Swedish History of Ideas

Required reading and theoretical framework for the course is:


1. Erland Sellberg, The learned culture in early-modern Sweden

My lecture will be an introduction to the whole course. First I will give a brief outline of the political culture and its peculiar features of which some are still prevalent in modern Sweden. The focus of the lecture, however, will be the learned culture from the Reformation in the 16th century right up to the middle of the 18th century.

Reading:


The subject of this lecture is the world-famous botanist of the 18th century, Carl Linnaeus, and his achievements. Linnaeus’ influential classification of the world of plants (and, incidentally, of man), as well as his more lasting binominal system and some of his lesser-known preoccupations and ideas, will be dealt with in the context of his time and place. The world-encompassing voyages of his many disciples, or as he called them himself, his ”apostles”, will also be discussed.

Reading:


3. Elisabeth Mansén: Women´s rights in 19th century Sweden

Sweden is supposed to be a progressive country regarding women’s rights. This seminar puts that opinion in perspective, using controversial texts by widely read authors. The Swedish
discussion on women’s rights was intense in the middle of the 19th century. It was present in politics as well as in popular fiction, and resulted in changes in thought and attitude as well as major changes in society and law. Both men and women were active. But even if women had some right to vote already in the 1720's, the final decision was taken in 1921, putting Sweden years behind the other Nordic countries.

Reading:

Students are supposed to read these texts in advance and be prepared to discuss their impressions. The books are in print (sort of) and can be bought, but you can also read them online or download them.

Fredrika Bremer: Hertha's dream, from Hertha (1856), p. 79-103.

http://books.google.se/books?id=l_4NAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=fredrika+bremer+hertha&hl=sv&sa=X&ei=ITIBUfuLKcat4ASQ9YHoBA&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA


http://ia600303.us.archive.org/25/items/saravidebeckchap00almq/saravidebeckchap00almq.pdf


The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a golden age of Swedish intellectual life. It was also a period in which the dichotomy of science vs. art was much less rigid than today. Many leading writers and artists had scientific and political aims with their art. And they were taken seriously by science: in nineteenth century psychiatry, for instance, descriptions of pathological mental states would often draw on literature for examples. Political issues – the rights of women and of the poor for example – were discussed on the stage and in books every bit as much as they were in parliament.

This lecture will discuss some aspects the interrelations of science, literature and politics in fin de siècle Sweden. Starting from Strindberg’s drama Miss Julie, we will investigate how political and scientific issues form an important element in the literature of the period, and how literature in its turn became an important force in science and politics.

Reading:

August Strindberg: Miss Julie, originally published in 1888, c. 60 pages. There are several translations available.

5. Karin Dirke: The patriotism of migrating birds: Sweden viewed from above

The lecture deals with the changing zoology in Sweden during the 19th century and its representation in nationalistic literature such as Selma Lagerlöf’s *The wonderful adventures of Nils* (1906-7). The migrating geese in the book provide a view of the Swedish nation from above and at the same time represent didactic patriotism. Lagerlöf’s book is also seen as a result of the new zoology of the 19th century which linked the Swedish fauna with the nation’s geography.

Reading:

Lagerlöf, Selma: *The wonderful adventures of Nils* (1906-7) the following chapters are to be read: “The boy”, “Akka from Kebnekaise”, “Westbottom and Lapland”, “Homeward bound!”, “The parting with the wild geese”.

http://archive.org/stream/wonderfuladventu001858 - page/4/mode/2up


This lecture/seminar will highlight the making and publishing of Lennart Nilsson’s photographs of human reproduction in the context of medicine-media relations in post-war Sweden. Ever since the publication of the photo essay “Drama of Life Before Birth” in 1965 *Life* magazine, Nilsson’s images of embryos and fetuses have been widely circulated in magazines, newspapers, books, television programs, exhibitions, and on the internet. We will discuss under what historical conditions some of these photographs have become powerful symbols of life and death, and also how the photographer himself has been made into a national icon, like ABBA, Ingmar Bergman, Volvo and IKEA.

Reading:

”About Lennart Nilsson”, accessible at the Karolinska Institutet website: http://ki.se/ki/jsp/polopoly.jsp?a=149020&d=30096&l=en


Nilsson, Lennart, "Behind the Lens: An Interview with Lennart Nilsson”, accessible at PBS Online: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/odyssey/nilsson.html. [5 pp.]


7. Lena Lennerhed (Södertörn University): Sex Reform in Sweden

The seminar/lecture will focus on the regulation of sexuality in Sweden in the 20th century, in particular ideas and debate on sex education in school, contraceptives, abortion, sterilization and homosexuality. The image of Sweden as "sinful" or "progressive" will also be dealt with.

Reading:


Lennerhed, Lena, "Sex Reform in the 1930’s and 1940’s: RFSU, the Swedish Association for Sex Education” in Tedebrand (ed), *Sex, State and Society. Comparative Perspectives on the History of Sexuality* (Umeå 2000)