Känslans patriark

Sensibilitet och känslopraktiker i Carl Christoffer Gjörwells familj och vänskapskrets, ca 1790-1810

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Akademisk avhandling

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Avhandlingen kommer att förvaras på svenska.

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Patriarch of Feeling: Sensibility and Emotional Practices in the Family and Friendship Circle of Carl Christoffer Gjörwell, c. 1790-1810

Abstract

This dissertation is a study of how the culture of sensibility was expressed in the everyday practices and social relations of the Gjörwell family. Headed by publicist, publisher and royal librarian Carl Christoffer Gjörwell (1731-1811), the Gjörwell family served as the centre of a wide circle of friends in late 18th-century Stockholm. Gjörwell has been regarded as one of the first Swedish representatives of 18th-century sensibility as well as an archetype of the Swedish cult of friendship. Due to his effusive emotional expressiveness and passionate friendships with other men, Gjörwell has largely been derided as effeminate by researchers from the 19th century onwards.

Using theoretical perspectives from the field of the history of emotions (more concretely the perspectives of William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein and Monique Scheer) this study centres on the emotional practices of the Gjörwell family, especially taking aspects of gender, class, sexuality and power into account. Gjörwell’s vast collection of family and friendship correspondence forms the empirical basis of this study.

This study shows that the Gjörwell family and circle of friends in many ways could be regarded as an emotional community in which primarily emotions of happiness and joy are expressed. Furthermore, this study shows how the exercise of power could form part in the creation of an emotional community, as Gjörwell makes constant attempts to influence the way family members and friends manage their emotions, strongly dissuading them from the expression of melancholy.

Although he has been viewed as effeminate by posterity, Gjörwell in fact regards himself as manly. This is due to his ability to remain joyful through adversities which testifies to his strong, and therefore manly, nervous organisation. This study thus further illustrates how a marked shift in masculine gender norms took place between the 18th and 19th centuries.

This study also shows how expression of tender emotion could be a way of reinforcing personal status. This was due to the close association made between sensibility and virtue, in itself a central concept during this era. As Gjörwell is denied recognition in his professional life, the expression of tender emotion – and thus of virtue – becomes an important aspect of his personal life.

Keywords
sensibility, sentimentalism, emotional practices, emotional community, history of emotions, eighteenth century, Carl Christoffer Gjörwell, friendship