POLITICS OF TRANSGRESSION IN EDITH SÖDERGRAN'S POETICS

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Tämä maisterintutkielma tarkastelee Edith Södergranin poetiikan poliittisuutta analysoimalla hänen debyyttikokoelmansa *Dikter* (1916) kolme runoa: "Två vägar", "Jag såg ett träd" ja "Violetta skymningar". Affektiorientoitunut hermeneuttinen kriittinen lähiluenta nostaa keskiöön runojen subjektien pyrkimykset rikkoa naisen halua ja seksuaalisuutta tukahduttavat patriarkaaliset normit. Runojen kuvissa subjektien ironia kohdistuu yhtä lailla moraalisen dualismin tarjoamaan näennäiseen valinnanvapauteen kuin yksilöiden uskomuksiin vapaudesta ilmaista halujaan. Kun tiukat moraalisäännöt ajavat yksilöitä valitsemaan 'hyvän' ja 'pahan', 'puhtaan' ja 'likaisen' ja jopa 'elämän' ja 'kuoleman' välillä, kollektivismi ja individualismi asettuvat vastakkain. Vaikka kollektiivisuus kuvataan runoissa yksilöä suojelevana vallan muotona, se myös kaventaa heidän toimijuuttaan ja halujensa ilmaisua. Samalla yksilöllisyyttään ilmaisevat työnnetään kollektiivisesti yhteiskunnan marginaaleihin.

Tutkielman väite on, että Södergranin poetiikka haastaa lukijaa tutkimaan yksilön mahdollisuuksia ja rajoja murtautua ulos sosiaalisesti tuotetusta ja toistetusta normatiivisuudesta. Lukemalla nämä runot tunnustaen niiden raamatulliset ja nietzscheläiset vaikutteet sekä tukeutuen Judith Butlerin ja Hélène Cixous'n kirjoitusten teoretisointeihin normien vastustamisesta ja kumoamisesta väitän, että se mitä Södergranin runot tarjoavat lukijalle, on myös tutkielma transgression politiikkaan. Runoissa transgressio ei ainoastaan tee alistamisen kollektiivisia mekanismeja näkyväksi, vaan, mikä vielä tärkeämpää, herättää kysymyksen halusta epävakauden lähteenä ja lannistumattomana sisäisenä elämänvoimana. Södergranin runojen individualistisen 'uuden naisen' konstruktiota käsitteleviin tieteellisiin keskusteluihin osallistuen väitän, että Södergranin poetiikassa individualismi yksin on riittämätön vapauden lähde, kun yksilöiden on neuvoteltava sosiaalisesti määriteltyjen rajojen ja sisäisten halujensa välillä.

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Dikter; Edith Södergran; poetry; feminism; transgression; desire; gender; sexuality; embodiment; politics

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Abstract

This master's thesis examines the politics of Edith Södergran's poetics by analyzing three poems of her debut collection *Dikter* (1916): "Två vägar", "Jag såg ett träd", and "Violetta skymningar". The affect-oriented hermeneutic critical close reading of the poems brings to the fore the efforts of the subjects of the poems to transgress the patriarchal norms that suppress female desire and sexuality. In the images of the poems, the irony of the subjects is directed alike to the ostensible freedom of choice provided by moral dualism and to the individuals' beliefs in the freedom to express their desires. When strict moral rules drive individuals to choose between 'good' and 'bad', 'clean' and 'dirty', and even 'life' and 'death', collectivism and individualism are pitted against each other. While in the poems collectivity is depicted as a form of power that protects the individual, it also narrows down their agency and expression of desires. At the same time, those who express their individuality are collectively being pushed onto the margins of the society.

The thesis' argument is that Södergran's poetics challenges the reader to explore the individual's possibilities and limits thereof to break out of the socially produced and reproduced normativity. Reading these poems with an acknowledgement to their biblical and Nietzschean influence, and informed by theoretical engagements with writings by Judith Butler and Hélène Cixous on the topic of resisting and undoing norms, I argue that what Södergran's poems offer to the reader is also an inquiry into the politics of transgression. In the poems, transgression not only makes visible the collective mechanisms of subjugation, but, even more importantly, raises the question of desire as a source of destabilization and as an irrepressible intrinsic life force. In contribution to the scholarly debates about Södergran's poems' construction of the individualistic 'new woman', I argue that in Södergran's poetics, individualism alone is an insufficient source of freedom when individuals must negotiate between socially defined boundaries and their inner desires.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

When the Finnish-Swedish poet Edith Södergran (1892–1923) wrote her poems just over a century ago, Europe was experiencing a major cultural and political crisis. The Russian Revolution and World War I changed the world order and produced a new framework for the discussions about the self and society. Artists were responding to the prevailing cultural and political turmoil by experimenting with radically new creative forms and topics. Södergran, as a modern feminist writer and poet, took part in the discussion about the individualistic 'new woman' and encouraged women to free themselves from patriarchal dominance. In the context of the early 20th century feminist movement, Södergran's thinking was ahead of her time in that she not only defended the rights of women, but also portrayed their identity as diverse and changing. Her poems also reflected on the risks of collectivism at a time when Europe started to drift towards World War II.

The relevance of Södergran's poems today remains undiminished. In recent decades, 'anti-gender ideology movements' have sought to restore the patriarchal order, as Judith Butler points out in *Who's Afraid of Gender* (2024). These movements aggressively promote the concept of binary gender and reduce female sexuality to reproductive and the nationalistic 'functions'. Butler warns that this anti-gender movement promoted by political factions, churches, and some states is linked to a broader authoritarian or even fascist project. (Butler 2024). In this sense, Södergran's poems remain highly topical, through the depiction of how the common world ceases to exist when it is reduced to one point of view, as Hannah Arendt (2017) aptly expresses (Arendt 2017, chapter 7). Södergran's poems help reflect critically on the 'anti-gender position' by showing its attempt at the forceful stabilization of the binary gender concepts as a multidimensional form of oppression and violence.

The interpretation of Södergran's poetics has long reflected bias and one-sidedness, which derives partly from the poor interpretation of the biographical information of the poet, as presented by some male researchers at the turn of 1940s

and 1950s (Rahikainen 2014, 152–188). These interpretations diverted attention away from the political aspects of Södergran's work. However, the female and gender perspective of the poems has started since the 1980s, primarily by feminist scholars. Although the gender-theoretical and philosophical-literary approaches of literary scholarship can be understood as political, Södergran's poetry has hardly been discussed from a political point of view. This thesis rectifies this gap in scholarship by seeking to bring out the politics of Södergran's poems for discussion more broadly. The aim is not, nevertheless, to categorize Södergran's production, or even part of it, as 'political poetry'. There are neither 'traditional' political aspects to all her poems. My political reading aims to open new possibilities for interpretation without trying to reduce her poems to the argument about their political relevance. The subjects of Södergran's poems have already been discussed in many studies in fascinating and constructive ways. My thesis contributes to that scholarship by approaching it from the perspective of feminist transgression. The focus is on the efforts and possibilities of the subjects of the poems to transcend the social norms, which narrow and suppress their subjectivities.

The subject of my master's thesis is the politics of transgression in Edith Södergran's poetics. I analyze three poems of her debut collection *Dikter* (1916): "Två vägar", "Jag såg ett träd", and "Violetta skymningar". I identify the concept of transgression to be central to Södergran's poems as a force and potentiality operative in the poetic, posing the following research questions:

1) How does the concept of transgression operate in Edith Södergran's poems at the level of form and representation?

2) How does 'transgression' as a social practice of resistance against repressive gender norms relate to freedom?

3) What are the potentialities and possibilities of transgressive acts in Södergran's poetics?

My work is a political theoretical study that makes use of the concepts in literary scholarship, while also considering the intertextual connections of the poems to the bible and to Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy. The theoretical-conceptual framework is feminist political theory, and in particular the writings on transgression by Judith Butler and Hélène Cixous. The thesis methodology is affect-oriented hermeneutic critical close reading.

My thesis proceeds as follows. In the next chapter, I shed light on the biographical and socio-historical backgrounds of Södergran's writing until the publication of her first collection of poems, *Dikter,* and outline the earlier research. In

the third chapter, I introduce my research material and Södergran's production, and move on to discuss my reading methods from a critical and self-critical close reading to hermeneutic approach and further to what I call affective images. In the fourth chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework of the thesis and conceptualize the feminist transgression and desire. This is followed by an analysis section: the feminist political reading of three selected poems. At last, I summarize my findings and conclusions.

2   BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Du sökte en blomma
och fann en frukt.
Du sökte en källa
och fann ett hav.
Du sökte en kvinna
och fann en själ -
du är besviken.

– Edith Södergran, *Dikter* 1916[1]

You sought a flower
and found a fruit.
You sought a well
and found a sea.
You sought a woman,
and found a soul -
you are disappointed.[2]

2.1   From Edith Södergran's 'Time' to the 'Time' of Her *Dikter*

The problematic and reductive approach to Södergran's poetry is not simply a matter of the past as demonstrated by the following example: "Södergran is of course a most fascinating personality, and her destiny profoundly affects her many readers in the Nordic countries. She started writing quite alone and isolated in Raivola […], had

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[1] Södergran, 1916a.
[2] My translation.

sparse social contacts, and lived life in poverty and ill-health until her premature death at age 31 in 1923." (Parland 2010). This depiction on Edith Södergran's life by Oliver Parland was published in *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* in 2010 in a brief article, in which Parland reviews the psychoanalyst and professor of psychology Bo Sigrell's (2009) book *Att dikta sig fri från verkligheten: Tove Ditlevsen, Edith Södergran, Gunvor Hofmo* (the title means: "to liberate yourself from reality by writing poetry", trans. by Parland 2010). In his book, Sigrell analyzes Södergran's, and two other Nordic women writers' psyches based on the diagnoses assumed or established about them. Although Parland finds Sigrell's approach questionable, he considers, nevertheless, the book as a good introduction for readers interested in these three authors. Unfortunately, Parland too, when leaning on a singular source, ends up repeating inaccurate and misleading information of Gunnar Tideström's Södergran-biography from 1949. Parland's reductive apercu of Södergran is symptomatic of the simplifications that continue to perpetuate about her. This thesis takes as its objective to critique them by seeking to show Södergran's relevance for the feminist political critique.

Edith Södergran's literary work becomes contextualized differently when the factors that influenced her writing are examined more closely. Agneta Rahikainen (2014), who has laudably contributed to the dismantling of the Södergran's romanticized poet myth, notes that already since childhood Södergran's life was socially and culturally active, and she received a lot of support for her writing. The family was enjoying wealthy life until the late autumn 1917, when the value of the ruble collapsed because of the Bolshevik Revolution. Since then, their poverty was also relative considering, for example, that the Södergrans still lived in their big villa in Raivola with their maid. The poet was diagnosed with tuberculosis when she was 16, but according to the remaining documents, the serious phase of the illness was limited to the poet's very last year of life. (Rahikainen 2014, 22; 24; 27; 175).

The texts by Tideström (1949) and Rahikainen (2014) illustrate the differences between traditional and more recent interpretations of Södergran's work and they represent two different approaches to contextuality in literary scholarship. Tideström's analysis of Södergran's poetry is based on his notions about the poet's biographic details. He (1949) identifies the 'I' of Södergran's poems as the poet herself. Also, for example the natural objects in her poems represent for him, at least partly, real objects from Södergran's living environments. (e.g., Tideström 1949, 90; 152; Rahikainen 2014, 177; 183–184). In contrast, Rahikainen (2014) emphasizes the intrinsic value of the poems considered separately from biographical data and questions the idea of referencing the author's biography as part of interpretation (Rahikainen 2014, 240). The criticism is particularly noteworthy when the question concerns an author's psychobiography. Rahikainen (2014) shows that what can be learned from

biographies is the ideological atmosphere of the time when the works were written, and how the author and their writings were received at different times (Rahikainen 2014, 242–244). My own take on the poet's biography, which is outlined below, will follow Rahikainen's critical approach. The biographical sketch below is thus part of the broader historical contextualization of my research material and will not have a direct impact on the analysis of the selected poems.

2.2   Edith Södergran: Biographic Outline until the Publication of *Dikter*

Edith Södergran was born in 1892 in St. Petersburg but spent her childhood in Raivola, about 60 kilometers from the internationally and culturally vibrant city of St. Petersburg. At the time, Raivola was a small but dynamic industrial town. Due to the good railway connections, Raivola had become a popular seasonal retreat area among the people of St. Petersburg. (Rahikainen 2014, 22; 86). In the town, there was also the new Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas. In 1895, to a few tens of kilometers away to the village of Lintula, Kivennapa, the orthodox female community of Holy Trinity was founded. The community became later a nunnery. From 1911 onwards, the sisters were maintaining an orphanage and a school in Lintula. The sisterhood lived a materially modest life from donations, and for example growing plants and herbs for food. (Lintula 2024). While Södergran herself lived a middle-class life, her living environment also provided an opportunity to observe the lives of women from the perspective of serving God and caring for others.

Södergran's mother, Helena Södergran, was very close to her daughter and became the young poet's main supporter and critic. Rahikainen (2014) depicts Helena Södergran as her daughter's "constant ally" and admirer, who supported Södergran's self-confident attitude. The father, Mats Södergran, moved away from his family. Rahikainen (2014) concludes that in Södergran's circle of acquaintances there was no one to limit her in any conventional gender-oriented way. She assumes that Södergran already at home received a different understanding about gender roles than the traditional model. According to it, also a woman could be visible and appreciated. (Rahikainen 2014, 22–23). The remaining correspondence suggests that Södergran's self-confident, transgressive behavior did not always please her male colleagues (e.g., Rahikainen 2014, 29).

Since childhood, multilingualism was a natural part of Edith Södergran's daily life. In addition to speaking Swedish, Finnish and Russian in her community, she received homeschooling in German language. At age 10, Södergran started her education in St. Petersburg at a German school, where another main language was

French. The Södergrans now began to spend the school terms in the city. During the school years, Södergran wrote poems mainly in German and with metered verse and end rhymes. From the autumn of 1908, however, Södergran's poetic language became Swedish, which could also be considered her native language. This transition from the language and style that she had studied at school to a language in which she had not received formal instruction, meant a transition to a more free and associative writing. (Rahikainen 2014, 22–24). German, which Södergran herself called her best language and the language of her intellect (Lindqvist 2006, 815), was now reserved for other purposes than art-making.

It is believed that Södergran wrote the first poems for her debut collection *Dikter* in the autumn of 1912 (Haapala 2005, 54), when her tuberculosis was treated at the Davos-Dorf Sanatorium in Switzerland. Although Södergran had to interrupt her studies at St. Petersburg to stay at the sanatorium, she was able to continue a linguistically, culturally, and socially active international life there, to which she had been used to in her home city. In Davos, there were theatres, art exhibitions, symphony orchestras and restaurants, and the sanatorium had a well-stocked library. In addition to studying classical philosophy, Södergran studied more languages, Italian and English. (Rahikainen 2014, 25; 27–28). Among the many cultural and intellectual influences of that period, she became acquainted with the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose philosophy already echoed in several poems of Södergran's debut (Haapala 2002, 28–31).

The time when Södergran wrote her "carefree hand-drawn sketches" ("vårdslösa handteckningar"), as she subsequently hoped her poems would be understood[3], was a time of cultural and political turmoil in Europe. The Russian Revolution created huge political and social changes. In 1914, the First World War began. During the war approximately 20 million soldiers were wounded and over 9 million people died (Haapala 2005, 262), which caused an enormous material destruction and socio-economic destabilization. The event is considered having constituted nothing short of a cataclysm: a breakdown of the ideas of progress and civilization, and a loss of a sense of self and of the possibility of an authentic experience. All this reflected the tension between individual life and freedom, which gradually developed into a major concern of modern society in social theory, psychological theory, psychoanalytic theory, and critical literature. (Luckhurst 2008,

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[3] "Mina dikter äro att taga som vårdslösa handteckningar" (Södergran in the preface of her second poetry collection, *Septemberlyran* 1918).

20). Intellectuals discussed the subject, the self, individuation, and massification[4] (Luckhurst 2008, 20) and many artists made efforts to respond to the prevailing cultural and political crises by seeking radically alternative ways of writing and producing art (Bru et al. 2009, 6–9). Modern art began thus to focus on the innovative transgression of rules, conventions, and constrains. In devotion to critically examine its own position in relation to the past, conceptualization inevitably entered the picture. (Jenks 2003, 84).

Södergran took part in the feminist discussions of the time. At the age of 20, she wrote in her essay "Women's Suffrage" that it was necessary to work for women's rights in all countries, and that women should claim their rights and understand that they, as women, did not exist merely 'for men's amusement'. She also played an active role in promoting women's place in the field of literature as she courageously advanced her work among male writers and publishers. (Rahikainen 2014, 23; 27; 29–30).

Edith Södergran's debut collection, modestly titled *Dikter (Poems)*, was published in 1916 at a time when Finnish Swedish poetry, and poetry in general, were highly valued. However, as both poetry as a literary genre and literary criticism were dominated by men, few women had dared to publish their poems in these years, and even less so under their own name. (Rahikainen 2014, 57). As a female poet, Södergran now broke the male canon and introduced a style and form that transgressed the dominant conventions of positivist and romantic poetry.

The collection received mixed reception. The poems were perceived as unintelligible and "pure insanity" and even the poet's mental health was suspected. (Rahikainen 2014, 57–58). Admittedly, the poems that were written with free rhythm and verse were radical alongside the idyllic, metric nature lyrics or patriotic battle poetry of the male poets of her time, as Vesa Haapala states (Haapala 2005, 20). Rahikainen (2014) contemplates that for some male writers, it was simply too much that an unknown woman suddenly appeared and "sabotaged" the poetic system that they had been building for centuries. She points out that defamatory comments were nevertheless made mainly under pseudonyms by non-professional columnists who were used to Runeberg's and Topelius' romantic styles. It was also that when traditionally poetry had no longer represented a challenging genre but a "bourgeois conventionality", these modernist poems required now a more intense intellectual efforts from the reader, as Rahikainen (2014) suggests. In this sense, the question was

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[4] E.g., in 1895, Gustave Le Bon published his famous book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. He stated that "[t]he substitution of the unconscious action of crowds for the conscious activity of individuals is one of the principal characteristics of the present age". Le Bon was concerned for "the extreme mental inferiority of crowd" (Le Bon [1895] 2000, 1). Sigmund Freud criticized Le Bon's depiction of the 'collective mind of crowd' (Le Bon [1895] 2000, 11) in the book *Group Psychology and the analysis of the ego* (1921) [1949].

not about *gender*: anyone who attempted to change the literary traditions was at risk to become rebuffed. (Rahikainen 2014, 58).

However, *Dikter* also received some positive attention from several professional critics and Södergran was able to break through into the literary field and gain recognition. The stupendous emphasis on subjectivity, symbolism, mysticism, and "dream-likeness" of her poems was noted and viewed in a positive light. The style of writing was considered technically skillful, and the "responsive intuition" and the "suggestive scarcity of expression" were praised[5]. It is noteworthy that since some modernist writers had already broken with the literary form and style of the time, it was specifically the content that was new in Södergran's collection. (Rahikainen 2014, 58–59).

All in all, the diversity of Södergran's poetics in all its peculiarities fascinated her contemporaries. For Rahikainen (2014) and many others, Södergran's debut, *Dikter*, started a new era in the Nordic literary tradition, which several contemporary critics recognized already during Edith Södergran's time (Rahikainen 2014, 57–58; 61).

2.3 Outline of Earlier Research

The above-mentioned Gunnar Tideström's pioneering Södergran-biography began academic research on Södergran and her works in 1949. Tideström (1949) classified the first period of Södergran's production, including the *Dikter*-collection, stylistically and ideologically as symbolic nature and love lyrics. (Haapala 2005, 18). The ideological periodization of the poet's works has been challenged since the 1990s (e.g., Torsten Pettersson 2001, 27; 60). For example, Ebba Witt-Brattström (1997) has specified the characterization of love lyrics as erotic poetry, which deals primarily with womanhood and with the embodied experience of being a woman (Witt-Brattström 1997, 11).

Apart from Vesa Haapala's (2005) dissertation, Södergran-research in Finnish has been relatively limited (e.g., Hökkä 1989). In contrast, a plentiful of dissertations, monographs, and articles of different research traditions have been conducted in Swedish and other languages (e.g., Enckell 1949; Schoolfield 1984; Roy 1992, Witt-Brattström 1997; Lillqvist 2001; Mier-Cruz 2021). In addition to literary and biographical research, scholars have been interested in the ideological and intellectual connections of Södergran's works to Schiller (Lillqvist 2001), Schopenhauer (Lillqvist 2001), Kant (e.g., Lillqvist 2001), and Nietzsche (e.g., Enckell 1949; Lillqvist 2001; Haapala 2005). The intertextual relationships of the poems to the bible and ancient

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[5] The author Erik Grotenfelt in the Dagens Press (13.12.1916).

myths (e.g., Schoolfield 1984) have been examined. (Haapala 2005, 31-32; 44). Among others, Jan Häll (2006) has mapped Södergran's poetic and religious development in her later period away from Nietzsche and towards Steiner (Häll 2006).

The female perspective of Södergran's poetics has been more closely examined since the 1980s. For example, Birgitta Holm (1983) has characterized Södergran's poetry with the concepts of feminist deconstruction and Tuula Hökkä (1989) has shed light on Södergran's female characters. Further, Holm (1990; 1993) and Witt-Brattström (1997) have demonstrated that Södergran's debut poems introduced into Swedish poetry the 'new woman', who reserved the right for herself to decide over her body, her life, and her future (Holm 1990, 57–64; Holm 1993; Witt-Brattström 1997, 236; Rahikainen 2014, 30).

One of the discussions on Södergran's poetics has concentrated on the question of the 'I', the subject(s), the voice(s), or the speaker(s) of her poetics. The question has concerned the (gendered) subjectivity or corporeality of the figures, or both. For Witt-Brattström (1997), for example, Södergran's lyrical 'I' is essentially female (Witt-Brattström 1997, 313). Furthermore, Ursula Lindqvist (2006) sees that while the avant-gardist subject of the poems from continental Europe was usually aggressive and masculine, Södergran employed the poetic subject to 'serve' her individual philosophical agenda. For Lindqvist, the speakers of Södergran's poems can be either female or gender neutral, however they are "mostly female". She also brings up the embodiment of Södergran's poetics and holds that the female body functions in Södergran's works as a site and source of creation for new poetry. Lindqvist points out that typically Södergran's poems involve "primordial elements of nature", such as primary colors - especially red, blue, and white - and fire, wind, water, sun, and stars. For her, all the other elements emanate from the physical features of the female body. (Lindqvist 2006).

In the *Dikter*-collection, Södergran is argued to have been primarily concerned with "erotic anxiety" and "manifesting a new sense of self" in "poetic images that juxtaposition boldly concrete and abstract" (Haapala 2005, 21). Vesa Haapala, Janna Kantola and Fredrik Hertzberg (2013) highlight the multitude of poetic voices in *Dikter*. For them, "[e]ach poem has a distinctive voice and ideological message" that represents a "certain erotic and social attitude". They consider this multitude of voices as embodying a modern condition of femininity that includes "both pitfalls and alternative routes to freedom". (Haapala et al. 2013, 450). In his dissertation, Haapala (2005) sheds further light on the problematics of the speakers of the poems and intellectual and intertextual connections of *Dikter* including myths, the bible and Nietzsche. Earlier research had recognized Friedrich Nietzsche's influence starting mainly from the second collection, *Septemberlyran* (1918), but Haapala (2005) shows

that already Södergran's first collection had been influenced by Nietzsche's "ecstatic and intellectual visions" (Haapala 2005, 20).

More recent research has been done by Benjamin Mier-Cruz (2021). In their queer readings, Mier-Cruz (2021) seeks to move away from the traditional interpretations of Södergran's works, which view the subjectivities and bodies to belong either to the biological poet or a singular, fictional feminine poetic subject. Although the subjects of the poems are assigned at birth as women, they do not remain "prisoners of their cultural bodies", but expand, in complex negotiations, into trans- or genderqueers. Södergran's poems, for Mier-Cruz, "reproduce processes of binary sexual difference to subvert them in a Nietzschean way". Mier-Cruz (2021) emphasizes that because it is possible to identify as both a woman and a genderqueer, seeing Södergran's poetic subjects as changing, does not de-feminize or de-sexualize Södergran's writing or diminish her female authorship or female subjectivity. Mier-Cruz (2021) describes Södergran's poetry as a kind of "universe of subjective and somatic experiences and irreality". This queer world that is in constant movement offers the reader, according to Mier-Cruz, an opportunity to reflect on their own positionality while renegotiating their place in it. (Mier-Cruz 2021).

3   RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

I begin this chapter with a brief introduction to my research material in relation to Södergran's production, and discuss, with Roland Barthes (1993), language as a social construction and possibilities to transgress its conventions. Secondly, I reflect on critical close reading, including self-criticality, which - since I. A. Richards (1929) and his contemporaries - has been particularly emphasized by feminist scholars. The third subchapter examines, where applicable, the hermeneutics from 'naive understanding' through explanation to interpretation outlined by Paul Ricœur (1976). I depict the difference between a symbol and a metaphor touching also on translation as a method of interpretation. Lastly, I will examine the possibilities of applying affect theories into the interpretation of poetic images.

3.1   Research Material

During her short career, Edith Södergran published four collections of poems: *Dikter* (1916), *Septemberlyran* (1918), *Rosenaltaret* (1919), and *Framtidens skugga* (1920), and the aphorism collection *Brokiga iakttagelser* (1919). The poetry collection *Landet som icke är* (1925) was published posthumously. Her drafts, youth poems and blanks for future works have been published in Olof Enckell's book *Vaxdukshäftet: En studie i Edith Södergrans ungdomsdiktning* (1961). Södergran also published nature-themed aphorisms *Tankar om naturen* (1922) originally in the *Ultra magazine* and her letters to Hagar Olsson have been published as a book called *Ediths brev. Brev från Edith Södergran till Hagar Olsson. Med kommentar av Hagar Olsson* (1955). Södergran's original works have been digitized to the National Library of Finland.

     For my research material, I chose three poems from Södergran's debut collection *Dikter* (1916): "Två vägar", "Jag såg ett träd", and "Violetta skymningar", which I have translated from their language of origin Swedish into English. This is not because

there would not be translations from which to choose, but rather, translating the poems has been part of my method, the affect-oriented critical close reading. Poetic language operates in an 'affective space' at the level of experience; therefore, in the process of interpreting such language, it is justified to interact directly with the original work, the poem.

The close reading of the first poem of the collection "Jag såg ett träd" brings to the fore feminist politics and transgression, which accommodates the research focus and guides to read the other poems with putting attention to feminist transgression. Given that the thesis concerns the capacity of poetry to offer the language of transgression against oppressive social structure, the selection of the specific poems was due to my identification of the tropes and motifs of violent gendered social norms as well as resistance against and objection to them.

Language as a socio-historical construction offers a writer an operation field of familiarity and borders that they cannot choose, as it is noted by Roland Barthes (1993). However, they may develop their individual style, which is, for Barthes, something that is born in a writer's body as a part of their own construction of the subject. When style is positioned beyond simply the text, but part of an embodied reality, the writer's body and the past become cradles for their reflections, modes of expression and the vocabulary they use. Therefore, the style is a result of growth, and not the result of an intention or a choice. In writing, then, a stylistic direction seems to be closely tied to the question of going against and reaching beyond the regulatory norms of writing existing at the time. We could perhaps even say that at hand is a certain "transgression of language", which brings to the fore something that is more than language. Thus, according to Barthes, the depth of style is born of how one experiences the world. (Barthes 1993, 39). To apply Barthes' insight to the question of Södergran's poetics, her use of verse was part of the retreat to *the solitude of style* (Barthes 1993, 12–16) from poetry written in meter that was used in Finland and internationally by most poets in the 19th century. In modern poetry, word received the generic form, which means that word was reproduced having unlimited possibilities for interpretations without anticipatory or permanent intention.

3.2 Critical and Self-Critical Close Reading

The term 'close reading' refers traditionally to reading individual texts accurately and in detail, paying attention to their linguistic features and rhetorical operations. The term originates from the English literary scholar I. A. Richards' influential book *Practical Criticism* (1929). In his book, Richards depicts classroom exercises, where he assigned his students to interpret poems without prior knowledge of their author or

context. The aim was to focus on the textual structures and details of the poems instead of trying to find out how, for example, the life events of the author would be reflected in the poems. Richards found that instead of focusing on how texts create meanings, readers created a variety of culturally related and social and political interpretations on them. It became clear that understanding the text required the reader to focus on practicing self-criticism. (Kortekallio & Ovaska 2020).

Close reading is commonly associated with the New Criticism school that emerged in the United States in the early 1940s. The School of New Criticism emphasized the criticality and objectiveness of close reading. The aim was not solely to shift the focus of reading away from the author's supposed intentions and social contexts to the text, but also to minimize the reader's subjective and emotional reactions. New Criticism had its roots in the groundbreaking studies of Richards and his students (e.g., Empson 1947). A simple way of summarizing this approach is that the text 'was practically all that mattered'. As such, the New Criticism has been criticized for not properly recognizing the political and ideological elements of the texts. (Kortekallio & Ovaska 2020).

In contrast, the feminist critical tradition of close reading examines how political structures are reflected in texts, and how different frameworks of interpretation reflect and partially produce them (e.g., Lanser 1986; Warhol 2003, 25). Referring to Louise Rosenblatt's observation as early as 1938, Robyn Warhol (2003) argues that the sensations, feelings, and interpretations that occur during the reading are often shaped by how we are used to receiving texts and their forms. For example, familiar gendered emotional structures are reproduced by reliving those patterns. Critical close reading can serve as a mean to deconstruct the familiar patterns. Rosenblatt (1995) states that a mere understanding of literary structures or techniques is not enough. She emphasizes that the reader reacts to the text as a corporeal being from their own starting points. "For a poem to exist at all, and not just a written statement, the reader must experience, to 'live' through what is produced by reading." (Rosenblatt 1995, 33). Perhaps this was also implied in Richards' view that literary texts create experiential, embodied knowledge or thinking. As Kaisa Kortekallio and Anna Ovaska (2020) state, close reading both provides the reader with the opportunity to become aware of one's own unconscious frameworks, reading habits, and presuppositions, and is a self-critical reading in the sense that it "allows us to become intellectually and emotionally aware of the various personal and social opportunities between which to choose" (Kortekallio & Ovaska 2020). Following that description, my own analysis of Södergran's poems also adopts such self-critical approach to interpretation.

3.3   Hermeneutic Approach by Paul Ricœur

The term 'hermeneutics' is often referred to a theory or method of interpretation, but it is a methodological approach based on a set of philosophical principles. In the reading of Södergran's poems, I will draw on Paul Ricœur's *Interpretation Theory* (1976). Like his predecessor Hans-Georg Gadamer, Ricœur (1976) emphasizes that our interpretations of texts are always based on our preconceptions (93). Since we cannot disengage from our initial conceptions, the question is how to read, translate, or interpret literary texts accurately and constructively.

Various hermeneutical approaches, including Ricœur's (1976), use the metaphor of a *hermeneutic circle* to illustrate the basic problem of interpretation. The hermeneutic circle can be said to depict the relationship between text and reader. When I approach a poem and read a part of it - a word, a phrase, or a verse - I immediately begin to form an opinion about that part in relation to the whole of the poem I envision or assume. As I continue to read the other parts of the poem, I constantly refer to the parts that I have read before and to the imagined whole, from which my opinion changes as I know more parts. Because the author's intention and their psychic experience is beyond the reader's reach, the process is akin to 'guessing'. Although there are no rules for making good guesses, there are ways of validating them. According to Ricœur, to construe a certain whole is to recognize the parts in relation to that presupposed whole. When we construe the parts, we mutually construe the whole. From the diversity of details also opens the diversity of the constructions of the whole. (75–79). Obviously, the circularity of a referential reading process of this kind is by no means straightforward; one could rather call it spiral-like.

Furthermore, in addition to guessing, the hermeneutic approach concerns the question of validity and justification. One interpretation has more validity than another. What is essential is the invalidation of conflicting interpretations, which saves the reader from a vicious circle that arises through a certain type of "self-confirmability". Not only should the interpretation be probable, but it should be *more probable* than another. Although there are numerous interpretations, according to Ricœur, the number of the possible constructions of the text is nevertheless limited. (79).

The hermeneutic circle can also be viewed as a sort of relationship between the present and the past, where the "historical horizon of the reader" and the "other historical horizon" meet. According to Gadamer, despite our preconceptions, the method of reading is constructive when the reader takes into consideration the historical context in which the text is written (93). My task as a reader is to form in a critical reading process an understanding of what the poem seems to bring to the fore in relation to what I know. Ricœur points out that while experience as such cannot be

transferred to someone else, the meaning of experience can nevertheless be transferred from one sphere of life to another. The reader actualizes potential references in a new situation, which is their own situation. Contextuality screens the ambiguity and reduces the multiplicity of possible interpretations. (15–17; 81).

Applying Ricœur to the analysis of my research material, the reading of a poem can be thought of as proceeding from naive understanding through structural analysis to a deeper opening of the "worlds" of the poem. In Ricœur's view, structuralism is practical as one method of explanation, but explaining the text by means of structural analysis is not yet an interpretation. For him, structural analysis has a capacity to examine only one element of the text: it classifies basic units of a text in relation to each other. (84). Thus, Ricœur suggests that the function of structural analysis could be to lead the reader from "surface semantics" to some kind of "depth semantics", which constitutes the ultimate "referent" of the myth [text] (87). In response the connection that Schleiermacher and Dilthey make between "understanding" and identifying the author's intentions, Ricœur reminds us that speech and writing differ in such a way that writing 'detaches' meaning from the event (52–54). In this case, the intention of the author and the meaning of the text no longer coincide. However, Ricœur holds that the event and meaning are in a dialectical relationship in the written text (55–56). For Ricœur, understanding means the opening of the world of a text, the "sense of text", with its dimensions, which invites one to look at things from a new perspective. (87–88).[6]

By analyzing the concepts of metaphor and symbol, Ricœur also reflects on whether linguistic meaning is the full meaning of a literary work. In a literary work, the explicit and the implicit are in a mutual relation. In the tradition of logical positivism, this distinction is the same as the distinction between cognitive and emotional language. (82; 84). Ricœur holds that in a living metaphor, the tension between the literal and the metaphoric brings out the creation of "true meaning" at the level of the sentence. This creation has no place in the established language. The metaphor dies when it becomes integrated within language use, like a chair leg, for example. A metaphor cannot be translated because translation destroys its innovative and infinite meaning. Ricœur concludes that metaphor has more than emotional value: it tells us something new about reality. (92–93).

For Ricœur, symbol, just like metaphor, has both linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions. This "surplus of meaning", for Ricœur, is based on the recognition of the literal meaning. In other words, the recognition of the literal meaning is necessary to

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[6] Concerning the criticisms on what Ricœur calls 'forcing intersubjectivity into hermeneutics', the psychologizing of the concept of hermeneutics has had a great influence on Christian theology. Consequently, a word act is a speech act, a gospel proclamation of which meaning as an original event testifies itself in the present, where one applies it to oneself in the act of faith. (22).

see that the symbol consists of still more meanings. The literal meaning and the other meanings are, however, not distinct, but rather it is movement to other meanings by means of or through the literary meaning. Viewed this way, a symbol allows for an endless interpretation (94; 96–97; 99).

The non-linguistic represents for Ricœur the form of a text. Ricœur mentions that traditionally feelings have been separated from the cognitive meaning making, but he does not bring out - at least explicitly - whether he seeks to exclude feelings or emotions from the interpretation process of that form. (e.g., 76; 78; 81–83). At a practical level a distinction of this kind would, nonetheless, be difficult, therefore I find constructive to reflect with affect theories a possible role of sensations, feelings, emotions, and affects might have in the interpretation of poems.

3.4   Affective Images

The intensive visuality of Södergran's poems poses a challenge regarding how the whole of the poem and the parts of the poem appear to the reader before a more conceptual image is formed. One way to approach the question could be via Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2004) notion that "underlying all conscious and accurate observation there is a non-conceptual and non-reflective level of perception where phenomena are not yet well-defined objects" (Puolakka 2018). The category of affect is related to the level of perception depicted by Merleau-Ponty. Although this 'level' or 'space' of experience includes problematic, ambiguous, and even contradictory elements from the point of view of academic research, it is necessary to address in the interpretation of poems. As I already referred to in the previous chapter, poems *affect* their readers and listeners precisely at the level of subjective experience of reading or listening, rather than being limited to conceptual analysis. That is why in what follows I consider shortly how the different theorizations of affect could be used to understand Södergran's poetic images.

There are several affect theories and definitions of the concept (Rinne et al. 2020, 6). In general terms, affect could be defined in the social sciences as an unstructured, physiologically 'primitive', corporeal force that impacts our perceptions and includes rudimentary valuing qualities and unconsciously guiding motives (von Scheve 2017; Rinne et al. 2020, 5–6). Instead of seeing the body and mind as contradictory, affect-oriented research proposes that the body, senses, and the unconscious sensations are part of people's thinking and of everyday cultural and social perceptions and practices. Affect theories differ in how conscious affects are thought to be and how they relate to cultural and social contexts. Particularly, the category of embodiment is brought to the center. Affective experience is thought to mean 'changing the energetic state of the

body' to become stronger or weaker in relation to something that the affect is directed at [or works in connection to]. (Rinne et al. 2020, 5–6; 10–11).

Despite the different meanings of the concept, cultural researchers have become increasingly interested in how affects guide our thinking, choices, and actions. Affect theories have been applied to examine the effects of emotions or bodily sensations on how we create meanings. The scholars have considered how affects relate to cognition or subjective sensations, such as senses or emotions. (Rinne et al. 2020, 5). This includes the question of how the researcher's own world of experience should be considered in research.

As proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2004) in their rewording of a famous line by Spinoza, affect means the ability to affect and become affected, rather than personal emotions. Rather, emotion is a specific cognitive representation of the affective experience. The reflexive mind interprets bodily experience tied to cultural models of interpretation. For Margaret Wetherell (2012) and Sara Ahmed (2004), emotions are not only cognitive but also corporeal. They suggest that, for example, ideologies or the shared atmosphere of mass events can have affective power. For Ahmed, emotions are focused on an object, and they are attached to the individual past and memories that are part of the momentary experience.[7] (Deleuze & Guattari 2004; Ahmed 2004; Wetherell 2012; Rinne et al. 2020, 8–10).

Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010) emphasize that affect is different from conscious knowing. It is the state of *in-between-ness*, a "momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation", and the "passage of 'force' or intensity". Affect passes human or non-human bodies. It consists of 'refusals' and 'invitations.' It resonates and circulates, and sometimes it attaches itself to bodies and 'worlds'. The potentiality of affect lies in body's capacity to affect and be affected. In the *in-between-ness* the question is of movement where there is space for hope. (Gregg & Seigworth 2010, 3–4; 9). I argue that the affective force of a poem is a capacity to elicit an image for the reader. The framings of affect theories support the idea of affective images as a creative hermeneutic space.

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[7] Jenni Rinne, Anna Kajander and Riina Haanpää note that considered on the level of experience, the difference between emotions and affect is, however, hard to see (2020, 8).

4 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: FEMINISTS THEORIZE THE TRANSGRESSIVE

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the thesis through discussion about the concept of 'transgression' in feminist political scholarship and beyond. The concept of 'transgression' is identified here as one of the key motifs in Södergran's poems and as a force and potentiality residing in her poetics. Traditionally, the concept has been closely linked to the work of Georges Bataille, who attempted to shake up rational certainty and conventionality through a violent eroticism, madness, and carnival (Jenks 2003, 87; e.g., 96–97). The political feminist transgression in Edith Södergran's poetics has hyperbole, dramatic, and even violent dimensions, which resemble the Bataillean style, but also display more nuanced and subtle aesthetics. In feminist political action, transgression is neither concentrated on extremist issues but the mundane constraints that have been inscribed to woman's identity.

The term 'transgression' is not commonly used in the feminist political critique as a conceptual theoretical framework although many studies are concerned with transgression. The thesis frames transgression primarily through the work of two key feminist scholars, Judith Butler and Hélène Cixous. Although neither of them uses 'transgression' as a central theoretical concept in their research, my work will argue that Butler and Cixous should be recognized as contributors to the philosophical tradition of the concept of transgression. Thus, the chapter asks together with these two authors what possibilities and potentialities transgression might offer for the feminist political critique and action.

Butler has developed an idea of gender that is directly relevant to the thesis' outline of transgression. I refer to their theorization of the subversion of sex and gender categories that are examined here from the point of view of transgression. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) to subvert, inter alia, means to overturn (Chambers 2007), i.e., to turn over or upside down (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary* n.d.). This, I suggest, introduces subversion as an act, which reveals - like

transgression - the previously unseen aspects of the problem at hand. While the terms overlap, and subversive is transgressive and vice versa, the concepts also have distinct dimensions. In so far as subversion is understood as "internal erosion" (Chambers 2007) of the system, transgression is the actual breaking the limits and boundaries. Transgression also expands the field of subversion from the critical political theory to the field of art and literature.

Cixous' idea of *écriture féminine* (women's writing) coincide with Södergran's poetics through its aspiration to transgress patriarchal structures, including language. *Écriture féminine* is 'carried' by irrepressible desire, a driving force for transgression. Cixous' insight is important when approaching Södergran's poems in that, as I show in the next chapter, also Södergran portrays the female subject and sexuality as heterogeneous, diverse, and irreducible.

The chapter begins with the etymology of the concept and then examines how the dimensions of transgression as a term have been conceptualized from the perspectives of the individual, society, and the transgressive act or action itself. The components of transgression are also at the center of the review. The chapter elaborates how transgression can be conceptualized in relation to the social and as a practice of social critique. Finally, I briefly reflect on the relation of transgression to desire and freedom, because to my view, desire is intrinsically related to transgression as a part of transgressive practice of freedom.

4.1   Definition and Delineation of the Concept

The term 'transgression' is used in philosophy, sociology, theology, criminology, and psychology, as well as in literature and political science, to name but a few fields that apply the term. The focus of this thesis is on political science although it is not appropriate or even possible to attempt to delimit the discussion about the term onto the field. In political science, the term is used, but not usually as a theoretical conceptual framework. As the interest of my inquiry is exactly the theoretical use of the term, it will be more useful to reflect on the sociological and philosophical debates concerning the term.

Transgression as a concept is elusive, and while scholars refer to the term, it is hardly ever defined (Boris et al. 2020, 5). I, too, lean initially on dictionaries in my attempt to deeper understand the dimensions of the term in terms of the social critique. The term is derived from Latin *transgressus.* The prefix *trans* means "across" or "beyond". *Gradi* (past participle *gressus*) means "to walk, go", and *transgredi* (past participle) also "step across, step over; climb over, pass, go beyond" (*Online Etymology Dictionary* n.d.). In terms of the etymology of the concept, movement and crossing over,

are central to transgression. From a philosophical point of view, this means that transgression as a concept is not value-laden: it neither makes a value judgment of the transgressive act nor of the different facets of what it transcends (e.g., Foucault 1977, 35–36). This is, however, not a place to focus on transgression as a philosophical concept, but rather, primarily to consider what transgression consists of and how it operates as a sociological-political concept.

In a social 'world', transgression enters the picture as an opposing force to the collective non-criticality and unquestioning obedience. It reflects, makes visible, and challenges the prevailing order. (Jenks 2003, 31). The meanings of transgression "passing beyond the bounds of legality or right; a violation of law, duty, or command; disobedience, trespass, sin" (*Oxford English Dictionary* n.d.) emphasize that the question is of moral, but also that transgression is generally seen as a negative and undesired phenomenon. Transgression denotes an action of *going against*; breaking, violating, infringing, or contravening, but also "moving out of sequence". In this sense, transgression is non normative; it opposes conformity, the expected, and the accepted. It is "behavior by individuals and groups against the hegemonic and normative in culture and society". (*Oxford English Dictionary* n.d.; Boris et al. 2020, 3; 5; 7).

Transgression is, however, not the same as disorder, but rather, it operates in a social world as a component of the rule. It is a threat of a chaos and the reminder of the necessity of order. Chris Jenks (2003) notes that transgression cannot be understood as something transient. He emphasizes that as a social process transgression is "a dynamic force in cultural reproduction", which "prevents stagnation". (Jenks 2003, 7–8). Transgression occurs not only through individual actions, but also through real or imaginary (transnational) networks and discussions (*Oxford English Dictionary* n.d.; Boris et al. 2020, 3; 5; 7). Contextuality and intersectionality are central when constructing meanings related to transgressive action. Interpretation of the transgressive should consider temporal, local, cultural, and societal aspects. Intersectionality suggests that "categories of [for example] race, ethnicity, sexuality, culture, nation, and gender not only intersect but are mutually constituted, formed, and transformed within power-laden processes". (Boris et al. 2020, 5).

4.2   Transgression in Relation to the Social and as Practice of Critique

The concept of transgression proceeds from an assumption that there is a recognizable 'that' which can be transgressed. In social thought 'that' is understood as imaginary limits and boundaries that are solidified by social norms. These boundaries delimit a social structure of meaning as a constitution of a center. (Jenks 2003, 15). It is a matter

of strengthening on the one hand and delimiting on the other. Society unifies, consolidates, and homogenizes the core of its 'pleasant familiarity' by excluding and marginalizing what it considers disagreeable (Jervis 1999, 4; Jenks 2003, 8–9). Margins thus have an important role in defining the center. Although the boundaries between the center and margins are fully analytical, virtual, multidimensional, and contextual, they are nevertheless known to members of society who interpret them from their own points of view. (Jenks 2003, 4; 15).

One of the mechanisms for establishing social norms is categorization. We are socialized to structure the social world through contrasting categories. These are, for example, good – evil, sacred – profane, normal – pathological, sane – mad, [and for feminists, essentially, man – woman]. It is critical to realize that the definitions of categories and boundaries between them can also be understood as absolute and unquestionable, as Chris Jenks emphasizes in his book, *Transgression* (2003). (Jenks 2003, 2; 31). In the words of Södergran's poem, "Jag såg ett träd"[8], these boundaries can be perceived as such, which "no-one transgresses". When this kind of categories and boundaries function as institutionalized and further as reified, we may relate to them as if they were 'natural' and autonomous beings, far from our power to transform them in any way. Although classifications and categorizations create on the other hand a sense of security, they can also function as coercive, oppressive, and violent, and operate as a part of structural violence.

The key ideological and systemic backdrop against which feminist transgression has taken place is heteronormative and patriarchal order, the foundation for the categorizations of 'compulsory' gender. The concept of heteronormativity reveals the institutional, cultural, and legal norms that reify and entrench the normativity of heterosexuality. As a regulator of binary sex and gender, heteronormativity privileges heterosexual desire and identity by presenting them as universally expected, demanded, and rewarded. In Foucauldian terms, it is a regulatory practice, a mechanism that shapes social behavior through the societal expectations, peer pressure, or dominant notions of propriety. (Chambers 2007).

A challenge is the privileged right of the juridical power systems [interconnected with other power systems] to produce subjects whom they subsequently represent. This is problematic for the groups that are formed, defined, and reproduced under the patriarchal rule hierarchically by "different axis of domination". (Butler 1999, 4–5). There is a kind of 'gradation' of harm; insofar as we all one way or another 'fail at performing gender', as Butler argues, everyone is vulnerable to these regulatory and disciplinary interventions. At the same time, there are those in particularly precarious positions who cannot 'pass' the normative ideal and are thereby vulnerable to violence that the rest of society that is 'simply' 'failing at doing gender' will not encounter. (e.g.,

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[8] Södergran 1916c

Butler 2015, 32–35). In particularly precarious gendered positions are those who identify themselves for example as 'trans' or 'queer', but also women in many contexts and environments. Södergran's poetics depicts a woman's hierarchically inferior position, but also, in a strict normative structure, the hierarchical categories of acceptability within the women's category itself. Thus, to understand the repressive mechanisms of power – knowledge, it is crucial to examine what constitutes the acceptability and the intelligibility within the system, as Michel Foucault has pointed out (Butler 2004, 27).

Cixous (1976) approaches the aforementioned problem of the patriarchal structure from a female perspective by underscoring the intertwining of written language, reason, and patriarchy. She points out that the classic representations of women have depicted them in a negative sense as uniformly sensitive and intuitive. This includes that in the Western tradition, the dualistic world view has not merely distinguished mind and body, reason and emotions, and man and woman, but it has contrasted them hierarchically. In Cixous' (1976) criticism, writing and the power to define our 'reality' are reserved for "great men", whereas women's writing is considered not only inferior, but also "silly". Cixous - like Södergran's poetics, I suggest - highlights that the question is not merely about the domination by the word, but about the overall domination by the *phallus*, which is the idiom of the masculine power. (Cixous 1976).

Cixous (1976) also complains that the patriarchal law has made women 'guilty of everything'. Women have been made guilty of "having desires and for not having any; guilty for being frigid, "too hot" or not being both at once; guilty for being too motherly and for not enough; and guilty for having children and for not having any". Cixous notes that from all this it follows that women have learned to hide their desires and to punish themselves for them with guilt, as well as to hide their writing like they hide their masturbation. Cixous declares that female body, the "whole territory" of it, is not unknown merely to men but to most women too. (Cixous 1976). In Södergran's poem "Violetta skymningar"[9], the subject of the poem calls upon women ("sisters") to realize that they already are "knightesses" and "warrioresses". Cixous points out that a woman without a body cannot be a good fighter. Therefore, women should start writing *from their bodies*, from and within their individual styles and beyond, to transgress the patriarchal scripts that are written on and for them, but without them. Writing for Cixous, is the possibility for change, therefore she (1976) challenges women to think about embodiment. By declaring liberation for women's bodies, Cixous disengages from the cultural structure, where the feelings of guilt are placed on the woman. (Cixous 1976).

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[9] Södergran 1916d.

In her essay *Le Rire de la Méduse*[10] (1975) Hélène Cixous (1976) introduces the term *écriture féminine* (women's writing) to challenge, or as I argue, to transgress "the traditional, phallocentric way of writing". This does not mean a theorization of a separate literary genre, but rather, a movement towards the plurality of voices and styles. This movement should take place in areas other than "those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination" and therefore Cixous (1976) emphasizes the significance of subjects, such as Södergran's poems depict, i.e., subjects who break the automatisms and refuse to be subjugated by authority. She thus calls women to write and, above all, write their *selves*. This represents transgressing "the violent patriarchal law" that has driven women away not only from their bodies, but from writing too. When saying this, Cixous (1976) emphasizes that when she speaks of a "woman", she means a universal woman subject and her struggle against the conventional man. In *écriture féminine*, she does not refer to a general or typical woman, but rather to an "infinite richness of their individual constitutions". For her, there is neither *a* female sexuality that would be a uniform, homogenous and classifiable. (Cixous 1976).

Cixous (1976), like the subjects of Södergran's poems, sets herself to oppose the dualistic language structure that is built on hierarchical juxtapositions, where the man is 'the first' and represents the 'superior', 'reason', 'light', and 'activity', whereas the woman is 'the second', 'inferior', 'emotion', 'darkness', and 'passivity'. According to Cixous, our thinking has become dependent on the process of differentiation, which necessarily always includes the oppositional Other. This thinking that is based on oppositionality appears to us as natural and eternal. Within this structure, the woman is the construct of the man, because of which the woman has become "non-existent" and unintelligible. For Cixous, then, *écriture féminine* undermines, and replaces the masculine order (Sellers in Cixous et. al 1994, 37–38). This, I argue, can be productively thought of as transgression, which displays the limits of signifying and defining, expands towards them and breaks them. While Cixous holds the 'women's writing' open also to men, she thinks, however, that at current times a woman is closer than a man to what she calls "female economics". In other words, she sees the 'women's writing' as providing another opportunity for reshaping existing structures. (Sellers in Cixous et al.1994, xxix).

Judith Butler's groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble* (1990) approaches the problem of the patriarchal and heteronormative structure by challenging the naturalist assumptions of binary sex and gender. Butler argues that the idea of gender has very little to do with any inherent features of *the self*: gender is socially constructed. (Butler 1999, 23; 180). The idea was transgressive thirty years ago, and it still is at a time when the conservative ideology of the only two 'true' genders is being reinforced and fueled by political leaders, such as Georgia Meloni, Viktor Orban, and Vladimir

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[10] The English translation of the essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" was published in 1976.

Putin, the Christian church with the support of Pope Francis, and the international 'anti-gender ideology movement' (see Butler 2024).

Butler opposes the idea of natural sex by formulating that the constructed sex and sexuality include a performative dimension, which appears as a reiteration of norms (Butler 1993, 94). From this follows that insofar as the sexual characteristics and ways in which the body expresses and produces its cultural meanings are performative, there is no 'true' or 'false' or 'real' or 'disordered' ways of 'acting' gender. Therefore, references to a 'true' gender identity are, for Butler, akin to a regulatory fiction. (Butler 1999, 23; 180). For Butler, the foundations of Cixous' insight of the *écriture féminine* are problematic as they assume the constancy of sexual difference between men and women. The question is whether womanhood must be defined in relation to the category of men. For Butler, the risk here is that the female body that has been liberated from the definitions of the paternal law may turn out to be "another incarnation" of that very law. In Butler's view, the notion of the performatively established genders treats both male and female gender in equal terms. This includes that if the performative female gender refers to the normative functions of the male dominance, it is merely because of the performativity itself. How a culturally constructed body can thus be liberated, is towards an open future of cultural possibilities. (Butler 2000, 209; 119).

Butler (2004) illustrates the contradiction between the social and the 'inner' by depicting that "[a]s bodies, we are always for something more than, and other than, ourselves" (Butler 2004, 25). The argument is both pessimistic and optimistic. The pessimistic reading of the phrase brings to the fore something that has in a way turned into a 'tragedy' of the humankind: epistemically, there is no body unless it has been defined and regulated socially. We are born in an already existing normative reality with assumptions and definitions of that reality. Our bodies have been defined beforehand at the level of discursive structures by people who we do not know, and that is what we must learn to live with from then on. We cannot fully escape the power of inherited structures that define our subject. If one has 'luck', or, to be more precise, social privilege, one is born and defined in a surrounding, where *the self* might not become too oppressed by social norms. Being 'unlucky', however, in its extreme means the possibility of being killed merely for being born with a certain kind of body. In this kind of 'reality', it is no wonder that one may be 'beside oneself' with emotional grief, or with political rage (Butler 2004, 20–22), as we will also find in Södergran's poetics.

Following Hegel's notion of recognition, Butler (2004) points out that in our negotiations of gender, an additional challenge comes from our desire for recognition. This desire brings us 'beside ourselves', into the realm of social norms, which we do not fully choose, but which nevertheless serve as an inevitable context for the choices

we have. Butler problematizes the struggle by emphasizing that the fight for the recognition and rights of marginalized people includes the assumption that the personhood has always already being formed. To become oppressed, one must exist as a subject of certain kind, based on which one is rendered inferior. Thus, intervening in the social and political process through which that personhood is defined requires demanding a social transformation for the very meaning of the personhood. (Butler 2004, 30; 31–33).

Butler's (2004) insight thus also opens possibilities for politics and action. They suggest autonomy to be understood as one dimension of normative aspirations. For a less oppressive social world for gendered and sexual minorities of all kinds, the aim should be to underline the value of 'being beside oneself', that is "of being a porous boundary" and being "given over to others" where "one is not the presumptive center". This means that the aim should be to become conscious of both the conditions by which the social operational field is constituted, and for the limits of those conditions. The limits can be found where the reproducibility of the conditions is not secure, but rather, contingent, and transformable. (Butler 2004, 27). It is exactly in the practice centered on shifting and pushing against these limits that the concept of transgression comes to play a central role in Butler's work.

For Butler (2004) - and for Södergran - fantasy is a part of the articulation of the possible and this is indispensable for the discussion of transgression. Fantasy is not the opposite of reality, but rather, it constitutes the limits of reality. As such, drag, and other socially subversive practices and identities, makes us re-consider what is real. They also show us how the norms that govern the predominant notions of reality can be questioned, and how new modes of reality can be instituted. Thus, the embodied relation to the norm carries transformative potential. Drag shows that the gendered body is not static, but plastic and in a mode of *becoming*. It exceeds and reworks the norm, which is to say that it *transgresses* it. Instead of reproducing the reality, it pushes against it and contests it by obscuring its limits and by demonstrating its constructed and performative, rather than 'natural', character. (Butler 2004, 28–30). As my analysis will show, in Södergran's poetics the figure of centaur functions in ways that are similar to Butler's drag: they blur the reality with their unconventional body and behavior. They are thus examples of the possibility to subvert or transgress the norm.

The term that Butler uses to designate transgressive practice is subversion. They do not define or conceptualize the term, but according to Samuel Chambers (2007), subversiveness is related, for Butler, to an "unplanned" or "uncalculated effect" of an act (Butler 1994, 38; Chambers 2007). Subversion functions from within culture, history, and discourse (e.g., Butler 1999, 185). This is at the heart of Butler's criticism of Julia Kristeva's theory, which, in its capacity to erode the Symbolic, assumes semiotics as 'prediscursive' or 'outside'. The political analysis of my thesis relies on

the basic constructivist premise found in Butler's work, according to which it is not possible to get outside the system of power that we wish to subvert. The agency involved in a subversive act, or in a subversive reading, appears from inside of the system that it attempts to overturn or transform. For this reason, for Butler, to claim that we can intervene into cultural-political power structures from outside them, would merely undermine the possibility of subversion. (Butler 1999, 174; Chambers 2007). Chambers (2007) therefore suggests that the term Butler uses could be understood as "internal erosion", which works on norms and weakens them from the inside (Chambers 2007).

Central is that to subvert or transgress oppressive norms, it is necessary to make them visible. Chambers (2007) notes that norms work the best when they are never exposed as social norms, but as, for example, natural and unquestionable 'facts of life'. Once norms require significant amount of reinforcing, demonstration, and argumentation on the part of their supporters, they have already been significantly weakened. Subversion questions norms by either merely exposing them or challenging their status, basis, or effects. (Chambers 2007).

To analyze how the risk and threat of transgression as well as transgressive action are addressed in a society is instructive for understanding the moral bonds and social structure of that society (Jenks 2003, 33). As Émile Durkheim has pointed out, in a society where normative standards are clear, apparent, and shared, transgression is perceived to offend the shared collective consciousness. Transgression may thus be experienced as an offence or 'crime' against the society itself. This is when the collective begins to reorganize itself against the offending individual, while the social reaction to transgression and the transgressor reveals the common symbols and shared taboos. (Durkheim in Jenks 2003, 20).

Transgression is thus a risk not only to the prevailing social order but to the transgressor themselves. The one who transgresses is also seen to pose danger to others (Douglas 1966, 116; Jenks 2003, 43). It might be believed that for example a transgression as the detachment from the idea of the gender binary threatens not only the social bonds and the structures but also the identity of people who identify themselves as women and men. The transgressor is thus reprobated [or violated] for endangering others, and not merely for crossing the line (Douglas 1966, 165; Jenks 2003, 36). It is thus not only the community, but also the individuals who turn against the transgressor. As external transgressive 'attacks' at a society foster solidarity within, individual internal attacks are punished to publicly reaffirm the structures (Douglas 1966, 166).

According to Friedrich Nietzsche, it is the societal "process of the oppression and compartmentalization of the will" that gives rise to a desire to go beyond the margins of acceptability. Indeed, to transcend and exceed physical, racial, aesthetic, sexual,

national, legal, and moral limits, becomes thus one of the features of modernity. (Jenks 2003, 7–8). At the heart of Nietzschean transgression is the decentralization of values and the rejection of the beliefs and conventions about the 'common person'. Nietzsche also sheds light on the moral bond that connects us with self-affirmative repression, i.e., feeling guilty of not living according to the standards of the collective life. He opposes the Christian view according to which pain is ennobling and self-sacrifice is good for the soul. For him, asceticism always diminishes humanity, because it does not value corporeality. (Jenks 2003, 80).

In his book *Also sprach Zarathustra: Aus Dem Nachlass* (1882–1885) Nietzsche seeks to move away from the 'collective ethic', whether that be religious or secular, and calls for constant revaluation of values. For Nietzsche, the purpose of a social life is not a stability but the challenge to convention. Instead of suggesting establishing an alternative set of values, he highlights the instability of the process. Thus, for him, the prevailing state of social life is an eternal return of circumstances, ideas, people, and things. (Nietzsche 2008; Jenks 2003, 71–72). It is also a continuum, where not-true does not mean false (Jenks 2003, 75). In this picture, transgressive is central, rather than marginal. It is "the unstable principle by which any stasis either sustains or transforms". The point of view includes the idea that transgressions are neither 'good' or 'bad', instead, they are purposeful. (Jenks 2003, 81).

Michel Foucault (1977) wonders whether "transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses". He notes that the line closes 'behind' the transgression to its unsurmountable in an extremely short wave. While saying this he also underlines that the relationship is however much more complex than this because the elements in question are situated in an uncertain context. (Foucault 1977, 33–34). It is here that I see, like Butler, a potentiality of transgression. What is worth noticing here, is that for Foucault (and Bataille), transgression does not represent oppositional, disruptive, or transformational. It is not violence in a divided ethical world, nor a victory for crossing its limits. (Jenks 2003, 92). A value of transgression then is that while showing the limit, as "a flash of lightning in the night" it reveals possibilities by affirming the limitlessness (Foucault 1977, 35).

As transgression does not occur in a vacuum, in a social world it is difficult to reserve for it a 'free zone' where transgression does not judge nor is itself judged. Foucault's point of a non-disruptive or non-oppositional transgressive 'space' might be, nevertheless, – although a complex – but interesting potential, which deserves some reflection. To this end, I am expanding the reflection beyond the discussion about transgression. For political actors, the logical space of possibility is often already closed, as Nikolas Kompridis (2011) notes. In political action disclosing new possibilities is nevertheless essential. Transgression may well be included in Kompridis' discussion about democratic politics as a chance to see ourselves, our

problems, and the world we share in a new light. As one of the challenges in this, Kompridis brings up our ambivalent relation to the new. He argues that a normatively rich conception of the new would require not only putting attention to our skepticism towards new, but also to our anxiety and fear. He points out with Stanley Cavell that the new is not just unfamiliar, but as such, it is also uncontrollable. (Kompridis 2011). Butler connects fearmongering as the political fuel of the 'anti-gender movement' (see Butler 2024). However, the subversion of gender, or by our term, the transgression of gender, is not to produce new or new kinds of genders that would have not existed before, but to allow the already existing into the norms that govern the 'reality'. This includes learning to bear with unknowingness (Butler 2004, 31; 35).

4.3   Irrepressible Desire and Transgression as a "Practice of Freedom"

As we may well interpret that for Butler and Cixous transgression pursues freedom, bell hooks in fact defines transgression as a *practice of freedom* (hooks 1994, 12). For me, in the context of Södergran's poetics freedom refers to both freedom from coercion and violence (negative freedom) and freedom to act and express oneself according to one's own will (positive freedom). Instead of determinism, in the center the question is of *reflexivity* and of *interpretation* (Jenks 2003, 31). Instead of adhesion, *movement* and *becoming* are central, or, when the question concerns the subject, becoming instead of being. Transgression as a "movement against and beyond boundaries" (hooks 1994, 12) does not deny the limits, but rather, makes them visible, exceeds and thus completes them (Jenks 2003, 7). However, according to Jacques Derrida (1982) the problem of transgression is precisely the tension between belonging to a tradition and breaking out of it. It is about necessarily belonging to what we can no longer belong to and trying necessarily to break into what we cannot yet get into. For him, in the end transgression is about unresolvedness or *aporia*, impossibility to resolve between two options. (Derrida 1982, 162). As it is highlighted also by Butler, transgressive movement occurs within the existing structures, that is, in this sense freedom is relative (e.g., Butler 1999, viii), rather than "pure" and "absolute"; it does not involve breaking free of discursive boundaries or power relations tout court.

On the other hand, the loss of freedom is also relative. As desire is related to freedom, but also to transgression, I discuss the question of freedom in relation to desire. Desire is an aspect of being beside the self: it draws us in contact with the social as an outer impact at the same time, when it feels like it is coming from within ourselves (Butler 2004, 27; Berlant 2012, 6). While, theoretically, it is a complex issue, it is important to distinguish here between such desire how we are socialized to feel for and want something from the desire that is understood more in Freudian terms,

i.e., desire as an irrepressible intrinsic life force. "[T]here is no way definitely to capture [this kind of] desire", neither in practice, nor in theory, as Laurent Berland (2012) points out (Berlant 2012, 17). The philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman defines desire as "productive, the engine driving the potentiality of change" (Zolkos 2022, 58–59). From this perspective, desire functions as a driving force of transgression. Desire in itself is freedom that pushes to transgress, whether we like it or not.

Constraint is generally associated with a desire to transgress it (Jenks 2003, 7). The idea that the forbidden produces its desire derives from Sigmund Freud. In his view, what is prohibited or beyond the boundary carries within the temptation to cross the line. From the perspective of a community, the question is of a fear of an infectious example, the temptation to imitate. It is thought that if one member of the community succeeds in satisfying the suppressed desire, the other members of the community will surely be inspired to pursue the same desire. Hence, transgression endangers the previously mentioned normative center and therefore it becomes crucial for the community to cut the chain of prohibited impulses. (Freud 1950, 71–72; Jenks 2003, 46–47). Butler's idiomatic drag character that I depicted earlier, is a political transgression, which shows that prevailing gendered norms and rules are arbitrary and contingent, rather than 'innate', 'natural', or 'immutable'. Transgressions are, for Butler like for Nietzsche, a parody of the norms, something that we can also find in Södergran's poetic images.

The above-described Freudian approach to prohibitions and boundaries as unapproachable 'taboos' includes an assumption of a clearly distinguishable 'good' and 'evil'. The moral purity, 'good', is connected for example to heterosexuality or a religion that is practiced in an 'orthodox manner' (Jenks 2003, 35), or as related to the former even to gender. If transgressive is seen to 'pollute' the ideal order of society, as Mary Douglas (1966) formulates, the 'pollutive' person is always wrong (Douglas 1966, 136). The term 'wrong' refers here to violation of the moral order rather than violation of the legal order. From the point of view of the society, one of the mechanisms to protect it from such 'impure' or 'evil' categories as, for example in a heteronormative society, 'gays', 'lesbians', 'trans', 'queers', and 'whores' is by shaming the transgressor. Collective shaming and inciting to it are powerful political tools because shame turns the attention to the individual who breaks the moral order instead of the circumstances that 'force' to cross the limits. Shame also tends to turn into an internal problem of the individual and pushes them to withdraw from the community and thus strengthen the collective marginalization. The collective appreciation of maintaining normative 'purity' as a high goal in addition contributes to strengthening acceptance for collective exclusion and marginalization.

On the other hand, if to live an embodied life is essentially to "be given over to others", then the prerequisite for writing within and from one's body would be to be

able to 'take it back' from others. In her emancipatory declaration, Cixous (1976) highlights that each body has its individual and infinite desires, and a capacity to be and act in its own special way without a model or norm. Like Södergran, she calls women to decide for themselves what position they will take regarding the tension between pleasure and reality. If a woman takes her body as her own when she is pregnant - as she reckons many women do - why women let outer opinions undermine their value on other occasions, Cixous (1976) rhetorically asks. She (1976) responds that the women have always functioned within the discourse of the man, which means that female bodies [and female desire] are defined in such a way that they are not 'owned' by women themselves. (Cixous 1976). In the upcoming analysis, I identify this theme as central to Södergran's transgressive poetics.

When for Georges Bataille, the question of freedom in relation to transgression is primarily of an 'inner' or 'interior' experience that is free from disciplinary, moral constraints and can hence question the certainty (Jenks 2003, 92), a feminist orientation is, for reason, to examine freedom in relation to the social constraints. Although the inner negotiation is undoubtedly a part of transgressive action, the focus of my work is the social critique. In the feminist theorizations of transgression, the concept is used more directly in the context of struggle for social justice.

4.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that Judith Butler's theorization and the work of Hélène Cixous' of the patriarchal order and of 'compulsory heterosexuality' should be recognized as a contribution to the philosophical discussion of the concept of transgression. I have shown that the value of their interventions lies in their respective emphasis on the gendered aspects of transgression and their respective connection between transgression and freedom.

At the heart of transgressive feminist political activism and scholarship, as well as in Södergran's poetics, is the struggle against the violent patriarchal script. They are about fundamental questions of human and civil rights: they ask, who are legitimate and under what conditions to define our contingent subjectivity. Reading Judith Butler's theorization on the subversion of gender norms with the concept of transgression shows that gender norms can be transgressed by making them visible and blurring their limits. For Hélène Cixous, transgression is pushing towards and extending the structural limits with the force of irrepressible desire towards the freedom of plural expression and being.

While the concept of transgression remains elusive, the power of transgression may lay specifically in that: when opposing categorization, transgression flees away

its defining. My study shows that there is also an important tradition of conceptualizing transgression in connection with social critique. Transgression is an essential part of a well-functioning society specifically because it reflects, criticizes, and prevents stagnation. Although my discussion only scratches the surface on the centrality of transgression in the feminist political scholarship, the literature shows that it might be worthwhile to seek its possibilities from more nuanced forms of political action. These nuances may be found with responsive and sensitive reading of poetry, such as Södergran's. My reading of Södergran's three poems in the next chapter is a humble attempt to contribute to the discussion towards these directions, or 'open spaces'.

5 RESEARCH ANALYSIS: THREE POEMS BY EDITH SÖDERGRAN

In the introduction, I placed Edith Södergran's poetry at its time of origin, modernism, and brought up how Södergran-research reflects the ideological currents of each era. When Södergran's first poetry collection *Dikter* (1916) was published, the poems were belittled likely because of the poet's gender, but also their transgressive style. Subsequently, scholarly interest in her poetry has grown, and Södergran's poems have been interpreted from feminist and gender-queer perspectives, including reflections on the subject or the 'I' of the poems.

The point of departure for my interpretations is hermeneutical critical close reading. Close reading refers to an attentive reading of a text. In the process, referred as a "hermeneutical circle", an interpretative reading is allowed to produce new interpretations until new interpretative ideas no longer arise. This is not to say that this interpreting method aims to exhaust the text, but rather, to allow the interpreter to reach - for the time being - the point where the ideas that are relevant to the work at hand no longer arise from the text. To find this kind of 'point' is particularly challenging when working with poetry because its objective is to open new ideas after having opened new ideas - and to leave things open. Interpretations are in constant movement also because poems affect the reader differently depending on their life situation, and their 'power' is particularly to blur the reality and raise questions. Because of these characteristics of poetry, my thesis seeks to practice, leaning on affect theories, reading poetry as some kinds of aforementioned 'affective images', which, for me, allows creative movement within and between the poetic images and the reader's imaginary world. The theoretical framework is feminism, and more precisely what I call feminist transgression, which I elaborated in the last chapter. While transgression as a social process makes boundaries visible and seeks to transgress them, it does not come about without a moving force, which, for me in Södergran's poetry, is irrepressible desire.

5.1 Noble Art of Subordination in "Två vägar"

TVÅ VÄGAR.[11]

Du skall överge din gamla väg,
din väg är smutsig:
där gå män med lystna blickar
och ordet: lycka! hör du från alla läppar
och längre fram på vägen ligger en kvinnas kropp
och gamarna slita den sönder.

Du har funnit din nya väg,
din väg är ren:
där gå moderlösa barn och leka med vallmoblommor,
där gå kvinnor i svart och tala om sorg
och längre fram på vägen står ett blekt helgon
med foten på en död drakes nacke.

TWO ROADS.[12]

You shall forsake your old road,
your road is dirty:
there walk men with lustful eyes
and the word: luck! you hear from all lips
and further ahead on the road lies a woman's body
and the vultures tear it apart.

You have found your new road,
your road is pure:
there walk motherless children and play with poppy flowers,
there walk women in black and speak of sorrow
and further ahead on the road stands a pale saint
with the foot on a dead dragon's neck.

In the poem "Två vägar" ("Two roads"), the subject of the poem juxtaposes women's life choices related to their sexuality and desire with the Christian ethics. By showing the strict moral codes originating from the Christian church in ironic light, the subject

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[11] Södergran 1916b.
[12] My translation.

brings to fore the repressive and violent attitudes and functions they construct towards womanhood and female sexuality and desire. In hyperbolic images that the subject paints, a woman is made to believe to have exclusively two life options to choose from: a life as a 'whore', or a life as a 'saint'. By scandalizing the life choices of their contemporary women, the subject of the poem transgresses the protective wall of propriety constructed around the moral dualism.

The opening words of the poem, "[d]u skall" ("you shall"), create an immediate association with the Ten Commandments, and through that connect the moral rules of the poem with the central moral principles of Christianity. These commandments are expressed in biblical writings as a 'finger of God' (The Holy Bible 1900, 347; 726), which captures their meaning of direct injunctions. By invoking the word 'you', the 'finger of God' - which signifies the Christian moral authority - does not merely point to and order a woman from above, but it also judges: the poet uses such phrases as 'your choices are immoral ('dirty')', and 'you must ('du skall') change'. The function of the 'finger of God' is to 'cast out devils' (The Holy Bible 1900, 3584) - in this case free expressions of female sexuality and desire - which in turn enables 'the kingdom of God to come' (The Holy Bible 1900, 3584–3585) to her. The phrase 'kingdom of God', as a direct counter-phrase to that of the Devil's[13] (McFarland et al. 2011, 265), refers here to the social dimensions of the allegory in determining through the concept of 'salvation' who, and under what conditions, are to be included in or excluded out from this domain of moral 'goodness'.

In the first stanza of the poem, the subject constructs a sarcastic image, where a woman's hypothetical choices position her as an object of male lust, which in turn makes her 'choices' immoral ('dirty'). Ironically, to avoid men's indecent lustful gazes, it is the woman who must change her way of behaving and living although she is treated as a mere object, not an agent. Instead, men are depicted as active individuals by the subject. They walk, which allows them to occupy the social space and move around in it. Such a setting can also be found in the biblical world, where, according to an example by Ilana Pardes (1992), "[s]exual freedom and its spatial correlate (free wondering) is a male prerogative" (Pardes 1992, 133). In the poem, men have also a social 'permit' to watch and evaluate women and speak to them. From this upper status, they promise prestige ('luck') to a woman who submits herself as an object to male lust. However, she will be deceived because respect is reserved merely for the women who refrain from expressing their sexuality, or channel it in compliance with

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[13] St Augustine, who is considered as the most influential Church Father of the Western Christian thinking, advanced the idea of the 'city of God' as a direct counter to be that of the Devil's. In the middle of these two is the *civitas terrena,* the "corporate humanity". Instead of the Latin *regnum,* Augustine used *civitas* as the presiding metaphor when discussing on the 'kingdom of God'.

the patriarchal rule. In the Pardes' example from the bible, "[a] woman who acts upon her desire runs the risk of being abused and shamed" (Pardes 1992, 133).

While Christian thinking has traditionally connected sexual desire and pleasure to procreation, 'lust' (female sexual desire) has been disconnected from love and defined simply as a fleshly (The Holy Bible 1900, 4231; 4058) - and sinful - "desire for the pleasure of sex for its own sake" (McFarland et al. 2011, 70; 470). In the depiction of the subject of the poem, the social attitude to lust as sin seems also to be gender specific. Being in contact to lust is completely negative for a woman and inevitably leads to 'misfortune'. A woman's 'misfortune' is, however, men's 'fortune' ('luck'). To apply Cixous' interpretation of the hierarchical social system that man has constructed: a man must "show-off", "show up the others", and prove, because masculine profit - "plus-value of virility, authority, power, money, or pleasure" - is linked to socially defined success. Instead, to gain enhanced self-image in her social reality a woman has nowhere to turn. (Cixous in Sellers et al. 1995, 44). In the poem, one of the seven 'deadly sins', lust – or even a passive exposure to it – is used to relegate women to the margins of society based on a socially constructed identity ('the road') through which they are defined as undesirable ('dirty').

As the social anthropologist Mary Douglas (2002) points out, 'dirt' exists exclusively 'in the eye of the beholder'. Something becomes 'dirt' when we view it as being in the wrong place. For example, soil is not dirt under herbs in the garden, but only on the dining table.[14] 'Dirt' is essentially a disorder. (Douglas 2002, 2; 36–37). Categorization into 'good' and 'bad' is also a central part of social order. However, the Western pathologizing of dirt has loaded the concept with disgust and fear (Douglas 2002, 36). Moreover, associating 'dirt' with identities of 'others' has become a violent tool of subjugation. In the image drawn by the subject of the poem, lust does not merely label female desire and sexuality but also her identity as a woman. The phenomenon could be called 'mixophobic'.

The term 'mixophobia' by Pierre-André Taguieff (1987), refers to an unconditional fear of mixing. This includes the tendency to treat others as deviants from the norm, to demonize them, to treat them with repulsion in any contact, and to obsessively defend what is considered 'pure'. (Taguieff 1987, 15; Bolaffi et al. 2002, 182). Bruce Wilson (2005) underlines that Taguieff calls for attention to anti-egalitarianist logic, which leads to inequality, exploitation, and domination of others within a society. In Taguieff's view, naturalizing inequality between biologically determined groups create cultures that further naturalize historical differences and justify exclusions. (Wilson 2005). "The differentialist imagination wants to preserve collective identities (and inter-communitarian differences) at all costs." (Taguieff 1993, 101). The "mixophobic" core of differentialism is the threat of the destruction of identities

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[14] My own example.

through physical and cultural crossbreeding. (Taguieff 1993, 101). A central issue for the evolvement of racism is the fear of others (Wilson 2005). Taguieff's idea may be applied to the interpretation of Södergran's poem. Christian ethics has reproduced and naturalized the ancient sexist idea of the characteristics of the two "biological" sexes. According to some philosophers of the ancient Greece, a woman is weaker than a man at controlling lust, which justifies a man to control a woman's desire. Within this hierarchical view, just as equating a man's identity with the female sex is disadvantageous to him, equating a woman's identity with the 'impure' category of the female sex is to her.

In the world of the poem, the fear of mixing strengthens the communal acceptance of gender-based violations. The woman's body that has been made into a symbol of 'sin' and of 'sinful life' is a useful object for the community even after it is no longer an object of the intense desire. She is reduced not merely to a body but to waste when her violated body is made into a warning example against 'immorality' by repudiating her communally. The 'tearing the woman's cadaver into shreds' is a metaphor for public shaming. Such communal 'trial' is accepted and sustained by the sharp distinction between 'pure' and 'evil'. 'The vultures', which are depicted in the bible as impure animals, represent God's vengeance for the 'heathen' who deserve their death. Instead, the 'nobles' are to be salved to the 'kingdom of God', which, in some interpretations, is equated with the Church. Thus, the social repudiation is a noble act. The moral guardians execute God's will and protect the community from 'sin' by 'removing from sight the waste', the 'contaminated' body of a woman, and the aforementioned moral segmentation becomes reinforced.

Moral shaming is an effective instrument of subjection because shame tends to become internalized. Shame is to experience oneself as the others see us. Referring to Sandra Bartky, Marguerite La Caze (2013) notes that internalizing shame includes situations when the judging audience is not real. In trying to understand shame, the focus should hence be on how shame is created by the way others view and treat someone. When shame has to do more with someone's identity rather than something they have done, experiencing shame might not have positive or improving effects, but it may instead lead to "self-obsession, self-destructive rage and in general disempowerment". (La Caze 2013). It is precisely the inwardly turning and disempowering effect that makes shaming an effective instrument of power. In the image of the poem, shaming serves as a violent power tool, which has the political function of stigmatizing, and subsequently emphasizing the moral division between what is considered the 'good' and the 'bad'.

The second stanza conjures an image of the road of moral purity, the 'new' identity that the woman has now 'found'. The phrase is ironic because the multilayered structural subjugation of women involves a collectively held belief that

women have real choices. Fulfilling the moral expectations, which the subject of the poem depicts as being successful in killing one's own 'dragon[s]' requires to suppressing one's internal desires. The role model of a woman is the Virgin Mary, a virgin and a mother. Her maternity and devotion for the 'good' of her community is entirely pure from sexuality. In biblical texts, the figure of Mary stands for the appreciation of maternity that is restricted to birth-giving. For example, in the Book of Revelation a woman who is giving birth is surrounded by 'heavenly treasures': she has the sun as her clothing, the moon under her feet, and stars as a crown above her head. The story of this anonymous woman juxtaposes with the one of Mary. She is important because of carrying a male child who will be ruling all nations and promoting the ideology written in the name of almighty God. Since the devil-dragon is stalking the child, God, the Father takes the child from his mother directly after the child is born to protect him. Instead, the woman who gave birth is taken by God outside the public sphere into the "wilderness". (The Holy Bible 1900, 4281). In a more general view, as Pardes (1992) notes, biblical mothers "vanish from the scene" as soon as their sons are on their own (Pardes 1992, 75). Although in the image of the poem women are depicted as active subjects who 'walk', to gain respect they must act in accordance with the social order, which they are not invited to negotiate. The moral purity includes through the metaphor of 'motherless children' that mothers exist explicitly through their children, not as themselves.

The motherless children of the poem (as they 'walk') continue their life playing with poppy flowers. As Adrian Parr (2008) notes, children are commonly understood to be asexual beings. This assumption propounds the myth that children are also pure and innocent. However, for Freud (1920), sucking at the mother's breast is the starting-point of the whole of sexual life and every later sexual satisfaction (Freud 1920, 356; Parr 2008, 21). Being in a healthy relation to the mother allows a child an enjoyment of desire, or as Jacques Lacan (1988) argues, connection to that what is "real" (Lacan 1988). Instead, the pursuit of moral purity would bring within a disturbance in child's contact to their inner desires. What is hence left for the motherless, is the world of the Symbol, which is the patriarchally structured language, the language of prohibition (Lacan 1988). However, in the subject's image the children are playing. Playing frees children from a predefined world (Fink et al. 2016, 234–235) and offers a possibility to throw oneself into the world of unpredictability and experimentation. In the world of play the wildly growing and seeding 'poppy flowers' of different color may symbolize innumerable things and new possible roads for the dualistic social order of the poem. Nevertheless, the metaphor of motherlessness brings a melancholic tone into the children's play: in addition to other negative consequences, being away from the mother impairs a child's self-confidence and curiosity towards new things. Play breaks the stagnation, but established order sets the boundary conditions to it.

In Christianity, the metaphor 'poppy' is associated with Christ's blood, but it is also linked to dream and death.[15] Considering the historical context of Södergran's poem, the poppies with which "motherless children" are playing can be connected to the poem "In Flanders Fields" that was written by the Canadian Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae on the battlefield of the First World War in 1915. In the poem, McCrae writes about poppies that "blow" between the rows of crosses and mark places for the soldiers. As the red poppies spread wildly after the great battles in the fields of Flanders, Belgium, they began to be associated with soldiers' bodies, blood, and sacrifices. The soldiers too are 'motherless children' away from their homes 'playing' with death. In the poem, the children, as anonymous as their mothers, have a heavy burden to carry as they walk ahead on the road of sacrifice that is connected to Christ's blood. The road refers to continuity, whereas poppies "blow" and spread the seeds of death in the fields where - as in the soldier's poem - no-one sleeps. (Barrett, 2016).

In Christianity, to become a saint, "a holy one", requires bearing "faithful witness to Christ, either by a martyr's death or by a life of heroic virtue". (McFarland et al. 2011, 455). With regard to the passivity that is required from women and to their role as the symbols of grief, the female 'sainthood' is in the poem suggestive of *mater dolorosa*. In the imagery of the Catholic Church this idea of the "mother of sorrows" is replicated and reproduced in the images of the Virgin Mary, where a sword (or seven swords) pierces her heart. Instead, killing a dragon as a heroic saint is depicted in the Christian and Western imagery as a male act. At the end of the poem there is an image of a saint standing "with a foot on a dead dragon's neck". Thus, the internalization of the Christian ethics means for a woman that 'at the end of the road', there is always a man who receives the highest reward in the public sphere. Referring to the mourning women of the bible (The Holy Bible 1900, e.g., 3304), a woman's part is to submit herself to shed powerless tears in the front of the 'powers of evil'. Then, dressing in black is not merely a sign of sorrow, but also, a sign of narrowing one's emotional life and agency. Nevertheless, for an individual, boundaries can create security although adopting the accepted social identity requires discipline and self-sacrifice.

Another set of associations is in the domain of Greek mythology as the vultures of the poem can be suggesting of Prometheus. In this ancient story, Prometheus transgresses the prohibition of the God's (Zeus) almighty command and steals God's possession of fire to bring it to the people. God becomes enraged and takes revenge on Prometheus by chaining him to a rock. Vultures eat Prometheus' liver, which God replaces every day with a new one for the vultures to eat it again. (Nietzsche 2007, 79). As in the myth, in the poem "Två vägar", man has undertaken the role of god and has

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[15] The idea of the poppy as a symbol of death originates from the poem "In Flanders Fields" written on the battlefield of World War I in 1915 by the Canadian Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae.

begun to speak in a voice of 'the truth'.[16] In my reading, the image of the poem is hopeless: suffering is socially repeated and replicated in the normativity that is represented in the poem by Christian ethics. Under the oppressive and violent norm, the woman's body (her) is in constant danger of being abused and disgraced. The woman in the poem is offered a solution to make seeming choices in a structure that is the construction of female gender. In this picture, the belief that there is no possibility of transgression is a form of over-generational oppression and violence.

5.2   Seeing with the Poem "Jag såg ett träd"

JAG SÅG ETT TRÄD….[17]

Jag såg ett träd som var större än alla andra
och hängde fullt av oåtkomliga kottar,
jag såg en stor kyrka med öppna dörrar
och alla som kommo ut voro bleka och starka
och färdiga att dö;
jag såg en kvinna som leende och sminkad
kastade tärning om sin lycka
och såg att hon förlorade.

En krets var dragen kring dessa ting
den ingen överträder.

I SAW A TREE….[18]

I saw a tree that was bigger than all the others
and hung full of inaccessible cones,
I saw a big church with open doors
and all that came out were pale and strong
and ready to die;
I saw a woman that as smiling and made-up

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[16] In Nietzsche's book *Also sprach Zarathustra: Aus Dem Nachlass 1882-1885*, Zarathustra disturbs the "sleepiness" of people who claim that they know what for them is good or evil. He bid people to laugh at their "great masters of virtue and saints and poets and world-redeemers". Then, Zarathustra "sat down by their great tomb road among cadavers and vultures, and (…) laughed at their past and its rotting, decaying glory". (Nietzsche 2008, 196).
[17] Södergran 1916c.
[18] My translation.

threw dice on her luck
and saw that she lost.

A ring was drawn around these things
that no-one transgresses.

The poem "Jag såg ett träd" ("I saw a tree") evokes an image of a landscape, or a scene, and its witness. The witnessing subject of the poem does not solely content themselves to state what they have seen. The testimony is based on a repetitive iteration – 'I saw', 'I saw', 'I saw' –, and includes a plea to the reader to be believed; 'I was there and saw those things, believe me' (see Derrida 2005). Seeing as a passive registration of images becomes thus active witnessing through the testimonial speech act.

The first thing the witness of the poem wants to draw the reader's attention to is their image of a tree with a distinctive characteristic: it was bigger than all the other trees. The tree appears in their testimony as something that cannot remain unnoticed because it is clearly different from its environment. While its roots are deep in the common ground, its crown reaches above the masses and therefore it can 'see' freely in all directions. The distinguishing feature of the image of the tree is that it is an individual tree standing out from the mass of trees, the forest.

When the mass of trees describes 'sameness', the big tree is a metaphor for individuality. Individualism is associated with the values of freedom, liberty, and equality, and it calls for individual's autonomy and self-determination. In contrast, it opposes collectivistic values that may subordinate the expression of individual's own emotions, preferences, ideas, abilities, choices, and goals. (Davis & Williamson 2019). The ideal of individualism embodies freedom to separate oneself from the mass, to transgress the collectivity.

Not solely did the tree stand out from the mass because of its size, but it also had something else individual and unique that caught the attention of the witnessing 'I'. The tree was full of cones, formations of pistil leaves that – after fertilization – had become thick and woody for supporting seeds maturing inside them. The cones that this extraordinary and fertile tree was carrying were hanging towards the earth, which emphasizes that eventually they would fall on the ground. When encountering a friendly environment – including space, light, and nutrients – the seeds would start growing into a new generation of trees, trees of which some might become bigger than others, just like their mother tree. However, for now, although the tree was strong, it was alone. By describing the cones of the tree inaccessible, the witness brings into light – in my interpretation – their own orientation, longing, and desire for new kinds of knowledge to flourish.

When the witnessing 'I' starts describing the second thing they consider significant, the reason for the inaccessibility of the cones as held by the individual tree becomes clear. The arboreal, growing, and fertile body contrasts with the testimony of the witness with the church as a building, its human-made institutional body, and the human bodies exiting the church. These human bodies have been institutionally trained to carry ideas 'planted' in them. These "embodied ideas" (see Scarry 1985) originate in the patriarchal institution of the Christian church and the movement of the ideas is strikingly one-directional: they are being carried out, but nothing is brought in from outside of them. The "intersubjective plurality of views through which human uniqueness is expressed and nurtured" (Faulkner 2010, 48) seems to be suppressed by the patriarchate. The figures leaving the church are strikingly uniform in appearance and behavior and resemble each other. The 'I' of the poem does not describe them as subjects, or even people, but as a closed and united, yet non-personalized mass. These figures prepared for death resemble soldiers; they are described as strong, but their faces are pale with fear. The poetic image appears hopeless; if they end in the dead soil of the church, the seeds of the tree might not germinate and grow under the watching eyes of the 'warriors' of the church.

The poem creates a clear family-resemblance between the church and the army. The function of both institutions is based on the logic of group discipline. Submission to the institutions means unquestioning loyalty to its norms and rules, of which the hierarchical, and non-transparent power structure is constructed to advance. Their persuasion technologies include a promise of collective honor and glory for those who follow the commands, and fear of collective punishment (see Freud 1921 [1945, 42]) and shame for those who resist them. The ritualistic repetition of dogmas and bodily movements seeks to instil into these 'united bodies' a shared believe in the juxtaposition of 'us' and 'others', 'life' and 'death', and 'winning' and 'losing'.

In the image of the poem, to express one's individuality is an option, which seems unrealizable for followers of religious or militant ideologies. Although these subjects are strong through ideological unification, their pale faces express fragility of their body-mind. While fear protects both individuals and the collective, it also suppresses individuals' other capacities – thoughts and emotions – narrowing down the possibility for individual empowerment and agency. Thinking does not, however, render possible ideas to been sown and germinating in us as if people were the soil. As Hannah Arendt (1981) highlights, thinking is searching for meanings. It is to question and deconstruct prevailing thinking structures. Thinking may thus break behaving, which is characteristic to masses, and transform it to actions, (Arendt 1981) like in the depiction below.

In contrast to the aforementioned death-oriented figures, the 'I' of the poem highlights a figure of a smiling woman. In a way, the woman is like the big tree: she

is lively, and she is also depicted in her solitude. Her smile does not necessarily indicate that she was happy; the smile could also have been arrogant. Either way, she had made a choice to make up her face. She had chosen to appear in public highlighting her individuality, and by doing so to separate herself from the mass of pale faces. Under the patriarchal order of the church, and guarded by the trained mass, the woman could not speak, but by smiling she can be seen as protecting herself from the 'sameness', from the patriarchal supremacy. This was her expression of resistance, a feminist transgression. The woman was transgressing by inhabiting her individual space.

Neither the woman nor the tree could be absorbed into masses, thus both transgressed the norms of social uniformity, but the woman – in the testimony of the witness – is the one who 'lost'. To apply Philip Pettit's perspective (1998), the difference between these two images is that while the image of the tree is future-oriented and describes desire as a representation of how the world should be, the image of the woman describes the belief of how the world actually is. The tree absorbs its force from the common soil, the culture, and over the decades reaches its individual length and new views. For a woman it is idealistic that her individuality could flourish in the common ground: at present she is alone and rootless within the domain of gendered supremacy. In the witness' account, to 'win', to gain social space as an individual is not an option that is rationally negotiable for a woman, rather, it is a matter of 'luck' in a societal 'game', where 'winning' and 'losing' are socially and intersectionally determined according to gender and other social categories such as class and cultural background. From an individual perspective losing would mean subordination to the collective norms. It is, however, notable that the judgement is made by the witness, and not by the woman they describe. By interpreting that the woman 'loses', the witness participates in reproducing the social norms they seek to bring into light.

The poem underlines the communal state of things in the laconic conclusion of the separate stanza. Having boundaries around 'these things' that no one should transgress seems to depict what Monique Wittig calls a coerced contract. With the term, she refers to an idea that assumes heterosexuality, the categories of men and women as natural facts although they are political. As itself, the gendered category of "sex", the social configuration of bodies, which is reproduced linguistically and representatively through bodies, is enslaving. Discourse is oppressive when it requires the speaking subject to participate in that oppression to speak and render oneself intelligible. (Wittig in Butler 2000, 143–147). In the poem, it is conspicuous that three images with their actors are not in explicit dialogue with each other. Instead, *dessa ting,* these things, an assemblage of objects is brought together in the testimony of the witness to juxtapose them for the purpose of opposition. The tie that binds the

objects and delineates their assemblage is the prohibition of transgressing the social gendered norms, collective values, and institutionalization of order. Considering the historical meaning of the word *ting* as court, as the ring of assembly, the poem draws an image of a moral court, which is based on the strict, non-negotiable patriarchal rule.

5.3 "Violetta skymningar" with Sisters

VIOLETTA SKYMNINGAR...[19]

Violetta skymningar bär jag i mig ur min urtid,
nakna jungfrur lekande med galopperande centau-
                                    rer...
Gula solskensdagar med granna blickar,
endast solstrålar hylla värdigt en ömsint kvinno-
                                    kropp...
Mannen har icke kommit, har aldrig varit, skall aldrig
                            bli...
Mannen är en falsk spegel den solens dotter vredgad
                        kastar mot klippväggen,
mannen är en lögn, den vita barn ej förstå,
mannen är en skämd frukt den stolta läppar försmå.

Sköna systrar, kommen högt upp på de starkaste
                            klipporna,
vi äro alla krigarinnor, hjältinnor, ryttarinnor,
oskuldsögon, himmelspannor, rosenlarver,
tunga bränningar och förflugna fåglar,
vi äro de minst väntade och de djupast röda,
tigerfläckar, spända strängar, stjärnor utan svindel.

VIOLET TWILIGHTS...[20]

Violet twilights I carry within me from my ancient times,
naked maidens playing with galloping centa-

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[19] Södergran 1916d.
[20] My translation.

urs…
Yellow sunshine days with neighborly glances,
only sunbeams embrace with dignity a tender female
                                                                            body…
The man has not come, has never been, shall never
                                                        be…
The man is a false mirror the sun's daughter furiously
                                                                        throws against the rock face,
the man is a lie, white children do not understand,
the man is a rotten fruit the proud lips disdain.

Beautiful sisters, come high up onto the strongest
                                                                rocks,
we are all warrioresses, heroines, knightesses,
innocence-eyes, heaven-foreheads, rose-larvae,
heavy breakers and flying-ahead birds,
we are the least expected and the deepest red,
tiger spots, taut strings, stars without dizziness.

The subject of the poem "Violetta skymningar" ("Violet twilights"[21]) lives in obscurity. 'Skymning' is stagnant, it does not have movement or direction. It is hard to navigate when one cannot perceive the spatial and temporal dimensions. However, for a human mind it is difficult to stay in an obscure state of not-knowing. The mind tends to search. Neither light, nor dark, but obscurity allows the visibility of violet on the horizon. Violet, as an intensive, even intrusive color, is associated with consciousness. The color carries with it a 'far-away knowledge', which is distant on, or even behind the horizon, outside *her*, and at the same time deep inside *her*, in *her* roots, in *her* experiences, 'ur henne urtid'. 'Violet obscurity' activates the movement of the mind, bringing the violet light closer. This violet becomes *her* personal liturgical color of repentance, reform, and expectation.

Firstly, the tinges of violet bring to the surface an image, where naked maidens are in play with wildly galloping centaurs. In Greek mythology, centaurs, with the upper body of a human and the lower body and legs of a horse, are described as figures who have conflicting characteristics: they are passionate, impulsive, brutal, and intensive, but they also have "the potential for moral greatness and spiritual

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[21] The metaphor 'skymningar' is translated here as 'twilights', although it has a different tone as a word. 'Twilight', for me, expresses more a state of in-betweenness of light and dark, whereas 'skymning' refers more to 'obscurity'. Both 'obscurity' and 'skymning' are used to express an obscure state of affairs. The word 'skymning' depicts also shades or tinges. This is a quality that the word 'twilight', but not 'obscurity', has.

superiority, kindness and bravery". These divisive figures have been pushed to live in the forests, outside the civilized way of life. (Syropoulos 2018). There, on the edges of moral acceptance, the maidens are shamelessly enjoying their nudity in the company of these queer creatures.

In the second image that the tinges of violet carry, a woman worships sun believing that it is exclusively the sun that treats a "tender female body" with respect. In addition to the pagan yellow[22], the color of warmth and joy, in its plenitude the natural light of sunbeams contains the whole spectrum of light, the colors of a rainbow from violet to passionate red. The Sun, God, is generous to *his* subjects. According to Jenks (2003), for Bataille the sun is a metaphor of selfless giving. As the sun charges and recharges, it provides the excess of energy, which "gives rise" to other. (Jenks 2003, 102).

At first, these two images are distinct in *her* consciousness, but the myths function as creating distance to reason-based thinking. Then, the 'Dionysian' exhilaration - as Nietzsche (2007) would express it - the bodily experience with the centaurs starts to bring the girl a closer sentiment of unity with others and nature. The 'Apollonian' beauteous, but somnolent serenity of being an individual begins to fade away. As *she* still stays enjoying the beauty of the sun, *she* feels the suffering.[23] This is to know that the embodied idea of a man carries within certain expectations for a woman. The 'selfless' giving of The Sun God, which refers mostly to male gods (Leeming 2005), expects passive worshipping from its subjects. The phallocentric reasoning has created "her weak", a woman who must passively wait for the man to come, because solely a man ('sun', the ruler) has the power of making her body visible, alive. While the centaurs gallop, their hooves shout: the man is an oppressive fantasy, 'a lie', which even as a 'rotten fruit' continues its destructive work. Empowered by her pride, disdain, and anger the woman transgresses her passivity. She too, wants to give. In Cixous' (1976) words: "The future must no longer be determined by the past." Although the effects of the past are still present, like Cixous, the subject of the poem declares that she refuses to strengthen them. She makes a Nietzschean move and destroys the old 'tables of law' furiously against the rock face (see Nietzsche 2008, 35; 212). With this transgressive act, she does not merely break the social image of a man, but also the social image of a woman, which the image of a man reflects ('false mirror').

White brings light into the darkness, and it is often stated that it leaves everything open for new beginnings. White light, on the other hand, consists of all colors. Our language, however, narrows the horizons. Without a prism, nothing but

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[22] Worshipping sun belong to pagan traditions; yellow is neither included in liturgical colors in Christianity.

[23] The interpretation on the images of the poem as 'Dionysian' and 'Apollonian' is based on Nietzsche's book *The Birth of Tragedy*. Particularly the beginning of the poem associates with Nietzsche's interpretation on these two concepts of antique. (Nietzsche 2007, 30–49).

white might be visible. Over the last centuries, both "white" and "child" have persistently been associated with innocence in the Western imageries. Despite the great emphasis of these images, whiteness and its related stereotypes of purity seem to get stained easily. For example, when Nietzsche depicts a child as an embodied "innocence" and "a new beginning" (Nietzsche 2008, 40–41), he does not consider that newborn starts imitating the primary others soon after being born. As Joanne Faulkner (2010) formulates it, innocence refers to "one that has not yet entered society because they are not yet contaminated by knowledge and experience" (Faulkner 2010, 48). In other words, the paradox of innocence is that it exists only in relation to its untouchability. Hence, the only way to keep innocence alive is not to 'touch' it. The political function of the term, for me, is exactly this 'untouchability': the use of the concept seeks to say that the issue at hand is so sacred or pure that it is practically impossible or wrong to handle it. Hence, insofar as white is understood as a symbol of innocence, the 'white children' of the poem are dead. Illuminated by the streaks of color reflected through the prism on the metaphor, 'white children' functions as a protective surface, which turns any determinations of its qualities away from them. The concept of innocence, which has been constructed from and within the patriarchal tradition, is as fictious as its counterpart in the poem. It does not reflect, 'understand', the traditional image of a man, but rather, it guides the attention to the social environment, where it is born.

The subject of the poem calls women to join and recognize the diversity of their identities. The question, for *her,* is self-recognition. With Cixous' (1976) formulation on women (1976, 878): "We've come back from always." Women *are* already fighters and heroes, reformers, and trailblazers. Now these 'heaven-foreheads', women who carry both divine ('heaven') and reasoning ('forehead'), are called to occupy 'the strongest rocks' 'high up'. These highest rocks have traditionally been ruled by men, such as in ancient myths Mount Olympus, where the throne of Zeus, the ruler of the mountain peaks, sited, or later in biblical stories Mount Sinai from where Moses brought the God's Tables of Law to 'all nations'.

"We are the deepest red", declares the subject of the poem. Red is the color of warriors, heroes, and knights. As a liturgical color, red is used in Christianity on All Saints Day. The antiphon for the day is: "And they shall see his face and his name shall be in their foreheads" (The Holy Bible 1900, 4310). For the subject of the poem, this confirmation to canonize a saint would carry within her own sense of red. For her personal liturgy - joined by the "sisters", the kindred spirits -, red is a divine color of passion and desire. The call for *her* 'sisters' is a call for empowerment not merely in the form of recognizing their own value, but also, in the form of uniting, and requiring among other things transgressing of the stereotypes of *her*.

In gendered discourses, women are sometimes depicted as beautiful, but vain and useless roses. To object against the stereotype, the subject of the poem offers women the identity of rose-larvae, which destroy roses by eating them. Such resistance is based on the simple fact that to survive, one must eat. Women must transgress the stereotype of themselves to avoid their death. Because we receive the cultural gender label when we are born (Butler 1999, 33), the 'metamorphosis', the negotiation of one's gender starts in an early developmental stage, as a child. Metaphorically, occupying the identity of a larva enables the transgression of the monolithic gender definitions towards transformative fluidity in gender diversity. While larvae develop into quite a variety of insects, there are also many types and figures of roses in cultural imageries. For example, roses occur both in classical myth and Christianity as a symbol of blood. When Adonis, the lover of Aphrodite died on her arms, red roses started growing from his blood. In Christianity, roses symbolize Christ's blood that spilled on the ground at the crucifixion. In both images, a man dies as a hero, whereas women's tears are water for his heritage to grow and flourish – at least until rose-larvae have spread in these roses too.

In the poem, the diversity of embodied identities is stressed specifically with the expression 'we are something' instead of saying that 'we have a characteristic'. It is noteworthy that the gendered forms 'warrioresses', 'heroines', and 'knightesses' are forms that are subordinates to established male titles, warrior, hero, and knight. This illustrates a character of transgression in linguistic but also more broadly in social sphere: transgression occurs within existing structures. As Butler (1999) underscores, it is not possible for us to get beyond the social structure to which we engage in transgressive activity, whether it be social norms or language (Butler 1999, 174). This is visible also with the metaphors that, instead of defining the identities of the subjects, define parts of bodies like 'innocent-eyes' and 'heaven-forehead'. Also, to be a 'tiger spot' is to be a part of united courage, a tiger that is already known as courageous. All in all, developing of multiform subjectivity as someone identified as a girl and a woman starts from defensive positions. This is to say that I *too* have these qualities that men already have: these qualities are embodied also in me.

Through the metaphor 'heavy breakers' ('tunga bränningar') the poem speaks also on transgression in relation to previously undefined, utopia. Waves are part of a larger 'structure', water, but it is not possible to distinguish a single wave from water. In a wave rupture, transgression, there is no clearly delineated boundary and therefore no facets that would exist before and after the wave rupture. It takes time for a wave to develop before it breaks, i.e., the question is of a process. This illustrates a characteristic of transgression as crossing borders. In a social world, it is difficult to point out boundaries, let alone name a line crossed. For Jenks (2003), transgression is

essentially a social process, and for me the essence of it is the movement in the social order breaking the stagnation (Jenks 2003, 7).

6   CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I have examined the concept of transgression in the poems of the Finnish-Swedish poet Edith Södergran (1892–1923) by analyzing three poems of her debut collection *Dikter* (1916): "Två vägar", "Jag såg ett träd", and "Violetta skymningar". I have argued that there is a political aspect of transgression in the poems because of their sustained commitment to showing the violence of the dominant social rules, and to undermining and undoing them. I examined Södergran's poems through the methods of affect-oriented hermeneutic critical close reading, focusing firstly on how the concept of transgression operates in Södergran's poems at the level of form and representation. Secondly, I shed light on how 'transgression', understood by Södergran as a social practice of resistance against repressive gender norms, relates to freedom. Thirdly, I considered the potentialities and possibilities opened by transgressive acts in Södergran's poetics more broadly including their relevance to our times.

With regard to how the concept of transgression operates in Södergran's poems at the level of form and representation, my reading highlighted in the poetic imagery of three poems the attempts at transgressing patriarchal norms that suppress female desire and sexuality. In all three poems, the subjects have recognized these norms and have manifested *desire* to transcend the boundaries and conventions by showing them to the reader. In the poem "Två vägar", the subject of the poem shows women's ostensible freedom of choice by ironizing about their life choices using hyperbolic metaphoric images. While the oppressive and violent social structure does not allow open acts of resistance, exaggeration, hyperbole, and irony themselves function transgressively. In the poem "Jag såg ett träd", the subject of the poem acts as a participatory witness and testifies to a woman's attempt to inhabit her individual space in relation to the mass behavior, as encapsulated by the institution of the church. The witness is clear about the fact that the woman's transgressive act ends in failure, suggesting that transgression always entails the risk that those who challenge

the dominant order will reproduce the prevailing norms that they seek to break. This is described in the poem in relation to the figure of a "ring" that no one breaks. Finally, in the poem "Violetta skymningar" the subject of the poem directs the transgressive action at the level of both form and representation, in regard to examples ranging from antiquity to the future. The form of the poem refers not only to the temporal but also to the spatial transition. The subject transgresses the social construction of the woman (and the man) empowered by the feelings of disgust and rage. Especially in this poem, affect and desire act as a catalyst for social change. The subject of the poem seeks to subvert the hegemony, i.e., to dislodge the current positions of power at both linguistic and systemic levels.

Situating the analysis of these three poems alongside a theoretical discussion of how selected writers in feminist politics have approached transgression, I have been able to show the clear connection in the theoretical and poetic texts alike between transgression and the concern with freedom. My theoretical-conceptual framework is feminist political theory, and I used the writings on transgression by Judith Butler and Hélène Cixous. Butler's theorization supported the recognition of gender normativity and the defining of transgression within the poetry images. Butler's work supports transgression as an act of showing that normalized social rules are types of convention that are constructed and can be dismantled. (e.g., Butler 2004, 28–30). Hélène Cixous' transgressive women's writing highlighted defining individualism in Södergran's poems as a positive force that functions in connection with desire, in bell hooks' definition, transgression as a *practice of freedom* (hooks 1994, 12). Transgressive acts and actions in the poems introduce freedom as relative; transgression cannot operate from outside the structures it seeks to transgress.

One of the problems that my analysis of Södergran's poems has revealed is a tension between individualism and collectivism. Södergranian individualism pursues freedom and positions itself to oppose coercive and violent collectivism. It differs from the hyper individualism of our times in the sense that it seeks to connect with positive collectivism. It also shows subjectivity as inherently intersubjective; it is not independent and self-sufficient in the individual but develops through relationships. In contribution to the scholarly debates about Södergran's poems' construction of the individualistic 'new woman', I have argued that in Södergran's poetics, individualism alone is an insufficient source of freedom when individuals must negotiate between socially defined boundaries and their inner desires. Individualism of choice is insufficient not only because it needs to be linked with positive forms of collectivism, but also because it sidelines the importance of desire and unconscious.

All in all, my thesis has contributed to the political-theoretical studies of poetry as well as to the scholarship on Edith Södergran's work by approaching it from the perspective of feminist transgression and by highlighting the efforts and possibilities

to transcend the social norms, which narrow and suppress subjectivities. With regard to today's politics of gender, the concept of transgression suggests that the patriarchal system, even in the absence of physical force, is a form of violence. Södergran's poems help to critically reflect on today's developments of anti-gender positions by showing how binary gender concepts consolidate into rigid categories and exert violent effects. Södergran's poems highlight the structures and collective practices that oppress women, including public disgrace, shame, and fear. My reading has presented individual desire as an inner life force that has the potential to break boundaries. Reading feminist poetry, like that created by Edith Södergran, has the potential of showing us the importance of categories of desire and affect in resisting violence and oppression.

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