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Passion and emancipation: love, modernity and gender in Swedish 20th century novels

Is it possible to combine passion and emancipation – or are they, actually, contradictions in terms? The project "Passion and emancipation" is investigating the theme of love that seems to have vanished from the public debate during the 20th century. On the other hand: the questions concerning the combination of women's emancipation with erotic love, within or beyond, the frames of marriage, can be traced throughout the 20th century. Love is one of the main themes in modernity's narratives on freedom, citizenship and gender – most obvious, in the history of the modern novel.

The overriding aim for the project is to map the changes in the modern view on erotic love from a gender perspective, by studying a representative selection of Swedish 20th century novels.

In its original design, the project was a bit too extensive to be fully carried out during the two years of funding. Thus, a couple of necessary changes has been made in the research plan - the most important being the separation of the project in two phases. The first one resulted in a book, published in 2008, under the title *"kärlek! och någonting att skratta åt! dessutom"*. *Sara Lidman och den kärleksfulla blicken ("love! and something to laugh at! as well". Sara Lidman and the loving gaze)*, which contains a study of the thematics of passion and emancipation in the seven novels in Lidman's suite *Jernbanan* (The Railway, 1977-1999). The second part is intended to contain three separate essays on the love theme in different novels and time periods (the trilogies of Kerstin Ekman respectively Ulf Lundell from the 1990's; the 'desperate housewives'-novels of the 1950's from writers like Elsa Grave and Rut Hillarp; the emancipation novels of Hjalmar Söderberg and Elin Wägner from the 1910's). From this latter part three articles has already been published (two on the "housewives"-novels and one on Kerstin Ekman), which can be regarded as part of the research result. One of the longer essays (on Kerstin Ekman's novel trilogy *Vargskinnet* [The Wolf's skin] is written but not published. A draft for the essay on Söderberg and Wägner is written, and also an introductory essay, which outlines love as a main theme in the history of the modern Swedish novel, starting from Selma Lagerlöf's *Gösta Berling's saga*, and stretching between two turns of centuries. The material on Ulf Lundell's trilogy has so far been presented in seminars and in articles and lectures aimed at a wider audience.

Three main results of the project

As the project's most important result I regard my book on the theme of love in Sara Lidman's novels, *"kärlek! och någonting att skratta åt! dessutom"* (2008, cf above). Through

a close reading and analysis of the development of the theme of love in the novels of a specific author, I managed to deepen and sharpen the guiding questions of the project. Lidman can be regarded at the same time as one of the most important and one of the most unrecognized writers of love in Sweden in the 20th century. The conflict between passion and emancipation functions as a driving force for the plot throughout the novel suite. Hereby love is stated as an emancipatory and democratic alternative to the rational idea of modernity as a means of progression, connected to industrialization. The belief in love is integrated in the narrative of the novels in the form of an "erotic demand", which in its turn becomes the starting point for Lidman to map and investigate the novel genre's potential of functioning as a subversive knowledge form.

In *Jernbanan* Sara Lidman locates a line of intersection between the urban and "provincial" sites of modernity, which made me realize the importance of including the relation/tension between geopolitical location and emotional narratives in the analysis. This is, thus, a result of the project which has led me to develop new research ideas, which I have presented in a couple of papers and articles, focusing on the novels of Sara Lidman and Kerstin Ekman, and will develop further in a new research project. Of special importance here is the distinction I am trying to make between different narrative strategies, connected to both topological and symbolic aspects of place and belonging.

The project has also resulted, in an overarching and meta-theoretical way, in a deepened understanding of the connection, as well as the tension, between the gender- and genre-related aspects of academic writing. This continuous (self-)reflexive part of my work has resulted in the anthology *Genus och det akademiska skrivandets former* (Gender and the forms of academic writing, eds. Annelie Bränström Öhman & Mona Livholts, 2007). Furthermore, the result of the project was integrated as a crucial part of the developing of the research-theme "Challenging Emotions" (which now consists of ten researchers, and for which I am the theme-leader). This research group is a part of the research programme Challenging gender at Umeå university, which was appointed 2007 as one of three Centres for Gender Excellence by the Swedish Research Council [Vetenskapsrådet]. My book on Sara Lidman has also resulted in a new project, with focus set on the emancipatory potential of the novel genre. This project has the work title "Stilens munterhet". Sara Lidman och romankonsten ("The cheerfulness of style". Sara Lidman and the art of the novel). In January 2009 I received fundings (2 million SEK) for this project from Umeå University Young Researchers' Award.

New research questions generated from the project

In my project I could clearly see the value of a model of analysis which includes historical contextualization, thanks to my setting of focus on a specific theme and topic, located in a specific time and geopolitical space (the conflict between passion and emancipation, analyzed in chosen examples of Swedish novels from clearly defined time periods during the 20th century). Soon enough I realized, however, that it furthermore might be productive to regard the "history of emotions" as a hidden and

gendered agenda in the history of modernity – not at least obvious in the development of the Swedish welfare state. This conclusion I have elaborated as a guiding research question for the research theme "Challenging Emotions" (cf above). Yet another research question, which directly emanated from the project, concerns the notion of the novel as a "situated" and "dissident" thoughtstyle; a potentially subversive and even emancipatory form of knowledge, both for the reader and for the writer. Both these questions are braided into, as mentioned above, my newly started project "Stilens munterhet". Sara Lidman och romankonsten.

Project's two most important publications

Book: Annelie Bränström Öhman, "kärlek! och någonting att skratta åt!dessutom".

Sara Lidman och den kärleksfulla blicken (Pang förlag, Säter 2008) ["love! and something to laugh at! as well". Sara Lidman and the loving gaze]

Chapter in book: "Kära systrar i det putmagade eländet! Om Elsa Graves livmodersförbannelser" i Dikten som mötesplats. Festskrift till Eva Lilja (red. Sissel Furuseth & Lisbeth Stenberg), Göteborg 2008 ["Dear sisters in the bulging stomach misery!" On Elsa Graves womb-curses"]

Other forms of distribution of results

The project has, both in its literary and theoretical aspects, been presented at a number of occasions, both in popular /education outreach contexts and at academic conferences in local, regional, national and international settings. Among these can specifically be mentioned in chronological order: seminar and paper presentation at the annual Book Fair in Gothenburg (September 2004), lecture at the Reading-organization's [LÄS-rörelsens]symposium at Vindeln Folk High School (November 2005), paper presentation at the symposium Peripheral Centres: Cultural Formations and Identities in Northern Spaces (Umeå University, December 2005), several lectures within the librarian SAV (Skönlitterärt Arbete i Västerbotten/Literary work in the county of Västerbotten, with fundings from Swedish Council of Culture), paper presentation at the annual National Philosophy (Umeå university, June 2007), course development and lectures at the seminar series / graduate course "The modernity of Emotions"(Dept. of Literary Studies, Umeå university 2007-2008), paper presentation at the conference "Methodologies, Travelling Theories, Translations: Nordic and European Feminist Research Training" (Åbo Akademi, Finland, September 2007) and finally several interviews and reports on nation broadcasting and television, such as the personal tv-interview on the theme of love in academic research, in the program series Vetenskapslandet (Science-land, Kunskapskanalen, SVT/UR, 22.12 2007) and participation in panel discussion on radio on the theme "Känslan i förnuftet"("The emotion in sense") on Filosofiska rummet ("The Philosophical Room", on SR/P1, tema "Känslan i förnuftet", 23.12 2007)