

Sex-mining the digital bookshelf. A digital analysis of literary intercourse in Norway 1950–1970.

In late March 1957 the Director of Public Prosecutions in Norway, Andreas Aulie, decided to prosecute the author Agnar Mykle and his publisher Harald Grieg for crimes against the Penal Code, §211, for spreading pornography in the novel *The Song of the Red Ruby* (1956). The Norwegian Supreme Court finally acquitted Mykle's story about a young student's search for love and recognition in 1958. Less than ten years later The Supreme Court convicted Jens Bjørneboe for the same crime for writing the pornographic novel *Without a Stitch* (1966). So far, this is the last legal ban on a fictional work of art due to its erotic content in Norway.

These two highly controversial novels were not the only novels in this period, depicting sexual encounters. In my study, I have put together a corpus of 385 literary works explicitly describing intercourse, either written in Norwegian, or translated into Norwegian between 1950 and 1970.

I have chosen to study the literary intercourses from the time around *The Song of the Red Ruby* and *Without a Sticht*, because they both suggest a drastic change in the representation of sex in Norwegian fiction. *The Song of the Red Ruby* had passages previously unsurpassed in detailed erotic realism, while *Without a Stich* more or less explicitly challenged the criminalization of textual pornography in Norway. The many series of erotic/soft pornographic pulp fiction of the period amplifies this point.

I wanted to find answers to the following key questions: What characterizes explicit erotic language in Norway 1950–70? How does literary sex influence our culture, conceptions of gender, or structures of power? In what way does translations contribute to changes in Norwegian literary eroticism? From early on, my hypothesis has been that sadism and voyeurism dominates the sexual language in this era, and that this may have supported a culture of male dominance, female submission and cultural misogyny.

My method has combined traditional comparative literary analysis or close reading with the digital tools provided by the open-source web application, Jupyter Notebook, including statistical modeling, data visualization, and metadata mining. The distant machine reading of

the vast digitized material at the National Library in Norway has made it possible to study the differences of literary sex between critically acclaimed literature and pulp fiction ('high' culture vs. 'low' culture), between male and female eroticism etc. It has made it possible to reveal the dominant association of sex and violence in fictional intercourses.

It has also made it possible create subsets of literary sex based on existing metadata on original languages, publishing houses, publishing dates, and gender of the author. Are there relations between literary sex and the growth liberalism and gender equality in Norway?

The methodological combination of traditional comparative literature and digital reading, modeling, and visualizations has been challenging, and experimental. To find literature containing literary intercourses I have had to go through a careful process of selection. First, I searched for a certain word combinations in the 47 475 digitized books published in Norway 1950–70: I searched for the words 'brystene' ('breasts' – definite form in plural) and 'kysset' ('kissed' – simple past). Thus, I was able to get rid of most nonfictional books, and retain fictional works with a certain erotic content (sorted on the criteria of (data) relevance). Secondly, I would search for books published at publishing houses with an erotic profile (based on the results of the word combination search). Thirdly, I had to confirm suspected intercourse content in my results. Every book in my study has at least one minimal description of sexual intercourse ("They had intercourse. It went ok."). My corpus does not claim completeness – I may have lost a few books on the way –, but relevance.

One critical methodological question I have been struggling with is whether my searches has defined the results. Did I miss the fiction describing sexual intercourses using an experimental, metaphorical or indirect language? I have tried to avoid this by looking for alternative descriptions, language associations and further searches. The datamining does not guarantee against such flaws. Still I believe it makes us better prepared to guard ourselves against them.

My presentation in Copenhagen will explicate my findings on literary eroticism in Norway. It will give me unique opportunity to discuss the potential shortcomings of my experimental methodological approach.