceneries in the Swedish countryside, she introduced this particular automobile as a wreck gracefully embedded in nature, in a birch woods by a lake. Nature has begun to overtake the car, “moss, flower and grass reaching up through its footsteps,” and the dying Oldsmobile becomes a place to dream and exchange secrets.

They sat in silence. They felt suddenly each other’s presence as safety, as limitless happiness. They were alone in the car, and they felt as though it moved, putting mile after mile behind them, until they took off into a blue space that echoed of their whispers and confidences.²² (Krusenstjerna 1944–1946, Part II, 110)

Stanny “drives” in this scene and gallantly offers Angela her hand when they have to exit the car. Later, back at the school, a kiss adds a physical dimension to the secret “blue space” of their relationship. Cars, in other words, need not be mobile at all to provide a (queer) space for human bonding.²³

In *Charlie*, queer car feelings first arise at the comfortable “rate of 50 miles an hour,” as Charlie, Sara, Elisaweta and her husband Fred, who drives, one day set out for a luncheon together (19). During the car ride, Sara realizes how much she dislikes Fred. The thought of his harshness and insensitivity toward his wife saddens her. In contrast, Charlie is in a splendid mood, teeming with youth, audacity, and anticipation. When the group arrives at the seaside restaurant and is seated at the best table, Sara is struck by a “feeling of discomfort” and suddenly wishes she had not come (22). Drawing on Ahmed’s (2014) discussion of queer feelings, Sara’s “discomfort” can be read as a response to the impossible alternatives she is exposed to in the car: a loveless heterosexual relationship, on the one hand, and Charlie – a queer impossibility, on the other. On their way back, Charlie takes the seat by Sara, and the two also leave the car

together. As Charlie's courtship of Sara is thus set in motion, a landscape of escalating queer feelings is entered without any clear arrival point in sight. This was a road both uncharted and unnamed.

transfigurations (II)

transfiguration: The action of transfiguring or state of being transfigured; metamorphosis. (Oxford English Dictionary)²⁴

The car was pumping something into her veins, something of pride, of arrogance, of re-gained self-respect, that no talk, no liquor, no love, could possibly give. (Cain 2008, 67)

If the emotive "transmissions" outlined above were initiated by certain car-enabled intimacies, the "transfigurations," to be discussed here, have more to do with the driver's ego and ambitions. As a way of making an impression on Sara, Charlie decides not only that she would enter the upcoming ladies' automobile race but that she would win it. She personally sees to the tuning of her car:

Charlie had registered her little Midget for the ladies' race. She saw personally to the trimming of her car, clad in oily brown overalls, and for several days was more or less submerged in the messy interior of a motor workshop. (74)²⁵

When the day of the race finally arrives she is ready – and wins:

She had started a wild chase on the cars flying ahead of her, and in spite of her perilous speed she had taken the curves safely and come in a faultless number one. (75)

Having thus won the race, Charlie looks for Sara in the evening at the celebratory ball, thinking: "If Sara had been pleased with her taking first prize, there had been some meaning in it all..." (76) When she finally sees Sara, she is already at the table reserved for the whole party,

which now also includes Charlie's brother, Bruno. Charlie's effort to transfigure herself into a worthy suitor in Sara's eyes quickly is thwarted by Bruno's presence.

The action of transfiguring or state of being transfigured involves, as the OED states, a metamorphosis of some kind; the primary example being "the change in the appearance of Jesus Christ on the mountain." Cultural studies of speed indicate that cars too – not entirely unlike mountains – constitute sites of transfiguration, enabling "individuation and conquest" (Schnapp 1999, 9). Noting how the driver was always "a potential god in ancient times," Jeffrey T. Schnapp (1999, 8–9) traces a history of speed lined with mythological sons of gods crashing and burning in the sky, brave charioteers and, later, reckless coachmen and speeding car owners. Even when speed was "secularized" and harnessed by an everyday-life world of traffic and commuting, driving did not cease its promise of divine powers. As Mimi Sheller (2004, 225) concludes "Whether phallic or feminized, the car materializes personality and takes part in the ego-formation of the owner or driver as competent, powerful, able and sexually desirable." Authors and filmmakers, sensitive to the "aesthetics of the windshield" (Danis 2001), consequently, from the earliest days of automobility, have associated high speed with the brave, the rich, the young, and the mad. In 1912, Finnish author Runar Schildt let a partying young crowd be carried away by a speeding automobile rushing through the dark city night in his short story *The Victorious Eros* (1912, 186), while a car crash takes narrative center stage in *The Great Gatsby*, and more recently, the blockbuster film series *The Fast and the Furious* continues the tale of (deadly) divinity behind the wheel in a surreal mix of fiction and reality.²⁶ What happens then in the modern imaginary when women take the wheel? Can women too be transfigured into the divine by the power of speed?²⁷

Transfigurations from a point of subordination – a point that women have historically inhabited – have often played out differently than expected. Charlie displays an immense confidence whenever she drives in Suber's novel, but as she wins the big prize, she also has to pay one. Sensing that she is moving, in Judith Butler's (2000, 81) words, into "the

far side of being,” when racing to win Sara, she has to mentally brace herself when decelerating, as she again comes into view of not only Sara, but of everyone else.

As long as she was at the wheel and had to keep up her speed and drive along the right roads, she was one with her engine, and existed only in relation to it. But when she could no longer identify with it, but had to exist as Charlie, she became anxious and almost hostile. (76)²⁸

Transfigurations of women mastering automobiles have always had the potential to be complicated – and threatening. Writing on female visibility in Swedish 1950s car cultures, Tom O’Dell (2001, 118) points out, quoting Janet Wolff, that there is an ideology of place at work here, specifically “woman’s place,” that has always rendered women perceived as “out of place” as “invisible, problematic, and in some cases impossible.” Women moving “out of place” may, of course, simply be read as masculine. However, because of the association of masculinity with sexual agency, such a reading does not solve the “threat” of sexual transgression, and as Judith Halberstam (1998, 28) has pointed out, “female masculinity seems to be at its most threatening when coupled with lesbian desire.” In this context, the vehicle does not even need to be motorized; expressions of sexual agency when operating a horse sledge were described by Agnes von Krusenstjerna (1944–1946, Part VII, 264) in her 1935 novel *Av samma blod* (where the cross-dressed character Agda “drives” her beloved Angela. Margareta Suber’s depiction of lesbian desire on the racetrack was a similarly bold move, and for such a novel to be published, at the time, the protagonist could win the race but not the woman.²⁹

Despite these threatening lesbian aspects of speed-induced transfigurations, narratives of female drivers have returned repeatedly to the theme of empowerment. Divorcee Evelyn Hall in Jane Rule’s *Desert of the Heart* from 1964, senses “a simple feeling of authority and independence” (2005, 110) as she takes the wheel, while Mildred Pierce, in James M. Cain’s classic novel by the same name from 1941, feels in-

toxicated by power as she steals her car back from her ex-husband (Cain quoted in Tengström 2009, 43). From a feminist perspective, driving was early on recognized as a path toward increased self-confidence as well as adventure, themes that remain topics of literary exploration.³⁰ In Suber's 1932 novel, Charlie is invincible on the road, but Sara is still not able to understand or receive her love. The novel nevertheless concludes on a potentially encouraging note, suggesting that Charlie's desires were all part of God's plan (Fjelkestam 2002, 130; Björklund 2014, 50). In the end, Charlie's transfiguration thus leads not to a successful romantic conquest but to a conquest of her own identity and self.

transcendences (III)

transcendence: The action or fact of transcending, surmounting, or rising above. (Oxford English Dictionary)³¹

her speed left even the winds behind;
[...] she wet not in the wave her flying feet. (Virgil 1910, 7.803)

When Charlie's friend Elisaweta longs for ways to transcendence "the muddy greyness of reality" (45) she first thinks of painting and dancing. However, it is Charlie's fast driving that actually causes her to momentarily forget her sadness: "With her mouth half-open, she bent forward and watched with suspense each fresh bend in the road, and the way the car took each curve." (47) Speed enables in this case a pause from unhappiness, and, from Charlie's perspective, a temporary break from further emotional interaction.

The option to use speed as a means to escape or transcend reality occurs again in *Charlie* in relation to a key scene in the narrative. One day Charlie discovers that someone has left a book on her beach chair, a German book written by Weininger, an author unknown to her. This was Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter* from 1903, a well-known book in Europe at the time, which claimed women's intellectual and moral inferiority to men and also approached the topic of homosexuality (Fjelkestam 2002, 121–2; Sutton 2011, 18). As Charlie starts to read

she is confused and soon horrified, as she begins to feel that the book “in some terrible, inexorable way, referred to her” (68). At this point, the theme of Suber’s novel – “the riddle of homosexuality” – is close to being revealed (Fjelkestam 2002, 121–4). As the implications of the German book on her life dawn on her, Charlie gets in her car:

At last she hurled herself into her car and drove, drove on blindly, but the little red roadster had not the power to detach her and her destiny from the hateful social structure in which, nevertheless, she had no place. (68–9)³²

As Charlie is forced to realize, there is, in the end, a limit even to speed’s transcending powers. Yet, her new “terrible” insights also move her to confess to Sara: “Then I know one thing now, at any rate, and that is that I love you, Sara.” (73)³³

In the modern queer imaginary cars and roads have often represented fateful – and painful – life journeys, highlighting a longing for escape or an adventure beyond the constraints of normality.³⁴ Margareta Suber utilized Charlie’s “red roadster” as a vehicle of both escape and transcendence (a recurring theme also in cinema).³⁵ However, whereas the metaphor of the *road* often symbolizes long timespans, cultural investigations of *driving* tend to dwell more in the present, exploring moments rather than months, focused not so much on the horizon at the end of the road but more on the grip of the steering wheel and the interior universe of the car’s cabin. As a novel that pays attention to this universe and the people in it, *Charlie* in the end approaches driving as a state of mind more than a journey, as a way of *transcending*, in Elisaweta’s words, “the muddy greyness of reality.” Transcending reality by way of driving thus has a clear connection to speed, to the thrill of roaring acceleration that “ostensibly perverts the illusory order of normal perception” (Virilio 1991, 110). Yet, as shown by Krusenstjerna’s Angela and Stanny, “driving” in their car wreck into the “blue space” of their imagination, queer car transcendences can also occur in a state of immobility.

As suggested by all of the above examples, automobile transmissions,

transfigurations and transcendences may be related to the car itself as well as to the act of driving, with bodily sensations as well with secret spaces. In this context, literature provides a unique window into the “libidinal economy” of cars (Sheller 2004, 225), and, more specifically, an opportunity to trace how the car from very early on came to be configured as a site of danger and desire and sometimes even dangerous desires. In the following, I will take a closer look at how such dangerous – and queer – visions of driving have chafed against visions of the car as a safe space, and indeed, a *normal* space.

Red Cars and Blue Cars

Around the same time as the publication of *Charlie*, Volvo’s company magazine *Ratten* described how Volvo had boldly taken on the difficult task of making an ideal, or “normal” car, *normalvagn*, which would suit any driver (“Kritisera Volvo” 1932, 3–15). This car would be affordable yet well built (made of Swedish steel), and its color would be deep blue, sparing customers from *l’embarras du choix*, the trouble of choosing. Priests, doctors and teachers were envisioned as typical Volvo drivers (“Något om Volvos reklam” 1930, 12), and with “normal driving” of their *normalvagn* they could expect a gasoline consumption of no more than about 1.75 liters per 10 km (“Kritisera Volvo” 1932, 5). Normal driving did not involve racing, but Volvo did enter competitions at this time, in so-called reliability tests, which were, as the name suggests, meant to test the reliability of various automobile brands, in all seasons and weather (Bursell and Rosengren 1996, 191; Egerlid and Fellke 2013). Stressing function over elegance, Volvo’s company magazine *Ratten* frequently discussed the technical advancements of Volvo cars: A Volvo was the perfect long-distance car, a great doctor’s car, perfect for camping – spacious and practical; it was a private room on wheels. Unlike Charlie’s car, a Volvo car was not “little.” While Volvo was hesitant to use advertising in the early years, arguing that high quality did not need gimmicks (“Något om Volvos reklam” 1930, 11–2; “Reklam” 1931, 10–1), ads of later years continued the tradition of branding Volvo as the reliable, sensible, and safe choice in automobility.³⁶

In contrast, Charlie's fictional red sports car was open, fast and easily turned into "a red streak on the road" (47). This image of female automobility was rooted in a discourse of the 1920s modern woman, celebrating female independence and a young, daring attitude (Søland 2000; Conor 2004). The historical habit of associating automobility primarily with masculinity thus reduces the complexity of this interwar world of red and blue cars. One can argue that Charlie is young and modern more than masculine, and the sensible Volvo driver, driving cautiously and embracing nature, could just as well be labeled feminine by conventional gender stereotyping. Still, in an emerging national car culture of reliable quality cars, Volvo's *normalvagn*, driven by male family providers, underscores Charlie above all as *different*, a young woman driving for, and with, other women.

This example of interwar red and blue automobility brings to mind the Nietzschean principles of theatre, balancing the Dionysian and Apollonian, the sensible and the mad, moderation and excess, passion and restraint.³⁷ In terms of advertising, visions of the car as a practical and safe means of transportation had in fact always existed side by side with temptations of speed, power and excitement (Scharff 1992; Clarke 2007). While motorized camping also seemed to embrace the adventurous and exciting, camping advertisements nevertheless tended to be structured around an Apollonian way of life, emphasizing sensibility and harmony more than danger and desire. Meanwhile, the "modern woman," who had enjoyed her fast cars in the auto advertising of the 1920s, was waning as an icon of modernity. As entertainment magazines declared the death of the once so fashionable *garçonne*-girl in the late 1920s ("La garçonne är död – Leve kvinnan!" 1929, 16–7), concerns were also raised from within the motorsports arena regarding the femininity of female racecar drivers. Male motorsport experts questioned whether women were up to the technical and physical challenges of race driving, and whether they would still be able to preserve their womanliness (Bratt 1929, 64–5). Despite recurring campaigns to preserve motoring as an exclusively male arena, women's automobile races nevertheless continued until 1937, when interest was deemed too little (Ströman 1994).

Historically, society at large also viewed male motoring with some suspicion, as car racing and driving about for pleasure could be perceived as a hobby for dandies and eccentric rich people (Virilio 1991, 111–2; Heurgren 1996). From an Apollonian perspective, such non-utilitarian ways of driving were useless and dangerous, bordering on the Dionysian. Yet, even though the red and blue of *Charlie's* and Volvo's visions of driving illustrate how motoring can be configured along a normal-queer axis of analysis, and not only along a masculine-feminine axis, the demise of the female racecar driver also illustrates how gender never leaves the equation. In heteronormative culture, a motor-loving woman will always come across as *more* queer – and Dionysian – than an equally motor-loving man. When Birgitta Stenberg, author of several novels relating postwar bohemian life in Europe, in her controversial debut novel *Chans* from 1961, let a young woman steal a car and then crash it, she also narrated the surprise and bewilderment of the authorities that the girl had been alone in the car, that she had stolen it, that she had crashed it. When interviewed by the police, an ex-boyfriend gives an incriminatingly queer explanation: “She loves engines.” (Stenberg 1961, 216)³⁸ The “queerness” of this statement arises – just as the case with the narrative of *Charlie* – by its indication of passion where it is not expected.

While popular culture has focused more on heterosexual car passions (Berglind 2009; Tengström 2009), than queer ones, Elisaweta and Charlie, as well as Angela and Stanny, constitute early examples of queer and even lesbian automobile themes. Stenberg later confirmed to the Swedish readership the erotic potential of cars. Her protagonist Mari ponders with a female acquaintance whether cars could not be used to pick up men, whereupon her more experienced friend replies: “Yes and each other.” (Stenberg 1961, 25) Even though 20th century heteronormative culture has worked to limit mainstream explorations of this “each other,” queer and lesbian literature have continued to provide a space for such car-enabled connections. Perhaps unsurprisingly, American fiction, crafted in a deeply car-attuned society, has often proven to be sensitive to the many dangers of a car interior, whether as

a site of speed-induced excitement or as an enabler of queer desire. As a controversial example of both, Patricia Highsmith's lesbian classic *The Price of Salt* from 1952, later re-published as *Carol*, narrated not only two women's cross-country car chase but also their unnervingly queer car sensations.³⁹

In the case of *Charlie*, these kinds of queer, emotional transmissions become a source not only of exciting intimacies but also of tensions and anxieties. Leaving her brother Bruno intentionally behind at one point, a frustrated Charlie finally speeds away with an increasingly uncomfortable Sara. The drive back to the resort is made in silence, and Sara pretends “not to see her [Charlie's] hand” when exiting the car (96). When inside, Charlie pleads to Sara to reject Bruno's love and accept hers instead. Following this emotional culmination, Sara indeed makes a choice – to leave the resort. The novel ends on an autumn evening back in the city when Elisaweta visits Charlie one night. The intimacy of the car cabin is now continued in the comfort of Charlie's room, where Elisaweta reveals that she had once known someone “like her” – a girl who had also shared her bed. In a much-quoted last sentence, Suber lets Charlie fall asleep knowing that “her body was now ready for the life for which higher powers had been pleased to create her” (108).⁴⁰

Concluding Remarks

Cars have always invoked dreams of freedom and escape. Yet, in the vision of Volvo's “normal car,” tied to harmony and family bliss, Charlie and other new women of modern fiction represented a disturbingly queer way of driving, transcending not only a passion for camping but pointing to a female agency that had turned its attention to the car itself – and to other women. From the perspective of a car-crazed 20th century culture, looking for freedom while defining the normal, Margareta Suber's 1932 novel constitutes an early modernist example of exploring not only the queer feelings of fast driving but, moreover, the winding roads toward feeling queer. While previous research has related in some detail Charlie's same-sex desire to contemporaneous medical discourses, this article has explored *Charlie* from another perspective, the modernist

linking of speed and driving with sexuality and desire at a time that saw the birth of family cars and motorized camping intersect with debates and concerns regarding modernity's independent "new women." Considering this development of an automotive "normal," I have contended in this article that driving can also be configured as queer.

Taking a closer look at the driving scenes of *Charlie*, I have explored the meaning of "queer automobility," first, in terms of queer, emotional transmissions, enabled by the privacy of an auto cabin; second, in terms of queer transfigurations of the driver, seeking to prove him- or herself by way of achievements on the road; and, third, in terms of queer transcendences, stimulated by speed or seclusion, allowing drivers and passengers to temporarily escape the "normal" dimensions of life. Finally, as this article has argued on a more general note, there are different kinds of speeds, genders, and sexualities to consider in the history of automobility. As suggested by *Charlie* and other queer narratives of literature, the car itself can be configured not only as an object of desire but as a site of desire, inviting "normal" as well as "queer" ways of driving – and being.

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NOTES

1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own in collaboration with line editor Rebecca Ahlfeldt. Original quotes in footnotes. The above quote in Swedish reads: Våra dagars personautomobiler äro bildlikt (*sic*) talat rörliga miniatyrsalonger med så gott som alla bekvämligheter. Volvo har gjort miniatyrsalongen till en ‘convertible’ sängkammare. (“Volvo och camping” 1930, 8) Volvo’s company magazine *Ratten: Volvos tidning* [*The Wheel: Volvo’s Magazine*] was published from 1930 until 2005.
2. Margareta Suber’s (1932) novel *Charlie* was translated into English by Paula Wiking and published as *Two Women* in the United Kingdom in 1934. Quotes in English from *Charlie* have been retrieved from this translation. The Swedish original will be given in footnotes. The above quote in Swedish reads: Hon ökade farten, ökade den ytterligare och lutade sig med spända muskler över ratten. Gruset strittade åt alla håll om hjulen, i en kurva slirade bakvagnen men kom upp igen mitt på vägen, bilen låg som ett rött streck utefter landsvägen. (Suber 2005, 45–6)
3. This observation leads to some complex theoretical considerations related to the conjunction of “bodies, technologies and cultural practices” (Sheller 2004, 227). From this perspective, an investigation focused on literature may seem limited. Yet, I believe that precisely because cars move people “in many senses of the word,” fiction provides a unique gateway to explore the many paradoxes related to car use, particularly sensations of freedom and constraint. Accessing a “mode of interiority” less available in other materials (Doan 2006, 29), literature thus provides an important prism of historical analysis, which, though not the only site to do so, oftentimes articulates concerns very much rooted in the “worldly” (Björklund and Williams 2008, 120). In the words of Deborah Clarke (2007, 5), “Writers do not simply respond to culture; they help to shape it through support, revision, and resistance.”
4. On the theme of speed and (loss of) control, see, for instance, Paul Virilio’s (1991, 109–21) historical notes on “the search for high speeds”, Rosi Braidotti’s (2002,

- 236–40) cultural analysis of acceleration and sexual arousal, or Jeffrey T. Schnapp's (1999) vertiginous essay on the theme of the crash ("speed as an engine of individuation"), reaching back to the ancient world. On the fascination of speed and efforts to control it in a Swedish context, see Gösta Arvastson (2004). On the history of speed and its relation to slowness, see also Orvar Löfgren (2000).
5. Narratives involving female same-sex desire and relations were present in Swedish novels published prior to *Charlie* (Järvstad 2008), but these novels did not focus or explore the theme of same-sex desire from the perspective of a confident protagonist, taking center stage in the narrative.
 6. For a more extensive discussion on norms and normativity, and more specifically the point that not all norms have historically been connected with the idea of *normality*, see Doan (2013, 168–73).
 7. For more on the first stages of the automobilization of Sweden, see Olle Hagman (2009), and Barbro Bursell and Annette Rosengren (1996).
 8. Although the early auto industry did welcome drivers of both sexes, the language of advertising campaigns often emphasized how female drivers were different, wanting safety and comfort from their cars more than power and speed (Behling 1997). However, the messages of advertisements were not entirely consistent. Especially in the 1920s, Swedish ads also depicted modern (upper-class) women behind the wheel as confident and ready for exciting auto travel (see also Clarsen 2000). Yet, such images were usually tempered by explanatory texts inside the ad (as well as editorial materials) that emphasized traditional discourses of sexual difference, assuming, in this case, a husband who knew which car to buy and why. Readers were thus reassured of women's need for male advice and expertise in all auto-related matters.
 9. There are some exceptions of course, but they mostly focus on the queer intimacies of body and machine. Deborah Clarke (2007, 23) notes, for instance, that women's "mechanical merging" with cars has always been viewed with suspicion, since the status of the car as a sexed object has not been entirely clear, "masculine in its power yet feminine in being a body that is ridden and mastered." Fears of women being sexually aroused by controlling a male machine, or even more disturbingly, bonding with and mastering a vehicle coded as female thus arose early in the history of automobility, as Clarke (2007, 61–2) notes, and this fear was even more intense with regard to motorcycling. Such fears were probably not abated by the fact that early women drivers often described their driving experiences, as pointed out by Jennifer Parchesky (2006, 175), "in highly erotic terms, citing the 'thrills' and 'excitement' of speed and power as well as the queer intimacy of body and machine." In her article on "the auto-erotics of early women's films" Parchesky (2006, 176) expands the notion of "auto-erotics" beyond the purely physical dimension, suggesting that automobility functioned, as constructed in these female-directed films, "as

- an experience of pleasure and power that can energise both a stable but unbounded sense of self, and a desire to extend that power and pleasure into artistic creativity.”
- On the queerness of specifically physical driving sensations, see also note 11 below.
10. More recently, cinema has explored how the tensions of heteronormative society can become both centered and released in the bodies of automobiles, when, for instance, teenage girls set out to hitchhike (*Fucking Åmål*, 1998) or mommy drives away – for good (*The Hours*, 2002). The point I want to make here is that queer car feelings are not dependent on a predetermined sexual identity but can be understood more broadly, whether as speed-induced physical sensations or as a queer moment, played out in the space of an auto cabin.
 11. Even before the advent of automobiles, the experience of speed was associated “with dream-like states: flight, intoxication, rapture, horror, hallucination” (Schnapp 1999, 20). With regard to the embodied experiences of automobility, Mimi Sheller (2004, 228) has discussed how drivers “feel the car,” responding “physically to the thrum of an engine, the glide through a gearbox, or the whoosh of effortless acceleration.” Whether speed-induced feelings are configured as thrilling, frightening or even as “erotic-transcendental” (Schnapp 1999, 5), I suggest here that such feelings, in all their strangeness and vulnerability, can also be described as queer.
 12. By first generations I refer here loosely to female drivers in the first three decades of the 20th century. In Sweden, the first female holder of a driver’s license was Alexandra Gjestvang-Lindh (Ekström 1983, 42), photographed driving an electric car in 1904 in Stockholm (Hagman 2009, 371). Selected biographical information on pioneering Swedish female motorists can also be found in Helena Egerlid and Jens Fellke (2013). There are many similarities between the conditions for, and representations of, female drivers in Sweden and in other Western countries in these early 20th century decades, even though the breakthrough in Sweden of a modern consumer culture (in the 1920s) lagged behind the USA, England, and France by a couple of decades (Husz and Lagerkvist 2001, 26). During the 1920s, the number of automobiles rose quickly in Sweden, from about 7,000 in 1920 to more than 100,000 ten years later (Elg 2005, 34). During these years, in the transnational flow of films, advertising, and news, the automobile-driving modern woman became a symbol of modernity and progress as well as changing gender relations (Scharff 1992; Clarke 2007). Yet, previous scholarship also suggests that contrasting notions of nationalism and gender did produce rhetorical and other variations in different national contexts (compare, for instance, Clarke’s [2007] discussion of American representations of pioneering female cross-country drivers with Bernhard Rieger’s [2003] discussion of the diverging rhetoric of English and German media in regard to the standing of female racecar drivers as national representatives). In Sweden, a utilitarian-framed rhetoric of modernity (see below) was combined with a celebration of speed and Swedish camping adventures, where traditional gender roles soon

- reappeared. From a wider modernist perspective, Clarke's (2007, 64) conclusion that "the automobile may have revised traditional gender roles, but it did not erase them" thus seems valid beyond the American context also.
13. *Svensk motortidning* published a series of interviews with modern "chauffeuses" in the mid-1920s [*Våra chaufföser*]. A more comprehensive discussion of female interwar motorists and contemporaneous gendered discourses on automobility will be included as part of my postdoctoral project, *Female Masculinity in Interwar Sweden: Play, Agency, Desire* (forthcoming).
 14. On a more serious note, a new "utopian reformism" was being formulated at this time in Sweden, most famously by Per Albin Hansson in terms of *folkhemmet*, founded metaphorically in a vision of a well-built and well-ordered "people's home." As much as this rhetoric signaled a vision of democracy and equality, Yvonne Hirdman (2010; Hirdman et al. 2012, 200–31) has also pointed out how a patriarchal and gendered way of thinking continued to guide the Swedish utopian reform agenda. Whereas men were seen as the builders and constructors of the people's home, active in the public arenas of politics, economy, science, etc., women were expected to engage with matters of "interior design," such as family matters and social welfare. Metaphorically speaking, the people's home got its own driveway during the interwar period when automobile lobby groups worked to improve the Swedish traffic system, including the road network, road regulations, education, fuel distribution and so on (Blomkvist 2001; Hagman 2009). Thus, the car quickly became a symbol of modernity, likewise imbued with a gendered rhetoric (see below).
 15. Frequent examples of this gendered automobile discourse can be found in articles in popular Swedish interwar entertainment and family magazines such as *Charme*, *Bonniers veckotidning*, *Veckojournalen*, and *Våra nöjen*.
 16. By "at that time" I mean here quite specifically the early 1930s. As shown by Doan (2001, 110–20) in a British context, the masculine fashion of the 1920s was (at that time) more likely to be read as something *modern* (or as upper-class eccentricity) than lesbian or queer. The situation changed in England, however, after the Radclyffe Hall trial of 1928, which brought about public attention to possible links between "inversion" and female masculinity (Doan 2001, 121–5). In Sweden, the literary representations of Suber's (1932) Charlie as well as the cross-dressing Agda in Krusenstjerna's *Av samma blod* (1935), part VII of the *Fröknarna von Pablen* series, also worked to establish associations of lesbian desire and female masculinity (Williams 2004). In Germany, these associations were explored more concretely in the 1920s, as part of Berlin's vibrant club scene (Sutton 2011).
 17. Swedish historical overviews of tourist travel place the beginning of motor car tourism to the 1950s, as this was the time when Swedes on a larger scale could afford to buy automobiles (Johansson 1996; Löfgren 2009). However, this historiog-

- raphy overlooks that the visions, ideals and dreams of motorized camping, including advertising campaigns, were formed much earlier – as early as the 1920s.
18. Cf. the gendered rhetoric that predicated the idea of *folkhemmet*, as noted above (note 14).
 19. Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* was translated into Swedish in 1932 (*Ensamhetens brunn*), the same year as *Charlie* was published. For a summary of recent scholarship on *Charlie*, see Jenny Björklund (2014, 49–55).
 20. Referenced page numbers of *Charlie* in the running text refer to the English translation, published as *Two Women* (1934).
 21. s.v. “transmission, n.” OED Online. September 2015. Transmission is also short for *transmission-gear*, a device for effecting “the transference of motive force from one place to another,” as the OED notes. In the present context, I am interested in car-enabled *emotive* forces.
 22. De sutto tysta. De förnummo plötsligt närvaron av varandra som en trygghet, en lycka utan gräns. De voro ensamma i bilen, och de tyckte att den rörde sig, lade stycke på stycke bakom sig, till dess de tillsammans flögo framåt i en blå rymd, som genljöd av deras viskningar och förtroenden. (Krusenstjerna 1944–1946, Part II, 110)
 23. Queer automobility thus need not be dependent on expensive sports cars, but can just as well occur in the space of a “dying Oldsmobile,” going nowhere beyond the imagination of its passengers.
 24. s.v. “transfiguration, n.” OED Online. September 2015. Just like the word “transformation,” “transfiguration” refers to a metamorphosis of some kind. However, “transfiguration” has historically denoted not just any change but a positive change, “into a more beautiful or spiritual state” (s.v. “transfiguration” Oxford Dictionaries. June 2016). Because this section focuses the empowerment and ego of the driver, I chose the word transfiguration rather than transformation.
 25. Charlie hade anmält sig att delta i damernas tävlan med sin lilla trekvarts liters Midget. Själv övervakade hon trimningen av sin vagn, iförd en oljig, brun overall, och under flera dagar var hon tämligen uppslukad av en motorverkstads smutsiga innandöme. (Suber 2005, 69) A more appropriate translation of “trimming” and “overall” would be “tuning up” and “jumpsuit.”
 26. In November 2013, Paul Walker, leading star of *The Fast and the Furious*, died in a car crash.
 27. While motion pictures have naturally tended to explore cars from the perspective of motion, literature has also, as the above examples show, offered narrations of vivid driving scenes in addition to investigations of the interior dimensions of the driver's mindset. Though outside of the scope of this article, it should be noted that films have also represented car feelings beyond speed, including female empowerment and passions in, or for, cars. For an excellent discussion of several early films that place driving women at the center, see Parchesky (2006). For an early Swedish

- example, see *Unga flickan tar greven och priset* (1924), a film featuring a modern young woman racing with her boyfriend through southern Sweden.
28. Så länge hon hade sttit vid ratten och det gällt att hålla farten och köra på rätta vägar, så hade hon varit ett med sin maskin och hade bara existerat i samband med den. Men när hon inte längre kunde identifiera sig med maskinen utan måste finnas till som Charlie, blev hon ångestfull och nästan fientlig. (Suber 2005, 70)
 29. Agnes von Krusenstjerna's *Fröknarna von Pablen*-series [*The Misses von Pablen*] caused a drawn-out and heated debate in the 1930s Swedish press that illustrates the sensitivity of portraying female sexual agency and homosexuality in fiction at the time (Björklund 2014, 14).
 30. For two recent examples, see Olivia Bergdahl (2015) and Tove Folkesson (2013).
 31. s.v. "transcendence, n." OED Online. September 2015. Oxford University Press.
 32. Slutligen hade hon kastat sig upp i sin bil och kört, bara kört, men den lilla röda sportbilen hade inte kunnat spränga henne och hennes livsöde ut ur den förhatliga samhällsbildning, där hon ända ingen berättigad plats hade. (Suber 2005, 64)
 33. In terms of sexual identity, the novel *Charlie* provides an opportunity to think more about, as Doan (2013, 139–42) suggests as part of a new queer critical history, "the cultural processes by which the sexual could be known," and also, in the context of Charlie's encounter with Weininger's book, "how formations of selves and self-formation sometimes operate as a dialogical process between name calling and self-naming."
 34. From Annemarie Schwarzenbach's *All the Roads Are Open: The Afghan Journey, 1939–1940* (2011) to Bodil Sjöström's *Route 66 går till Trollhättan* (2011), the theme of the road has remained prevalent in non-fictional as well as fictional queer narratives. While the road and the road trip have perhaps acquired special allure in modern culture, immobility has often been depicted as a source of frustration, as in the Swedish film *Show Me Love*, configuring two teenage girls' restlessness and desire for each other as hatred of their immobility, of being stuck in the town of Åmål (as better revealed by the Swedish title: *Fucking Åmål*). An attempt to hitchhike their way out fails, but turns into an exciting and bonding experience.
 35. In *Thelma and Louise*, one of the most iconic feminist road movies, the car essentially becomes, as Rosi Braidotti (2002, 239) writes, "a vehicle of displacement," shifting realities as the women drive on: "[The car] operates a shift of reality, a change of dimension. They are not just two runaway wives who have decided not to stand by their men, they also take turns at the wheel, swap places and drive on until they become increasingly depersonalized in the process. They disengage themselves from their social, sexual identity, go on a rampage, shoot and blow up. Finally, in the hyper-real space of American roads, they melt into the landscape, merge with the speed of crossing it."

36. This safety discourse culminated perhaps in 1991, when Volvo produced an ad that simply equated the safety of a Volvo car with that of a mother's womb (Clarke 2007, 83–4). Such auto-industrial emphasis on safety is a reminder that rapid transport continues to be recognized as a matter of “combining risk and comfort” (Virilio 1991, 112).
37. Thanks to Jenny Björklund who brought my attention to this theme and how it has been explored in recent literary studies (Björklund 2016).
38. Hon jagades i den stulna bilen tills hon kvaddade den i en kurva och gav upp. Underligt nog var hon ensam i vagnen. Det är ganska ovanligt att en grabb är ensam om att låna en bil och beträffande en flicka är det ytterst sällsynt. I allmänhet vill ju vederbörande imponera på någon bekant. (Stenberg 1961, 256)
39. In Highsmith's *The Price of Salt* (or *Carol*) a car thus characteristically becomes a scene for the unraveling of themes of death and desire: “They roared into the Lincoln tunnel. A wild, inexplicable excitement mounted in Therese as she stared through the windshield. She wished the tunnel might cave in and kill them both, that their bodies might be dragged out together. She felt Carol glancing at her from time to time.” (Highsmith 2004, 60–1)
40. Hennes kropp var nu mogen att börja leva det liv, för vilket vår Herre behagat skapa henne. An alternative translation of this quote has been made by Jenny Björklund in collaboration with line editor Rebecca Ahlfeldt which reads: “Now her body was mature and ready to start leading the life for which our Lord had chosen to create her.” (Björklund 2014, 50)

SAMMANFATTNING

Denna artikel belyser automobilitet ur ett historiskt queerperspektiv, där bilen ses som en komplex emotionell arena. Genom att analysera både skönlitteratur och bilindustrins tidiga visioner av ett modernt bilsamhälle, undersöks hur heteronormativa bilkulturer har byggts upp men också ständigt störts av queera berättelser där bilen fungerat som ett rebelliskt snarare än tryggt rum. Mer specifikt undersöks Margareta Subers roman *Charlie* publicerad 1932 (där en röd liten sportbil blir en scen för förbjudna tankar och begär), samt Volvos samtida lansering av en svensk ”normalvagn”. Utifrån dessa undersökningar, och med stöd i kultur- och hastighetsteori liksom i feministisk kulturhistoria, utforskar artikeln innebörden av en ”queer automobilitet”. Genom att fokusera på exempel som sällan uppmärksammas i automobilhistoriska sammanhang, som lesbiskt begär och kvinnliga sportbils-

förare, belyser artikeln ett brett spektrum av känslor i och för bilar, i termer av spänning, risker, drömmar, intimitet, frihet och flykt. Artikeln visar hur uppkomsten av en automobil normalitet (grundad i en heterosexuell maskulinitet) historiskt sett har skymt andra typer av genus och begär i förhållande till bilen och drömmen om bilen.

Keywords: queer automobility, female driver, lesbian, speed, desire, *Charlie*, Volvo