Panel 8: Emotions

Lydia Wistisen, Emotional Socialization in Swedish Post-War Literature for Girls

This paper examines a selection of Swedish post-war novels for girls through the lens of emotions. During the 1950s and 1960s a new culture of emotion developed in the Western world, as a growing number of young people were rejecting and opposing the dominant values and behavior of society. This process, with its 1950s teenage revolt and 1960s counterculture, produced a shift in how the young generation is thought of and represented on the one hand, and in emotional norms and expression on the other. For the first time in history, teenagers became important culture assets and trendsetters.

This change, in turn, affected the contemporary girl’s book. Drawing on the history of emotions studies, the paper investigates how emotional expressions are utilized to negotiate and contest given norms on the one hand, and the literary conventions of the girl’s book on the other. The material consists of novels such as Britt-Mari lättar sitt hjärta (1944) by Astrid Lindgren, Aldrig en lugn stund hos Oskarssons (1952) by Martha Sandwall-Bergström, Flicka i april (1961) by Kerstin Thorvall, Våg mot imorgon (1961) by Birgitta Järvestad, Snart sjutton (1966) by Siv Widerberg, and Tillträde till festen (1969) by Gunnel Beckman.

Theoretically, the paper is inspired by Sarah Ahmed’s The Cultural Politics of Emotion (2004) and William Reddy’s The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions (2008). The point of departure is intersectional and focuses on the relationship between emotion, power, and socialization. In particular, the paper considers how intersections of age, gender, and class relate to depictions of feeling and establishing of new emotional norms. By critically comparing how different representations of emotion are used to affirm or contest norms, the paper will shed light on the shifting role of morals in the post-war Swedish girl’s book.

Dr. Lydia Wistisen is a researcher and lecturer at the Department for Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University. Her research interests include YA, picture books, emotion history, intersectionality studies, spatial studies, urbanity. She is a part of the editorial board of Nordic Journal of ChilLit Aesthetics and the guest editor of one of the latest volumes of Barnboken: Journal of Children’s Literature Research. Additionally, she reviews children’s and young adult literature for the Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter.

Laura Leden, Mystery of Nancy Drew in the Nordic Countries: Emotional Characteristics Lost in the Norwegian and Finnish Translations

In honour of the 90th anniversary of the first Nancy Drew books published in 1930 by the Stratemeyer Literary Syndicate under the pseudonym Carolyn Keene, my paper will solve the mystery of the abridgement of the Finnish 1950s translations by examining the origins of the abridgement and its effects on characterization. The series about the detective girl Nancy Drew
is one of the internationally most well-known formula fiction series for girls. Nancy is known as an escapist feminist icon representing ideal girlhood of freedom and adventure (Nash 2005). The series was created with marketability in mind and the books have undergone major adaptation in many countries (Skjønsberg 1994).

A comparison of early Finnish Neiti Etsivä (Miss Detective) translations with their American originals shows that the translations have been subject to major abridgement, since both the page count and number of chapters are considerably lower. Skjønsberg’s (1994) report of similar abridgement in the Norwegian Frøken Detektive translations from the 1940s is a clue to the origin of the Finnish abridgement.

The abridgement, which travelled to Finland via Norway, is driven by target-oriented business norms and a wish to produce books for a younger audience than the original 10–15 years. It can be called narrative abridgement, which affects how the story is told by shifting the balance between narrative, descriptive and argumentative elements (types of narration described for example by Bal 2017). Descriptive analysis of shifts affecting the characterization of Nancy shows that the translations favour narrative elements advancing the plot and the character indicators actions and speech on the expense of descriptive elements and the indicators thoughts and feelings, which makes the female detective presented to Norwegian and Finnish readers less emotional and tougher than the original character. The simplified, more fast-paced translations present a more action-oriented image of girlhood.

Laura Leden is a PhD candidate at the University of Helsinki and holds an MA in Swedish Translation Studies and a BA in Scandinavian Literature. Her thesis examines adaptation of the image of girlhood in translations of girls’ books from English into Swedish and Finnish. She has published on translations of L.M. Montgomery’s works in the children’s literature journals Barnboken, The Lion and the Unicorn and The Looking Glass and presented several papers, for example at the L.M. Montgomery conferences organized by the University of Prince Edward Island.

Vera N. Veldhuizen, Good Girls, Bad Girls, and Suffocating Softness

In this paper I analyse the untranslated Dutch YA novel A Mouth Stuffed With Down (1994) [Een Mond Vol Dons] by Lydia Rood. This novel, which won the prestigious Zilveren Griffel upon publication, deals with the troubled close friendship of two girls, and how their different reactions to the feminised softness with which they are approached by their parents push them apart. The protagonist-narrator, Marjan, lives with her single and pragmatic mother and obedient bully sister. Her best friend, Sophie, has run away from her caring and gentle parents. Feminised softness (the limiting of “correct” emotional display to passive and gentle emotions) plays a significant part in both girls’ lives; Marjan is timid, and is given almost complete freedom at home as a means of encouraging gentle obedience. Sophie, on the other hand, is not allowed to argue at home; every disagreement has to be handled through gentle discourse. She describes this situation to Marjan as “suffocating”, recalling dreams of her mouth being stuffed with down.

In this paper, I analyse the forms this feminised softness takes in the narrative, and the contrasting impacts it has on the two main characters. To do this, I combine a cognitive
narratological approach to examine the different emotions portrayed by the characters with a thematic approach using which I demonstrate the roles of intimate teenaged relationships (parents-child, bosom friendship, sibling, and romantic) in creating this sense of suffocating softness. The resulting fallout reveals that the obstruction of non-soft, non-feminine emotions in this narrative leads to the breakage of the key relationships involved, and the permanent impact emotional limiting discourse can have on teenaged girls. I argue that through displaying this impact, the narrative critiques the extra-textual narratives surrounding girlhood in the Netherlands in the 90s.

**Dr. Vera N. Veldhuizen** is Assistant Professor of European Languages and Cultures at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her research expertise lies with cognitive approaches to children’s literature. Her most recent publications include “Empathy Across Time in Speculative Children’s Shoah Fiction” in *English Association: Issues in English* (2019) and “Narrative Ethics in Robert Westall’s *The Machine Gunners*” in *Children’s Literature in Education* (2020). She is currently adapting her Cambridge PhD project, supervised by Professor Maria Nikolajeva, for publication as a monograph.