Materiella vändningar
Läsningar av Parland, Lispector, Berg och Byggmästar

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i hörsal F, Humanisthuset, fredagen den 17 april, kl. 10:15.
Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

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The aim of the dissertation is to examine the analytical potential of the “material turn” within the field of literary studies. In particular, it explores how theoretical perspectives associated with the material turn may shed light on the work of four writers: Henry Parland (Finland, 1908–1930), Clarice Lispector (Brazil, 1920–1977), Aase Berg (Sweden, b. 1967), and Eva-Stina Byggmästar (Finland, b. 1967). As is demonstrated, however, these works of fiction and poetry also pose a challenge to the theories of the material turn. Recognizing this tension, fiction, theory, and poetry are engaged on an equal footing in an investigation of subjectivity, matter, nature, and their possible conceptualization.

The study begins with an overview of the theoretical research field, discussing five influential research anthologies of the material turn published between 2008 and 2015. The introductory chapter also reviews current research on the material turn in a Swedish context, concluding with a discussion of reading as an affirmative philosophical practice.

The first part of the dissertation then examines Parland’s novel Sönder (1930) in relation to object-oriented ontology and feminist readings of the novel. Part two takes Lispector’s Água viva (1973) as its object, discussing it in connection to critical plant studies and the way plants present themselves in texts. Part three uses the frameworks of material feminism to discuss themes and motifs in Berg’s motherhood trilogy (2002–2007). Part four highlights cuteness, detail-centered aesthetics, nomadism, the pastoral trope, and the forest as a place of queer resistance in five poetic works (2006–2014) by Byggmästar. In different ways, the four case studies all center on issues of how the intricate relation between humans and nonhumans can be explored and expressed in writing, and what implications artistic exploration may have on an ethical and political level.

As the dissertation concludes, the material turn reassesses many of the fundamental philosophical categories (i.e. subject and object, nature and culture, human and nonhuman). The major theorists of the field – Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, and Timothy Morton – all stress the need to destabilize given concepts of nature and culture, establishing matter, materiality, and the environment as agents beyond human control. This standpoint, however, has problematic consequences for literary studies, given that literary scholars work with aesthetic representations created by humans. If, as many of the above-mentioned theorists assert, nature has its own powers, can it then be said to write fiction or poetry? If we answer the question affirmatively, how does this nature-writing-itself into fiction happen? These complications often lead to analytic aporias, but as the dissertation argues, such aporetic readings are not discouraging per se. On the contrary, the aporias or failures produced by the four case studies highlight the need for even more careful readings of literary as well as theoretical texts, and provide the grounds for a discussion on the ethical dimensions of reading fiction.

Keywords
The material turn, posthumanism, feminist new materialism, critical plant studies, ecocriticism, object-oriented ontology, Henry Parland, Clarice Lispector, Aase Berg, Eva-Stina Byggmästar

Language: Swedish
PDF: 978-91-7855-248-1
Number of pages: 418