

Unspeakable Desire: Norm Breaking Strategies by Swedish Women Authors of the 1880s

Cecilia Annell

University of Gävle, Department of Humanities, Hornsgatan 84, 118 21 Stockholm, Sweden
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6154-7873>
cecilia.annell@hig.se

In this article, I argue that the dichotomy of the virtuous and the sinful woman functioned as a strongly censoring factor for nineteenth century women authors in their writing about intimacy, desire, and sexuality. This dichotomy was the foundation of the double standard morality, holding different moral codes for men and women and for women of different social classes, which was a social norm that had to be followed in literature as well, in order to gain acceptance and authority as a woman writer. I identify and explore textual strategies that two Swedish women authors of the 1880s devised for dealing with censorship and self-censorship when writing about intimacy and sexuality. First, in "Pyrrhic Victories" ("Pyrrhussegrar") 1886, Stella Kleve depicts a desire that the woman experiences but does not give in to. Secondly, in "Aurore Bunge" 1883 and Womanhood and Eroticism I-II (Kvinnlighet och erotik I-II), 1883 and 1890 respectively, Anne Charlotte Leffler describes a moral woman with sexual desire. The strategies are analyzed with the help of new censorship theory, which has been developed in recent decades based on Foucault's theories of power. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity, I show how speech acts, when repeated, can take on a skewed relationship to the norm and thus function as strategies of opposition.

Keywords: Swedish literature / Swedish women writers / intimacy / sexuality / censorship / Kleve, Stella / Leffler, Anne Charlotte

The 1880s in Sweden and Scandinavia were a politically progressive period: young intellectuals turned against the church and the conservative establishment in order to criticize bourgeois society.¹ The program for the Modern Breakthrough movement followed the rallying cry of

¹ I would like to thank Åke Wiberg's Foundation for their research grant which enabled me to write this article.

Danish critic Georg Brandes, who declared in 1872 that the task of literature was to debate problems. Those problems could include poverty, class antagonisms and gender-related issues. Scientific ideas were often used as the basis of the arguments and reasoning that the authors of the Modern Breakthrough put forward.

The most pressing question was the so-called woman question, and the issue of sexual morality was the focus of lively debate during the 1880s, which was largely conducted via works of fiction. Both male and female radical writers expressed criticism of prevailing gender norms and the hypocrisy of the morality surrounding marriage and family life.

This article deals with two Swedish female writers of the 1880s: Stella Kleve (pseudonym for Mathilda Kruse, 1864–1942) and Anne Charlotte Leffler (1849–1892). Stella Kleve's short story "Pyrrhic Victories" was the spark that ignited the morality debate in Scandinavia. Published in autumn 1886 in the journal *Framåt*, it was followed by a fierce debate about free love and sexual morality that led to the journal's closure in the wake of boycotts by advertisers as well as readers (Hjort-Vetlesen 339). A critic in *Dagny*, the journal of the liberal women's movement, compared Kleve to the misogynist Swedish writer August Strindberg and found that the novel was "of the most degrading kind," and that both Kleve and her protagonist gave expression to "moral ruin and unbridled and depraved imagination" (Review 1). The liberal women's movement strongly distanced itself from the radical and scientifically grounded idea of free love expressed in "Pyrrhic Victories" because its adherents believed that women were at risk of falling victim to deceitful if they became pregnant. The liberal women's movement was also founded on Christian ideals that were incompatible with new scientific ideas (Manns 86–92).

In March 1887, Danish feminist Elisabeth Grundtvig declared in a speech that now was the time not only for equality in the family and in the state but also moral equality. Until now society had demanded that unmarried women be chaste and married woman faithful while requiring neither of men. Grundtvig suggested that there were two alternatives, either women could behave like men, that is, like libertines; or men could behave like women, and stay chaste. Advocates of free love like Georg Brandes and August Strindberg found the idea that women could be like men or men like women both impossible and absurd (Alfort 86, 96–98). For Brandes, the idea was clearly beyond discussion.

Anne Charlotte Leffler also took a stand in the debate. She argued that the risks involved in free relationships were far higher for women

than for men, since a pregnancy outside marriage would lead to personal catastrophe. On the other hand, she described premarital relations in fictional works such as “Aurore Bunge” and *Womanhood and Eroticism II*. In her novel draft *Utomkring äktenskapet (Outside of Marriage)*, Leffler even imagines a young gymnastics teacher who wants to have a child whom she will be both mother and father to and support on her own (Alfort 91–92).

“Aurore Bunge” and *Womanhood and Eroticism II* caused an uproar when they were published. Many critics reacted negatively to the depictions of sexuality in *Womanhood and Eroticism II*. Swedish critic Hellen Lindgren wrote in *Dagny* that the love depicted by Leffler was “foul, even gross, and [...] repellent to the reader” (Review 2; Lindén, “Afterword” 283–285). In the afterword to the Danish translation, which appeared in autumn 1890, Leffler noted that the book, as she had foreseen, was her most criticized work: “Much read, much talked about, much criticized by almost all the newspaper critics, and enthusiastically praised by a few, who have neither seat nor vote in the parliament of public opinion.” (Leffler, *Kvinnlighet* 267)

At the time, Leffler lived in Italy where she married the Italian mathematician and marquis Pasquale del Pezzo in 1890. *Womanhood and Eroticism II* was Leffler’s last book, as she died tragically in 1892, four months after she had her first child (see Lauritzen). Kleve, for her part, had published two novels, *Berta Funcke* (1885) and *Alice Brandt* (1888), both of which caused scandal and outrage reviews. In 1890 she married Peter Malling, a Danish merchant, and thereafter began publishing country house romances using her own first name and new surname, Mathilda Malling (Ney).

During the 1880s, Leffler and Strindberg, who were both born in 1849, were founding figures in the Modern Breakthrough movement in Sweden (Lauritzen 319–322). Sometimes, it is called the Women’s Modern Breakthrough, since many female writers published their works during the period, such as Alfhild Agrell, Victoria Benedictsson, Amanda Kerfstedt and Hilma Strandberg.² In the late 1880s, reaction to the success of the women writers resulted in Leffler, like many of her peers, being pigeonholed as a woman’s writer on the grounds that they were writing “tendentious literature” or even “indignant literature,” as opposed to fiction displaying high aesthetic value. This process by

² Many of the female writers of the Modern Breakthrough also wrote plays, such as Alfhild Agrell, Victoria Benedictsson and Anne Charlotte Leffler. Their plays were translated into several European languages and some of them were staged, for example in London, Hamburg, and Frankfurt-am-Main (Lindh Estelle 78).

which male authors both devalued and relegated women's writing has been described in detail by the Swedish literary scholar David Gedin (Gedin 173–214). For female writers, their male peers, no matter how radical their moral views, thus became as much an obstacle as their bourgeois critics (Lindén, "Afterword" 291–293).

The process of devaluating women writers continued during the 1890s, helping to form the literary canon that excludes or accords only marginal place to women authors in twentieth-century literary histories. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, female writers of the 1880s were rediscovered and re-established as significant authors by feminist literary historians and critics. A literary history of Nordic women writers, from the eleventh century to the present, was published in five volumes between 1993 and 1996, following which numerous dissertations, monographs, and biographies on women writers have been published in Scandinavia.

The dichotomy of the virtuous versus the sinful woman

In the nineteenth century, many epithets were used to describe women who had sexual relations with men outside of marriage: immoral, depraved, fallen, ruined. Such women were in breach of the first commandment of the prevailing bourgeois ideology: no sex before marriage. The dichotomy of virtuous versus sinful woman underpinned a double standard that held women to a different moral code from men. This was a social norm that women writers were also required to follow in literature if they were to achieve authority and acceptance.

The double standard rested on notions of class as well as gender. While bourgeois women who had premarital sex were condemned, society tacitly condoned their male counterparts having sexual relations with working-class women and prostitutes. This double standard thus also sanctioned prostitution. Writers could criticize the moral hypocrisy, as the Finnish Swedish author Gerda von Mickwitz does in her short story "Measles" (published in *Framåt* in 1886). The plot concerns a man whose premarital relations lead to his wife becoming ill with syphilis, a calamity that is concealed as measles. To describe a virtuous woman who has sexual desires was more difficult. And yet it happened: *Eppur si muove*.

In this article, I argue that the dichotomous notion of virtuous or sinful, or moral or immoral, functioned as a strongly censoring factor for nineteenth-century women writers in their treatment of intimacy,

desire, and sexuality. I examine the strategies that two Swedish women writers of the 1880s devised for dealing with censorship and self-censorship in writing about intimacy and sexuality—in effect, a kind of counter-hegemonic practice. How did these writers find ways to circumvent norms that were imbued with patriarchal perceptions of women? How did they devise strategies to express female desire even though it was considered inappropriate or even impossible and unthinkable on the grounds that women were widely held not to have a sexuality of their own? Can these issues be elucidated in a fruitful way with the help of the “new censorship theory”?

Censorship and new censorship theory

Censorship conventionally refers to a state agency preventing something from being disseminated to the public by requiring that it be approved in advance. During the nineteenth century, this practice gradually disappeared in Europe. Sweden was an early pioneer and passed the Freedom of the Press Act in 1809. However, there were several exceptions. For example, it was forbidden to criticize the church. When August Strindberg published his short story “The Reward of Virtue” (“Dygdens lön,” 1884) he was charged with blasphemy, though later acquitted. This was thus a case of post-publication censorship. Both these forms of censorship are *repressive* in being imposed upon the author or the work from outside. A third form of repressive censorship takes the form of financial constraints or inducements (Bunn 31).

Censorship, however, can also be seen as *productive* and active in various types of social and cultural discourses. Such is the claim made by advocates of new censorship theory, a critical movement that has emerged in recent decades and that is largely based on Foucault’s theories of power:

New Censorship Theory sees censorship as a diffuse, ubiquitous phenomenon in which a host of actors (including impersonal, structural conditions) function as effective censors. These “structural” forms of censorship may be based upon the effects of the market, ingrained cultural languages and grammars, and other forms of impersonal boundaries on acceptable (and indeed intelligible) speech. (Bunn 27)

Although there is freedom of speech and freedom of the press, speech is thus always limited: by market demands, by social and cultural norms and ideals that are internalized by speakers. According to Judith Butler,

productive censorship creates the very conditions for the production of an intelligible and thus acceptable speech by making the speaker follow explicit and implicit norms. If you violate these norms, you risk being thrown into the domains of the unspeakable, which are variously labeled as madness or impossibility (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 128–141). I would say that the notion of a moral woman having sexual desire was unspeakable, in Butler’s sense, for a nineteenth-century female writer. According to the prevailing ideology of femininity of the late-nineteenth century, a moral woman does not have sexual desire, or at least does not express them. Virtue or virtuousness functions as a bar that simultaneously creates immorality while protecting against it: staying on the right side of the boundary thus makes a woman respectable and enables her to be published.

How is it then possible to violate the discursive norms that make the violation itself unspeakable? How are change and emancipation possible? What practices of opposition were possible in the nineteenth century?

According to Butler, the possibility of changing the gender order lies in the repetition of the speech acts with which we are continually performing gender. In these performative acts, the norms for gender and heterosexuality are confirmed but space is also allocated for displacements of and deviations from the norm. By responding incorrectly to appeals or ideological interpellations, or by performing gender wrongly or in a skewed relationship to the norm, the repetition of an original subordination can be given another meaning, one whose future is open. Butler designates the fact that a speech act can acquire new meanings when repeated as *a strategy of opposition* (see Butler, *Gender Trouble; Excitable Speech* 37–41).

In this article I will address the following strategies of opposition:

- Describing a desire that the woman experiences but does not give in to: Stella Kleve “Pyrrhic Victories” (“Pyrrhussegrar”) 1886.
- Describing a moral woman with sexual desire: Anne Charlotte Leffler, “Aurore Bunge” 1883 and *Womanhood and Eroticism* I–II (*Kvinnlighet och erotik* I–II) 1883 and 1890 respectively.

Women and sexuality

During large parts of the nineteenth century, women were not considered to have a sexuality of their own (see Foucault). However, Darwin’s revelations about the evolutionary origins of human beings in *On the Origin of the Species* (1859) led to a veritable revolution in how sexuality

was conceptualized. Darwin's view of human beings as a species of animal among other animals challenged the Christian worldview, particularly its dualistic view of the human subject as divided into body and soul, with only the latter being capable of salvation. Quite simply, it became possible to talk about the body in a new way—a reevaluation from sinful to natural (Annell, “Feminism” 94–100; Lindén, *Om kärlek* 206–214).

In the wake of Darwinism, the theory of evolution became a trans-cultural point of reference for feminists across the Western world. Science could be used to reinforce notions of women's subordination—the view that women occupied a lower stage of development than men—but it could also be used for emancipatory ends. Feminists invoked evolutionary theory in support of emancipatory ideas about sexuality as well as their critiques of marriage as an institution and the sexual double standard (Annell, “Feminism” 94–100). In her study of nineteenth-century American feminist advocates of free love, Wendy Hayden has shown that the language of science provided an opportunity to discuss sexuality in more powerful ways than had been possible using the rhetoric of the Enlightenment:

First, science provided the language to discuss sexuality, more powerful than the language of Enlightenment rhetorics [sic] of natural law and individual sovereignty favored by male free-love advocates. Second, science changed the rhetorical situation of discussions of sexuality: rather than discussing sex as within the bonds of the marriage institution, free-love feminists discussed it as a key element of human evolution. (Hayden 7–8)

The idea that women have a sexuality of their own was beginning to spread in the middle of the nineteenth century. In his book *The Elements of Social Science, or Physical, Sexual and Natural, Religion* (1854/1876),³ English doctor George Drysdale (1824–1904) claimed that both male and female sexual organs, like the rest of the body, need to be kept in “healthy exercise” in order not to wither. Neither men nor women were exempt from this “physiological law.” Drysdale's book was an expression of the new scientific ideas. In bourgeois Christian ideology, love had been idealized and disembodied, but for Drysdale it was about pure drive, a pent-up energy in both men and women that required a natural outlet.

³ *Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion* was published anonymously in 1854 and is more known by the title of its second edition, *The Elements of Social Science* (1876). The book was translated to many languages, and into Swedish in 1878.

Strategy 1: Describing a desire that the woman feels but does not give in to

In the short story “Pyrrhic Victories” (1886) by Stella Kleve,⁴ the twenty-four-year-old protagonist Märta Ulfklo goes to Montreux in order to cure herself by “breathing alpine air, drinking grape juice and bathing in sunlight” (Kleve 140). She is terminally ill.

At the beginning of the story, Kleve establishes a strong opposition between the sensual and living on the one hand and the dead on the other. She describes the lively and changing activity of nature: the sun, the storm, the rain, the thunderstorm. Flowers are in full bloom, fruit is ripening, and the steamers hoot, bringing people of various nationalities with their valises. But Märta sits indoors with dark circles under her eyes and doesn’t see the colorful life going on out there. She only stares sullenly into the distance. She is, as it were, frozen and petrified, unable to perceive the world.

According to Märta’s doctor, the disease is caused by her “hereditary disposition, aggravated by an excessively impetuous blood” (141). This is made clear in the following conversation between Märta and the doctor:

– Every prom night, Miss Märta, every dance has been fuel for the fire. And all the erotic fantasies--

– That I suffocated. She could hear the rawness in her own voice.

– Very true—that you “suffocated.” That’s the crazy thing, that. Those have been dangerous victories, Miss—downright devastating for such a constitution.

Dangerous, expensive victories—Pyrrhic victories! She could count them on her fingers, mention them by name, these “erotic fantasies,” which she ably suppressed, but in a struggle that cost her all her strength and vitality. And not even now did they leave her in peace—into death they pursued her.

For all those nights when, still with the fever of the dance in her limbs, incited by the wine and the men’s glances, in burning sleepless anguish, hour by hour, she tossed and turned in her bed. [...] It was this wretched prudence, which she now hated as her misfortune—this ambiguous surrogate for virtue, which society forces woman to plaster over all her feelings and interests, until she becomes a colorless, dependent wretch, who never dares take a single step, without fumbling with antennae—and always withdraws. (142–143)

The short story describes several situations in which Märta sees and meets men. She remembers their bodies and glances and how they

⁴ The short story was published in the journal *Framåt* in 1886. I here refer to the version in the anthology *Synd: noveller av det moderna genombrottets kvinnor*.

arouse her desire: a sailor's gaze, a flirtatious game with a beautiful Bavarian Don Juan type. She always withdraws. She has lived according to the standard of femininity that deforms women and keeps them in a condition reminiscent of what Darwin describes as a "lower stage of development."

When Märta hears someone singing outside the window, she momentarily comes alive. But soon she collapses again, blood mixed with froth at her mouth. She realizes that it is too late:

At last, it has become clear to her that she has nothing to hope for from life and the future—that it is only for the disease, this all-degrading, ravaging disease, that she has saved her beautiful body. And while the memories still press upon her [...] each erotic episode, each repressed and thwarted temptation, and present it as an indictment of her wasted life, she now—*saved by death from the judgment of men*—in defiant despair mocks her own cowardice, she bitterly regrets every opportunity she herself wasted. (150–151; emphasis mine)

Here, Märta realizes that she has become ill from living in the way that a woman is expected to live. Only the proximity of death means that she can now break the unstated prohibition against women talking about their sexual desire. Earlier in life, Märta internalized the mechanisms of censorship and held back her desire. Now, under the protection of death, she dares to express that this was wrong, that it is actually this imposed restraint that has made her ill.

As we saw earlier, the doctor believes that Märta's illness is caused by suppressed erotic fantasies. Here we recognize Drysdale's line of thinking. Perhaps the doctor is even a Drysdale adept, but whatever the case he serves to pathologize her condition by saying that restraint has been injurious "to such a constitution" and that a hereditary disposition has been aggravated by her "excessively impetuous blood." In so doing, he indicates his adherence to the pre-Freudian, medical discourse of the late nineteenth century. This hegemonic discourse was characterized by an interest in pathological deviations in woman's sexuality, which were explained by means of prevailing theories of women's biology, heredity, impetuous blood, and so forth (Annell, *Begärets* 62–66; Johannisson 25–39, 68). In Drysdale's eyes, the pathology lies not in the woman's body but in the norms that she is expected to follow.

In any case, the message of the short story is that a woman can become sick and even die if she suppresses and denies her erotic feelings, that is, if she follows the rules of how a woman should behave. The novel's logic can thus be seen as inspired by George Drysdale's ideas.

Strategy 2: Describing a moral woman with sexual desire

“Aurore Bunge”

The protagonist Aurore Bunge in the 1883 short story of the same name by Anne Charlotte Leffler (1849–1892) is approaching her thirties and “no longer at the height of her beauty” (Leffler, “Aurore Bunge” 50)—the latter a vital asset in the marriage market of the 1880s—but she is still “in great demand as a marriage match” (51). During the last ball of the spring season, Aurore receives two proposals, one from the rich Count Hans Kagg and one from Baron Gripenfeldt. Count Kagg is an insecure and reclusive man who feels she is superior to him, while Gripenfeldt is a self-confident military man who, having lived a debauched life and squandered his fortune, is looking for a wealthy bride. Gripenfeldt is immediately dismissed by Aurore, who asks Count Kagg to give her the summer to consider his proposal. Aurore envisions a bleak future as Countess Kagg, a life that will continue to be filled with empty conversations. She longs for something that goes beyond the social laws of convention, “something bigger, stronger, more soul-exciting, more worth living for than these petty triumphs, which no longer even flattered her vanity” (51).

During the summer, Aurore travels with her mother, the baroness, to their isolated summer retreat in the archipelago. Aurore explores the surroundings and adapts to rural life; she throws away her corset and cuts off the heels of her French shoes. She carries out nature experiments with frogs, and makes excursions on the island, fishing, and swimming. She is happy and feels “the fullness of life roaring and rejoicing within her” (65). One day, she asks the fisherman to take her to the lighthouse, where the keeper lives alone. A storm causes her to remain at the lighthouse and she has a passionate three-day affair with the keeper.

Here, Leffler contrasts the goodness of nature with the artificiality of culture, a contrast that is important for the course of events in the short story, and emphasizes the attractiveness of the lighthouse keeper, whom she places on the side of the natural.

The stay at the lighthouse results in Aurore becoming pregnant. Her mother prevents a scandal by arranging a marriage with Baron Gripenfeldt, realizing that her daughter’s honor can only be saved by marriage to a person willing to cover up the scandal for the purposes of financial gain. Accordingly, the short story ends with a grand wedding.

Kleve’s tale bears witness to the fatal consequences for women of the sexual morality prevailing at that time. But what particularly interests

me is the portrayal of Aurore's desire. At her first sight of the lighthouse keeper, she is seized with vertigo, and she realizes that she now "would begin to live" (69). At stake here is not a frivolous desire, but Aurore's sense "that she was facing something decisive," a feeling that connects to her earlier longing for something bigger and more meaningful. Her craving becomes strong because the desire is linked to a sense of making something meaningful out of one's life, beyond the empty forms of convention. It is connected to what the Swedish writer Ellen Key calls "life growth"—a desire to live life to the fullest and not leave one's "life destiny unfulfilled." In coining the term "life growth," Key joins Darwin's evolution theory with Nietzsche's "will to power" (Lindén, *Om kärlek* 363).

Aurore wonders why the lighthouse keeper makes such a strong impression on her. She speculates that it is because he is big and strong and radiates security with his "faithful, brown eyes" (Leffler, "Aurore Bunge" 70). He reminds her of a Newfoundland dog that is humbly devoted to its owner but also prepared to protect her from possible dangers. She simply trusts him. She wants to put her hand in his and say: "I'll follow you wherever you want." (72)

The storm forces Aurore to stay on the island. When she goes out later in the evening, she is unable to get back into the lighthouse because the door is held shut by the wind. The lighthouse keeper comes to her rescue and clasps her, in order to save her from falling into the foaming sea. His passionate gaze makes her associate it with a painting that she "viewed with a certain pleasure" (77) during her childhood. The memory upsets her and she throws herself off the cliff. Aurore wants to die not because she is afraid of him, but because she is afraid of her own desire. Yet the keeper rescues her and carries her back into the house: "There was something of secure, undisputed ownership in the way he carried her; but it was also the way one carries one's most precious possession." (79)

As in "Pyrrhic Victories," death here appears to be a way to escape the judgment of society. Aurore has internalized the social condemnation of female desire to the point that she would rather die than follow her desire. However, it is the sense of security, the trust she feels in the lighthouse keeper, that wins out and allows her to initiate the relationship. This is not described in more detail but evoked euphemistically in the laconic phrase: "The storm lasted three days." (79)

Journeying back to the mainland in the fisherman's boat, Aurore is gripped by anxiety at the thought that her life will once again relapse into long, hopeless tedium. When she gets home, Baron Gripenfeldt,

who happens to be visiting, sees that something has happened to Aurore: “Something peculiarly animated had come into her whole expression.” (85) Scornfully, he asks her about the lighthouse keeper. Although she replies that she took no notice of the keeper, Gripenfeldt’s suspicion “tainted her and branded her as an ordinary adventuress” (86). It is extremely important to Aurore that her moral respectability is maintained in the eyes of the outside world.

After returning to town in October, Aurore makes a full confession to her mother, who has already made “certain observations” (88). Her mother does not judge Aurore very harshly—she herself has had illicit relationships in her youth—and is happy to let her have her acquaintances. In a simple sentence, Leffler indicates that among the upper classes, women can have extramarital relations.

In “Aurore Bunge,” the love affair is hampered by the rules of convention: Aurore is forced into marriage with the hateful baron Gripenfeldt to prevent a scandal. However, in another work, *Womanhood and Eroticism II*, Leffler more fully develops her view of love.

Womanhood and Eroticism I-II

The short story “Womanhood and Eroticism” was published in 1883, while the novel *Womanhood and Eroticism II* was published in 1890.⁵ In the short story, a budding relationship between Rikard and Alie is depicted. They have known each other for a while and both have a feeling that they should get married, but she doubts his love and her own ability to make him happy. When he finally proposes, she declines. Rikard, deeply hurt and bitter, travels to a seaside resort in Norway. There he meets a girl he wants to marry, Aagot, something he communicates to his mother in a letter. His mother reads the letter together with Alie, who comments on its contents. Thus, Rikard philosophizes about the essence of love:

One could well think that love should primarily arise between those who understand each other best, who can live a complete and full soul life together. But it is not so; these developed women, who understand us completely, we

⁵ The short story “Womanhood and Eroticism” is included in the collection *Ur lifvet 3 (From Life 3, 1883)* and *Womanhood and Eroticism II* was printed in *Ur lifvet 5 (From Life 5, 1890)*. Page references in this article refer to the new edition of both texts, *Kvinnligheten och erotik I-II (Womanhood and Eroticism I-II)* with an afterword by Claudia Lindén.

want them as friends—as such they are invaluable, we admire them, we gain a lot from exchanging thoughts with them, we find them highly interesting, but—we do not love them. (Leffler, *Kvinnlighet* 36)

Here we get the “Old” man’s view of the New, “developed” woman. And from Alie’s comments—she compares his love for Aagot to a sneeze—we understand that he is incapable of loving in a way that would be interesting to her because he divides women into two categories: the developed; and those whom it is possible to love.

Later in the letter Rikard writes:

Yes, you would only see my Aagot, mother, and you would understand better than if you read dozens of treatises on this subject [love] what I mean. You would see her with those open blue child’s eyes, which look so wondrously and innocently upon the great, unknown world— (37)

When Alie hears this, she exclaims: “Oh, that’s pretty! Never have I known that Rikard loved children.” (37) Then she announces that she will go in and “ponder over the big problem of love.” She wants to write a thesis, which she will call “Womanhood and Eroticism” (38).

In this passage, Leffler’s comical tone can be considered a strategy of opposition. With sharp irony, she shows the absurdity of the fact that women are expected to look like children. I also want to point out the metafictional element: Alie wants to write a thesis called “Womanhood and Eroticism”—the title both of the short story itself that we hold in our hand as well as the title of the novel that Leffler will publish a few years later.

In *Womanhood and Eroticism II*, Rikard and Aagot have entered into a marriage that, for Rikard, is characterized by a calm indifference. When Aagot begins to suffer from long-term lung catarrh, the doctor advises her to spend some time in a warmer environment. She travels to Italy with Alie as a companion. In Nervi, on the Italian Riviera, Alie meets the Marquis Andrea Serra. The novel is a long and winding story about how their relationship develops.

Serra first imagines a light-hearted adventure with Alie—he is planning to marry a woman whose money he needs to be able to maintain his palace and his position. Alie’s interest in him makes him believe that she has had previous romantic experiences, but when he asks about it, she becomes upset:

You cannot understand that for me love can only come as a whole, as something all-consuming, all-encompassing and for the whole of life! All the rest,

calculation, wisdom, prudence, I despise—oh, so deeply—he who cannot stake all on his love, lose all on it, rather be unhappy for life on it, than happy in any other way—he cannot love, and he shall not come and speak of love. (119)

Her speech resonates strongly within him and strengthens his feelings for her. After overcoming several obstacles and misunderstandings, Alie manages to get Serra to embrace her view of love: that it can legitimize their relationship even if they are not married. Leffler describes free love as more moral than marriage, because it is based on the feelings of the lovers, as Claudia Lindén has noted in the afterword to her edition of the novel (Lindén, “Afterword” 284).

The story’s long and winding nature emphasizes precisely that time is passing, that there are many opportunities for new discussions, new responses to appeals, new performative acts, to speak with Butler. It results in a mutual understanding, with Rikard coming to understand her view of love.

In the novel’s dramatic resolution, Alie and Rikard end up doubting each other’s love. His impulse to kill her breaks the deadlock. When she offers to die for her love of him, he recognizes her seriousness and feels cured of his skepticism: they may as well get married, he says, because she has now given him the strength he lacked.

The death thematized here is not the same as that of “Pyrrhic Victories” and “Aurore Bunge.” In these two stories, the desire for death was based on fear of the judgment of society, whereas here it appears as a final escape from the grief that arises from the loss of a beloved, just as it did for Dido when she climbed onto the pyre after losing Aeneas.

The novel ends with the union of Alie and Serra. But it is not a happy ending in the traditional sense of “they lived happily ever after.” No, Leffler writes that Alie is aware that happiness may not last: “She knew well that she was in this moment consecrating herself to a life of continuous struggle, and there was anxiety and trembling in the happiness with which she faced the future. She knew that perfect happiness only exists for a moment and that it is always bought at a high price.” (Leffler, *Kvinnlighet* 263)

Leffler is describing how time is an important factor for the realization of New Love. It is the feeling of love and trust in the moment that motivates Alie and Serra’s union. However, the future will involve “a life of continuous struggle” if they are to maintain their love and their faith in each other’s love, regardless of whether they marry. What

Leffler is describing is that the difficulty in their relationship lies in the maintaining of trust in the other's love.

Leffler depicts love as intimately intertwined with physical desire. Already early in Alie and Serra's relationship, love arises as a physical desire. During a swim that ends with a kiss in a cave, Leffler describes in a breathless, analytical sentence how desire is awakened in both of them:

It was one of those moments when a hidden passion, unknown to both, can suddenly seize two beings as irresistibly as vertigo, and when the lightest touch becomes a caress, the look becomes a possession and an irresistible giving, the words are muted or fade away empty and meaningless, the whole outer world, the past, the future, all disappear in the breathless intoxication of the moment. (92)

The novel is imbued with desire—there are embraces and hot kisses and even a description of intercourse, what Leffler delicately formulates as Alie's "devotion without limits" (161). *Womanhood and Eroticism II* provoked sharply negative reactions because of "its red-hot eroticism," as Leffler writes in the afterword to the Danish edition (270).

Physical desire is difficult to separate from powerful feelings of love or desire for a meaningful life. In this way, Leffler shows how the sinful/virtuous dichotomy is impossible to maintain. Love—which includes both body and soul—is stronger than the censorious rules and norms governing marriage and relationships. A free relationship is possible to realize on the condition that the two lovers trust in each other's love. In *Womanhood and Eroticism II*, it takes many pages to build up the trust between the two lovers, while in "Aurore Bunge" it is summed up in the lighthouse keeper's likeness to a Newfoundland dog.

Conclusion

In the 1880s, gender norms and hypocrisy surrounding marriage customs and family life were the focus of fierce debate in Scandinavia, particularly in literature. At the heart of the debate, as I have argued, lay the dichotomy of the virtuous and the sinful woman, which also served as the basis of the sexual morality of the prevailing bourgeois ideology.

That bourgeois ideology was based on Christian principles, which separated the body and the soul and conferred upon the latter. It was disrupted by the emerging Darwinian discourse, which argued that human beings were merely one species of animal among others and, in the process, created new avenues for discussing sexuality.

With the help of new censorship theory, I have investigated how women authors were able to depict female desire without ending up in the immoral, sinful position, thus being able to publish their works in defiance of the censorship mechanisms that permeated society and the book market, and that were even internalized by women themselves. Drawing on Butler's theory of performativity, I have shown how speech acts, when repeated, can take on a skewed relationship to the norm and thus function as strategies of opposition.

I have identified and analyzed two strategies that the Swedish writers Stella Kleve and Anne Charlotte Leffler devised in order to express female desire: describing a desire that the woman experiences but does not give in to and describing a moral woman with sexual desire. Both Kleve's and Leffler's texts have radical messages. They transcend the dual notion of the good and the bad woman. Kleve describes how a woman becomes fatally ill from holding back her desire, that is to say, from conforming to how a woman is expected to live. The message is that it is harmful, even fatal, for a woman to deny such urges in the spirit of George Drysdale. Leffler's "Aurore Bunge" and *Womanhood and eroticism II* both describe premarital relationships based on love and trust in the other. In "Aurore Bunge," the relationship is considered a misstep and to avoid scandal a wedding is arranged between Aurore and the hateful Baron Gripenfeldt. In *Womanhood and Eroticism II*, the feminine view of eroticism is unfolded and here it is shown how a woman can enter a premarital relationship without considering herself "fallen," because the relationship is legitimized by love.

The second strategy—"Describing a moral woman with sexual desires"—is of course the boldest in that it seemingly abolishes the dichotomy of woman as either pure or sinful. I have shown that this is possible because Leffler describes sexual desire as united with strong love, mutual trust, and a deep sense of life, a "life growth" that makes the dichotomy show its ugly face: its truth is revealed as patriarchal ideology.

WORKS CITED

- Alfort, Sara. *Damer der var for meget*. Copenhagen: Gads Forlag; Golden Days, 2022.
- Annell, Cecilia. *Begärets politiska potential: Feministiska motståndsstrategier i Elin Wägners Pennskaftet, Gabriele Reuters Aus guter Familie, Hilma Angered-Strandbergs Lydia Vik och Grete Meisel-Hess Die Intellektuellen*. Ph.D. dissertation. Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2016.

- Annell, Cecilia. "Feminism, Intimacy and Darwinian Time. The New Women of Elin Wägner." *Women Writing Intimate Spaces. The Long Nineteenth Century at the Fringes of Europe*. Eds. Birgitta Lindh Estelle, Carmen Beatrice Duğu, and Viola Parente-Čapková. Leiden: Brill, 2023. 94–111.
- Bunn, Matthew. "Reimagining Repression: New Censorship Theory and After." *History and Theory* 54.1 (2015): 25–44.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London; New York, NY: Routledge, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. London; New York, NY: Routledge, 1997.
- Review 1. *Dagny: tidning för svenska* 10 (1986): 249–250.
- Review 2. *Dagny: tidning för svenska* 6 (1890): 173–185.
- Drysdale, George R. *The Elements of Social Science or Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion*. London: E. Truelove, 1876.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1. The Will to Knowledge*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990.
- Gedin, David. *Fältets herrar: framväxten av en modern författarroll: artonhundraåttitalet*. Ph.D. dissertation. Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2004.
- Hayden, Wendy. *Evolutionary Rhetoric: Sex, Science, and Free Love in Nineteenth-Century Feminism*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013.
- Hjort-Vetlesen, Inger-Lise. "Modernitetens kvinnliga text. Det moderna genombrottet i Norden." *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria Bd 2 Faderns huset: 1800-talet*. Ed. Elisabeth Møller Jensen and Inger-Lise Hjort-Vetlesen. Höganäs: Wiken, 1993. 330–353.
- Johannisson, Karin. *Den mörka kontinenten: kvinnan, medicinen och fin-de-siècle*. Stockholm: Norstedt, 2013.
- Kleve, Stella. "Pyrrhussegrar." *Synd: noveller av det moderna genombrottets kvinnor*. Ed. Ney Birgitta. Stockholm: Ordfront, 1993.
- Lauritzen, Monica. *Sanningens vägar: Anne Charlotte Lefflers liv och dikt*. Stockholm: Bonnier, 2012.
- Leffler, Anne Charlotte. "Aurore Bunge." *Synd: noveller av det moderna genombrottets kvinnor*. Ed. Birgitta Ney. Stockholm: Ordfront, 1993.
- Leffler, Anne Charlotte. *Kvinnlighet och erotik I–II*. Stockholm: Rosenlarv, 2009.
- Lindén, Claudia. *Om kärlek: Litteratur, sexualitet och politik hos Ellen Key*. Ph.D. dissertation. Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2002.
- Lindén, Claudia. "Afterword (Efterskrift)." Author Anne Charlotte Leffler. *Kvinnlighet och erotik*. Stockholm: Rosenlarv, 2009.
- Lindh Estelle, Birgitta. "Melodramatic Spaces: Intimacy and Emancipation in Swedish Women's Playwriting." *Women Writing Intimate Spaces. The Long Nineteenth Century at the Fringes of Europe*. Eds. Birgitta Lindh Estelle, Carmen Beatrice Duğu, and Viola Parente-Čapková. Leiden: Brill, 2023. 77–93.
- Manns, Ulla. *Den sanna frigörelsen: Fredrika-Bremer-förbundet 1884–1921*. Ph.D. dissertation. Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1997.
- Ney, Birgitta. *Bortom berättelserna: Stella Kleve—Mathilda Mallings*. Ph.D. dissertation. Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1993.

Neizrekljiva želja? Strategije kršenja norm pri švedskih pisateljicah v osemdesetih letih 19. stoletja

Ključne besede: švedska književnost / švedske pisateljice / intimnost / spolnost / cenzura / Kleve, Stella / Leffler, Anne Charlotte

V članku pokažem, da je dihotomija krepostne in grešne ženske delovala kot močan cenzurni dejavnik za avtorice devetnajstega stoletja pri njihovem pisanju o intimnosti, želji in spolnosti. Ta dihotomija je bila temelj morale dvojnih meril, ki je imela različne moralne kodekse za moške in ženske ter za ženske različnih družbenih razredov, kar je bila družbena norma, ki ji je bilo treba slediti tudi v literaturi, da bi kot pisateljica pridobila priznanje in avtoriteto. Ugotavljam in raziskujem besedilne strategije, ki sta jih dve švedski pisateljici v osemdesetih letih 19. stoletja iznašli za spopadanje s cenzuro in samocenzuro pri pisanju o intimnosti in spolnosti. Stella Kleve v »Pirovih zmagah« (»Pyrhussegrar«, 1886) prikazuje željo, ki jo ženska čuti, vendar se ji ne prepusti. Anne Charlotte Leffler pa v delih »Aurore Bunge« (1883) in *Ženska in erotika I–II* (*Kvinnlighet och erotik I–II*, 1883 oziroma 1890), opisuje moralno žensko s spolno željo. Strategije so analizirane s pomočjo nove teorije cenzure, ki se je v zadnjih desetletjih razvila izhajajoč iz Foucaultovih teorij moči. Na podlagi teorije performativnosti Judith Butler pokažem, kako lahko govorna dejanja ob ponavljanju zavzamejo izkrivljeno razmerje do norme in tako delujejo kot strategije nasprotovanja.

1.01 Izvirni znanstveni članek / Original scientific article

UDK 821.113.6.09:305-055.2

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/pkn.v46.i1.06>