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Performing Space —A Modernist *Hembygd*

An Exploration of Sara Lidman's
Works

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG Dieser Beitrag über das ‚modernistische Heimatdorf‘ in Sara Lidmans Werk bzw. ‚die Heimat des Lidmanschen Werkes im literarischen Modernismus‘ baut auf der Erfahrung eines Aufenthaltes in Missenträsk auf (März 2013). Im Geburtshaus der Dichterin habe ich mich von den konkreten und textlichen Spuren des Ortes leiten lassen, eine Auswahl von Werken gelesen und mich, als deutsche Literaturwissenschaftlerin und Touristin, einem biographischen und atmosphärischen Experiment ausgesetzt. Vor diesem Hintergrund setzt sich die Werkauswahl aus den beiden ersten Romanen (1953, 1955) und dem zweiten Teil der Romanserie *Jernbanan* (1983–1999) zusammen, die einen starken regionalen Bezug aufweisen. Hinzu kamen einer der sogenannten Afrika-Romane, *Jag och min son* (1961), und das Protokoll-Buch *Gruva* (1968), die den dörflichen Horizont zwar klar überschreiten, aber dennoch gemeinsame thematische Komponenten und verwandte erzähltechnische Gestaltungsmittel aufweisen.

Die mehrfache Fokalisierung ist eines der Verfahren Lidmans, die für einen eigenartigen Übergang zwischen der Wahrnehmungsposition von impliziter Erzählinstanz und den jeweils involvierten Figuren sorgt. Auf diese Weise wird das ‚biographische Interesse‘ der Lesenden immer wieder geweckt, die häufig eine Sprachrohrfigur vorzufinden

meinen, aber niemals Klarheit über die jeweilige Parteinahme gewinnen können. Zugleich wird eine geschlechtsspezifische Zuordnung der Perspektiven verunsichert, denn der weiblich und der männlich konnotierte Blick können gleichzeitig zur Anwendung kommen.

Trotz meiner biographischen Neugier, die auf die atmosphärische Wirkung von *Missenträsk* zurückgeht, liegt der Schwerpunkt der vorliegenden Analyse auf der sprachlichen Konstruktion des Heimatdorfes. Diese Verankerung in der mündlichen Sprache (als sprachlich erzeugter Ort) weist ebenso deutlich eine eigene Historizität auf wie der regional-, kultur- und mediengeschichtliche Wandel Norrlands. Nimmt man eine distanzierte, ethnographische Haltung ein, wie sie Lidman selbst in der Serie *Jernbanan* nahelegt, ergibt sich eine Neubewertung der Kombinationen von historischen, auch dialektalen sprachlichen Registern: Dieses Verfahren zielt darauf ab, dass die Lesenden im performativen Nachvollzug die Konflikte zwischen den staatlichen Institutionen und Akteuren und den neuen Siedlern in Norrland erfahren können. Diese in der gesprochenen Sprache der Lokalbevölkerung aufgeführten sozialen und psychischen Konflikte hinterlassen Spuren in den Träumen, Gedanken, Dialogen, Lektüren und Texten. Der historische Ort erscheint vornehmlich als ein Konglomerat, das die mündliche Rede von Zeitzeugen hervorgebracht hat.

Die Erzählinstanz nimmt sich der vielstimmigen Figurenrede an und dokumentiert den historischen Sprachgebrauch, unabhängig davon, ob ein realistischer oder phantastischer Code zur Geltung kommt. Häufig taucht das Motiv einer verzerrten Nachahmung auf. Dies kann als programmatischer Hinweis auf eine Ästhetik einer formalen, hier performativen und narrativen Mimesis gedeutet werden, die besonders klar den Nexus von sprachlichen und sozialen Handlungen herausstellt. Sprechen ist Handeln. Das Glossar, das den ländlichen Dialekt und Soziolekt ins Hochschwedische überträgt, unterstreicht ebenfalls das sprachliche Handlungspotential, das unmittelbare soziale und politische Effekte herbeiführen kann. In der Serie *Jernbanan* werden die stilistischen Kollisionen zugespitzt, wobei lautliche und syntaktische Mittel hinzutreten. Dies ist als prosalyrisches Verfahren gedeutet worden, kann aber auch der nachdrücklichen Betonung der inszenierten mündlichen Rede in ihrem Vollzug dienen.

KEYWORDS Sara Lidman, modernism prose, staging of place, oral literature, writer's autobiography, exploitation, tourism

Not just in Scandinavian literary history but also in German-language accounts of Swedish literature is Sara Lidman (1923–2004) considered an author of charismatic identity with a strong regional attachment to Norrland.

One aspect of her works concerns cultural and socio-historical ‘representativeness,’ above all, of the colonisation of remote woodlands and high-moor bogs which she critically explores in the seven novels of *Jernbanan* (‘The Railway’), as well as of the exploitation and oppression of Norrland’s miners, blacks in South Africa and Kenya in the early 1960s, or the Vietnamese population during the Vietnam war. The state-funded exploitation of the resource-rich areas of Norrland since the nineteenth century approximates an occupation with the seemingly utopian vision of propelling the entire Swedish nation on a course of both economical and nationally edifying progress. Today, many regions are termed *glesbygd* [‘thinly populated areas’] and there is considerable discussion as to whether it is at all possible to ‘maintain operations’ in the northernmost region of Sweden’s elongated geography: “Ska hela Sverige leva?” [‘Should Sweden remain as a whole?’] (cf. Johansson 2008). The dynamic of rise and fall, in the sense of a naturalised narrative, is closely linked with this region and exerts a strong aesthetic fascination: it now seems entirely appropriate to speak of a suggestive aesthetic of ruins in the areas gradually being abandoned which have formed their own emotional tropes.

This can best be explained by the fusion of a former spirit of optimism and nostalgic disillusionment, with living history finding its expression in both the genealogical or personal accounts of contemporary witnesses and the features of the cultural scene. The actual and the naturalised narratives, and the biographies of the Norrland inhabitants, can be vividly understood as parallel lines. The improvement in access depicted in *Jernbanan* is also interpreted as a symbolic aspect of the history of modernisation in Sweden which is seen as nationally representative: thus a metaphorical path is taken from the workers’ and peasants’ destitution in the nineteenth century to the era of the Swedish *folkhem* [‘people’s home’].

On the Scene

On a mental map of Sweden, Västerbotten, the village of Jörn and the town of Skellefteå are doubtless on the periphery, if it is not the case—especially from the vantage point of Stockholm or southern Sweden—that the entire Norrland territories are seen as a diffuse northward appendage to the country. The little village of Missenträsk, Lidman’s birthplace, is not even shown on many maps; in the 1950s, almost 300 people lived here, today the figure has dwindled to around 20. Of the 35 former farmsteads, only one larger, modernised agricultural holding has survived. The proximity to Vithatten mountain, however, makes this a popular region for *vildmark* tourism [‘wilderness tourism’]; and the skiing, sledding and snow scooter activities on offer or overnight accommodation in a yurt tent imbue the woodlands

and high-moor bogs with the connotations of adventure and action. It may be that the further development and colonisation of Norrland to reflect the needs of tourism has already been set in motion, as the low land and property prices attract both international investors and private individuals, whether they be thrill-seekers or desperados. Because the infrastructure in a number of areas is being 'dismantled,' the conversion of existing buildings or traffic routes are typical signs of a new form of signification. The appropriations of the tourism industry will encroach on the landscape and distribution of resources and above all create social tensions due to the growing discrepancy between well-situated visitors, local businesspeople and frequently low-income local groups.

With this background-knowledge in mind, I set out to Lidman's home village in order to stay in her house and work on her novels, aiming to explore her literature in relation to the surroundings of its place of origin and to test my own approach between academia and tourism, between familiarity and alterity, between an inside and an outside perspective.

The station in Missenträsk has closed (Fig. 1.), as have the chapel, school and grocer's shop, all of which are now located eight kilometres away in Glommersträsk. The majority of the occupied buildings in Missenträsk are located on the (only) village through-road, while the few side roads present a mixture of occupied and empty buildings. The snow-covered tracks which



Fig. 1. The station in Missenträsk. Photo: Antje Wischmann.

pass through the bog forest are used as a snowmobile route in the winter.¹ The station building in Jörn (Fig. 2) is a testament to past glories and the extent to which forestry and the exploitation of natural resources (copper and iron ore, silver) as well as hydropower (for electricity generation) formed part of a prestigious national project around 1900. The Jörn–Arvidsjaur route opened in 1928 and ceased operations in 1990, having connected the main line in northern Norrland with the inland line. Today, timber is transported along this route by lorry. The railway line between Jörn and Skellefteå is still in operation; it is significant that updated forms of colonisation are also manifest here, as the French-made railway carriages are not well suited to winter operations in Norrland and thus often have to be substituted with replacement bus services. I myself was able to see how a bus journey of this type intensifies touristic or exotic patterns of perception: as the only passenger, I was driven through a dazzlingly sunny winter landscape on the Jörn–Umeå route for several hours by a good-natured bus driver, accompanied by boisterous dansband music. Of all places in the vicinity of Umeå, a little variety was added to the endless woodlands: a herd of reindeer gathered on the carriageway.



Fig. 2. The station building in Jörn. Photo: Antje Wischmann.

Under the Spell of the Home

The 25 kilometres from Jörn to Missenträsk can only be traversed by car.² The house in which Lidman was born and spent her childhood is administered by institutions such as Umeå University and Skellefteå, and authors or researchers (like me) can rent it for a token price; scholarship holders are accommodated here, as are, on occasion, the first resourceful tourists. This both fossilised and alive establishment largely constitutes receivers' notions of the authorship setting and sets the tone for many biographical interpretations of the author's novels, prose works and plays. Her journalistic works and political agitation writings are mostly related to a world explored and experienced far away from this Norrland microcosm. It thus seems appropriate to focus more closely on the idea of contact between the world and Missenträsk (cf. Holm 1998). This zone of contact is established by language use, especially by personal and media communication, oral tradition and the circulation of material texts and documents.

The large stables, the barn, the grandparents' house and the great-grandfather's cottage are located close by Lidman's house of birth (Fig. 3). The house itself is still filled with many of the author's books and some of her furniture, as if she had only just departed. A note signed by Lidman is stuck below the kitchen clock, the fridge hums, the water pipes gurgle, spectacle cases lie on top of a chest of drawers. This was the very first time I had been



Fig. 3. Sara Lidman's house of birth. Photo: Antje Wischmann.

in such intense biographical proximity of an author. This overwhelming or perhaps ambivalent proximity transmutes into reflective distance when considering that Missenträsk is representational space, historical environment, literary institution and biographical territory in almost equal measure. From the mid-1970s, the author spent her summers here, writing the 'railway' series (1977–1999). She mostly, however, lived in Stockholm, before moving to Umeå in old age.



Fig. 4. The wall clock in Lidman's house of birth. Photo: Antje Wischmann.

There is little reason to glorify this place as an enclave in time and space: the *glesbygd* policies, the population exodus, technical advances and touristic trends will in all probability foist changes upon Missenträsk. *Kommunikationer* (both 'means of transport' and 'means of communication') are leitmotivically yearned for by Lidman's characters, whether these be a rail link, the daily newspaper from Skellefteå or a glossy magazine like *Hela Världen* ['The Whole World'] in *Hjortronlandet* ['Cloudberry Country'] (Lidman 1955: 120). Later, there is excitement over the arrival of a radio, not least legitimated by the broadcasts of church services, or a telephone connection is eagerly awaited. But also a migrant worker, a door-to-door salesman or a home-visit hairdresser who import knowledge of the world through their narratives can assume the role of storage or broadcasting media.

I witnessed this when I realised that there was no public transport in the village and no internet in Lidman's home. The relief is all the greater on discovering that, at the very least, one is not in a notorious *glesbygd* mobile phone dead zone. The electricity network is stable, but the water supply is sometimes subject to fluctuations. The municipal street lighting in Missenträsk is due to be switched off for good in 2016.³ When twilight falls, will the loud humming of the generators then also fall silent? If the last residents move to 'Glommers' or Jörn, will they find a street lighting cooperative or maybe even a settlement of holiday homes behind Lidman's house, as is feared?

Discounting nostalgia, the stillness of Missenträsk can still take on a threatening face today. The author herself expressed the idea that Missenträsk might fall mute, disappear or even be absorbed by the cosmos. Below the kitchen clock, a typewritten note by the author is pinned on the wall explaining that the loud ticking of this wall clock (Fig. 4) is just as welcome as the polyphonic ticking of the many alarm clocks laid out throughout the house. The building thus insists on its own rhythm and is safeguarded from the risk that the universe might creep in.⁴ The ornamented wooden clock, allegedly purchased by family members who had emigrated to the USA, should therefore be wound up regularly.

Only several weeks after leaving did I realise that the building's floor plan had suggested a way to navigate through Lidman's work. I spent most of my time in the spacious kitchen-cum-living room. The majority of the books in the ground-floor living room are kept in cabinets; right next to the door, I found the two early works *Hjortronlandet* (1955) and *Tjärdalen* ['The Tar Pit'] (1953), novels which encouraged me not to look at the dialectal expressions as a barrier to understanding. Immediately adjacent was Birgitta Holm's indispensable and pioneering work *Sara Lidman – i liv och text* ['Sara Lidman—in Life and Text'] (1998). This monograph enables a detailed

contextualisation of Lidman's œuvre, reviewing recurrent topics of shame, guilt and repentance (frequently from a psychoanalytical standpoint). Holm had direct contact with the author while writing her study, meaning that certain indiscreet issues could first be addressed in later research projects. According to Holm, the Electra complex proves to be a key premise of Lidman's authorship: an academically qualified farmer's daughter uses her artistic output to speak out and empower herself, only to later pin the blame for this supposed arrogance on herself.

The Africa and Vietnam novels can be found in the staircase corridor on the second floor, as well as *Gruva* ['The Mine'] (1968), whose interviews and monochrome photos had already impressed me many years ago. In view of some recent work on the documentary-interview genre and several papers on *Jag och min son* ['I and My Son'] (1961/1963), I decided to focus on these two examples of the political 1960s in my presentation of Lidman's works.

Only a few days later did I discover the author's major work on, of all things, a large, leather-bound bible. This was a new edition of the 'railway' series in two substantial anthologies (in total some 1,600 pages).⁵ Both volumes feature a glossary which I immersed myself in after the administrator of the Missenträsk farm had shown me such things as old agricultural equipment, the sleds, the hot tub and the berry-picking rakes for harvesting the blueberries and cloudberry in the stable building. This simultaneous 'reading' of historical artefacts made clear to me the marked ethnographic dimension to Lidman's works. I had initially evaluated the 'railway' series with reference to the Lidman family's involvement in the ambivalent colonisation process. Now, however, the glossary's historico-cultural and etymological expertise and its literary-style alienation effects, in addition to the striking layout of *Jernbanan*, drew my attention to the modernist language and the narrative self-reflection of the mimesis (see below on 'mimicry' and 'scenic imitation').

Hjortronlandet, Tjördalen

In *Hjortronlandet*, two female characters prominently emerge from the collective of poor villagers in Ön ('island'). One of them is the aloof girl Claudette, thus named because her mother had once read a French novel. This minor distinction increases the risk of 'Klådett' being regarded with suspicion.⁶ As the daughter of a financially secure family, Claudette looks upon the *lumpenproletariat* Skrattare ('laughing') family with fascination: Their destitution may be repellent, but this does not impair their subversive energy. It is significant that the talented and seductive Märit is part of this marginalised family, her command of standard Swedish gives her family a chance to defend itself against the sanctions of the authorities (*Kronan*).

Märit has managed to delay the action for eviction by composing her letters in 'finely turned-out' officialese (Lidman 1955: 72). As a mother, wife and farm worker in one, the adult Märit finally wears herself out and dies, while Claudette leaves the village and resolves to imbue her name with new meaning and define her identity on her own terms (cf. Lidman 1955: 246).

The naturalistic style recalls the *Statare* novels, in particular the works of Moa Martinson.⁷ In *Hjortronlandet*, an indignant attitude is, of all things, presented in an ironic and cutting manner which simultaneously conveys a sense of alienation. The primitivistic reminiscences are highly obvious, for example when Stina enters as an *urskogsmänniska* ['primeval being'; Lidman 1955: 87–88] and beats up the teacher in a carnivalesque rebellion against the arrogance of this official who abuses her power and, having bettered herself through education, despises those from her own social class.

The newspaper as a means of broadening one's horizons is mentioned on several occasions in *Hjortronlandet*; even the shabby newspaper wall-paper is closely studied. The fishmonger from the small town brings not just the sensation of his delivery van (in contrast to the *one* horsepower the village has) and his pompous, gum-chewing daughter to Ön, he even expands its vocabulary by circulating the expression "Jag är idel öra" ['I'm all ears'; Lidman 1955: 118]. The metaphorical expression points to the recurrent humoristic mutual play-off between verbal and figurative meaning: 'free play on words' and (primitivistic) references to the material world are contrasted: for the hungry villagers, for example, the concrete significance of rye (*råg*) is more important than the metaphorical term 'backbone' (*råg i ryggen*; cf. Kerber 1989: 63]. In this context, it is important to emphasise that in Lidman's work subordinates in Norrland are also aware of the ambiguity of idiomatic phrases or metaphorical expressions.

The *läshunger* ['hunger for books and education'; Lidman 1955: 243] is vividly portrayed, this desire interestingly directed at matter taught both verbally and in written form. In this respect, biblical material is also welcome and, as it were, relieved of its didactic functionalisation. Lutheran discipline, which amplifies malevolence and social control, appears in a critical light. At the same time, the religious daily rituals in *Hjortronlandet* are presented in a comparatively neutral manner as routine practices which can be adopted as well as potentially repudiated (cf. Lidman 1955: 126). The common practice of religion stabilises the village community, even if the latter is also in a position to present itself as a misanthropic community of victims.

In one scene in *Hjortronlandet*, the language of the provincial authorities is confronted with the local dialect, resulting in an intersection of

linguistic registers. Linguistic styles are infectious! The officials inspect the Skrattare farm to check the lease which, in accordance with the settlement policies of the time, prescribes its agricultural use. The well-meaning grandmother Anna-Stava has lent out one of her cows, and so it becomes possible to deceive the inspectors. In the following summary, the linguistic register of the first half of the sentence recalls officialese, while the colloquial wording in the second half conveys the language of the villagers: “Nu kunde man tvista om markens lämplighet och dylikt, om ett kreaturs vara eller icke vara kunde intet käbbel uppstå.” [‘There may very well have been discord regarding the suitability of the arable land and the like, but no-one argued about whether there was cattle or not;’ Lidman 1955: 72.] The triumph of the laughing Paria family is increased by a recurrent derisive technique, unmasking imitation which is also conceptualised as ‘mimetic theft’ and frequently used in Lidman’s works both narratively and programmatically. The transformation of an experience into a play-acted scene enables a temporary reversal of power relationships. The five impudent sons of the ‘laughing family’ closely observe the three officials, so they can ‘copy’ them in the winter season; in this regard they affirm their superiority (cf. Lidman 1955: 73). This scenic technique must naturally also be considered in connection with Lidman’s theatrical output, it goes beyond the character level to achieve a higher level of reflection and is transformed into a further, integrated genre when, in a fictitious drama tableau, the roles of Do (the incompetent) and Da (the responsible) engage in dialogue. A didactic interlude is incorporated within the flow of text: a play within a play.

The debut work *Tjärdaalen* exhibits a considerably tauter structure, as the chapters are divided up into weekdays and the plot focuses on one conflict, a relative rarity in Lidman’s otherwise more episodic novels. The integrity of a village community in Eckträsk, which is first threatened and then—with the help of a collective victim (in the sense proposed by René Girard)—restored, is portrayed with almost allegorical intensity. The death penalty is implicitly imposed on one villager who destroys a charcoal pile and sustains life-threatening injuries because no-one (with the exception of one heroically portrayed disabled woman) gives the perpetrator medical attention: he comes to a wretched end. Even the committed and mediating figure of Petrus fails in his duty to provide assistance. The villagers’ ‘propensity for violence’ is heightened by their dependence on both the authorities and a shameless lender (cf. the close analysis in Kerber 1989).

In the context of increasingly digressive narrative techniques and the exploration of alienation effects, *Hjortronlandet* stands as the foundation for Lidman’s mature polylogic work. These techniques, which are energised in terms of narrativity and genre combinations and often deployed to re-

flect on language, are multiplied in *Jernbanan*—in the late works, the techniques themselves occasionally even appear to assume a foregrounded role.

The predominantly psychological, interrelated novels *Regnspiran* ['Rain Bird'] (1958) and *Bära mistel* ['Carrying the Mistletoe'] (1960) follow on from the early works and declare existential marginalisation as necessary to practise art: bourgeois manners, a settled life, marriage and family are not compatible with committed authorship. With her linguistic and acting talent, the little girl Linda (in *Regnspiran*) does not just possess a valuable gift but also a powerful manipulative instrument which gives her a strong sense of guilt. As an adult woman, the singer and musician Linda accompanies the unhappy and unsuccessful homosexual Björn on tours: the relationship founders on Linda's masochistic subjugation, her artistic career on insecurity and self-restraint which Linda imposes on herself in the manner of a 'womanly masquerade' (Joan Rivière).

Authorship is connoted as masculine, conceptualising writing as a risky challenge to patriarchal relations and religiously ordained 'self-effacement.' The sanction is experienced as anticipated. In a programmatic passage on the self-empowerment of the author, little Linda demonstrates a linguistic appropriation in the domestic setting, creating an alliance with fatherly power:

Han satt vid bordet och hon stod bredvid och upprepade ett par ord i taget. Hon blev ivrig och glömde osämjan med fadern och la sin hand på hans knä. Han darrade vid beröringen. Snart kunde hon upprepa hela rader utan att staka sig och slutorden gjorde henne vild av förtjusning. För varje rim slog hon sin lilla knytnäve i faderns knä med ett högt fnitter.

Till slut kunde hon hela strofen utantill och började gå i bestämda turer genom stugan medan hon läste den, för varje rimord stampade hon i golvet.

Tu måst all ting från dig skilja och hon gick från fadern till utdragssoffan i hörnet som var hennes sovplats, *om du Jesum följa vil:* hon passerade kopparsån och diskbänken, gläntade på skafferidörren, *wilt du höra himlen till:* hon stampade framför eldstaden. *Wällust, gull och värdsig ära:* förde henne förbi höstolen, vedkistan och kommoden till kammardörren, *bör icke ens begära,* hon smällde igen en liten låda i köksskänken och stannade framför föräldrarnas säng med det rödvitrutiga överkastet som hängde ända ned till golvet, *Then all världen dyrka plär:* den versen ledde henne till österfönstret, *såsom trenne Gudar här* var den sista versen, hon rabblade den och sprang triumferande tillbaka till fadern, hon kom med utbredda armar som om han varit hennes mor. (Lidman 1961: 12–13)

['He sat at the table, she stood next to him and repeated the words in succession. In her excitement she forgot the earlier row with the father and placed her hand on his knee. Her touch made him tremble.

Soon she could repeat entire lines without getting stuck, the final words sent her into rapture. She struck the father's knee with her fist on every rhyme and laughed out loud. Finally, she could recite the entire strophe by heart and marched around the room while speaking, also stamping her foot with each rhyme.

You must give your all, she moved away from her father to the pull-out bench in the corner which was where she slept, *if you want to follow Jesus*, passed the copper tub and the sink, cast a glance at the cabinet door, *if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven*: she stamped her feet in front of the stove. *Sensuality, gold and earthly glory*, she passed the hay-storing chair, the firewood container and the chest of drawers next to the door, *you shall not covet*, noisily shut the little drawer in the kitchen cupboard and stopped at her parents' bed, whose red and white checked cover hung down to the floor. *Whoever idolises the world*: this line led her to the east window, *like these three gods*—she quickly rattled off this last line and returned triumphantly to the father, with outstretched arms as if he were her mother.']

The idea of a 'home village' (hembygd) should not be understood in too literally a semantic sense. Instead of regional topography, a metaphorical place of the self's or the subject's origin is constructed from the spoken language which expresses itself in a vivid, extreme manner in the dialect. Genealogical thinking is thus less concerned with the historical family tree than with a sensory, aesthetic relationship to the world based on linguistic experience and acts.

Jag och min son

At the centre of *Jag och min son* (1961)⁸ is a perpetrator with no sense of wrong-doing. The unnamed male first-person narrator is not 'entangled' in the collective use of violence in South Africa (in contrast to, for example, the well-meaning Petrus in *Tjärdalen*) but is a self-aware proponent of racist rule who, however, considers himself neutral and apolitical. This businessman from Norrland appears to see a disdain for alterity as necessary to valorise his own life choices. The text, which is composed of the narrator's heterogeneous reflections, creates an aesthetics of the open diary. As a 'crisis profiteer,' the protagonist expects to do good business in this unstable country. Beyond this, he is characterised by contradictory traits which are depicted in provocative combinations: loving father of his young son Igor but misogynist lover with sadistic tendencies, anti-fascist in his notes on the Eichmann trial (1961) but former Franco combatant and a hardened veteran of the Finnish-Soviet Winter War. His 'dissecting gaze' (Lidman 1961: 111) essentialises cool rationality and the arrogance of power (connoted as masculine).

This very early and highly explosive engagement with 'Swedish racism' is spectacular, appearing to problematise Sweden's role as a 'pioneering liberal education nation' with a cynical undercurrent and in the process breaking new political ground: the act of solidarity with the 'third world,' the blacks or subordinates, reveals itself as well-meant patronisation which takes the (colonial) Nordic mentors' sense of superiority for granted. It is of significance that the author Lidman thus launches her own political project, the global struggle against oppression and exploitation, in a spirit of massive self-doubt.

The personal aspect of *Jag och min son* is more complex yet, as in this novel Lidman further refines the psychological case studies which were her two preceding works *Regnspiran* and *Bära mistel*. Existential exclusion, however, is put aside in this continued exploration of divisions, while destructively connoted gender relations increase in importance. The feminine position in the gender matrix is equated with the subordination of the blacks, and the struggle between the sexes projected onto a conflict of 'ethnic difference.' Just as meaningfully formed is the structural archetype, which sees the 'external system of rule' internalised and repression and violence ultimately 'passed down;' in both Norrland and South Africa, it has a devastating impact.

In Lidman's second Africa novel, *Med fem diamanter* ['With Five Diamonds'] (1964), a documentary journalistic style is used to portray how, in the 'asynchronously modernised' postcolonial societies of some African nations, ethnicity and gender perilously promote aggressive exclusion processes and foment hate. The young Kenyan Wachira leaves his village to earn money as a *boy* in Nairobi, hoping it will help him to marry Wambura and facilitate recognition of the tribal community. Humiliated by the feminine connotation of his role as service staff, Wachira's self-contempt and hatred finally erupts when, in the heat of the moment, he murders his homosexual brother who, with his Indian partner, a doctor, had vindicated new forms of social opportunity and with them the modernisation of society.

What stands out in *Jag och min son* is the way in which the psychological and autobiographical is interweaved with the political; the narrative failure of the novel (cf. Holm 1998; Granqvist 2009) is a pointed indication of how the desired combination of an 'egocentric-psychological' and simultaneously politicised world literature again leads to colonial arrogance. The gesture of solidarity towards the oppressed and exploited cannot eschew exoticism. Furthermore, in the course of a modernist critique of civilisation, technology, consumption and the suppression of desire, Lidman holds out the prospect of an African capacity to achieve knowledge and liberation,

which at the same time, however, appears rather deceptive. The title *Jag och min son* may also reference the relationship between Europe and Africa: the overrated subject is named first, increasing the provocative potential of the title. The final words of the text, which conveys something of a 'work in progress,' end without a full stop and concern the loss of the son in and to Africa (Lidman 1961: 223), giving almost graphical expression to the highly uncertain future of the former colonial nations. The balance of power between the 'first' and 'third' worlds can and may not be the same as the hierarchy of parents and children.

The interest in solidarity conveyed by the narrative voice always remains directly linked with the outlook, attitude and knowledge of the sentient characters. The implicit reader is thus also addressed simultaneously with various, in part even contradictory, ideas. This gives rise—at least from today's perspective—to an enlightening or educational invocation, as the multiple focalisation draws the reader's attention to their own biased, colonial or heteronormative interpretative understanding.

En svart flicka sitter på trottoaren med bara fötterna i rännen, sitter i skuggan av en parkerad lastbil och broderar på en linneduk. Vilken sammanstötning av livsstilar – stenålderskvinnan, med asfalt mellan sig och jorden, broderande som en fästmö från sekelskiftet på en duk så stor som skulle hon bli värdinna vid ett enormt matsalsbord. Brigitte Bardot sitter klistrad på bilrutan, anstränger sig att puta med munnen som en negress – hur skulle hon inte avundas den här barfotabruden en sex appeal som putar utan minsta ansträngning. (Lidman 1961: 164.)

[‘A black girl sits on the pavement, her feet in the gutter, sits in the shadow of a parked lorry and embroiders a linen fabric. What a clash of lifestyles—the stone-age woman, asphalt between her body and the earth, embroidering like a maid, and the piece of fabric so large that one might see her as a hostess at an enormous dining table. Brigitte Bardot sits, stuck to a car window, tries to pout her lips like a Negress—how she would envy the effortless erotic magnetism of this bare-footed beauty.’]

According to Granqvist, who sees the male first-person narrator as the author's alter ego, the project of recognition and the construct of desire remain bound to a dichotomous concept of identity and alterity (Granqvist 2009: 74).⁹ Holm, by contrast, bases her assumption that this is more an autobiographical than documentary work on the process of focalisation. She defines the multiple focalisation as transferring sight to the characters while the narrative voice formulates its own assessment: “Bilder och associationer hämtas från romanpersonens värld även om relationen är författarens” [‘Images and associations are borrowed from the world of characters in

a novel, although the relationship [with what is depicted, AW] is that of the author'] (Holm 1998: 259).¹⁰ The switch back and forth between internal and external focalisation is unusual and is a characteristic feature of Lidman's oeuvre. This multiple focalisation does not aspire to analytical plausibility, which Holm expresses as *gridlock*, a narrative block.

Jernbanan ['The Railway']

In the following, I will focus on the four novels of *Jernbanan* written between 1983 and 1999. The first three volumes have previously been discussed by Helena Forsås-Scott (1984: 1177–1181). In its enormity, and with a 20-year genesis stretching back to 1977, the series as a whole assumes monumental proportions which do not facilitate easy access for the reader. This is not the place to examine the general function of family sagas as narratives of epic breadth, but I will at least touch on the 'end of history' debate and the need for authenticated history. Beyond these issues, the distinct fascination with *släktforskning* ['depiction of family history in terms of genealogy'] in Sweden seems worthy of note, as reception of Lidman's works frequently emphasises the bonding of the reader or scholar with a place of origin in Västerbotten / Norrland. *Jernbanan* thus appears to suggest certain types of historical reconstruction employing contemporary witnesses and historical artefacts, occasionally stimulating its receivers to conduct interviews themselves, index and analyse archives or inspect church registers. The study of such ancestors who may have contributed to the background of a personal biography evidently holds out the prospect of creating continuities and enriching a reciprocal relationship with the world.

From the novel *Den underbare mannen* ['The Wonderful Man' (1983), the second part of the series spans an arch from the activist settler Didrik (who has been interpreted as a portrait of Lidman's grandfather) via his son Isak Mårten to Didrik's daughter-in-law Rönng. Didrik personifies the beginnings of railway construction and the enthusiasm of the settlers and pioneers. The colonisation process is portrayed in great detail, making it possible to reconstruct the intricate internal and external motivations of the settlers' work, tantamount to outward and self-exploitation.

Ditches were created to drain the marshlands (*träsk*) and high-moor bogs (*myror*) for the construction of a railway and agricultural use. The settlers were given a (sometimes already developed) plot of land to provide for themselves, so that those families could pay their leases in the form of work and taxes: alongside agricultural self-sufficiency, trench digging, forestry, railway works were the major employment opportunities. The *rallare* laid railway tracks, while the *snallare* were responsible for transporting the building materials and other goods by horse-drawn carriage. Other occupa-

tions which crystallised in the course of colonisation were the merchants (*grosshandlare*) who freighted goods from coastal towns to the small inland general stores (cf. Lidman Ordlista 2003: 834) or the migrant/ seasonal workers, called ‘birds of passage,’ who sought work along the railway lines under construction and in contrast to the temporary local workers (*hemfödingar*) usually came from other parts of Sweden. The image of the migrant worker, still relevant in the present day, is vividly described in the following depiction of an overnight stop for transport workers (*snallarställe*):

De hade fäll med sig och låg på köksgolvet; de hade stekpanna med sig och värmd skaffning på elden; kaffe däremot köpte de för några ören i stugan som gav nattlogi. (Lidman, Ordlista 2003: 834.)

[‘They had a fleece which they laid out on the kitchen floor; they also had a pan for heating up their food on the fire; on the other hand, they bought coffee from the people they lodged with.’]

The draining of the countryside resulted in more arable farming and stronger pine and fir tree trunks.¹¹ Initial successes in exploiting Norrland’s resources raised expectations of major profits across the nation. If the tightly calculated lease agreement could be fulfilled, a silviculturalist family’s (*hemmaskiftet*) estate became its own property (*hemmanet*), confirmed by an entry in the land register (*lagfart*). This transformation is called *avvittring* (approximately ‘land division’) (cf. Lidman, Ordlista 2003: 829). Achieving such success, however, meant fighting for decades in circumstances of great hardship, often exacerbating already extreme poverty and deprivation. The punishing working conditions and the inflexible, sometimes absurd adhesion contracts for the leaseholders recall the work of slaves offered the prospect of—constantly deferred—imminent freedom in a hypocritical and cynical way. The never-ending work of the settlers has a general existential and ethical dimension, in turn typical of the rationality and discipline of the self in modern twentieth century life. The characteristic features of compulsory labour to which the settlers submit in the spirit of pietism are all too obvious (cf. Lidman 1999: 726).

The co-coloniser Didrik is nevertheless marked as a positive character, highly ambivalent and imbued with carnivalesque energy. He is enthusiastically involved in the construction of the railway, invests his time and savings, but falls from favour with the authorities after misappropriating financial aid: he pays the starving village residents more than they are entitled to. He gets into debt and as a coloniser has a keen sense of moral guilt, not least because the estate handed over to him in the course of an official allocation has been appropriated from a completely impoverished family

which could not meet the leasehold conditions. For misappropriation of state funds, in 1896 Didrik must serve a sentence of several months in Stockholm's Långholmen prison, although this in no way weakens his brazen crooked attitude. Didrik thus becomes a henchman of the state colonisers and forces his descendants to meet the terms of the lease, thus condemning his children to a life of debt. As a railway pioneer, Didrik is an outstanding advocate of modernisation and a media technology 'early adopter' who is fittingly one of the first to use a telephone (cf. Lidman 1996: 559). On the day Didrik dies, a predominantly mechanical age comes to an end when the electrification of homes begins.

Didrik's daughter-in-law Rønnog rebels with her bursts of rage, her (sometimes sexual) impulsiveness in the face of hardworking, religious and inhospitable subjugation. Although Rønnog is tough on both herself and others, she questions Protestantism and its fixation on sin. Before her marriage, Rønnog pursues a career in the local dairy, which offers the young women scientifically validated training based on the latest hygiene regulations (c. 1910–1920). She opposes self-repression and self-denial. As a respected skilled labourer, Rønnog initially appears distinct from the primitivistic tradition embodied by many of Lidman's female characters, but her violent temper nevertheless takes on a threatening guise. In *Oskuldens minut* ['The Minute of Innocence'], Rønnog gives birth to Nanna, who learns the art of storytelling from her father. Holm sees Nanna as the author's most explicit alter ego character; the little girl vies with Rønnog for the attention of the father, and with her younger sister for the love and affection of her mother.

To prevent being drowned out by it, Nanna must find a way of relating to world at a very young age, and this is made possible by her dramatisation of events, her creative stories and narratives (mimesis as transformational imitation). In contrast to Linda in *Regnspiran*, the genesis of a childhood talent is portrayed in a positive light. The story ends in the 1920s. A harmonious balance is struck at neither the beginning nor the end of *Jernbanan*, and no 'original state' or nostalgic notion of history is suggested (cf. Larsmo 2001: 289).

Lidman's works with a regional connection to Västerbotten are considered difficult or almost impossible to translate because they use an artificial language which combines dialects/sociolects, biblical idioms, traditional local linguistic constructs (e.g. legends, ghost stories, fairy tales, family gossip etc.) and neologisms. The difficulty in translating—as in the passage with the young Linda's readings in the kitchen—relates less to a territorially given linguistic ability than to a staged orality and polyphony. Using literary means, a *genius loci* is created as an articulative space. This is

indeed a challenge for translation, as can be seen in the lengthier extracts cited above.

An emerging innovative trend of acknowledging a lack of fixed genre boundaries in Lidman can be seen in recent research, particularly concerning the transitions between prose, poetry and drama in the 'railway' series. The occasional lack of punctuation in the text and the 'expansive' layout, the rhythms of colloquial language and the typographical alienation in the series are interpreted as characteristics of prose and poetry. They can, however, also often be understood as scenic means and signs of fictitious orality. Lidman's manner of working, such as dictating the first version to tape (cf. Holm 1998: 402), also substantiates this written staging of a sometimes faltering, sometimes flowing way of speaking and alternating vocal texture, which in my opinion should be related to the idea of multiple focalisation. The various episodes, for example, on isolated incidents or fates are structured in sequences and scenes, they sometimes resemble documented oral narratives, that is, report by historical contemporary witnesses.

The glossary of dialectal and historical expressions in *Jernbanan* provides ethnographical insights into how historical, neglected subordinates become visible in retrospect and can be made to 'speak.' It must be remembered here that *Skellefteå-bondska* ['rural Skellefteå dialect'] is a mixture of local dialect and the idiom of the uneducated rural underclass and thus a characteristic sociolect: "Bondska – skelleftemålet till skillnad från rikssvenskan, 'schwänschkan'" ['Rural language—the dialect of Skellefteå, contrasting with standard Swedish, termed "Schwänschkan"'] (Lidman, Ordlista 2003: 829). The 'sch' sound not used here in the standard language and the spelling with an 'ä' in 'schwänschkan' reinforce the language's class-specific proletarian social distinction. Biblical texts exert the greatest written-language influence on the characters' discourse.¹² The 'railway' series includes a further register, that of pompous and sometimes misunderstood expert or official language. Didrik tends to fall into rhetorical fervour (*ordberusing*), the sound of the words carries him away, the gradual development of his language and thoughts steering him down unexpected avenues. A new language appears to emerge via the medium of Didrik (although he himself is portrayed as an enthusiastic user of media). Didrik transforms the clash of linguistic registers, which always means a performative iteration of class struggles, into something new, a verbal and scenic code presented as unique. His carnivalesque use of language vividly elucidates the elementary relationship between word/term (*ord*) and order (*ordning*). Before Rönnog marries into the family, Didrik's hegemony is seriously undermined by the power of two women, Anna-Stava, the wife who loves him unconditionally, and Hagar, the lover demonised for her carnality. The primitivistic borrowings are more than apparent, allowing identification

of a legendary female archetype, honoured in the glossary with the noun *queejn* (approximately 'matriarch'). An explicit commentary is presented expressly for this purpose: "Trots Hustaflans bud och trots fattigdomen var kvinnorna i Västerbotten tämligen suveräna, 'stugans drottning'" ['Despite the laws of the catechism and despite poverty, the women in Västerbotten were almost in complete control, sometimes the "queen of the home"'] (Lidman 2003: 833). The codex of *Hustaflan* in Luther's *Small Catechism* (1531) states that "Mannen är kvinnans hufvud" ['the man is the head of the woman'] (Lidman, Ordlista 2003: 831). This rule is nevertheless subversively circumvented by Anna-Stava in the same novel by grotesquely imbuing the expression with new meaning and her practice of wearing the cranium of her former lover Hård on her body at all times.

The make of Didrik and Anna-Stava's marital bed, 'Imperial,' reveals just how much referential power a single word can have in the symbolic order of the sexes. The potency embodied by furniture—sexual desire, untamed greed for profit, ridiculous narcissism—is exposed in the process. Another definition in the glossary unmasks how male norms are made to appear entirely natural: "människan – I första Mosebok 2:25 heter det I Carl XII: bibelöversättning: Och the woro både nakne, menniskian och hans hustru" ['Man—in the first book of Moses 2.25, the translation of the bible by Carl XII reads: and both were naked, the man and his wife'] (Lidman, Ordlista 2003: 832). The frequency of biblical language indicates that patriarchal society is upheld every day via iterative linguistic practices.

As a paratext, the glossary in *Jernbanan* holds a key function, providing essential stage directions for the socio-cultural setting. In order to illustrate and bring to life this milieu, all furniture, tools, items of clothing, artefacts and foodstuffs are qualified to inspire a lexicon of historic everyday actions: *am-stolen* (chair for breastfeeding women), *björnbindingar* (iron chains for securing wooden trunks to their means of transport), *lista* (a metre-long knitted scarf which can be wrapped around the entire body), *kom-i-säng-tröja* (seductive nightdress), *nagg* (quill for punching holes in the thin bread called *tunnbröd*) and *fårfeta* (lamb suet, considered a delicacy) (cf. Lidman, Ordlista 2003: 829, 832, 833, 830) all make the spartan scenography loom large before our eyes. The glossary concludes with a seemingly bizarre list of units of measurement which takes ethnographic meticulousness to extremes. The scale zooms down to *skålpund* (425 g) and *tum* (2.5 cm) (cf. Lidman, Ordlista 2003: 835–36). The glossary conveys a poetic and ethnographical manifesto which invites us to explore material details, perhaps even to lose ourselves with abandon in them.¹³

Many of the above-mentioned narrative techniques are used together, but more freely, in the 'railway' series. The lack of punctuation and the en-

jambments create an impression of occasionally faltering speech. Only after reading are the receivers in a position to interpret who perceives, feels or dreams. A daydream, an inner image, can, for example, be related in an italicised passage (cf. Lidman 1983: 154).

By contrast to the earlier texts, the ethnographic-documentary narrative voice appears outside the depicted world and explains the dialectal expressions in the ongoing text: “under stajn och rajta (under sten och torv)” [‘under stones and peat’] (Lidman 1983: 29), which appears like a retrospective intratextual effect of the glossary. The transfer and citation of voices thus form separate thematic areas (cf. Lidman 1983: 133). In the context of ‘code switching’ and reciprocal translation into dialect or standard Swedish, the expressions are allocated to a character using linguistic means; when there is a translation from standard Swedish to dialect, there is a sense of a shift to the historical past, the dialectal wording supposedly a prior stage of development (cf. Lidman 1983: 214). These decodings and recodings enable the establishment of a temporal scale between ‘then’ and ‘now,’ and assume the function of an ethnographical verification of authenticity: italicised dialectal expressions, which are sometimes only comprehensible after consulting the glossary (cf. Lidman 1983: 50), establish a documentary technique, as if a record of the character discourse were being made and the respective term cited as evidence (cf. Lidman 1983: 32). Such idiomatic expressions unique to certain characters also set the tone of the passages in ‘actual speech,’ whereby characteristic expressions or a personal phonetic pronunciation are suggestive of individual characters (cf. Lidman 1983: 34). If the speakers are expressly identified, graphically emphasised inquit formulas (in the layout of a drama) are used in some contexts, conveying an immediate sense of clarity, scenic intensity and tempo change.

The layout also creates scenic effects: as in reconstructing Didrik’s eye-to-eye contact with a Sami in the specific textual layout, the Lord’s Prayer is given in bilingual Swedish and Sami versions side by side (cf. Lidman 1983: 75), a technique of implied mutual commentary also used in *Gruva*.

The layout and typography visualise the idioms and not least the collision of linguistic registers, text types and topic areas. At the same time, the font and its size can reflect the volume and vigour of a statement: an advertisement, for example, is presented in bold type, the seed corn is extolled as if with a roaring voice: “SE HIT! [...] Underkornet som är ett dunderkorn!” [‘LOOK HERE! [...] The wonder grain is the purest thunder grain!’] (Lidman 1983: 191). Contemporary advertising language is critically unmasked but also prized as a linguistic and material base element; perhaps a little like the debris which becomes a coveted product as railway ballast or the newspaper wallpaper which suddenly sparks a seemingly literary flood of associations.

The modernist language is a touchstone of any translation, which must stand up to phonetic scrutiny: Didrik's expression "*Undrande kommationer!*" ['wondering commutations!'] [*recte* 'kommunikationer,' meaning both means of transport and communications technology in Swedish] (Lidman 1983: 251) is difficult to translate into another language, because of the need to pick up on the phonetics of the thundering [*dundrade*] wonder miracle seed and simultaneously convey the meaningful slip of the tongue typical for Didrik. On his newly acquired word *prioriteringar* ['priorities'], for example: "Han gillade att säga ordet, det fanns en munterhet där, det gick på tå, det nådde inte golvet med hälarna – dess innebörd hadde han dock allt mindre sinne för" ['He wanted to utter the word, he was cheerful, he seemed to go on tiptoe, his heels had lifted from the floor—but he concerned himself ever less with the content'] (Lidman 1983: 211).

Instead of volume, the speed of delivery may also be emphasised: "inbilla-dig-inte-att-du-är-min-förtrogne!" ['don't-imagine-that-you're-my-confidant!'] (Lidman 1961: 77). The clash of registers often releases surprising humour: "extraprima furutimmer" ['extra-fine spruce wood'] (Lidman 1999: 784) plus "samt 1 styck galen hustru" ['one piece of mad wife'] (Lidman 1999: 802). (Note the phonetically founded linguistic contact between *furutimmer* ['spruce wood'] and *fruntimmer* [colloquial term for 'a woman']). The phonetic infectiousness of words brought about by allusion and internal rhyme appears to give the language employed its own dynamic—and on occasion these experimental acoustic effects appear to propagate themselves.

Some syntactical constructions (e.g. dialectal inversion, anacoluthon, sequences) aim to orchestrate the stream of thoughts as a potential flow of words. The dialectal habit of ending sentences with "och så vidare" ['and so on'], after which it must be clear to the other person that expected and unnecessary formulaic expressions will now follow, occurs in the manner of a leitmotiv and bears out the scenic means and the staged orality. One special case is the hypothetical conversation (one character imagines what another would say) in which the cited excerpt from the character discourse is presented in inverted commas (e.g. "'medixin åt utbölingar'" ['medixine for those losers from outside;'] once again Didrik's incorrect pronunciation of a loan word] (Lidman 1983: 349).¹⁴ A variant of hypothetical narration is the anticipation of speech by a (not always easy to identify) narrative voice which employs conjecture about how a character may respond, that is it continues the dialogue speculatively (cf. Lidman 1983: 228). When neither inquit formulas nor inverted commas are used, the use of an omniscient voice occasionally appears, now and again taking Didrik's side: "Hade det stått i avisen?" ['Was that in the newspaper?'] (Lidman 1983: 38). "[...] vet du vad primitiv betyder? Slå upp i ordboken! Bra att kunna" ['[...] Do you know

what primitive means? Look it up in the dictionary! It's good to know'] (Lidman 1996: 511). I see the frequent question marks at the ends of main clauses as intonation pointers to raise the voice in the implied speech. The textuality should be experienced in speech mood.

Exclamations expressed phonetically are given a vivid graphical function, for example, "telefåååå" ['telephone'], "FÅÅÅ" ['telephone or idiot'] (Lidman 1999: 704) or "Avavavaviiiken!" ['dededeviation'] (Lidman 1983: 57). The orthography reconstructs the manner of speaking and increasing vocal intensity, the call's spelling indexically attributes it to one character's authorship. (When characters speak, linguistic momentum is increased: with his stuttering and drawled pronunciation of the place-name Avaviken (a play on *avvikelsen*, 'deviation'), Didrik reveals that he is about to commit adultery, something his wife also understands immediately.

The long list of place-names ending in *-träsk* is also designed to highlight the phonetic effect (cf. Lidman 1996: 509–510). This 'naming' of an imagined terrain as a collective place is an epitaph in minimalist prose poetry.

The sections in verse entitled "SKALLEN" ['CRANIUM'] in *Den underbara mannen* can only be clearly attributed to the point of view of a character in retrospect, following knowledge of the episode relating to Hård's refound skull. The short lines of this passage, set as free verse in the layout, increase the tempo, although at the same time they demand greater concentration because the lack of punctuation requires the reader to construct meaningful phrasing/ sequences himself. The enjambments pointedly create an ambiguity by the fact that two different phrasings and interpretations are frequently plausible (cf. e.g. Lidman 1983: 162).

Lidman employs similar linguistic techniques across her works and text types, primarily because they represent a stage for a performative critique of power: "MYNDIGHET – dymedelst berövande gemene man hans myndighet" ['AUTHORITY,' literally: 'majority institution,' AW]—by which means ordinary people are robbed of their authority/ their majority'] (Lidman 1975: 41).¹⁵ In place of multiple focalisation, Larsmo sees various narrating roles in Lidman's work. He considers them as helping to relativise the idea of language's regional roots. The strong claim of language and stylistic orchestration to independence, sometimes even the status of protagonist, questions the usual connection between language/ dialect and origin/ descent.

Gruva ['The Mine']

Even *Gruva* (1968) is based on a material/ concrete combination of documented character's voices. The famous documentary takes Odd Uhrbom's black-and-white photos of Svappavaara and Kiruna as its starting point

and is primarily an 'under-ground' record of workers who are seen in mining shafts, excavators and other vehicles or changing cubicles, alone or in small groups. Other images show families in their homes or life on wintery streets. Particularly expressive are the close-ups of the workers' faces and bodies, marked by heavy exertion, in part—as in the photo of an undressed worker being examined by a medical officer—also of work-related deformities and illnesses: the exploitation of human vitality and time, if not simply a theft against every single working human committed by a state company and endorsed by society, is denounced in *Gruva*.

Lidman visited the pit in Svappavaara as part of a commission which refocused attention on the Vietnam war to inland Sweden. The number of interviews Lidman conducted with the workers was far higher than the number of biographical narratives recorded in *Gruva* (cf. the detailed commentary in Annika Olsson 2004). There is still controversy as to the extreme concentration of male workers (cf. Olsson 2004: 234–235), even if they formed the majority for the symbolically physical underground labour. I would venture to argue that the category of 'class' had absolute priority on this political project. In this case, it is undoubtedly officially recognised gainful employment in the male sphere which is negotiated in the anti-capitalist and socially emancipatory struggle for liberation.¹⁶

Gruva is devoted to the ethnographic exploration of an unknown place, with the reader encouraged to adopt the role of intensively addressed, practically involved witness (cf. Olsson 2004: 237). The stories of the workers use the previously discussed techniques of staged orality, scenic structuring and linguistically reflective fracture. The interviewer appears in the prologue and an inquit formula: "Sara: [...]" (Lidman 1968: 81). The ellipses '['...']' indicate pauses in speech or a search for words but at the same time are valuable verifications of authenticity and a means to imbue the interview responses, compressed into monologues, with rhythm. In the section "Parantes om språket" ['A comment on language in brackets'] (Lidman 1968: 75–77), the narrative voice intervenes in order to attribute a racist comment to one character giving their view on the Finnish–Swedish language conflict. In everyday speech, Finnish and Sami linguistic practice mark out the social hierarchy as well as the hegemony of the 'white,' Swedish, male persons within the workforce. They frequently express solidarity with the North-Vietnamese colleagues, who are far ahead of Norrland in terms of the class struggle.

Gruva is the outcome of newly acquired critical insights which are carried over from the Vietnam protests to the Norrland mines: those who make the natural resources available, thereby safeguarding the lives of many while at the same time risking life and limb, have a clear entitlement to

land ownership and the means of production (cf. Lidman 1975: 43). The bureaucratic arrogance of the mine operators and the unrealistic regulations set by the municipal authorities are attacked in *Gruva* by means of the above-mentioned combined critique of power and language. Euphemisms are elaborated and the cynical attitude of managers entrenching themselves behind a wall of legal or technical jargon demonstrated using the example of document collages. The prologue contrasts a quotation from Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) with the summary of a meeting of the company management (cf. Lidman 1968: 10–11). Their use of violence is thus linguistically 'mediated'—Stanley Milgram's experiment on obedience to authority figures was already the subject of considerable discussion in the early 1960s.

If we acknowledge the literary status of *Gruva* (cf. Zillén 1993, Olsson 2004, Bak 2012), the possibility of discovering another of the author's calling cards in this work is opened up: I interpret the fossilised fir cone found by one of the interviewed workers deep in the mine as a reference to authorial reflection and the conscious use of means to create continuities in Lidman's works. Neither Holm nor Olsson could find this interview excerpt on the tapes.

Men det käraste jag har är faktiskt den här tallkotten. Experterna har sagt att den legat i jorden i sjuttifem tusen år. Den låg på tjugo meters djup. Det var jag som fann den. Den är ju svart och grå och du tycker kanske att den ser obetydlig ut. Men jag ser på den och känner på den varenda dag. Det är så man vill stanna av och tänka efter när man tar den här kotten i handen. (Lidman 1968: 58.)

['The most valuable thing I have is this fir cone. Experts believe that it lay in the earth for 75,000 years. It was 20 metres in, and I found it. It is black and grey and does not really look like anything special—or so you will think. But I look at it every day and briefly hold it in my hands. Then, you want to stop time and reflect.']

Might this fir cone, which extends labour history back into a mythical pre-historic era, be found in the Missenträsk study—even if not in fossilised form? In any case, I would suggest that the fir cone is to be found on a shelf there.

Gruva is a work which captures the literary spoken text of representatives of the working world between the covers of a book, in turn impacting on the extra-textual world: one year after *Gruva* was published, strikes erupted in the mines. More recently, the current cultural history of Norrland has helped Lidman's works to regain political relevance. New finds and increasing demand for iron and copper ore have rejuvenated the mining industry, with the surprising effect that a highly efficient extraction industry

was established *after* de-industrialisation, its boom requiring the recruitment of international workers. The mine in Svappavaara, which was shut down in 1983 and swamped with water, is due to reopen in 2014.

Outlook

Language is an ethical and political instrument in Lidman's work, delimiting or expanding the world of individuals and collectives. It establishes power structures and sets out patterns of perception. Every linguistic utterance is an act which engages with the world. These insights into the constitution of the world through language are predicated on the experimental use of modernist language, and are probably experienced as such by readers.

In Lidman's incredibly prescient commentary on regional Swedish politics, appeals and linguistic reflection again go hand in hand. Whoever no longer wishes to speak of a *hembygd* ('home village') but rather a *glesbygd* ('thinly populated area') and *av-folknings-bygd* ('exodus village') is already executing the politically approved depopulation process and has admitted defeat (cf. Lidman 1985: 18f.). In 1985, writing of a "natur-upplevelse-produktion" ['nature experience industry'], the author already presages the danger of event tourism (Lidman 1985: 19).

Lidman did not live to see how a further variant of continued slavery using both old and new means would become established in Norrland: every year, seasonal workers from countries such as Thailand, Poland or Ukraine are hired to pick blueberries or cloudberries; they are forced to spend a part of their pitiful wages on travel, food and accommodation. The undignified working and lodging conditions violated and still today often violate human rights. The seasonal workers were often deprived of their identity papers, placed under huge pressure and were often not able to pay for their return journeys. Their concerns have since met with greater sympathy amongst the Swedish public, but the conflict continues.

The exodus of people in Västerbotten/Norrbottn, the resource allocation conflicts for electricity and water are recurrent themes in the local newspapers. Who should be held accountable when state institutions withdraw and appear to turn certain areas adrift? A reduction in the number of empty flats or houses caused by new immigrants is just as worthy of an optimistic piece in the newspaper as the postponement of a school closure. The opening of cafés, flea markets or the care and conversion of listed buildings are a testament to the spirit of resistance. In closing, it is also worth mentioning that the danger of a hotel with the outline of an elk being built on Vithatten mountain appears, for the time being, to have been averted.

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NOTES

- ¹ In the summer, tourists can hire railbikes.
- ² I was driven by the administrator of the Missenträsk farm, Lars Sundqvist. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my warm thanks for his generous assistance and valuable information. My stay in Missenträsk would not have been possible without Lars. I would also like to express my due thanks to Umeå universitet, in particular Carina Sehlstedt, Birgitta Holm and Annegret Heitmann for finding me accommodation.
- ³ This was officially announced at the time of my visit in late March 2013.
- ⁴ “– När hon går, klockan, tänker man inte på henne. / – Men när hon står kan man intet tänka, fyllde en annan i.” [‘– When the clock ticks, you don’t think of it./ – But if it stops, you can’t think at all, added someone else’] (Lidman 1981: 142).
- ⁵ See list of works consulted.
- ⁶ The consonance with the word ‘klåda’ (itchiness) invites mockery.
- ⁷ The influence of Stina Aronson (1892–1956) on Lidman’s work has not to date been sufficiently explored, see for example Aronson’s depictions of Tornedal.
- ⁸ On the ‘Immorality Act’ and details of Lidman’s deportation, see Hale, who like myself examines the first version of *Jag och min son* (1961). He assumes that this work initiates the documentary phase (cf. Hale 2000: 68). Hale suggests that the author was irritated by the media attention, her isolated case problematically diverting attention from basic infringements of human rights (Hale 2000: 62–65). Granqvist observes that Lidman would have had to leave the country in any case due to visa issues in February 1961 and therefore assumes a certain over-dramatisation of the incident which Lidman would have accepted.
- ⁹ Granqvist himself casts an essentialist look at the author when he attests to her ‘inherited religious’ obligation to engage with the issue of personal guilt (cf. Granqvist 2009: 74).
- ¹⁰ Holm writes of the absorption of the narrative voice (and even of the author) (cf. Holm 1998: 406), removing the possibility of differentiating between ‘who sees’ and ‘who speaks.’
- ¹¹ Conversely, trench digging also lead to a lowering of the water table.
- ¹² The amalgamation of very different linguistic registers presents a challenge to translation, as analogous alienation effects must be created in the target language.
- ¹³ The ethnographic profile is highly relevant to the tone of the translation and for marking linguistic alienation effects. The foundations are laid for receivers choosing to limit themselves to the Västerbotten horizon or discover the influence of the periphery on the world and identify the modernist impulse. Simple colloquial language is to be preferred in place of an effective dialectal equivalent in the target language. One might almost say that it is a translation which can unlock the potential to expand the local relevance, model the dialect more strongly as a sociolect and thus intensify the universal ethical issues.
- ¹⁴ The ‘thought report’ may as such be a marked, imagined inner monologue: “Didrik

berättade genast inom sig att [...]” [‘Didrik immediately recounted in his mind and for himself that’] (Lidman 1983: 68).

¹⁵ The preposition ‘dymedelst’ is formal officialese, as if the noun ‘official’ had become connotatively ‘infected.’

¹⁶ The fact that, at this time, there were by all means report books relating to female workers or housewives, further shores up this consciously chosen focus, even if allowance must be made for the cooperation between Lidman und Uhrbom.

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