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Fantasy Imaginaries and Landscapes of Desire

Gustaf Tenggren's Forgotten Decades

Abstract: Gustaf Tenggren (1896–1970) was a 20th-century Swedish-born American illustrator of children's books, magazines, advertisements, and artwork for the Disney Studio. Tenggren's work was so ubiquitous that it remains in circulation and widely recognized today. But this large body of work has been understudied, as has its impact on the popular imagination. This article revisits Tenggren's long career, and reinserts periods often skipped over, such as his work in magazine advertising during the 1920s and 1930s, and argues that although Tenggren is most often referred to as a children's book and fairy-tale illustrator, his style was developed in the commercial field of magazine advertising, which incorporated aspects of modern art. That is, those aspects of modernism – abstraction, attention to form, the bright use of color for emotional impact – that were so much a part of fin de siècle Europe, a time when Tenggren was in art school, were appropriated first by advertising in America, and then by children's book illustration. Thus, in the process, modernism was translated and democratized for middle-class consumers.

Keywords: fairy-tale illustrations, modernism, advertising, consumerism, gender, Gustaf Tenggren

Despite a prolific career that spanned from the 1910s through the 1960s, Gustaf Tenggren, the Swedish-born American illustrator is not a well-known name. His work, in contrast, is widely recognized and was, in mid-20th century America, ubiquitous. From his illustrated advertisements and women's magazine illustrations in the 1920s and 30s, to his work for the Disney Studio from 1936 to 1939, to his many children's books, especially the Little Golden Books series, Tenggren participated in popular media forms as they were emerging, thus significantly contributing not only to the look of these media, but also popular perception of them. Biographies of Tenggren have con-

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sistently de-emphasized the bulk of this work as inferior and crass commercialism, focusing instead on a narrow selection of his early illustrations for fairy-tale collections, a form popularized during the so-called Golden Age of Illustration (roughly 1880 to 1925). Typical of this is the entry about Tenggren in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, according to which Tenggren's fairy-tale illustrations from the late 1910s and early 1920s were "influenced by Arthur Rackham and Kay Nielsen," while his subsequent work lacked the "experimental flair of his early stunning work, *for which he is still known today*" (518, italics added).¹ In other words, Tenggren's work, by far the majority of which was in the context of mid-century American publishing and illustration trends, is evaluated on the basis of his work from early 20th-century Sweden. This selective retrieval of only the earliest of Tenggren's work – and that limited to fairy-tale collections – as well as the wholesale dismissal of nearly four decades of Tenggren's work in advertising, animation, mass media and mass-produced children's books in the U.S. – is not only historically inaccurate and untenable, it also fails to recognize the mutually constitutive fields of illustration, advertising and mass media that shaped Tenggren's American experience. This article argues that Tenggren's greatest impact was in mass-mediated magazines and advertisements during those years typically elided and dismissed by critics – the 1920s and 1930s – the "forgotten decades," which not only served as a clear break with the Golden Age of Illustration, but which also influenced all of Tenggren's later work. From these decades on, Tenggren's images saturated the visual realm in multiple formats, and while thematically he often returned to fantasy and in particular the fairy tale, his illustrations, using modern technologies, techniques and media introduced and normalized a modernist aesthetic and in doing so remade the very nature of the fairy tale.

The Early Years: Fairy Tales and Modernism

Such is the power of the ahistorical, revisionist story that it has become *the* standard narrative about Tenggren: authorized by "experts," circulating freely, and remarkably consistent over time. According to this narrative, Tenggren's Rackham-esque, "old-world" style derives from the influence of his paternal grandfather, an eccentric folk craftsman who raised Tenggren in a countryside filled with "gently exaggerated figures and mythical forests" (Swanson, *From Swedish Fairy Tales* 7). It was because of this background that Tenggren was the natural choice to take over the illustrations for the Christmas an-

nual *Bland Tomtar och Troll (BTT)*² in 1917, and this style was to carry over to illustrations for various fairy-tale collections such as selections from the Grimms' fairy tales (1922, 1923) and Mme. D'Aulnoy (1923). Years later, Walt Disney, looking to capture an "old-world" sensibility for his animated fairy-tale feature films, turned to Tenggren and other European immigrant artists during the production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Canemaker). This putatively unbroken continuity in Tenggren's work from *BTT* to his time at Disney nearly 20 years later depends on the telescoping and discounting of major periods of his work, jettisoning disruptive elements such as Tenggren's work in advertising and his styles that deviate from the Golden-Age look. Reinserting these into Tenggren's story not only tells us more about the artist himself, but also sheds light on his role in popular art during a transitional time in America.

Rather than the nostalgic rural childhood spent with his grandfather, Tenggren's story is one of crushing rural poverty, the subsequent social dislocation and disintegration of the family, widespread urban unemployment, and eventual emigration. Tenggren's early childhood living with his large family in the urban slums of Gothenburg was characterized by the endemic poverty that was a result of large socio-political upheavals in early 20th century Sweden: agricultural reforms that favored large, private farms and market-based production combined with a spike in population growth that forced many off the land to seek work in the urban centers, where poverty and high rates of unemployment ultimately resulted in upwards of 20% of the population emigrating to the U.S. Half of Tenggren's immediate family emigrated to the U.S. seeking work, and financial insecurity was to be a consistent factor in his life until after 1920 when Tenggren himself emigrated to the U.S. The circular logic by which Tenggren's illustrations are taken as *prima facie* evidence of the existence of Scandinavian "mythical forests" which Tenggren is naturally inclined to represent because of his rural roots recapitulates the early 20th-century Romantic deployment of a constructed, idealized Nature for political purposes.

Comparisons to Arthur Rackham similarly elide significant differences. Rackham, a full generation older than Tenggren, was one of the Golden-Age illustrators of Victorian England whose style was falling out of fashion by WWI. His complicated pen and ink illustrations filled expensive fairy-tale and fantasy collections, and were explicitly directed towards a Romantic and idealized Victorian child. Tenggren, in contrast, began his career at the beginning of WWI in Sweden, where social and political conditions as well as the art world

were radically different. Unlike England, Sweden was experiencing a surge of Romantic Nationalism, emphasizing the rural landscape as a national repository (Facos), and children's books were directed towards the construction of new Swedish citizens. In the art world, the European avant-garde, which rejected the conventions of realism of the old guard (which included Britain), was spreading from its center in Paris into Scandinavia. Thus, Tenggren began his career at the end of the so-called Golden Age of Illustration, and although this style is indeed reflected in some of his early work, the aesthetic was already passing out of vogue and Tenggren was experimenting with a variety of different styles.

In 1914, when WWI broke out, Tenggren was beginning a three-year scholarship at Valands Konstskola in Gothenburg. In Tenggren's last year, Valands' director Axel Erdmann was replaced by Birger Simonsson who had been the leader of *De unga*, a group of Swedish artists whose exhibitions in Stockholm in 1909, 1910 and 1911 are credited with introducing modernism to Sweden. At least half of *De unga*, including artists such as Isaac Grünewald and Leander Engström, had studied at the *Académie Matisse* during its 3-year existence from 1908 to 1911, and their emphasis on color and abstraction reflects this shift away from the conventions of realism. Birger Simonsson's directorship had a direct influence on Tenggren, who already was resisting the conservatism of the old guard. Tenggren worked while in art school, taking on portrait commissions as well as concurrently producing black and white sketches for the (pro-German) weekly newspaper, *Vidi* (1916–1919). His work at *Vidi* is an important if overlooked episode, not only because it anticipates his work in newspapers and magazines in the U.S. in the 1920s and 30s, but also because it demonstrates Tenggren's stylistic range and the diversity of media within which he worked throughout his career. It is also during his time at Valands that he began illustrating for *Bland Tomtar och Troll* (1917). Leaving Gothenburg for Copenhagen in 1919, Tenggren was again in the company of many expatriate Swedish modernists including Grünewald and Einar Jolin. It is thus important to note that at the time that Tenggren was producing images for *BTT*, his cohort had moved away from the Golden-Age illustration style of *BTT* and some of these shifts can also be tracked in Tenggren's own work. A close examination of all of Tenggren's illustrations for *BTT* not only reveals a striking range of styles – evoking a host of contemporary artists – but also significant changes from his first years at *BTT*, while still in Sweden, to those years in which he continued to illustrate for *BTT* after he had emigrated to America



Fig. 1. *Bland Tomtar och Troll* cover illustrations from 1919 and 1926.

(1920–1926), which reveal a marked influence of American illustrators such as Howard Pyle (see fig. 1).

Although both Tenggren and John Bauer, his predecessor at *Bland Tomtar och Troll*, clearly worked in a larger, international context that was informed by the work of Rackham and others, it is the particular and intertwined context of Scandinavian art, fairy tales, and nationalism that best illuminates Tenggren's work in *BTT*. Many of Tenggren's contemporaries across Scandinavia – Hugo Simberg, Gerhard Munthe, Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Theodor Kittelsen – explored the intersections of symbolism, folklore and Nature during this period. In addition, the reciprocal influence of these Nordic artists on those in England and France is also apparent: "Nordic art had a magnetic appeal in European art centres around the turn of the twentieth century. . . [t]he idea of the decay of industrial culture triggered an interest in things considered representative of primeval knowledge which issues from the depth of time immemorial and excites the imagination" (Ohlsen and Pettersson 7).

Bland Tomtar och Troll was a self-consciously nostalgic endeavor. Initiated in 1907, the authored stories stand in contrast to works such as Asbjørnsen and Moe's *Norske Folkeeventyr*, which circulated for generations in Norway. In the Norwegian case, stories collected from the folk by Asbjørnsen and Moe in the initial nation-building moment of the mid-19th century were later famously illustrated by Th. Kittelsen and Erik Werenskiold in the next generation's citi-

zen-building project aimed at children. Their value lay in their consistency across time. In Sweden in the early 20th century, authored fairy-tales were re-creations using traditional material in novel ways, which evoked an imaginary realm from an equally imaginary past with no pretense that these were stories coming from the folk. The authored tales that Tenggren illustrated in *BTT* reflect a very modern deployment and reworking of traditional themes that call upon the stability of an imaginary past. The growing role of nostalgia in shaping a new, invented Swedish identity among the emergent middle class in the urban centers of Stockholm and Gothenburg was increasingly realized in a fantastic, imaginary space and time – the realm of *tomtar* and *troll*. The use of nostalgic, rural lore as an identity marker occurred as rural life itself was becoming increasingly a thing of the past. The bourgeois move to re-appropriate this past in the 20th century was thus coincident with the abandonment of the countryside by even more peasants “seeking to emulate the ways of life of the town middle classes, or emigrate in large numbers to America” (Barton 131). Tenggren, coming from rural poverty, fits clearly into this latter group, and yet his illustrations are located firmly in the middle-class vision for shaping the future through the re-imagining of the past while concurrently using modern modes of production and distribution.

Contrasting *BTT* and *Vidi* as contemporaneous Swedish publications for which Tenggren worked during and immediately after WWI provides a different understanding of Tenggren’s images. In addition to the trauma of the war itself, the messy conclusion and aftermath of the war brought about a sense of anxiety about the future in Sweden. International insecurity added to the existing internal social pressures of industrialization and unemployment and was a topic of great concern in public discourse. *Vidi* was only one of many newspapers across the political spectrum that was part of this discursive terrain (Roos), which also included the resurgence of authored fairy tales such as appeared in *Bland Tomtar och Troll*. *BTT* and other similar fairy-tale collections offered up nostalgia as a palliative to the ills of modernity. John Lindow has pointed out that even the title, which links domestic gnomes with the once frightful trolls, as well as *BTT*’s being a Christmas annual for children reflect a transformation in the nature of the material.

Coming to America – 1920 to 1936: Fairy Tales, Advertising, and the Democratization of Desire

The sixteen-year period between Tenggren’s arriving in the U.S. and going to work for Disney in 1936 is usually compressed into

a few short comments in academic literature, but it was one of the most transformative and productive times of Tenggren's career. While continuing to produce illustrated fairy-tale collections and children's books in the older fashion of *BTT*, Tenggren was rapidly transitioning into different formats and styles, many of which had no connection to the realm of children's books. His experiences during this period influenced his later work at Disney and especially with the Little Golden Books after 1942, and it was during this period that his work entered into the popular imagination through his illustrated advertisements.

Upon arriving in Cleveland in late 1920 he began illustrating for the daily newspaper *The Plain Dealer*, providing sketches for news, sports events and advertisements. One ad in particular anticipates his later advertising work in New York City: "News from France" (see fig. 2), mimicking a news column, depicts ready-made women's fashions arriving at the Wm. Taylor & Sons Department Store in Cleveland straight off the streets of Paris.³ In the magic of advertising, two imaginary worlds collide - Paris, that "magical link" that was a "near guarantee of fashion-minded customers," and the world of fashion, which promised to "lift [women] into a world of luxury or pseudo-luxury, beyond work, drudgery, bills and the humdrum of everyday" (Leach 99).

During this time Tenggren was also getting work in magazines with national distribution. His cover illustration for the April 21, 1921 issue of *Life*, entitled "The Crescent Moon," is reminiscent of his color plates for *BTT* and was a high-profile entry into the competitive world of magazine cover illustration that included illustrators such as Norman Rockwell, Maxfield Parrish, F.X. Leyendecker, and Rea Irvin, all of whom also had *Life* covers in the 1920s. In this same issue of *Life*, Tenggren provided a comic vignette entitled "Mohammed and the Mountain," one of a series of seven black-and-white sketches entitled "Unfamiliar Anniversaries" which Tenggren produced for *Life* in 1921. These more obscure pieces are striking for their resemblance to Tenggren's work for *Vidi* while he was still in Gothenburg, but also to the caricatures his contemporary and fellow Swede Einar Nerman was producing during this time in London.

Moving to New York City in 1923, Tenggren found himself both agent and participant in American Culture - the culture of consumer capitalism, a culture radically different from that which he had left in Sweden. Tenggren's transition to this new world was parallel to his gradual redirection away from the fairy-tale collections of the Golden Age. His final illustrated volume was Lang's 1924 *Red Fairy Book*, and 1926 was the last year he contributed to *Bland Tomtar och Troll*.

**News
from France**
Published by Wm. Taylor Son & Co.

THURSDAY, MAY 11, 1922



RUE de la PAIX

Noted

Often, what appears to be just a retiring little plain envelope will surprise you with the gayest kind of a lining!

Note paper pads contain hand-finished paper, in loveliest tints.

Chansons de France stationery for little American girls and boys, as well as French children! 50c.

Belle Lettres (pretty letters) stationery is daintily tinted with more intensely shaded linings. \$1.

**Pour la
Correspondence**

THE Rochambeau, a big French liner, just brought over from Paris for Taylor Store what is probably the broadest selection of fine French notepaper ever seen in Cleveland. Every bit of it was personally selected in Paris by our Stationery Chief himself, who knew Cleveland women liked unique and individual stationery.

And it doesn't take a fortune to own it, either—for it's no more expensive than our own domestic paper of the same high quality.

Prices range from 50c a box for cute child notepaper to \$3.50 for large and beautiful boxes containing rich treasures of stationery.

First floor



Blouses

FRENCH Voile, French needlework, and that means super-beauty! If you have a love for things French—for things beautiful, then you will be fascinated by these new blouses of French birth. There are voiles with those exquisite touches of real lace which cannot be excelled; and silk crepe blouses weighted with a million sparkling beads!

They have no competitors.

**Robes Pour
l'après midi**

THE hand-made Wash Frock is the newest summer style note in Paris, right now—and in Cleveland, too.

These hand-made wash frocks are made of softest, sheerest voiles, handkerchief or dress linens, Resilla or Rumania cloths.

And Taylor Dress Section has them, made up in typically Parisienne styles—and of softest summer styles.

Mostly, they're in easily-put-on styles, with elastic at the waist.

Many have hand-drawn work and tiny, fine hand-tucks. Others are gorgeously beaded.

Sizes come for women. Prices are \$19.50 to \$39.50.

Women's Dresses—Second floor

Colors

- Lemon yellow
- Salmon pink
- French blue
- Nattier blue
- Strawberry
- Orchid and
- Cocoa

Fig. 2. "News From France," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 1922. Courtesy of the Kerlan Collection at Univ. of Minnesota.

The timing of Tenggren's transformation coincided with the end of the Golden Age in American illustration which was marked by the "simultaneous decision at *Harper's Monthly* and *The Century* to eliminate illustration" in 1925 (Levin 128), ending the phenomenon of the illustrated literary magazine and leaving only advertising-based

magazines for illustrators. In other words, this end of the Golden Age effected a complete break between art and illustration. "In the decades which followed, illustrators would be restricted to only four areas: children's fiction, scientific illustration, cartooning, and advertising" (Levin 128). Tenggren was immersed in this commercial art scene and the emergent medium of advertising - especially illustrated ads in magazines. Now, in a medium detached from fairy-tale collections, with huge monthly distributions and tie-ins to other venues such as billboard ads, Tenggren's visible impact on the new consumerist culture in the U.S. was to be profound and pervasive.

Advertising's manufactured desire established a connection between the consumption of goods and self-fulfillment and happiness. Fundamentals of successful advertising were delineated by experts, including Emily Fogg Mead who not only advocated the creation of desire by "appealing to the imagination and emotion" (221) but who also identified the middle-class woman (housewife) as the main consumer within the nuclear family and thus the primary target. This democratization of desire, no longer the domain of the elite, was to be accomplished through the *saturation of visual space*: "The successful advertisement is obtrusive. It continually forces itself upon the attention. It may be on sign boards, in the street-car, on the page of a magazine, or on a theater program. Everyone reads it *involuntarily*, and *unconsciously* it makes an impression. It is a subtle, persistent, unavoidable presence that creeps into the reader's inner consciousness" (Mead 231, emphasis added). In this new realm of advertising the primary and most direct appeal to the imagination was visual - "Eye appeal." The visual landscape was filled with advertising images that were informed by what Frank Alvah Parsons describes as a streamlined sensibility in which "anything irrelevant [wa]s a waste of material, space, money and mental consciousness;" one in which color and sexualized imagery created immediate, visceral responses and "associations in the consumer's mind" (qtd. in Leach 156-6). This visual "styling the goods" - *style moderne* - "freely appropriated and synthesized the tropes of modern art" and generated "a new breed of advertising artist - influenced as much by cubism, futurism, and suprematism as modish decoration" using "eye catching colors and abstract forms designed to draw the consumer's eye into a vortex of illusion" (Heimann 22).

After 1900, magazines became an advertising medium in which advertising was the driving mechanism of magazine sales, and what was driving those ads were illustrations. Manufacturers could now directly appeal to consumers. "Modernism's codification of visual

principles had begun in earnest," and "the profession of graphic design was taking shape in the context of new communications strategies, advertisement, branding campaigns, and mass market publications" (Drucker 37), contributing to a modern visual epistemology. Tenggren's illustrations in the pages of *Cosmopolitan*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Redbook*, *Life* and others throughout the 1920s and 1930s demonstrate this embrace of the *style moderne*. Integrating aspects of the Golden Age with modernist aesthetics, Tenggren fused fantasy landscapes with New World glamour in which he created a "structure of enticement" (Gundle & Castelli 16) through a "system of visual enchantment" (Gundle & Castelli 86) producing a site of consumer desire through fantasy and glamour. Products are transformed "aesthetic effect" (Brown 23) through visual presentations which intermedially, interspatially, and affectively draw the consumer into new subjectivities. Subject and object, consumer and the image are gendered feminine, as is glamour, and it is gender which provides the link between glamour and modernity and which is most aggressively manifest in consumer culture.

The 1920s: Flappers, Pirates, and Magicians

In Tenggren's ads from this period this sense of glamour is enhanced in his juxtaposition of fantasy backgrounds with the quintessential icon of modernity and glamour – the flapper. The flapper, in her exaggerated linearity, her straight, short shift, and short hair provided a model of pure exteriority, the accessorizing of which would become the basis for the consumption of mass-produced and yet "unique" styles. Her motility and dynamism further suggested a freedom of movement in public space enabled through the creation of such a public identity (Kitch; Asma). Tenggren's flapper signals the shifting landscape of gender relations in the 1920s consistent with the increased presence of women in the public sphere and the ratification of the 19th Amendment (women's suffrage).

There is a parallelism in the ways in which advertising democratized modernist high art and the ways in which fashion (and modernism) was democratized by designers such as Chanel, with her off-the-rack, ready-to-wear fashion, whose straight, clean lines freed up the New Woman from the constraints of the previous age. Coco Chanel's "Little Black Dress" and her synthetic Chanel No. 5 presented an externalized (performed) self, and provided a means by which women could relate to public spaces (Asma 11). Chanel's creations, like her own personal style, offered up a fabricated "modern

girl” who could negotiate in a public world still run by men (Banta 83). Tenggren’s ads often articulate variations of this “modern girl” which complicate and challenge a top-down analysis in which women are seen as manipulated and drawn into a consumerist trap through impossibly fantastic imagery, and instead signal the changes in gender relations in the early 20th century, speaking to the perils as well as the pleasures of advertising and consumption.

Tenggren’s images – featuring and directed at women – sold intimate personal products (nylons, deodorant, soap, watches), housewares (silverware, glassware), and foods (dates, ketchup) all in recognizable fantasy environments – pirate ships, fairy-tale landscapes, Orientalist scenes – simultaneously appealing to sexualized fantasies and to bourgeois aspirations to the upper-class. In associating the promise of the fantasy with its fulfillment through consumption, consumption itself assumed a fairy-tale aspect – transformative, liberating, self-fulfilling, and regenerative. And yet, in the modulation of art and advertising in these magical landscapes which purport to provide transcendence from the mundane aspects of daily life, the ads cannot fully escape their own instrumentality. In the creation of “eye appeal” formed in the cluster of disconnected imaginaries, the underlying stories have been replaced by the overriding logic of consumption. Still, the ubiquity and appeal of Tenggren’s images persistently effected new ways of seeing and new ways of being for tens of millions who consumed them. His images in women’s magazines, ads, and children’s book are also constitutive of what Lauren Berlant has called an “intimate public space” in which consumer desire, however mediated, “acts as a seemingly intimate connection between people even in what is essentially an impersonal public space,” and thereby “cohesively render[s] their subjectivity accessible to others” (11). A sampling of Tenggren’s ads demonstrates not only how he negotiated old and new styles and thereby effected a “modernism for the masses,” but also how his female figures embody the complexity and ambiguity of gender relations as they shifted and were reconfigured, exemplified in the worlds of advertising and fashion.

Tenggren’s ad for Elgin watches (see fig. 3) first appeared in color in *Saturday Evening Post* in 1926, and also later circulated in black and white. Tenggren’s modern girl – a flat-chested, bob-cut, short-skirted flapper looks onto a framed fantasy scene straight out of the *Arabian Nights*, clearly juxtaposing modern and “Orientalist” (primitive) worlds. The old world is viewed by *both* the modern girl and the viewer. Floating without framing, she bridges the spatial discontinuity between the represented and the experienced as we



Fig. 3. Elgin Watch Ad from *the Saturday Evening Post*, Oct. 9, 1926.

look over her shoulder. The modern girl sits looking in (and back) upon the bejeweled woman in the scene with obvious amazement, pleasure, and desire even as she has eschewed the constricting “style of Scheherazade” (Charles-Roux 125) and opted for the freedom of the flapper’s dress. Visually Tenggren has effected what Edward Fry has referred to as “cubist reflexivity” – the dialectic between past and present forms of representation, and has called attention to the conventions of both (296–298).

To the ad’s question: “What should I give to Me?” the answer is clearly that modern form of jewelry – the woman’s wristwatch, but the question also underscores the pleasure and satisfaction in luxurious consumption, leaving aside the question of the need for a watch and the discipline of standardized time that undergirds modern industrial capitalism. Wristwatches were first marketed as smart fashion accessories for women, another way in which to physical-

ly enter into the public, modern, technological sphere by wearing that essential marker of modernity (and industrialized time). But the question also stresses financial independence, self-indulgence, and disposable income to be used to accessorize and construct an exteriorized identity. The flapper's independence here is qualified, however. Women's political independence of the turn of the century had been replaced in the Roaring 20s by apparent sexual freedom (Kitch 122) and, more importantly, freedom to shop, and was essentialized in the figure of the flapper whose thin, minimally-clothed body delivered the (sex) appeal of the product with which one could accessorize and thus identify.

Gender politics and fashion also intersected in the 1920s with rising hemlines, above the ankle in 1920 to above the knee in 1929 (Richards 47), resulting in a revolution in the hosiery industry, with new materials – silk, and new colors – “nude.” This new product was aggressively advertised in new fashion magazines, which focused on the visual. Blue Moon Silk Stockings began in 1925 at the height of this silk hosiery-manufacturing boom, and Tenggren's evocative Blue Moon Stocking ad (see fig. 4), which transformed the stocking into aesthetic effect, ran in various magazines and on billboards from 1926 through 1929. The fairy-like beauty astride the crescent moon is apparently weightless; the gossamer veil cascading from her body echoes the sheer stockings that accessorize her legs, and yet in their dark “nude” hue, they call attention to artifice and exteriority. Accompanying ad copy calls upon the viewer to engage and participate in the fantasy, offering up the stockings “[f]or these exquisite Summer evenings, when in fairylike frock of chiffon or lace you dance to music of infinite charm” (“Silk Stockings”). The ad encapsulates Judith Brown's notion of glamour as “both a formal category and an experiential site of consumer desire, fantasy, sexuality, class, and racial identity” which is “part of a complex aesthetic network that binds high modernism with a range of [mass cultural] phenomena” (1).

Although the girl in the ad shares many of the flapper's aspects, she also evokes a fantasy that is mired in tales of the past – in this case literally so, in that her face is the same as that Tenggren used in the early 1920s for his illustrations in *Grimms Märchenschatz* – specifically those for “Marienkind” (Mary's Child) and “Aschenputtel” (Cinderella), thus fusing the wonder of advertising with the wonder tale. Tenggren's image maintains the allure of luxury and the whimsy of fantasy, conflating the desirability of the product with both women's own notions of desirability and their desires for the fantasy. The cruel irony (and merchandising brilliance) in the magic of the image is that

BLUE MOON
Silk Stockings

New Day in Women's Hosiery!
\$1.85 to \$2.15

A NEW silk stocking has been made—so beautiful, so durable, that women are amazed to find that the price is only \$1.65 to \$2.15. Not at any price, however high, can you buy silk stockings that are more lovely or more lasting. And the reason is this:
The Blue Moon Company makes nothing but this one brand of *full-fashioned silk hosiery*. On this one product their entire effort is centered

Patented Triple Garter Strip Prevents Runs.

—their great new factory, the latest improved machinery, the highest textile skill. And inspiring all this, is a conscientious pride in doing a fine thing well.
Every Blue Moon Silk Stocking is made of pure Japanese dipped dye silk, which is the longest-wearing fabric known. Delightfully sheer yet substantial and firm. Shimmering, dainty, exquisite!
Blue Moon Silk Stockings come in every smart new shade—for every taste, every occasion. Be sure to ask for the new Blue Moon Silk Stockings next time you go shopping. Don't accept a substitute.

BLUE MOON SILK HOSIERY CO., Philadelphia, Pa. New York Office: 389 FIFTH AVENUE

"LONGER WEAR IN EVERY PAIR"

Fig. 4. Tenggren's Blue Moon Stocking Ads (1926-1929)

not only was it selling a product that was completely without utility and immediately disposable (despite the mitigating slogan "Longer wear with every pair"), but that it was simultaneously masking the exploitation of millions of mostly female garment workers' labor, some of whose organizing efforts in the 1920s laid the groundwork for the "labor" feminism of the 1940s and anticipated the CIO (Siderrick). The irony here is of course that while the ad and the product promised a kind of magical transcendence through consumption, those

producing the stockings were seeking to transcend their material and economic realities by organizing to secure fair labor practices.

In creating fantasy worlds for advertising's backdrop, Tenggren used material already in popular circulation and adapted it to the new consumerist context. Familiar fairy-tale images, Orientalist scenes, magic, and pirates, all found a place in Tenggren's illustrations. This mix of fantasy themes was evident in Tenggren's first show in Cleveland in 1921, which featured, in addition to his paintings from fairy tale scenes, one of pirates kidnapping a woman entitled "The Capture" (Emanuelsson & Ekman 103). Pirates were to continue to be a part of Tenggren's work: from the 1926 pirate-themed calendar for *New York World Magazine* (Emanuelsson & Ekman 102), to the 1931 *Pirate's Loot* (Rogers) published by Sears, to his illustrations for the Golden Books in the 1940s and 50s inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson and others.

A terrifying threat to life, property and trade in the 17th century, pirates were transformed in 19th-century fiction into romantic outlaws by authors such as Lord Byron, Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson. Adventure tales of pirates were serialized in new forms of publication – magazines for adults (*Harper's Weekly*) as well as for children (*St. Nicholas*) – shaping the pirate of popular imagination (Cordingly). But it was Howard Pyle (1853–1911) and his students who would create the iconic pirate, providing the template for swashbuckling movies and images thereafter. From 1887 to 1909, Pyle, one of the initiators of the Golden Age of Illustration in America, produced over five dozen pirate illustrations in books and magazines (Loechle 8), while his student N.C. Wyeth illustrated Stevenson's classic, *Treasure Island*, in 1911.

As with the Blue Moon hosiery ads, gender politics contextualize the popularity of pirate imagery at the *fin de siècle*. The rise of the "New Woman" – the college-educated, politically independent woman who challenged male-dominated society – provoked a crisis of masculinity, expressed in a range of cultural phenomena from virility-enhancing electric devices to the Boy Scouts of America, from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to fictional, male-only adventure realms published in books and magazines directed at male readers. Illustrated pirate adventures of the late 1800s and early 1900s were thus part of a larger discursive terrain that included cowboy novels, tales of knights, of Robin Hood, Tarzan and even Arctic explorers, and were fabricated, male-only worlds of exotic and violent fantasy in which men were strong and women absent (Loechle 2).

Tenggren's pirate illustrations are well within and informed by this American illustration convention with one striking exception –

his use of pirate themes for a series of ads for the 1847 Rogers Brothers line of silver plate from the late 1920s to the early 1930s. Within familiar pirate scenes Tenggren not only switched the pirate's gender from male to female, but also merged that pirate with elements of the flapper. Since by the mid-1920s the New Woman had been displaced by the sexually-liberated flapper as the face of female empowerment, nullifying her threat and obviating the need for such protected spheres as the male-only pirate world, Tenggren could utilize the sexualized and exoticized female pirate while maintaining the glamour and magic of the pirate world. In one such ad entitled "Homeward Bound with Treasures Found," featured in the March 1928 *Ladies' Home Journal*, a tattered-shorts-wearing female pirate is at the helm of her ship on the open seas surrounded by a silver-plate coffee and tea service and a boxed, formal silverware set. Conspicuous consumption, accumulation and display of luxury goods are thus set in a sexualized, fantasized and escapist scenario, which is simultaneously domesticated – the accompanying copy informs that her destination is "home." Unlike her male pirate counterparts, her quest for booty is justified: the act of obtaining it fulfills her (true) homemaker role.

Throughout the Great Depression, Tenggren also continued illustrating children's storybooks, but these were severely diminished not only in number but also in format and content. The prohibitive cost of color plates resulted in a higher proportion of black-and-white to color illustrations, as with *Seldom and the Golden Cheese* (1933) and *Sven the Wise and Svea the Kind: and Other Stories of Lapland* (1932). These two, along with Tenggren's 1932 illustrations for *The Ring of the Nibelung* and the 1935 version of H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales round out his fairy-tale illustrations of the 30s, all of which had limited runs and quickly went out of print.

In contrast, Tenggren's work in advertising and in women's magazines during this time expanded, and in this commercial context continued to weave together the "fairy-tale of modernity" (Op de Beeck xvi) with the American Dream of personal fulfillment (Marchand), interpellating a broader middle-class audience into that dreamscape. One of the most interesting of these ads is from a series of promotional images Tenggren did for the Karle Lithographic Company from 1927 to 1932 (Emanuelsson, "Old sweet magic"). In the 1931 illustrated booklet for the pudding mix Junket ("works magic with milk"), Tenggren's images have little direct association with the mundane "magic" of the rennet-induced transformation of milk into pudding. Instead, he captures the imagination with an image of a conjurer (see



Fig. 5. 1931 Junket Ad

fig. 5) accompanied by instructions for magic tricks with which children can “amaze” their friends. The mix of the visual allure with the illusionist’s secrets enlists children who, accompanying their mothers to the market, can then act as agents in the consumerist project. On the inside pages of the booklet, children are encouraged to “keep fit with Junket” by checking their weight and height against standardized charts, subsuming children into a self-regulatory body regimen, while the extraneous dessert mix purports to be nutritious and beneficial. Tenggren’s artwork transforms the ordinary into the fantastic, while symbolically (magically) dessert is transformed into

food that is “healthy” despite the absence of nutritional value, linking desire and discipline in “the magical, healthful, delicious Junket, which they all love.”

It was in women’s magazines, illustrating articles, short stories, and romances, however, that Tenggren found steady work during the Depression. His escapist, fantasy images of fairy-tale scenes, Orientalist tableaus and romance not only accompanied the featured stories but also continued in his ad illustrations that were interspersed between the articles. Thus desire was imperceptibly directed from the fantasy to the consumer goods as millions of women turned the pages of magazines whose *raison d’être* was the ads they featured. American women were being trained to “buy into” the fantasy, which, in the Depression was no longer linked to luxury goods but to the products of everyday life. Democratized by mass-production, the consumption of these promised happiness, fulfillment and upward mobility to middle-class women while incorporating them into the disciplinary regimes of beauty, style, fashion and good housekeeping.

If Tenggren was instrumental in shaping a fantasy consumerist landscape in mid-20th century America, he was nonetheless not detached from conditions in Europe. Although his visual commentary on the growing refugee crisis in Europe (see fig. 6) did little to sway the overwhelmingly isolationist and anti-immigration sentiments of the day, it does provide additional insight into the émigré artists who found work in the realm of fantasy and children’s books. Their images and stories of the plight of refugees in Europe suggest that rather

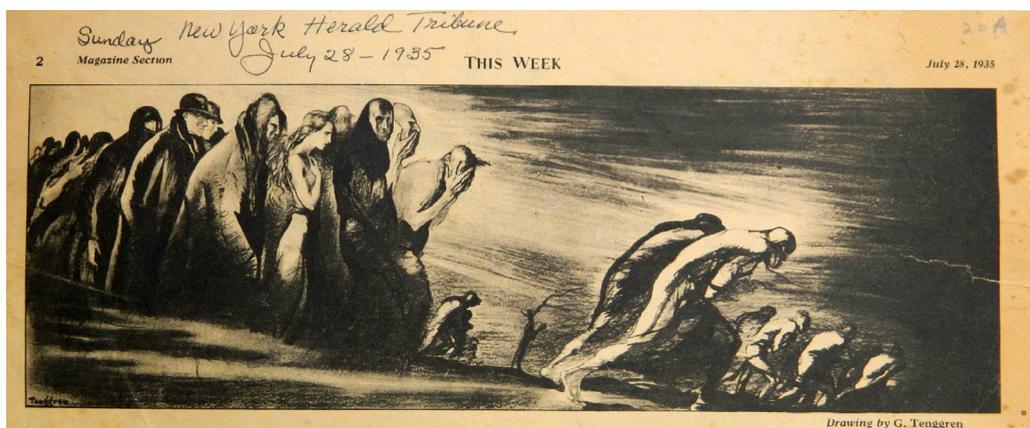


Fig. 6. “Refugees in Europe,” *NY Herald Tribune*, July 28, 1935. Courtesy of the Kerlan Collection, Univ. of Minn.

than bringing an innate “old world sensibility” to American illustration, these illustrators were working within an already existing set of expectations of an imaginary, nostalgic, “fairy-tale” Europe that, in 1935, was conceptually distant from the lived experiences of many Europeans about whom recent immigrants were acutely concerned. As with the disjuncture between the fantasy images and ads during the Depression, fantastic fairy-tale scenes from an imaginary Europe occulted contemporary realities and again linked the fantasy with consumerism. Tenggren’s subsequent work at Disney can be better made sense of, thus, in light of Walt Disney’s own desire and longing for a European past that never existed as well as the escapist fantasies of the American public slowly coming out of the Depression who were disinterested in the European scene and well accustomed to the language of advertising and cinema.

The Disney Years – 1936 to 1939: Fairy Tales and Imaginary Nostalgia

In 1936 Tenggren was recruited by Disney, who was staffing up for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the feature-length animated film based on the story from the Grimms, and he would remain at Disney to contribute to *Pinocchio* (1940) and the Academy Award-winning short, *The Old Mill* (1937). Tenggren joined the *Snow White* team as an art director when production was already underway, but although he was working for an animation studio, he was neither an animator nor a character artist.⁴ Instead, as a concept artist, his background illustrations were thematic, developing a mood and extra-narrative atmosphere for specific scenes, which would then be translated by various sketch artists and animators. Tenggren contributed to many of the important extra-diegetic scenes, such as Snow White’s flight through the forest, which was significantly expanded from the Grimms’ narrative. Tenggren’s concept art was aimed at producing an intense, emotional response in the viewer, creating a mutual affective response between the viewer and the character on the screen, a technique he had honed in magazine advertising over the previous decades. Such was his impact at Disney that Robin Allan claims that “no single artist, except perhaps Mary Blair . . . would so stamp their signature on the Disney oeuvre in quite the same way again” (81).

Descriptions of Tenggren’s tenure at Disney, rather than acknowledging his significant experience and fame as a commercial artist, instead claim that his European fairy-tale credentials and own personal experience made him an obvious candidate for animated adap-

tations of European fairy tales. Speaking of Tenggren's illustrations for *Pinocchio*, Disney layout artist Ken Anderson remarked, "[h]e was a European, and those were the things he knew as a boy – he knew those places" (Ghez 136). Similarly Swanson states: "the look of carved wooden beams and furniture set into rustic interiors were Tenggren's contributions to inspirational sketches for *Pinocchio*, invoking memories of his childhood and Grandfather Teng's carvings" (9).

In turning to the fairy tale in the mid-30s, Disney may have been appealing to a Depression-era desire for escapism coupled with the promise of happiness out of adversity, but it was not a *return* to the Grimms. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was yet another reimagining of the fairy tale whose modern incarnation arguably had been set in motion by the Grimms, but which had since been reiterated in countless editions, translations, illustrations, and stage and movie adaptations. The time and place of the European fairy tale, like that of the pirates of Howard Pyle, was an imaginary realm that was already fixed in the popular imagination. If Disney was seeking an old world look, it was moreover both a Germanic and nostalgic one already envisioned by German popular artists during the turn of the century (deBlécourt). Tenggren's illustrations had to fulfill these already-in-place expectations and his landscapes and décor were of an imagined and imaginary "old world" rather than ones he had personally experienced. Tenggren's famous scenes in *Pinocchio* are doubly attenuated, based on photographs and images of the quintessential German tourist destination (itself a nostalgic reimagining) – the town of Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Artistically, these street scenes, with high-angled, arial perspective and curvilinear contours have been likened to the work of the American Regionalists such as Grant Wood, Doris Lee and Thomas Hart Benton, all of whom Tenggren followed, as evidenced by the large number of clippings in Tenggren's personal papers (Kerlan Collection). However, these Regionalists are more fundamentally linked with Tenggren in their creation of an imaginary, nostalgic, and escapist world perfectly suited to reaffirm an American identity bruised by the Depression.

Alongside the obvious conflation of German(ic) and Swedish sensibilities and the location of both of in some kind of peasant past is the obvious impossibility of reconciling Tenggren's own childhood experiences with them. Furthermore, a close examination of Tenggren's artwork for *Pinocchio* as well as that in *BTT* and elsewhere demonstrates his tendency to use blank, sparse backgrounds which highlight and focus on the characters, along with a significant *lack* of carved, anthropomorphic busy work in the backgrounds, which was,

rather, the illustration style of Swiss immigrant Albert Hurter. If taken in the context of his previous work, however, in which Tenggren worked in modern media, with modern sensibilities and modes of production while evoking a sense of magic and wonder by recycling well-recognized imagery, then it is clear that in his ads as well as in his work at Disney Tenggren was creating a landscape of desire.

Perhaps most significantly, in terms of the popular influence of Tenggren's work at Disney was that in addition to providing concept art for *Snow White* and *Pinocchio*, he also illustrated many of the promotional materials for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Such posters, record covers, illustrated articles in magazines, coloring books, and sheet music were ubiquitously displayed at every level of the market and were converted to household items upon purchase, to be viewed and reused on a daily basis, or, like magazines, arranged in the background. Prior to the advent of video, when movies with limited release dates could only be seen in theaters, such secondary promotional material disproportionately contributed to the saturation of the visual field, effecting Berlant's "intimate public space." Tenggren also illustrated the serialized story of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* featured in the November and December 1937 issues of *Good Housekeeping* prior to the release of the animated feature and thus it was *his* images that first introduced Disney's *Snow White* to the public in a magazine format. His fairy-tale images, inserted into a long text that recounts all the scenes in the movie in great detail while additionally inserting characters' thoughts and feelings, fit in with Tenggren's other magazine work. Amidst ads for (transformative) face creams and diet products, children's health care, house-cleaning and cooking supplies promising to "Make Hubby Happy" (ad for Angostura Bitters), *Snow White* fits clearly into the fantasy romance genre directed specifically at an adult, middle-class white female readership, interpellating them into the landscape of desire situated within the role of domestic homemaker. Tenggren's *Snow White* is a mature woman, making her identification with the reader explicit; the color images of *Snow White* engaged in cleaning the dwarfs' cottage explicitly link domesticity with the fantasy. Tenggren's role in the normalization of this particular *Snow White* to the exclusion of all others is critical: it was his images that pervaded the public view in the ephemera and secondary material and which were thus insinuated into conventional notions of *Snow White*. Epistemologically, how and what we know to be *Snow White* post-Disney is thus not only visually informed, it is in large part the result of Tenggren's interpretations.

Post-Disney: The Return to Children's Book Illustration

In the decades after Tenggren's years at Disney, advertising itself changed, with the rise of television and with magazines ads turning more to photography, and Tenggren again adjusted. For the rest of his life he would illustrate children's books, mostly for Golden Books, and mostly illustrating fantasy, fairy tales, and historical fiction. In this format, with massive print runs and market saturation, Tenggren continued to utilize the forms of modernism and the techniques of advertising, saturating the visual sphere with his imagery, and insinuating the aesthetics of modernism and advertising into everyday life in mundane, essentially disposable children's books.

Often described as a complete break from his earlier styles (Zipes; Emanuelsson, "Gustaf Tenggren"; Swanson), Tenggren's post-Disney return to children's book illustration and fairy-tale themes in the Little Golden Books can more productively be seen as an extension of his work in illustration, advertising, and animation in the 20s and 30s. His colorful, Constructivist-inspired illustrations complemented the radical new vision of Little Golden Books: to produce cheap, image-heavy children's picturebooks in hitherto unimagined volume, and arguably his illustrations contributed to the series' unprecedented success – 15 million copies of Tenggren's *The Poky Little Puppy* were sold between 1942 and 2001 according to *Publishers Weekly* ("All-Time Bestselling Children's Books"). Over his long career, Tenggren would continuously renegotiate form and context, working in emerging commercial media to incorporate new forms and techniques while reshaping images from previous contexts, to create new sensibilities.

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Notes

1 The encyclopedia entry, written by Jack Zipes, not only sets up the selective interpretation for subsequent analyses, it is also replete with factual errors. To wit: Tenggren immigrated to the US in 1920, not 1922; and the oft-cited illustrations for Hans Christian Andersen are not from the early 1920s and not color illustrations, but from a minor work from 1935; and Tenggren never worked as an animator, contrary to Zipes's contention that he abandoned animation after Disney.

2 Christmas annuals, yearly collections of illustrated stories for children, were very popular in Sweden beginning in 1891 with *Jultomten*. The Swedish Institute for Children's Books lists 25 such annuals in their database, *Bland Tomtar och Troll* among them. In contrast to the majority of these, which were published by the Folkskolans Barntidning Förlag with the express purpose of increasing literacy in working-class children through the publication of cheap reading material, *BTT*, with its high-quality color images, is more upscale, and more in line with expensive fairy-tale collections. John Bauer illustrated the first issue in 1907, and intermittently thereafter until 1916.

3 Such Parisian fashions were being furiously pirated by U.S. merchandisers (Pouillard), and, as a result, fashion, and fashion advertising "... more than any aspect of mass culture [. . .] acted as a conduit for this [modernist] aesthetic" (Maltby 78).

4 Contrary to claims, for example, Tenggren did not develop the individual personalities of the dwarfs, and thus could not have brought to them a Scandinavian sensibility that derived from the work of Th. Kittelsen. In fact, in Scandinavian tradition and in the Grimms' stories, dwarfs, trolls, and gnomes are anonymous. The naming and individualizing of the dwarfs is an American innovation. The *animators* responsible for the dwarfs' personalities and many of their gags were Ham Luske, Fred Moore, and Vladimir Tytla (Kaufman, *Snow White* 108). In illustrations Tenggren produced for promotional material, such as the cover of the 1938 RCA 78 record of the songs of *Snow White* in which the dwarfs are walking across a log on their way to work, their faces are only slightly differentiated.