

Om du velger å bruke denne artikkelen i undervisningen vil du her finne

- a. noen nyttige lenker
- b. løsningsforslag til oppgavene

a. Nyttige lenker

Lenken under viser en smakebit fra fjerde serie, og etter sendestart, 27.10, vil episodene være tilgjengelig i en periode på www.nrk.no

<http://www.nrk.no/kultur/forste-smakebit-fra-downton-abbey-4-1.11248383>

Det er skrevet mange gode artikler om serien i britiske aviser, naturligvis:

<http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/downton-abbey>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/downton-abbey/>

Her finner du en kort liten quiz om serien:

<http://int2.hellomagazine.com/quizzes/film/207-downton-abbey/>

b. Løsningsforslag: Working with the text

Content, language and genre

Tore Rem's text is not a news report, but a commentary. These two genres have different functions and raise different questions. A *news report* focuses on covering the basic facts of the event: What happened? Who did it? When did it happen? How many were involved? How much did it cost? A news report on the popularity of *Downton Abbey*, then, would focus on issues such as ratings, award nominations and maybe compare it with competing TV series. The writer is not supposed to argue a case or make his or her opinion known, but to report the events in a neutral manner.

A *commentary* tries to dig deeper. Instead of reporting the news, it takes a recent event as a starting point to discuss wider historical, political, and social issues. Questions commonly addressed in commentaries include: What caused the change? How is this significant today? What is the origin of the phenomenon? The writer may give his or her opinion on the matter.

1. Read Rem's commentary carefully and answer the following questions:

a) What recent trend is the starting point of Rem's text?

Rem's starting point is the popularity of TV series like *Downton Abbey* about class relations in Britain among Norwegian TV viewers.

b) Identify the main question he raises. What does he want to explore?

Rem explores what the popularity of *Downton Abbey* can tell us about British history and

social relations. He uses the TV series to discuss the real lives of servants and their employers, historically and today.

c) What does he reveal about his own opinions on class in Britain and Norway today?

Rem suggests that things are not much different today than they were in the past. There still is a class who pays others to clean up their mess. The major difference between today and the 1910s and 1920s, when the events in Downton Abbey take place, is that servants tend to be recent immigrants and do not live in the same house as their employers. A new class of wealthy people benefits from a global economy where cheap labour can be recruited across borders and not just from the lower classes. The au pair system in Norway, he argues, is part of this trend.

2. The author uses irony and satire, two related literary devices, in this text. According to the [Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary](#), irony can either be:

a) "the use of words that mean the opposite of what you really think especially in order to be funny"

or

b) "a situation that is strange or funny because things happen in a way that seems to be the opposite of what you expected."

The dictionary defines satire as:

a) "a literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn"

b) "trenchant wit, irony, or sarcasm used to expose and discredit vice or folly"

Identify uses of irony and satire in Rem's text. What type of irony appears there? What does it add to the text? Where does he use satire?

One example of irony is found in the anecdote at the beginning of the text. Rem uses both the first and second definition of irony in the anecdote. The expression "the suffering of the upper classes" is ironic in the first sense because it seems out of touch with reality. The quote from the supposed essay about his poor family and his poor butler is ironic in the second sense. A family with a butler is not poor.

Rem uses satire when he describes Mrs Miniver's attitude towards servants and comments on how Mr and Mrs Miniver's exciting inner lives relied on having other people to clean up their mess.

3. Rem starts his text with a teaser that recounts an anecdote about a conservative politician. An *anecdote* is a short and humorous, more or less true, story about a real person that is meant to catch the interest of the audience and introduce the broader themes the author/speaker will address. What does the anecdote add to Rem's text?

As you answer the question, consider the following:

- a) What is meant to be funny about the anecdote? Do you think it is funny? Why? Why not?
- b) Why do you think Rem included the anecdote? What did he try to say by including it?
- c) What does the anecdote tell you (whether it is true or not) about the British upper class?
- d) How does the anecdote introduce broader themes in the commentary?
- e) Does it make you more interested in reading the text? Why? Why not?

History and fiction

The TV series *Downton Abbey* is a piece of historical fiction. Characters like Lord Grantham, Mr. Bates, and Anna are not real people. There is no real estate called Downton Abbey. But Yorkshire is a very real part of England. And real history enters in and shapes the storyline. For instance, the very first episode had the Titanic disaster as a backdrop. Other episodes dealt with the suffragette movement (the fight for women's right to vote) and the First World War. Historical fiction, whether as presented in TV-series, a film, or literature, is therefore, not completely removed from real history.

Historical fiction, however, differs from films, literature, and TV series *based on true stories*. A film like the recent *Lincoln*, for instance, was based on a true story, namely that of President Abraham Lincoln's political battles in the 1860s. The Norwegian *Kon-Tiki* film, likewise narrates the story of Thor Heyerdahl and his crew on the raft across the Pacific Ocean. The term *based on* signals that there is room for adapting the stories in order to write a good plot.

History as presented on TV, in literature, and on the big screen, then, is a complicated matter. Nevertheless, historic fiction can often work as a starting point to better understand history and the present. Rem's commentary is an example of how one may discuss the past and the present in response to art.

4. Discussing the relationship between fiction and history, Rem refers to Simon Schama's critique of *Downton Abbey*.

- a) How does Schama explain the popularity of *Downton Abbey*?

Schama explains the love of *Downton Abbey* with people's superficial and removed understanding of the past.

- b) What does Schama think about people's knowledge of the past?

He believes that people create an imagined past where harmony reigned instead of understanding history as a complicated matter. The simple past becomes a contrast to the complicated present.

5. Rem argues that, "To what extent this was in fact a golden age depends on which side of the golden age you belonged to..."

- a) What do you think he means by this statement?

Rem points out that the old social order of a servant and a master class may have been a golden age for those in the upper classes, but not for those in the lower classes.

b) How does he support it?

Rem gives an example of how the upper class could ask for anything, like a few lambs on the fields for decorative purposes, and the servants would make it happen. He also gives examples of both tough and mundane jobs servants performed. A maid, for instance, could carry tons of waters up and down the stairs each week. Another servant had opening doors as his main job.

6. What does he say about how class matters in British society today?

Rem points out how the amount of money spent on domestic help in Britain was four times higher in 2011 than it was in 1978 and that there are as many servants today as there were in early 20th-century England.

7. How does he explain the decline in the number of servants in Britain in the 20th century?

Rem points out the two World Wars, changing gender roles, industrialization, and new technology as factors that contributed to the declining number of servants. The World Wars opened up jobs to women as men were engaged on the battlefields. Jobs in the industry were more appealing to working class women. Technological advances meant less need for manual labour to perform various tasks. For instance, indoor plumbing and boilers meant no need for maids to carry water upstairs and heat up the water before the master of the house could take a bath.

Writing

8. What does Rem say about class in Norway today? Do you agree with him? Why? Why not? Do you partly agree? Write three paragraphs of 3-5 sentences where you support your argument. Start each paragraph with a topic sentence.

Vocabulary

9. Go to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (<http://www.britannica.com>) and/or *Oxford Dictionaries* (<http://oxforddictionaries.com>) and search for these terms:

| | |
|--------------|----------------|
| aristocracy | gender |
| butler | appearance |
| middle class | anthropologist |
| egalitarian | |

Choose 3 of the terms above to paraphrase. Then:

- Read the definitions carefully.
- Write 5-10 keywords about each term.
- Use your own words to define the terms.