

MOTHERHOOD AND MOTHERING IN LITERARY, MEDICAL AND MEDIA NARRATIVES
INTERDISCIPLINARY SYMPOSIUM, UPPSALA UNIVERSITY, October 14–16, 2020

INVITED SPEAKERS

Jenny Björklund, Associate Professor of Literature, Uppsala University. Her research interests are gender theory, women's literature and queer studies. Recent publications deal with literary representations of resisting motherhood and mothers who abandon their children.

Christian Fiala, MD, PhD, Medical director of the Gynmed Clinic, Vienna, and affiliated researcher at the Department of Women's and Children's Health, Division of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Karolinska Institutet and Karolinska University Hospital. He is the founder and Director of the Museum of Contraception and Abortion, Vienna. He has published widely on abortion, family planning, the care of women with an unwanted pregnancy, and reducing maternal mortality.

Christine Hamm, Professor of Scandinavian Literature, University of Bergen. Her research focuses on motherhood, fatherhood and family in Scandinavian and especially Norwegian literature, and she has done work to develop gender theories on motherhood.

Valerie Heffernan, Professor of Literary and Cultural Studies at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. In her teaching and research, she focuses on contemporary writing by women and representation of mothers, mothering and motherhood in contemporary European literature and culture, especially Swiss literature. She is one of the PIs of MotherNet.

Eglė Kačkutė, PhD, University of Vilnius and Maynooth University, Ireland. Her research focuses on motherhood in French literature. Participant in the Maynooth University Motherhood Project on cultural representations of motherhood in popular culture: film, literature and the media. Her current research focuses on transnational motherhood/motherhood and migration. She is one of the PIs of MotherNet.

Merete Mazzarella, Professor em. of Scandinavian literature, University of Helsinki. She specializes in Scandinavian literature and has published research as well as autobiographical literature within the field of medical humanities. Among her interests are life-long motherhood and the relationship between generations of women.

Cilla Naumann, writer, Stockholm. She has published autobiographical texts and highly acclaimed literary fiction about adoptive mothers, for example *Bära barnet hem* (2015).

Lina Palmér, Assistant Professor, Caring Science, University of Borås, as well as registered nurse and midwife. Her research focuses on breastfeeding and women's existence as mothers.

Elizabeth Podnieks, Professor, Department of English, Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada. She is member of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI). Among her publications are the edited volumes *Mediating Moms: Mothers in Popular Culture* (2012) and *Pops in Pop Culture: Fatherhood, Masculinity, and the New Man* (2016). She is working on a book on representations of motherhood in modernist auto/biography and journalism.

Milja Ranung, nurse and writer. Her autobiographical book (Helena Askén) *Moderslycka. Vart tog glädjen vägen? En mammas berättelse om depression efter förlossningen* (Maternal happiness: What happened to happiness? A mother's story about post-partum depression) was published in 2012.

Olof Stephansson, MD, Senior researcher, Karolinska institutet. Clinical obstetrician and researcher, focusing on pregnancy and the neonatal period among women with chronic diseases.

Berit Åström, Associate Professor of English literature, Umeå University. Her research focuses on the representation of mothers in literature, film and television. She has recently published an edited volume on “absent mothers” in the cultural imagination.

THE PROJECT *MOTHER ANYWAY: LITERARY, MEDICAL AND MEDIA NARRATIVES*
PARTICIPATING RESEARCHERS

Margaretha Fahlgren, Senior Professor of Literature, Uppsala University. Her research interests include gender and culture, life writing and motherhood studies. She was PI for the research program GenNa. Gender, Nature, Culture and Transgressive Encounters (2007-2012) and is now working in the project *Mother Anyway*. She has written about the concept “baby fever” in contemporary Swedish narratives and participated in a study on midwives and abortion.

Helena Wahlström Henriksson, Professor of Gender studies and Associate Professor in American literature, Uppsala University. Her research interests are feminist literary and cultural studies, masculinity studies, and critical kinship studies. Current projects focus on embodied parent-child relations in son’s memoirs about mothers, in mediated representations of single parents, and, within the framework of *Mother Anyway*, in narratives about breastfeeding bodies in advice literature for new parents.

Cecilia Pettersson, PhD, Comparative Literature, University of Gothenburg. Her current research focuses on bibliotherapy, the use of literature to improve health and wellbeing; and motherhood studies. Within *Mother Anyway* he has investigated whether and how participation in a bibliotherapeutical reading circle can affect the well-being of women who experience mental illness after delivery, as well as how motherhood and postpartum depression are portrayed in contemporary Swedish literature.

Christine Rubertsson, Professor of Reproductive, Perinatal and Sexual Health, Lund University and midwife, currently working at “Maternity care at home in Malmö”. Her research interests include methods for preventing perineal tears, women’s experiences of perineal tears and their effects, fear of childbirth, mental health during the childbearing period, initiation and support of breastfeeding, and experiences of breastfeeding in public spaces. Within the project *Mother Anyway* she has written on midwives and (reading about) abortion, and on narratives of breastfeeding.

Sara Sylvén, MD, post doc researcher, Department of Neuroscience, Psychiatry, Uppsala University. Her research focuses on psychiatric illness during pregnancy and the postpartum period, aiming to find new ways of detecting psychiatric symptoms during the perinatal period, as well as developing new treatments. She also has research interests in breastfeeding and in gender dysphoria.

Anna Williams (PI), Professor of Literature, Department of Literature, Uppsala University. Her current research focuses on narratives of motherhood in 20th century- and contemporary literature. She is co-editor of the edited volume *Mamma hursomhelst. Berättelser om moderskap* (Mother anyway: Narratives about motherhood, 2018).

ABSTRACTS

Helena Askén

Moderslycka – vart tog glädjen vägen?

The lecture deals with the experience of postpartum depression from an autobiographical perspective. What were the symptoms? What emotions did I experience? What help was provided? I will give examples from my encounters with professional health care. Furthermore, I will talk about the experience of being a nurse and a patient at a psychiatric clinic, and about writing the book *Moderslycka. Vart tog glädjen vägen? En mammas berättelse om depression efter förlossningen* (Maternal happiness: What happened? A mother's story about postpartum depression, 2012).

Jenny Björklund

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Maternal Abandonment and Queer Resistance in Twenty-First Century Swedish Literature

In twenty-first century Swedish literature there is a surprising number of mothers who leave their families. How can we understand this literary trend, situated in a country which is usually seen as one of the best countries in the world to raise a family, especially for mothers? In my presentation I will discuss the trope of maternal abandonment in twenty-first century Swedish literature and its significance at this particular moment in time. I will show how a queer-theoretical framework can bring out the norm-critical dimensions of the novels and argue that literary representations of mothers who leave their families can be understood as resistance to ideals in the current sociopolitical context, such as involved parenthood, the nuclear family, and pronatalism. I will also discuss how maternal abandonment seems to require a privileged position in order to be intelligible as resistance. The mothers who leave in twenty-first century Swedish literature tend to be white, heterosexual and middle-class, and in their narratives maternal ambivalence often functions as a way to resist family norms and mandatory motherhood. Less privileged mothers who leave are rarely represented in these novels, and when they are, they are not focalized, which means that there is a lack of representation of their perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, their leavings tend to be represented as noble acts, like in the case of migrant mothers who cannot support their children and leave them behind when they go abroad in order to provide for them. Thus, the literary representations of mothers who leave challenge and resist norms and the structures of power and privilege they are linked to, but they also reinstate privilege at the center of this resistance.

Christian Fiala

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Fertility Control: The Eternal Struggle for Self-determination

Nature has planned an average of 12–15 pregnancies in the 35 years of a woman's fertility, resulting in an average of 10 deliveries and 8 surviving children, each breastfed for 2 years. Then, if she was still alive, a woman entered menopause. Consequently, throughout all human history, people have tried everything imaginable to reduce the natural course of fertility to the individually desired number of children – but never succeeded to do so. It is only during the last 100 years – through technical revolutions like the contraceptive pill, pregnancy tests and most recently the abortion pill – that we have achieved autonomy in this most intimate aspect of life, our sexuality and fertility. The progress towards women controlling their fertility has been in parallel with the democratisation of society, and continues to entail persistent and partly violent resistance of those in power. States intervene in the most intimate aspect of our life, for example

via legislation around abortion. This paternalistic interference is intended to exert pressure on the population to make as many children as possible. State interventions introduce an artificial distinction of ‚good‘ women who have as many children as possible and continue every pregnancy vs ‚bad‘ women who decide for themselves how many children they can guide into life in a responsible way. In this context, individual autonomy by using contraception, abortion or anonymous delivery are presented as negative. However, prevention of unwanted pregnancies is an integral part of family politics and an absolutely necessary prerequisite for couples, to enable them to raise their desired children and in the family life they want. The presentation will give a historical overview of the origins of the paternalistic state interventions. This helps to understand the current situation, based on which we will discuss options for the future.

Christine Hamm

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Making Sense of Motherhood: Mothering in Recent Norwegian Fiction

In 2018 several well-established female novelists produced fiction dealing with mothering. In interviews published in national papers, they openly admitted that they wanted to write about their own experience with motherhood. While many female critics welcomed this heightened attention on mothering in literature, there were also critical voices. One male critic talked about “a tsunami of breastmilk”, claiming that the novels were boring, narcissistic and without any literary worth. In this paper, I do not focus on the reception (even if this also would be a tempting subject). I rather concentrate on the following questions: Why do women writers in 2018 have the urgent need to write about their experience as mothers? What answers to this question can we find by looking closely at the novels they write? And why do the authors want to use fiction to write about their experience, why not produce autobiographical texts? My leading hypothesis is that the literally devices the Norwegian authors can use in writing fiction enable them to enhance their understanding about the experience they have made. I argue that the authors need to come to terms with the meaning of motherhood, and I do so by shortly presenting the different pictures of mothering rendered in Kjersti Skomsvold’s *Barnet*, Heidi Furre’s *Dyret*, Inger Bråtveit’s *Dette er også vatn* and Monica Isacstuen’s *Rase*. I further analyze some of the narrative techniques used by the authors. While all four novels contain pictures of everyday activities in the family such as preparing dinner and changing diapers, the texts range from first-person to third-person narration, from inner monologue to narrated monologue and from present to past tense narration. Some of the novels even contain longer essayistic parts, bringing out the subjective view of the authors in specific ways.

Valerie Heffernan

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Transnational Matrilineal Narratives in Contemporary German Women’s Writing

Since 1989, the German literary market has seen a rise in the popularity of transnational family narratives. These novels use the prism of the family to explore the impact of a century of revolutions and wars, enormous political and social change, and massive mobility within and across national borders on individuals, communities, and societies. Through exploring the stories told between female family members – and between mothers and daughters in particular – many German women writers depict the work done by women to uphold cultural continuities in the face of massive change and mobility. This article looks at two transnational family narratives by women, Nino Haratischwili’s *Das achte Leben (Für Brilka)* (2014) and Pia Ziefle’s *Suna* (2013). Drawing on Irene Gedalof’s ideas about migrant mothers’ practices of cultural reproduction, I analyze how these writers engage tropes of storytelling to relate their reconstruction of the past to the construction of individual and family identity in the present.

Through exploring the narrative techniques, plot structures and stylistic devices that Haratischwili and Ziefle employ, this article argues that the novels in question present the maternal as a critical nexus for contemplating the past and its impact on the present.

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Women's Bodies Get in the Way:

on Breastfeeding and Gender Equality in Swedish Advice Literature for New Parents

Breastfeeding rates have gone down significantly in Sweden in the past 25 years. While the reasons behind this trend are likely to be multiple and complex, this presentation – via an analysis of popular twenty-first century advice literature for new parents – explores the possibility that breastfeeding as a gendered embodied practice collides with the Swedish ideal of gender-equal parenting. In Sweden, popular handbooks for new parents authored by people from the “media class” typically feature one chapter on breastfeeding. In these texts, breastfeeding is resisted, represented as problematic, and downright rejected, while health benefits are toned down or directly questioned. The books “speak back” to what they present as a “breastfeeding imperative” voiced by health care professionals and WHO recommendations. Drawing on feminist theorizing of female bodies, and feminist studies of breastfeeding specifically, and from the disciplinary perspectives of reproductive health and midwifery, and gender studies/cultural studies the presentation explores how gendered bodies, gendered (parental) rights, and gender equality figure in these texts about infant feeding.

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Silence, Voice and Maternal Space in Abba Farhoud's “Le bonheur a la queue glissante”

Abba Farhoud's “Le bonheur a la queue glissante” is an important text of “écriture migrante” (*migrant writing*) in Quebec. As such, it has attracted a wide scholarly interest and has mostly been considered in terms of exile and belonging or lack of thereof as well as aging. In the context of mobility in contemporary women's writing in French, it is “one of very few narratives in French to adopt the perspective of a migrant woman in old age, relating Dounia's trajectory from her village in Lebanon to her present situation in Montreal” (Averis, 2017). Considering that the novel gives voice to an old and illiterate migrant mother of six, Dounia, who, at the end of her life, reflects on her migrant and maternal experience, it is surprising that the novel has not yet been sufficiently read from the point of view of motherhood studies. This paper aims to address this gap in scholarship. Fictional narratives in French focussing on migrant motherhood mostly feature young mothers (Catherine Cusset's *Un brillant avenir*) or mothers of the middle generation whose children are still growing up or are at the cusp of adulthood (Ying Chen's *La lenteur des montagnes*, Nathacha Appanah's, *La Noce d'Anna*, Catherine Cusset's *Un brillant avenir*). Thus, in the same way as with aging, Farhoud's “Le bonheur a la queue glissante” is also one of very few narratives in French to adopt the perspective of a migrant mother in old age relating her experiences of bringing up and socialising her children in a foreign country the language of which she does not speak. I will draw on maternal theory and the notions of

maternal space and well as voice to give an account of maternal subjectivity portrayed in the novel in question.

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Previously Experienced Breastfeeding Difficulties: An Existential Breastfeeding Trauma in Motherhood

This study is part of a larger project with a lifeworld perspective on women's breastfeeding stories focusing on the existential dimensions of breastfeeding difficulties. The previously studies determined that initial breastfeeding difficulties places women as new mothers in an exposed and vulnerable situation where they experience loneliness and lostness during motherhood. Such existential dimensions of breastfeeding difficulties make the relationship with the infant difficult to manage, and the life situation for the new mother can turn into a state of chaos, entailing feelings of inability and doubts about being a mother, as well as a sense of insecurity in the breastfeeding relationship. The vulnerability of breastfeeding women is an important part of the embodiment as a mother and an existential aspect of human life that needs to be further understood. The present study therefore further investigate the complexity of breastfeeding for women experiencing difficulties with breastfeeding. A reflective lifeworld hermeneutical approach was adopted and lifeworld interviews with women who had experienced difficulties with breastfeeding was performed. The result of this study shows that previously experienced breastfeeding difficulties represent an existential breastfeeding trauma in an individual woman's life, from which there are two intertwined pathways for future breastfeeding: a fear of breastfeeding, which renders the idea of future breastfeeding unthinkable, and a longing for breastfeeding, which increases the likelihood of future breastfeeding. Fear and longing are intertwined in ambiguous ways in an individual woman's life. To conclude, women with previous breastfeeding difficulties may bring negative breastfeeding experiences with them, which are etched into the woman's being as a mother as an embodied memory. A lifeworld-led caring science perspective with the breastfeeding story as the ethical compass can contribute to the development of caring practices, which grasp the existential nature of the breastfeeding trauma.

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Bibliotherapy as a Complement to Treatment for Women with Mental Illness after Delivery

Mental illness after delivery is a health issue which has gained more and more attention in recent years, not least in Sweden. Several of the diagnoses, such as postpartum depression (PPD), are currently treated with medication and/or psychotherapy, but there is an increased interest in investigating whether alternative therapies, such as light therapy, acupuncture and bibliotherapy, can produce effects on health and well-being. This paper focuses on a qualitative study examining whether creative bibliotherapy in group, that is, reading and talking about fiction for health promotion purposes, may be an appropriate complement to treatment to women affected by mental illness after delivery. Previous research shows that bibliotherapy can reduce anxiety and stress but increase social ability in people with mental illness such as depression, posttraumatic stress and panic disorders, that is, that kind of mental illness that women often suffer from after delivery. However, there is no previous study investigating the impact of bibliotherapy on postpartum depression or other perinatal mood disorders. This is remarkable, especially since an increased social well-being is important for women with mental illness after delivery, who frequently withdraw from social contexts, because of illness itself and because of the taboos associated with motherhood and mental illness. I describe the

organization and implementation of the bibliotherapeutic reading circle, which forms the basis of the study. In addition to this, I highlight in what ways participation in the reading circle affected the participants' psychological and social well-being. Based on these results, I draw conclusions as to whether creative bibliotherapy in group seems to be a good complement to other treatment for women suffering from mental illness after delivery.

Elizabeth Podnieks

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“The synergy between you”: Mothers, Nannies, and Collaborative Caregiving in Contemporary Matroethnographies

The twenty-first century has seen the rise of motherhood literatures dubbed “mommy lit” in Britain and North America. These fictional and autobiographical texts are matrifocal, that is, they are narrated from the mother’s perspective. Revealing often-taboo truths about women’s experiences and identities, these stories perform what Susan Maushart calls the “unmasking of motherhood.” Relatedly, the genre of so-called “nanny lit” is burgeoning. While the caregiver has been a staple of fiction in the past, P.L. Travers’s line “But nobody ever knew what Mary Poppins felt about it, for Mary Poppins never told anybody anything,” describes the silences and masks that contemporary nanny-focal narratives seek to break and uncover. Against this background, my presentation examines representations of mother/nanny relationships in what I am calling a new genre: matroethnography. The term fuses the prefix matro (Latin root for mater) with ethnography; and further, signals a conflation of matro with the auto (autobiography) in autoethnography, itself a hybrid genre from the fields of life writing and anthropology. I identify a group of texts published in the last fifteen years that employ interviews, testimonials, and creative storytelling to showcase how mothers (largely white, Anglo-American) and nannies (largely immigrant women of colour) feel about themselves as maternal figures; each other as partners and competitors; and the children in their mutual care. Such texts enable nanny-centric voices and subjectivities to be articulated and valued in unprecedented ways, and enable the radical (re)-positioning of the mother in terms of her relationship with her child’s caregiver. Unmasking mother/nanny truths raises issues about race, ethnicity, class, and power dynamics, and conceptions of duty and love. In their re-defining of mothering as a collaborative reality, these texts point to crucial directions for motherhood studies.

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Births in Sweden: Trends in Maternity Care During a Half Century

In the period since the beginning of the Swedish Medical Birth Register in 1973, birthing practices, maternity care, and characteristics of women giving birth have all undergone changes. For example, average maternal age at first birth has increased from 23 years in 1973 to 28 years in 2017, and the proportion of overweight and obese women in early pregnancy is today more than 40%. One in three women were cigarette smokers in early pregnancy in the 1980ies whereas only one in 20 smoke cigarettes today. The proportion of cesarean delivery has increased from 5.3% in 1973 to 17.3% in 2017, at the same time epidural analgesia in vaginal births has risen from 1.5% to 56.2% in first time mothers. Hospital stay has become shorter and shorter and was for vaginal deliveries in first time mothers: on average 6.6 days in 1973 and 2.3 days in 2017. Hospital stay for first time mothers with cesarean delivery was 9.4 and 3.3 days, respectively. As for the babies, the neonatal mortality (death of a live-born infant between 0-27 days) has dropped from 7.9 per 1000 live births in 1973 to 1.6 in 2017.

According to the Swedish Pregnancy Register - a quality register for quality of care improvement and research - more than half of all first-time mothers in 2018 received medication for

augmentation of labor. Some 77.8% of all mothers reported exclusive breast feeding at discharge from the delivery hospital which dropped to 69% four weeks after delivery. Approximately 6% of first-time mothers and 10% of parous mothers received special care for fear of childbirth in 2018, and 8% of pregnant women were treated for psychiatric disease. In the Pregnancy Register, birth experience is measured on a scale from 1 being the worst possible to 10 being the best. In 2018, 55.9% of women reported birth experience and the proportion of women with a very positive experience (8-10) was 72.3%, a good experience (4-7) 23.5% and 4.2% of women reported a bad experience (1-3). This presentation outlines significant trends in maternity care in the 21st Century.

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Mommy Is Sad: Psychiatric Illness During Pregnancy and after Delivery

Depression is one of the leading causes of disability world-wide, according to the WHO, and the rising prevalence of mental disorders during recent years has become a growing global concern. Epidemiological studies estimate that the life time prevalence of depression varies between 10 to 25 % among women and 5 to 12 % among men. Depression is not only an important issue due to the extent to which it significantly decreases the affected patient's functioning and quality of life, but it also increases the risk for several other medical conditions, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. During pregnancy and the postpartum period, up to 85% of women experience some type of mood disturbance. For most women, symptoms are transient and relatively mild; however, up to 20% of women will suffer from a more serious form of disorder, such as postpartum depression or postpartum psychosis. Despite the high prevalence of depressive symptoms in the peripartum period, the condition is often underdiagnosed due to patient, family and professional misconceptions or lack of training in using validated screening tools. Untreated psychiatric illness during this period places both the mother and infant at risk and is associated with significant long-term effects on child development and behavior. In the most severe cases of psychiatric illness during the peripartum period, there is a risk for suicide or even infanticide, and 5-10% of women with peripartum depression present with a high risk of suicide. Suicide is now, in fact, one of the leading causes of maternal death in developed countries.

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"Never part of my plan": Rejecting Motherhood in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy

This paper investigates and problematizes representations of motherhood in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010), focusing in particular on Katniss Everdeen. Her marriage and maternity in the epilogue to the third novel, *Mockingjay*, have been read as a heteronormative cop-out, undoing the character's allegedly gender-transcending work earlier in the series. Drawing on literary and sociological research, I suggest a different reading, interrogating the epilogue not, as other scholars have done, from the point of view of the supposed domestication of Katniss, but from the character's lack of agency and choice. It is suggested throughout the novels that Katniss does not want to have children, and the final decision is framed in terms of (ultimately futile) resistance on her part and coercion on her (eventual) husband Peeta's. Analysing the text within the framework of voluntary childlessness as female liberation, as well as the difference between "will" and "consent" in relation to reproduction, I suggest that Katniss' submission and subsequent emotional distress articulate an ambivalent attitude towards motherhood. Thus the novels could be said to invite the reader to question motherhood as the natural terminus of the adolescent girl's maturation into womanhood.