A Complicit Reading Strategy: Exposing Censored Themes of Intimacy in Swedish Alfhild Agrell's *Räddad*

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This article proposes an ethical reading position by taking the author's socio-historic censorious situation into account and by adopting a complicit reading strategy in order to expose silenced themes of intimacy. It does so through textual references to the 1883 play Räddad (Saved) *by the Swedish female playwright Alfhild Agrell. By taking the point of departure in Helen Freshwater's idea of an inclusive model of censorship, Judith Butler's theory of reiteration, and Toril Moi's claims of the political potential of a reading mode starting in the concerns of the text, I establish the theoretical basis for a complicit reading strategy. I then present the gendered period-specific censorious situation of the 1880s in Sweden, in which the aesthetics of idealism influenced censorship in the theatres and also regulated playwriting. I demonstrate a vacillation between self-censoring and exposing themes of intimacy in Agrell's play, proposing that this should be regarded as a specific rhetoric produced by an awareness of gendered censorship. Finally, by leaning on phenomenological and new materialist instruments of analysis, I present an embodied reading strategy for Agrell's play in response to its specific individual poetics and concerns, to expose its full gender/feminist potential.*

Keywords: feminist literary criticism / women's writing / Swedish drama / Agrell, Alfhild / intimacy / censorship / self-censorship

The Swedish playwright and author of prose fiction Alfhild Agrell, a contemporary of August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen, was quite successful in Scandinavian theatres in the 1880s. Her breakthrough play *Räddad* (*Saved*) was first staged at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in 1882 and was published in 1883. Due to the gender critique of the play, it has been considered part of an early feminist movement in the

theatre in the wake of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) (see Nordin Hennel, "En stjärnskådespelerska" 234–235; Wirmark 9–10). Agrell's success as a playwright did not last long, though, and by the early twentieth century her plays were deemed of low quality, recognized as simply constructed expressions of indignation with stereotyped roles (see Schück and Warburg 164, 173, 196; Tjäder 214–215). Ibsen's and Strindberg's ways of composing plays have set the standard for our historical understanding, structuring how we read and interpret realistic and naturalistic plays of the period in general and establishing a benchmark of quality. Consistent comparisons through history with Ibsen's plays have not only intensified the negative evaluation of Agrell's plays but also contributed to a position on the fringe of the canon, their inclusion conditioned by their feminist value. Although efforts have been made in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to clear the plays of accusations of being badly composed and to show their topicality,[1] they linger in what Gunilla Hermansson has referred to as the "outermost area" of the theatrical and academic canons, the area inhabited by authorships excluded from summarized national historical narratives or, on the contrary, highlighted to complement or challenge the traditional, usually male canon (Hermansson 193).[2] My stance is that the pejoratively judged features do not indicate poor dramaturgical skills but are gendered responses to censorship imposed by theatre managers and as institutional restrictions in the 1880s. Alternative reading strategies for Agrell's plays, and women's writing in history in general, that question established historical narratives and established interpretation patterns and instead acknowledge the gendered censorial situations of the authors, are needed to do their works justice, as those situations af-

[1] In the spring of 2007, a group of actors at the Royal Dramatic Theatre organized four readings of works by Swedish women playwrights found to have been frequently staged in Scandinavian theatres in the 1880s. The same theatrical season saw several new productions of plays by women playwrights of the "Modern Breakthrough," both in Stockholm theatres and elsewhere. These productions were the outcome of the projects by women actors, dramaturges, and directors at several theatres. The SPETS project, a collaboration between Östgötateatern (the regional theatre of Östgötland County) and Riksteatern (Sweden's national touring theatre), toured Swedish theatres with *Räddad*, among other plays, and *Modärna kvinnor* (*Modern women*), a collaboration between the Stockholm City Theatre and the National Gallery, received considerable attention in the newspapers and other media. Riksteatern received funding to digitize and publish plays from the nineteenth century. The project Dramawebben (The drama web) started with plays by women playwrights of the Modern Breakthrough.

[2] Gunilla Hermansson uses the Swedish term *randområde*, further describing this as a mobile, precarious, and conditioned area (193).

fected the presentation of morally sensitive themes of intimacy, such as feelings and emotions connected to marriage and family.

In this article, by taking the point of departure in Helen Freshwater's idea of an inclusive model of censorship, Judith Butler's theory of reiteration, and Toril Moi's claims of the political potential of a loving caring reading mode that starts in the concerns of the text, I first establish the theoretical basis for a complicit reading strategy. Using *Räddad* as an example, I then present its period-specific censorious situation and demonstrate a vacillation between hiding and exposing themes of intimacy in the work, suggesting that this should be regarded as a specific rhetoric produced by an awareness of gendered censorship. Finally, I claim that a complicit reading strategy must be individually designed in response to the specific rhetoric and concerns of the literary work in question, and by leaning on phenomenological and new materialist instruments of analysis, I present an embodied reading strategy for Agrell's play, to reveal its full gender-critical potential, exposing expressions of women's emotional reactions in relation to the deprivation of intimacy. Thereby, as a reader and scholar from my much more permissive and privileged twenty-first-century position concerning what can be written about intimacy compared with Agrell's censorious situation, I join forces with the late-nineteenth century playwright making myself complicit with her, against the gendered restrictions that she faced when composing the play, explicitly expressing what she could not.

A reading strategy from an ethical standpoint in complicity with the (self)-censored playwright

Instead of starting with a set definition of censorship, Helen Freshwater offers an inclusive model based on a responsiveness to censorship that reflects socio-historically specific instances of control, conditioning, or silencing and furthermore allows for and distinguishes between different manifestations of censorship (Freshwater 241). Consequently, different forms of censorship of varying severities and kinds—*i.e.*, regulatory interventions by political authorities, institutional impositions and restrictions, and structural control—may, in line with Judith Butler's ideas, appear simultaneously as a continuum, connected to one another but without negating differences or ruling out certain kinds of censorship (Butler, "Ruled Out" in Freshwater 242). However, time- and site-specific censorious events affect individuals differently and are thus experienced and responded to differently,

depending on the individual's specific social and cultural position. Pierre Bourdieu has proposed that how the individual author deals with normative codes and restrictions attaches her to a specific position in a cultural field (Bourdieu 235). Turning Bourdieu's proposition around, the individual's specific position in the literary and theatrical field and the larger social and cultural environment is decisive for how s/he can deal with institutional regulations. As feminist scholars have pointed out, the types of capital of a specific field (in the Bourdieusian sense) exist in the interrelationships among social positions carved out in the intersection of social structures such as gender, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality. The intersection of these structures brings with it access to or limitations on what types of capital are available to certain positions (see Moi, "Appropriating Bourdieu"; Skeggs; Reay), affecting the individual's maneuvering room within the field and how s/he can relate to external regulations and, consequently, how s/he transforms them to internal regulations—in other words, self-censorship.

Michael G. Levine criticizes scholarship that restricts its analysis of (self)-censorship to the question of reprehensible content and how it is smuggled into the public sphere, as it fails to understand how self-censored writing also and above all gives voice to a complex network of internalized power structures (Levine 51). As Beate Müller points out, self-censorship is not necessarily a conscious process, as the internalization of regulating norms is not easily overcome (Müller 25). Consequently, the line between self-censorship and writing strategies is blurry, and complicit relationships between censoring agents and censored individuals cannot be ruled out. This also implies that external regulations such as critical exclusion and institutional interference are connected to self-censoring authorial strategies visible in the rhetoric of a literary text.

Freshwater underlines the temporal aspect of censorship, stating that a censorious event is not singular but part of a chain of events, including interactions with censorious agents. Repression, silencing, and control require reiteration in order to maintain their force (Freshwater 225). Although canonizing processes do not necessarily happen in sanctioned institutions, they are still regulating and silencing instruments,[3] which is why they can be regarded as long-term historical censorious forces and the result of loyalties between censorious agents. Censorious agencies and silencing processes in canonization, layers of established historiographical narratives, and scholarly methods of literary

[3] For a more extensive discussion of the canon and censorship, see Müller 12–14.

analysis need to be critically examined when dealing with women's writing in history and censorship.

Freshwater's heterogeneous view of censorship marks an ambition not to reinscribe an original act of exclusion just because a certain experience of being censored does not correspond to a predefined category (Freshwater 241). The same ethical stance must characterize a reading strategy that is loyal to the attempt to express censored themes by starting in the socio-historic situation of the author, making her experience or anticipation of being censored from a gendered position the node around which the literary text is structured. In a reading in complicity with the censored author, the anticipation or negotiation of censorship is regarded as the generator of a style that addresses censorious limitations both "as a debilitating impediment and … as an impetus to stylistic innovation" (Levine 2). The two sides of reiteration are thus stressed: while needed for controlling regulations to maintain their impact, reiteration also creates latitude for a level of negotiation. As Judith Butler argues, each instance of reiteration represents an invitation to perform a specific speech act differently (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 1–41). Consequently, the limitations of censorship may be destabilized by the possibility of negotiating responses such as irony and silence, creating ambivalent meanings or an awareness of censorial exclusions in the reader or theatregoer.[4]

When tracing the style or rhetoric of the text, starting in a censorious situation means giving priority to the historical context and paying attention to how words and structures imposed by this situation are used, rather than taking the point of departure in theoretical concepts. Toril Moi, who has questioned the hegemonic position of the "hermeneutics of suspicion" in scholarly interpretations of literary works, points to the need to recognize situations in which a reading mode of loving care, giving priority to the concerns of the text by seeing word and meaning as a coherent whole rather than divided elements, is more politically effective and useful than the suspicious quest for "something else" (Moi, *Revolution* 175–177). The complicit reading strategy for the censored literary text, which I propose, responds to the text's concerns and ways of addressing its reading audience, focusing on the

[4] Judith Butler has furthermore pointed out that censors are compelled to restage the utterances that they seek to banish from public life, conducting "a performative contradiction" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 130). Freshwater notes another counterproductive reflexive effect of overt censorship: it may create an awareness of excluded material, generating complicit audiences who can perceive the dual structure of the censored text (Freshwater 234).

negotiation of normative regulating structures. In contrast, established narratives of literary history, set definitions, literary evaluations, and scholarly methods are viewed with skeptical suspicion, as products of long-term temporal chains of censorious events.

By viewing rhetorical traits, such as breaches of expectation and fissures found in literary texts, in relation to the norms and conventions of the theatrical institution as responses to censorious situations and by relating them to the concerns of the text, works may be opened to new modes of reception, thus breaking historiographic chains of silencing events. As concerns of literary works differ, complicit reading strategies must also do so. The reading strategy that I suggest, in solidarity with Agrell's censorious situation and with regard to the concern of her text, aims at recovering censored feelings and emotions connected to marriage and family. It demands an embodied reading strategy, creating an intimate bond between protagonist and reader. In the analysis, I lean on Sandra Lee Bartky's ideas of feminist solidarity between women in different positions with different experiences and on her notion of "feeling-with-another," which is a response to an observing position that does not mean a total emotional identification but allows a certain distance from the individual whose situation is observed (Bartky 73–81).[5] Jay Rajiva notices that such a reading position orients the reader towards certain types of narrative structures, such as visceral elements, that may be mobilized without taking leave of context and interpretation (Rajiva 32). "Feeling-with" the protagonist of the play, I pay attention to the many descriptions of tactile sensations and also to melodramatic hyperbole addressing the reader's memory of emotional and bodily experiences.

Rajiva understands the literary text as a canvas on which "the Other" emerges as a figure of representation and on which a character or a marginalized subject position can be examined (Rajiva 10). Bronwyn Parry, who explores "distributed spaces of intimacy," suggests that intensely intimate relations without personal encounters can be achieved through interaction with shared objects through the deep sentiments these objects may embody or evoke (Parry 35–36, 43). By combining Rajiva's and Parry's reasoning, Agrell's *Räddad* is treated

[5] See also LaCapra, whose notion of "emphatic unsettlement" resembles Bartky's position of "feeling-with-another." For LaCapra, emphatic unsettlement "resists full identification with, and appropriation of, the experience of the other" (LaCapra 41). The secondary witness (to traumatic experiences) puts him/herself "in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (78).

as an interface through which the subordinated subject position of a nineteenth-century, bourgeois, young Swedish woman can be examined from an emotional perspective, which creates the foundation for my conclusions regarding the political potential of the embodied reading strategy.

The specific socio-historic censorious situation and the suspicious reading of established historiography

The rhetoric of self-censoring and exposure in Agrell's plays responds to the moral and artistic restrictions and impositions of the aesthetics of idealism, acted out both as an authoritarian intervention by theatre managers and as an institutional regulation influencing playwrights' ways of composing plays. The moral content closely connected to an ideal dramaturgy was decisive in the censorious task of litterateurs and theatre managers when deciding what, and what not, to stage (Johansson Lindh 59).

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Scandinavia may be seen as characterized by a paradigm shift, as varieties of aesthetic anti-idealism, such as critical realism and naturalism, challenged the late nineteenth-century version of aesthetic idealism. Still, as in many European countries, the aesthetics of idealism occupied a hegemonic position in the prestigious Scandinavian theatres of the 1880s, extending until the mid-1920s when modernism had achieved hegemony (Moi, *Henrik Ibsen* 67–68).[6] The moral backbone of the aesthetics of idealism essentially comprised conservative, Christian, patriarchal, bourgeois values, closely connected to artistic conventions demanding didactic uplifting qualities. In particular, these conventions defended matters of decency (see Molnár 145, 158; Johansson Lindh 62). The anticipation of authoritarian intervention as well as institutional regulation in the form of conventions shaping the audience address and the audience's expectations, and consequently success or failure, meant that all playwrights, male or female, were influenced by the aesthetics

[6] In accordance with Toril Moi's use of the notion, aesthetic idealism refers to a set of "post-Kantian aesthetic principles that survived romanticism as a literary and artistic movement," which in an impoverished moralizing and didactic form (compared to romanticism proper) contributed to a more or less compulsory "master discourse" about literature and art well into the twentieth century (Moi, *Henrik Ibsen* 82). In line with Moi's observations the main distinction should not be made between romanticism and realism but between an ideal realism and a materialist critical realism.

of idealism and either consciously related to it, if they wanted their plays staged at a prestigious theatre, or unconsciously internalized the regulating norms as the benchmarks of good quality.

In the 1880s, realism without idealistic elevation was regarded as a more-or-less direct representation of reality, having the capacity to expose the naked non-mediated truth (Gedin 378, 387–391). Consequently, critical realistic depictions of marriage or family—the core of society—were considered dangerous. Aided by critical realistic and naturalistic narratives, indecency threatened to cross the line between the intimate and public spheres in both directions, bringing sensitive information about men's sexual behavior into the family and exposing the secrets of family life in public (Gedin 387–391). Performances that criticized or clashed with the theatrical norms and conventions supporting decency, which included the prevailing gender norms and ideology of family and marriage, provoked strong emotional reactions in both reviewers and ordinary theatregoers.

Banishment from the theatrical stages was the primary consequence of failing to balance on the edge of indecency, but a secondary consequence was the less distinct exclusion from bourgeois circles by means of social shaming. Moreover, critical realistic and naturalistic literature was thought capable of posing such a severe threat to society that it could have legal consequences.[7] David Gedin notes that it was more complicated and sensitive for a woman writer to appear in public than for a male writer, although a woman's writings on the subjects of marriage, family, and sexuality did not run the same risk of being considered indecent as did the critical realism of radical male authors (Gedin 377, 390). The plays by Agrell and her contemporary Swedish female colleagues are more cautious, though, in their opposition to the aesthetics of idealism than are, for example, Ibsen's and Strindberg's realistic and naturalistic plays (see Lindh Estelle). Agrell risked transgressing boundaries both as a woman, expressing ideas in public, and as a dramatist, exposing differences between the public image of marriage and its reality from a power perspective and articulating women's points of view. I claim that the uneven gender structure of the public space affected the author's dramaturgical and stylistic choices, which played an important role in censorial judgements of decency. In a letter to a friend, Agrell's colleague Anne Charlotte Leffler shows her

[7] August Strindberg, for example, was prosecuted for blasphemy and risked being sentenced to jail for having questioned the Christian sacrament of communion in one of his short stories.

awareness of this. She finds Ibsen's *A Doll's House* immensely interesting but strange, and that it would have been rejected by the Royal Dramatic Theatre had she written it: "In order to defy the audience's taste like that, your name must be Ibsen." (Lauritzen 178) Leffler clearly found that the conditions of playwriting were different for her than for her male elder colleague and that she was acting from a more restricted position in the cultural field.

The "Modern Breakthrough" controversy over aesthetics at the *fin de siècle* still influences our modern understanding of artistic value. Literature and theatre are validated from the winning side of this fight, from within a discourse that the literary scholar Frederic Jameson has called the "ideology of modernism" (Jameson 3), which favors, for example, distance, reflection, abstraction, iconoclasm, and aesthetic purity. Moreover, the emergence of modernism and its literary ideals also meant the development of formalist literary theory, which still influences analysis in the academic discipline of contemporary literary studies. This has had radical consequences for the evaluation of women's plays of the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough. Negotiation of the typical features of the aesthetics of idealism in Agrell's plays has been deemed to indicate inability or insecurity in playwriting (see Tjäder 214–215; Nordin Hennel, "Strid är sanning, frid är lögn" 520), instead of being connected to the gendered field of the arts and the centrality of morality, or considered in relation to the concerns and structure of her plays.

The rhetoric of self-censoring and exposure in *Räddad*

Breached expectations of a happy outcome for the female protagonist, defeats, and losses recur in the plays by Agrell and her female contemporaries, contributing to vacillation between cautiousness in their treatment of marriage, mothering, love, sexuality, and other motifs of intimacy and a strong urge to say it all—to reveal uncensored truths about women's situations in marriage and the family (Lindh Estelle). In *Räddad*, the promise of escape for the good-hearted, strong-willed female protagonist from her precarious situation in marriage is dashed.

In the last act of *Räddad*, the protagonist speaks her true mind about her marriage in a scene of revelation (Agrell 100–113). The usually quiet and subservient young wife Viola rants about her husband's treatment of her and fully reveals her suffering and frustration. What enables her outburst is a large sum of money given to her as a gift by

a friend of her mother's and the prospect of her husband Oscar being convicted of embezzlement. Viola's mother-in-law tries to persuade Viola to use the money to cover her husband's crime, but Viola refuses, realizing that her time has finally come. This scene recalls Nora's exit in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, but Viola escaping her unhappy marriage after having scolded her husband and mother-in-law, with her husband's conviction of a crime giving her custody of her son and with enough money to start a new independent life, strikes me as much more radical than Nora's exit without her children or any money. However, in a sudden twist of the plot, Viola's young son dies in a fit of croup (117). In the high-strung melodramatic final scene taking place late in the evening, Viola appears all dressed in black and with a black veil covering her face. After having signed over her gift of money to her husband, enabling him to conceal his crime, Viola leaves the house in despair with her dead son in her arms (125–130).

Traditionally, the revelation scene would have ended the play, giving the representative of virtue her due reward and either punishing the villains or converting them to the right moral track, resulting in the reconciliation of the family and confirming to the reader or theatregoer that upholding the conservative bourgeois moral values brings success and happiness (Molnár 145, 158). Viola, who is good-hearted, right-thinking, and in a subordinated position, certainly has the qualities of the virtuous heroine, and is thus formed for the audience to side with. Unlike the heroines of ideal realism, however, she is punished by losing her son, while her antagonists, the merciless mother-in-law and irresponsible heartless husband, win the battle when she signs over her money to Oscar. By the plot twist, ending the play in darkness and despair for the protagonist, Agrell thwarts the expectations built up in the revelation scene, renegotiating the conventions and the release of reader/spectator tension that the revelation scene was conventionally meant to produce. The dramaturgy shows the possibility of a radical ending with Viola happily escaping her marriage, which would break the moral regulations of the aesthetics of idealism, yet the actual ending presenting Viola's defeat keeps it on the accepted moral track. Viola can be interpreted as fairly punished for her unwomanly behavior and rebellion against her husband and mother-in-law, but at the same time the expectations of her escape and the awareness of the traditional use of the revelation scene call into question her punishment.

In the heated revelation scene, the other characters' actions contribute to the ambivalence towards Viola's behavior. Even Viola's supportive and loyal friend Uncle Milde is appalled at watching Viola's

scolding of her husband and mother-in-law and condemns it (Agrell 112). This enables an interpretation of Viola's merciless outburst as wrong and furthermore caused by meanness, particularly as Viola herself claims that "everything that was noble and good" in her has been suffocated by her marriage.[8] Depicting Viola as doing wrong out of meanness, and letting even the characters who are her friends take a stand against her outspokenness, reduces the critical force of her fierce testimony about women's conditions in patriarchal marriage; at the same time, however, the scene critically illustrates the emotional destructiveness of a loveless marriage. This is underlined by Oscar's regrets and reproaches towards his mother, and by Viola's friends' worries about her when she has finally left the house. The ambivalence created by incorporating the criticism within established structures of the revelation scene, structures traditionally used for the didactic purpose of keeping women within the limits of conservative bourgeois decency, invites a dual response on the part of readers and theatregoers: it may produce a response in line with the conventions and morality of idealist realism as well as one in compliance with the subversive protest against it. This vacillation, exemplified by *Räddad*, between hiding and exposing the critique of marriage illustrates an urge to expose women's experiences of lack of intimacy in marriages of convenience while emphasizing the vulnerability of doing so.

In *Räddad*, censorship's "performative contradiction" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 130) means demonstrating the debilitating impact of censorship itself. Rather than trusting awareness of silenced content (Freshwater 234), the possibility of an alternative order is explicitly exposed only to be destabilized, offering the possibility of an interpretation in accordance with the conservative, patriarchal, and bourgeois moral norms of the time, but also revealing thoughts and feelings that transgress the patriarchal norms of subservient femininity, addressing a complicit audience. In line with Michael G. Levine's reasoning about censorious control as a generator of styles (Levine 2), renegotiation of the didactic structures of ideal realism has produced a rhetoric of vacillation by which Agrell is able, in a sophisticated way, to communicate her critique of marriage and represent the experience of emotional deprivation, without explicitly opposing patriarchal bourgeois morals, as regulated by theatrical conventions. This strategy can, in Butler's terms, be described as taking advantage of censorship's need for reitera-

[8] My translation of the following original: "Förqväft allt, som var ädelt och gott …" (Agrell 105). All translations of quotations from here on are mine.

tion by treating playwriting as an invitation to perform the theatrical conventions differently, thus destabilizing the impositions of censorship and simultaneously safeguarding the position in the theatrical field (see Butler, *Excitable Speech* 1–41).

"Feeling-with-another" and mobilizing a tactile memory in the reading of *Räddad*

The last step of reading *Räddad* in complicity with Agrell's censorious situation entails exposing its subversive and political potential by responding to the concerns of the text. In the revelation scene, Viola asks her husband if he has "looked into the hearts of most wives" when he claims that he has not been worse than any other husband (Agrell 107).[9] First, this question summarizes what Agrell lets the reader/theatregoer do in *Räddad*, namely, look into the heart of a subordinated wife; second, it hints that the play represents suffering in an emotionally barren marriage as a collective experience shared by many bourgeois women. I claim that the stereotyped roles and melodramatic exaggeration, which has caused the play to be pejoratively labelled a mere piece of indignation, are perceived as instruments for representing a subordinated wife's emotional distress—in other words, for focusing on the female protagonist and her emotions.

By referring to Roland Barthes' notions of "hermeneutic code" and "proaretic code," Margareth Cohen discusses the difference between the plots of sentimental versus realistic narratives (Cohen 61–62). In the classic realistic narrative, the proaretic code precedes the hermeneutic code, sending the reader on a quest for the "truth" of the narrative and, through the progress of this quest and its actions, the reader can finally interpret this "truth." In the sentimental narrative, the two codes work in parallel: the "truth" of the narrative is established early in the plot and the actions then prove it (61–62). While the narrative of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which has strongly affected the interpretations of *Räddad*, can be compared to the classical realistic narrative, the relationship between these two codes in Agrell's play resembles the relationship in the sentimental narrative. In *Räddad*, a conflict between male supremacy and female subordination, causing women to suffer, is already established in the exposition of the play. The play's action then illustrates the strength of this conflict, demonstrating that the initially

[9] "Men har du sett ned i de hustrus hjertan, som äro förenade med dessa flesta?" (Agrell 107).

established truth about female suffering is valid. Rather than focusing on external actions, the function of the plot is to highlight Viola's mental suffering.

The focus on the protagonist and her situation is combined with establishing Viola as a representation of a kind-hearted and caring woman with moral integrity but in a subordinated and thus vulnerable position. This is also made clear to the readers/theatregoers from the beginning of the play, prompting them to sympathize with Viola. They are invited to adopt a position of solidarity with the female protagonist, as if watching the events and her antagonists while standing by her side. Sandra Lee Bartky suggests that observing "the Other" from nearby still allows a certain distance, preventing total emotional identification and shaping a response of "feeling-with-another" (Bartky 73–81). Paraphrasing Bartky, the reader is invited to such a position of "feeling-with" the female protagonist. In the first act of *Räddad* when we are introduced to Viola and her situation, she appears quiet and troubled. Dressed in black, she sits close to the fireplace, staring into the fire, lost in thought (Agrell 5–6, 25–26). Oscar thinks that "marriage has had a reposeful effect" on her, a comment that ironically exposes Viola's silence and thoughtfulness and hints at her underlying emotions (6).[10] Later, in the first and second scenes of the first act, Viola's lack of power and imprisonment in marriage become obvious: her task is to run the household, but she has to adapt to her mother-in-law's advice and the maids ignore her orders. Her husband forgets her birthday and, on top of this, she finds a picture of another woman, which has slipped out of Oscar's pocket (14–15, 18–20). The dialogue and actions show a representative of virtue in distress. Melodramatic hyperbole is used to depict the situation, making it transparently clear and deepening our sympathies for Viola. In combination with a stereotypical husband without any redeeming qualities, the reader/spectator is invited not to feel the same as Viola but to feel *with* her, to look at the events from her perspective and to get upset on her behalf, or—paraphrasing the critics' judgements—to become indignant.

Furthermore, direct references to sensations help create closeness to the protagonist. Oscar recalls Viola's behavior at the beginning of their marriage: when he came home early in the mornings after nights out with his friends, she used to sit at the window waiting for him, shivering with cold and her eyes red with crying (Agrell 8–9). Viola's emotionally barren marriage and her longing for intimacy and care are communicated through the descriptions of her coldness by the window

[10] "På dig åtminstone har äktenskapet inverkat lugnande." (Agrell 6)

and the warmth of the fireplace. Rajiva draws on Derrida when proposing that, in the reader, the communication of sensations may form an "eidetic figure" from memory, generating a sense of recall and confirming an optical intuitionism (Rajiva 28). The connection between the sensations of cold and warmth, on one hand, and Viola's suffering and longing, on the other, speaks to the reader's eidetic memory, which has the potential to produce an embodied understanding of the experience of the miserable marriage. The tenderness and love Viola feels for her son are accompanied by tactile references to the velvet in the jacket that she has made for him, which similarly may produce eidetic images in readers (Agrell 15–16). Moreover, embodied responses are engendered through communicating the protagonist's memory of the sensation of movements. The contrast of the freedom of Viola's childhood years to the restrictions of marriage is communicated through her memory of the sensations of running and playing in the woods (55).

In the final scene, melodramatic hyperbole communicates extreme distress. Viola wears her black dress and veil, holding white flowers in her hand and carrying her dead son in her arms, wrapped in a black shawl. She says that she will leave for her mother's grave, crying out in anguish and laughing hysterically. According to Peter Brooks, such melodramatic exaggerations ask for interpretations beyond the literal. They should be conceived of as the expressionistic dramatization of bodily experiences, extreme states of minds, and moral conflicts (Brooks 55). The dark colors with gothic tints convey Viola's emotional distress at its strongest in the very moment of experiencing it, without any temporal or spatial distance. In the final scene of *Räddad*, the reader's or audience's embodied memory is addressed to activate the memory of sensing Viola's wild despair over her dead son.

Parry suggests that intensely intimate relations without personal encounters can be achieved through works of literature, through the deep sentiments these may embody or evoke (Parry 35–36, 43). Through an embodied reading that evokes sensations and sentiments in the reader, the play becomes an interface, intimately connecting today's readers and the late-nineteenth-century women whose emotional experiences are represented in *Räddad.* In accordance with Moi's proposition that a reading mode of "admiration and loving care" starting in the concerns of the text might often be more politically effective than one in line with the hermeneutics of suspicion (Moi, *Revolution* 175–177), I suggest that an embodied intimate reading strategy realizes the full artistic and political potential of Agrell's play.

Sharing intimate experiences over temporal and geographic distances through the interface of literary works

Regarding women's writing on intimacy, I have proposed a complicit reading strategy that acknowledges the censorious situation of the author. The style and rhetoric of the text are looked on as responses to such a situation. In the case of Alfhild Agrell's *Räddad*, I have shown that the authoritative and institutional restrictions and impositions of the aesthetics of idealism have produced a vacillation between censoring and exposing the female experience of an emotionally barren marriage. It has produced two ways of interpreting Viola and her situation, either subversively or in line with the aesthetics of idealism and its associated ideology. By first considering the censorious situation and then identifying the rhetoric it has produced, I have highlighted the mental suffering of a wife trapped in an emotionally barren marriage as the core of the gendered criticism of the play. Starting in skepticism towards established scholarly literary methods, set definitions, historiographical narratives, and evaluations, I suspected them of being links in a chain of censorious events. In contrast, I have privileged the concern of the play over theories and paid attention to how words and structures are used in relation to this concern. In Agrell's *Räddad*, this means applying an embodied reading mode. The sentimental narrative and idealized heroine in a precarious situation, which have been evaluated pejoratively in literary histories, help construct a dramaturgical position from which the emotional experience of an emotionally barren marriage can be represented, inviting the reader to "feel-with" the protagonist. Melodramatic hyperbole and references to sensations are perceived as activators of the reader's tactile and emotional memory, creating an embodied understanding of the text. In this embodied reading mode, the play works as an interface bridging the distance in time between the modern reader and the nineteenth-century women whose experiences are represented.

Complicit strategies for reading women writers' *fin-de-siècle* representations of intimacy on a large scale in different European regions, considering the censorious situation of the writing and liberating these works from canonized interpretative patterns to explore their specific rhetoric in relation to their concerns, could broadly reveal the impediments imposed by gendered censorship and the various strategies for overcoming and taking advantage of them, consequently highlighting innovative rhetoric and styles. The reading strategies must be heterogeneous, depending on the specific poetics of the works in question and

the differences in cultural site- and time-specific socio-censorious situations of production. Nevertheless, ideas of decency, the female body, and the gendered division of public space throughout Europe dictated what was appropriate for women to write about and in what form and style, as well as what parts of public space women could inhabit and on what terms. Due to such similarities shaping women's social and cultural positions throughout Europe, complicit reading strategies may also expose shared experiences of intimacy, bringing out the full gendered political force of women's writing on intimacy at the *fin de siècle*. Consequently, these women writers' large-scale literary legacy and contribution to modernization through their ideas on the democratization of intimate relationships would be made visible.

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Strategija zavezniškega branja: razkrivanje cenzuriranih tem intimnosti v švedski drami *Räddad* Alfhild Agrell

Ključne besede: feministična literarna veda / švedska dramatika / Agrell, Alfhild / intimnost / cenzura / samocenzura

Članek predlaga etično bralno stališče, ki upošteva specifično družbeno-zgodovinsko cenzurno situacijo avtorice in uporablja strategijo zavezniškega branja, da bi razkrilo zamolčane teme intimnosti. Pri tem se opira na besedilne reference v drami *Räddad* (*Rešena*) švedske dramatičarke Alfhild Agrell iz leta 1883. Teoretična podlaga za strategijo zavezniškega branja so koncept o inkluzivnem modelu cenzure Helen Freshwater, teorija ponavljanja Judith Butler in trditve Toril Moi o političnem potencialu načina branja, ki se začne v skrbi za besedilo. Nato so predstavljene spolno specifične cenzurne razmere v osemdesetih letih 19. stoletja na Švedskem, v katerih je estetika idealizma vplivala na cenzuro v gledališčih in oblikovala tudi dramsko pisanje. Prikazano je nihanje med samocenzuro in izpostavljanjem teme intimnosti v igri A. Agrell in izpostavljen predlog, da bi to obravnavali kot specifično retoriko, ki je nastala zaradi zavedanja spolno pogojene cenzure. Na koncu s fenomenološkimi in z novimi materialističnimi analitičnimi orodji predstavim strategijo utelešenega branja igre A. Agrell. Da bi izpostavila njen celostni spolni/feministični potencial, analiziram polemike o tem literarnem delu in posebnosti njegove poetike.

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