

Den ensam sjöjungfrun

Om Carina Rydbergs jagberättande ur ett genreperspektiv

Tamara Andersson

Akademisk avhandling

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Fakultetsopponent: FD Anna Forssberg,
Institutionen för språk, litteratur och interkultur/Karlstad universitet,
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Author

Tamara Andersson

Title

The Lonely Mermaid. On Identity Narration and Genre in the Autobiographical Works of Carina Rydberg.

Abstract

The focus of this study is the two autobiographical novels *Den högsta kasten* (1997) and *Djävulsformeln* (2000) by Swedish author Carina Rydberg. Both novels generated lively public debate regarding how they ought to be read and understood, what genre they belonged to, and the ontological status of the narrating "I". The aim is to investigate why the protagonist, Carina, is perceived as unintelligible by many readers and explore how she can be understood in relation to what constitutes an intelligible identity from a literary and cultural perspective.

The novels, as well as their protagonist, are approached from the perspective of genre theory, the argument being that Carina's unintelligibility is directly dependent on what genre she is read in relation to. In the first part of the thesis the ambiguities of autobiographical texts are discussed, and the narrative and protagonist are analyzed in relation to the autobiographical genre. In the second part of the thesis the consequences of reading the texts as examples of the Gothic with emphasis on monstrosity, the uncanny and sexual transgression are examined. The two readings demonstrate how interpretations of text and character are highly influenced by the reader's expectations connected to genre. Rydberg's transgression of the norms of genre, gender, and identity leaves the reader with a contradictory set of genre-specific expectations, which in turn makes it difficult to understand and accept the protagonist.

The main theme of both novels is Carina's unsuccessful attempts to reconcile what she sees as two separate, essentially incompatible identities: woman and author. The final chapter includes a comparative study in which Rydberg's novels are linked to works by other Swedish female writers, both past and contemporary, to demonstrate that the conflict of woman versus author is a common problem for female writers. The thesis closes with a discussion about the possibility of placing Rydberg in a specifically female literary tradition and demonstrate how a feminist analysis can make the unintelligible intelligible.

Keywords

Carina Rydberg, autofiction, autobiography, identity narrative, the Gothic, female Gothic, genre, Swedish literature, identity, gender, sex, femininity, monstrosity, female authors, transgression, the uncanny, intelligibility.

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