

From AIDS to Assimilation: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Swedish Literature

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines representations of male homosexuality in Swedish literature from 1968-2013. Since the initial visibility of homosexuality with the coming-out of Bengt Martin on Swedish television in 1968, dominant gay rights discourses in Sweden have been characterized by internal dissent over the “proper” image of male homosexuality. Rather than tracing its origins to the Stonewall Inn Riots of 1969, this dissertation focuses on the AIDS crisis as a crucial and pivotal turning point in the history of homosexuality, and as playing an integral role in the shaping of contemporary discourses on male homosexuality. The project expands the history of homosexuality in Sweden beyond legislative milestones, and analyzes key sociopolitical moments in Swedish history in order to locate the literary representations into a broader context.

This study is organized into four chapters that examine the literary representations of male homosexuality. The first two chapters of this study offer analyses of the literary history as

well as the political and legal discourses through which ideas about homosexuality were circulated. Chapter I discusses Bengt Martin's coming-out on Swedish television, and argues that Martin's trilogy about the young homosexual in Stockholm, *Sodomsäpplet* (1968), *Nejlikmusslan* (1969) and *Finnas till* (1970), first established literature as a space in which dominant ideas about homosexuality were contradicted. Prior to Martin's coming-out, the medical profession and legal discourses produced information about homosexuality unilaterally. Chapter II examines Ola Klingberg's *Onans bok* (1999) in the context of two pieces of legislation surrounding HIV/AIDS, inclusion of HIV under *Smittskyddslagen* (1985) and *Bastuklubbslagen* (1987). This chapter analyzes the legacy of these pieces of legislation in both *Onans bok* and the coming-out of Swedish pop star Andreas Lundstedt in 2008.

The two latter chapters of this dissertation reflect the shift in the way homosexuality and gay identity have been discussed in a broader sense since the late 1980s, and thus employs a more theoretical framework in order to drive its discussion. Chapter III works with the idea of the cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis, which was undertaken by dominant gay rights discourses in order to promote a bourgeois image of male homosexuality. This chapter looks at two subgenres of Swedish literature: the young adult novels *Duktig pojke* (1977) by Inger Edelfeldt and *Spelar roll* (1993) by Hans Olsson; the gay chick lit novels *Jaktsäsongen* (2006) and *Bekantas bekanta* (2007). The analysis focuses on the symptoms experienced by gay culture and identity as a result of the phenomenon of cultural amnesia. Chapter IV employs trauma theory to examine Jonas Gardell's trilogy *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* (2012-13) and focuses on the idea of the double trauma of the AIDS crisis. This chapter argues that Gardell's trilogy demanded a cultural *recollection* of the AIDS crisis, and engages scholar Sara Edenheim's critique of the media discourse that ensued.

This dissertation considers the broader effects of the overall increase in acceptability and visibility of homosexuality, and concludes that literary representations of male homosexuality demonstrate a distinct departure from earlier representations that were informed by medical discourses and discourses of disease; the analysis presented in this study demonstrates how representations of male homosexuality published after the AIDS crisis unanimously support gay identity as a valid expression of an authentic self. The study also concludes that Jonas Gardell's trilogy marks a crucial shift in the role of representations of homosexuality in literature, as the trilogy is the first example of literary discourses of homosexuality informing dominant discourses on cultural memory and sexual identity.

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DEDICATION

For my parents, without whom this would have never been possible.

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INTRODUCTION

Dissertation Focus: Homosexuality in Swedish Literature

The project of gay rights in the twentieth century is one that has resulted in remarkably swift and widespread legislative, political, and social change in the Western world. Sweden is often touted as one of the pioneers of this progressive sociopolitical movement: homosexuality was decriminalized in 1944, Sweden's (RFSL) *Riksförbundet för homosexuellas, bisexuellas, transpersoners och queeras rättigheter*¹ [Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights] was established in 1950, registered partnership was granted to same-sex couples in 1995, and same-sex marriage was sanctioned by *Svenska kyrkan* [the Church of Sweden] in 2009. The history of homosexuality in Sweden often contradicts this progressive myth, however, with intensely homophobic periods occurring in the 1950s and the drastic public health measures taken in the 1980s with the spread of the AIDS epidemic. Ideas about male homosexuality had circulated in broader medical and state discourses in Sweden since the late nineteenth century, but the new visibility of homosexuality in the late 1960s and 1970s began to challenge the dominant discourse on homosexuality. This dissertation examines representations of male homosexuality in Swedish literature from 1968-2013 that have driven the discourse forward, a progression that also complicates Sweden's status as an LGBTQ² pioneer. In literature testimonies on the individual level often contradict the legal, political, social official history of homosexuality.

¹ This organization was formerly known as *Riksförbundet för sexuellt likaberättigande* and is one of the oldest gay rights organizations in the world.

² Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer. HBT (Homo Bi Trans) is commonly used in Swedish.

The discourse on male homosexuality since the AIDS crisis has been driven forward by what I call cultural amnesia. My study defines cultural amnesia as the process through which certain histories, memories, and experiences have been purposefully suppressed in order to drive the project of gay rights forward. This dissertation locates the cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and examines its effects in both the literal and figurative senses in Swedish literature: literally in the fact that any mention of AIDS or its effects are completely absent from the literary discourse of the 1990s through the 2010s; figuratively it had broader ramifications of cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis, and the profound effects that it has produced both in literary and broader cultural discourses on male homosexuality. In this dissertation I examine novels that have propelled the discourse of gay rights in Sweden. The phenomenon of cultural amnesia, at times active and at others osmotic, has been undertaken by a number of legislative and media manifestations, from decriminalization to infectious disease legislation, which included literary, filmic, and popular cultural representations.

My study analyzes representations of male homosexuality in Swedish literature that have largely been left out of the broader discourse on homosexuality. The dominant histories of homosexuality in Sweden have tended towards the political, criminal, and sociological; this dissertation stresses the inclusion of the literary discourse into broader discourses on male homosexuality. In addition, my study of the dissonance between the sociopolitical and the literary discourses on homosexuality demonstrates the necessity of *both* discourses in producing deeper and more nuanced understandings on the history of homosexuality in Sweden.

This dissertation employs literary analysis to focus in particular on the ways in which these novels have driven the discourse forward, but it also employs a cultural studies approach to take into account the ways in which key sociopolitical moments have functioned within this

narrative. It offers analyses of key sociopolitical moments in the history of homosexuality as a point of departure, beginning with author Bengt Martin's coming out on Swedish television in 1968, and continues to examine the ways in which literary representations have driven forward the discourse on homosexuality. My analyses examine the ways in which male homosexuality is depicted, how they inform and circulate ideas about male homosexuality, and how these literary representations contribute to the broader discourse on homosexuality. Close readings and analysis of key sociopolitical moments illuminate the models and representations of male homosexuality that have been forgotten through cultural amnesia.

My study also examines the public relations project undertaken by the gay rights movement, which gained particular momentum with the rise of the visibility of homosexuality, and argues that amnesia of the AIDS crisis has been a necessary facet of this political project. The new visibility of homosexuality in Sweden as inspired by the Stonewall Riots that erupted in New York City's West Village in 1969. Since then, the gay rights movement has evolved through many phases, which has resulted in the general bourgeois acceptance of homosexuality in Sweden. However the price of political legitimacy has been the sanitation and assimilation of queer people, a desexualization and sanitation that gained particular traction during the most crucial period of the AIDS epidemic and the decades that followed. Within the span of less than a century, the gay rights movement brought about remarkable political and social change in Swedish society. Up until 1944, homosexuality was a criminal act punished by prison and hard labor. However today, same-sex marriage is sanctioned even by the Church of Sweden. I will examine how this discourse has been reflected in literature, as well as how significant sociopolitical moments informed and were affected by them.

This project is also driven by my own personal experience. Growing up in New York in the 1980s and 1990s, homosexuality was inextricably linked to immorality and sin within my Irish Catholic community. More significantly, HIV/AIDS was synonymous with homosexuality. It was the manifestation of sin and the decay of the American family, and death by AIDS was the justified punishment. These sentiments were echoed by fundamentalist Christian voices like Anita Bryant and Jesse Helms, and condoned by the Reagan administration's stubborn silence on the disease and the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) foot-dragging regarding approvals of potentially life-saving HIV medications. However as AIDS soon spread and came to be understood by the medical community as a disease not specific to prostitutes, junkies, and male homosexuals, the homophobic rhetoric somewhat subsided. Soon likeable and attractive celebrities gradually began coming out as gay. Male homosexuality in particular became palatable and unthreatening to American audiences, and staples like the 'gay best friend' became commonplace in film and television. Legislative milestones in the American gay rights movement like the repealing of "Don't ask, don't tell" (DADT) and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) led to even greater visibility of non-heterosexual Americans, and as of October 2014 same-sex marriage is legal in the majority of US states. Within less than two decades, homosexuals went from societal relegation as diseased sodomites to now experiencing the heteronormative cultural pressures to marry and have children. This swift cultural and political shift has led to the questions behind the development of the political and cultural discourse on homosexuality.

Not all LGBTQ people have supported this mainstreaming of gay and lesbian politics, citing the inequalities and fallacies that it perpetuates as inherently problematic. Queer theorist Judith Butler has described her original aim with foundational book *Gender Trouble* (1990):

In 1989 I was most concerned to criticize a pervasive heterosexual assumption in feminist literary theory. I sought to counter those views that made presumptions about the limits and propriety of gender and restricted the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity. It was and remains my view that any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of gender in the presuppositions of its own practice sets up the exclusionary gender norms within feminism, often with homophobic consequences. It seemed to me, and continues to seem, that feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion.” (vii-viii).

Butler’s original object of critique of second-wave feminism’s essentializing tendency and rhetoric, which yielded not only homophobic consequences, but racist and classist ones as well, can be easily applied to the gay rights movement. The dangers of essentializing ‘woman’ are just as salient as the essentializing of ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian,’ an idea decried by queer theorists and activists, as well as organizations like *Against Equality*³, which locate mainstream gay and lesbian politics within broader neoliberal institutions. This queer idea of resisting the essentializing of gay and lesbian identities is a central idea in this dissertation. Through examination and emphasis on the sociopolitical development of homosexuality and its various periods, I intend to do just that: underscore its function as a sociopolitical discourse rather than a linear political progression whose narrative can only move *forward* toward the narrow ideas of essential identity. It is this crucial and central tension within gay rights discourses that this project examines, unpacks, and seeks to delineate a historical narrative outside of the dominant gay cultural memory.

³ *Against Equality*’s website proclaims that “we are committed to dislodging the centrality of equality rhetoric and challenging the demand for inclusion in the institution of marriage, the US military, and the prison industrial complex via hate crimes legislation” (*Against Equality*).

The History of Homosexuality in Sweden

The Nordic countries, and Sweden in particular, often have been touted as pioneers of gay rights. Today, Sweden is also known around the world as one of the top gay-friendly tourist destinations (Spartacus). However, the historical circumstances and the realities that have allowed sexual equality legislation to be implemented reveal a more complex causal relationship than Swedish culture's emphasis on human rights or an increasingly secularized Swedish welfare state. There are a number of social milestones and artistic expressions that have contributed to the development of the discourse of homosexuality in Sweden. LGBTQ culture in Sweden today is dominated by support of visibility and state-sanctioned relationships via normative institutions like marriage, but this has not always been the case historically.

The term 'homosexuality' was coined in 1868 by the Austrian Karl-Maria Kertbeny and was quickly picked up by the medical community in the rest of Europe. Around the turn of the twentieth century, homosexuality became increasingly medicalized in Sweden as well as the rest of the Western world. Well known Swedish scientist and physician Seved Ribbing's book *Om den sexuella hygien och dess etiska konsekvenser* [On Sexual Hygiene and Its Ethical Consequences] (1888) is one of the first mentions of homosexuality that appeared in Swedish (Norrhem, 100). Dr. Anton Nyström also wrote two works that addressed the topic, *Könslivet och dess lagar* [The Laws of Sexuality] (1904) and *Om homosexualiteten inför vetenskapen och lagen* [On Homosexuality In Science and the Law] (1919) (101). These works still engage homosexuality in the medical context, but Nyström's work from 1919 is often considered a response to the questions his close friend, Pontus Wikner, grappled with in his diaries and writings from the 1860s and 1870s (102). Wikner, an Uppsala University philosophy professor, is considered the first public figure known to be homosexual in Sweden. His *Psykologiska*

självbekännelser [Psychological Confessions], written in the late 1860s and 1870s and released posthumously in 1971 per Wikner's will, forbade its publication until after his wife and children had died. Wikner's diaries and confessions are widely regarded not only as the first example of a closeted homosexual's writing in Sweden; the spiritual and personal agony over his sexuality is considered a window into the way in which homosexuality was perceived during this time before it even had a name.

Thus this period is widely understood as the time during which the medical discourse on homosexuality, located within sexual hygiene and the burgeoning discipline of psychoanalysis, informed the greater cultural discourse which allowed for the popularization of this term. However a number of other factors contributed to the visibility of homosexuality in Scandinavia. One example of this is the widely publicized sentencing of Oscar Wilde, the Irish author who received two years' hard labor for his sexual relationship with a younger nobleman. Although this occurred in London, Wilde's international fame as an author and personality put a face to this newly minted term, 'homosexual'. Although studies have been conducted on homosexuality before the beginning of the twentieth century, homosexuality was not taken up as a *social* problem in Sweden until the 1930s. Before then it was a largely criminal concern.⁴

Another key factor that influenced the development of the social discourse on homosexuality is the rapid industrialization of Sweden at the turn of the twentieth century. More Swedes began migrating to larger urban areas, and large cities like Stockholm and Gothenburg grew. Larger cities like Paris, London, and Berlin had existed for centuries, but the populated urban metropolis was a new phenomenon in Scandinavia during this time. Rural areas afforded a certain anonymity to homosexuals, and the rise of Scandinavian cities allowed homosexuals to

⁴ See Rydström and Mustola for an in-depth criminological history of homosexuality in the Nordic region.

come into contact with other homosexuals. There is only one known literary representation of this period in Sweden, Martin Koch's *Guds vackra värld* [God's Beautiful World] (1917), based on the diary of a thief named Knut Stålhand, describes the underground male homosexual networks in Stockholm involved in bribery, theft, and prostitution. Although the term 'homosexual' was in use during this time, Stålhand used the terms "kvinnohatare"⁵ [woman-hater] and "bögis" [faggot] to describe male homosexuals (104).

The establishment of the Swedish *folkhem*⁶ [the people's home] in the 1930s saw, already at this early time, a debate about homosexuality, which centered on whether to punish homosexuals or to treat them for mental illness. The decriminalization of homosexuality in 1944 meant that homosexuality was no longer a crime, but this in turn stressed the concept that homosexuality was still a disease that ought to be treated, and that homosexuals were to be pitied rather than punished. The literary representations during this time offer no depictions of male homosexuality, except for Agnes von Krusenstjerna's series of seven novels *Fröknarna von Pahlen* [The Misses von Pahlen] (1930-35). The series contains a number of male homosexual characters, most notably the tragic Count Gusten Värnamo af Sauss, who takes on a more central role in the fourth novel in the series, *Porten vid Johannes* [The Doorway at Johannes⁷] (1933), along with several other homosexual male characters. The novel begins with a quote from August Strindberg's *Black Banners* (1907) that warns the reader to stay away from "de där herrarna" [those gentleman] that exist in "alla samhällslager" [all social strata] (509). Margareta Suber's *Charlie* (1932) offer accounts of the lesbian experience during this period. As mentioned earlier,

⁵ Strindberg also introduced this term in his writings, along with other terminology. See Roy, 12.

⁶ This political concept was central in the Social Democrats' creation of the Swedish welfare state. This concept envisioned the welfare state as an institution whose primary goal was to take care of its citizens but also mandated active citizen participation in contributing to this collective good.

⁷ The title refers to Saint Johannes church in Stockholm.

Krusenstjerna's series describes a bourgeois community of mostly women that live on the periphery of society, a luxury afforded by their upper class status. *Charlie*, regarded as the first lesbian novel written in Swedish, is often compared to Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). Much like Hall's novel, the main character, Charlie, suffers from feelings of desperation and loneliness, and she is plagued by the feeling that something is 'wrong' with her.

While the debate over homosexuality continued, vitalism and sexual hygiene were also intensely debated and contested in the politics of the new Swedish *folkhem*. The notion of healthy and productive Swedish citizens was proposed by Alva and Gunnar Myrdal in *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* [*Nation and Family*] (1934). Images of the homosexual body also became visible in the work of vitalist artists like Eugene Jansson, whose later paintings depicted nude sunbathing sailors and muscular young men engaging in physical activities like swimming and weightlifting. The homosocial (and arguably homosexual) aspects of Jansson's works were often overlooked and embraced by the vitalist community, yet art historian Patrik Steorn notes in *Nakna män: Maskulinitet och kreativitet i svensk bildkultur 1900-1915* [*Nude Men: Masculinity and Creativity in Swedish Visual Culture 1900-1915*] (2006) that although the white heterosexual male body became coded as the universal individual, images of the homosexual male body also began to circulate within this discourse (67). Jansson's later work depicted nude men bathing in *Flottans Badhus* [*The Navy Public Bath*] or engaged in healthy vitalist activities like sunbathing and weightlifting. Nils Hallbeck's *Grabb på glid* [*Boy Gone Astray*] (1949) is the only novel from this period that depicts male homosexuality⁹. This novel locates homosexuality in a world of delinquency and crime, although it does take up the issue of the homosexual age of consent (124; 135). Hallbeck was also an influential figure in the

⁹ Hallbeck also published a number of pornographic works under the name Jan Hogan.

establishment of RFSL. Ronnie Busk's *Änglaskuggor* [Shadows of Angels] (1969) was published years later but also depicts this pre-World War II seedy underbelly of juvenile delinquency, crime and prostitution in Stockholm. While Pedro is disgusted by homosexuality in *Grabb på glid*, Busk's depictions of homosexual sex and romance in *Änglaskuggor* reflect the free love values celebrated during the Sexual Revolution.

The few years after the Second World War in Sweden were characterized by discourses of vitalism and industrialization, but the plight of homosexuals would soon worsen because of two notable scandals, the Haijby Affair and the Kejne Affair¹⁰. These two scandals sparked not only an increased awareness and visibility of homosexuality in Sweden, but also intensified the homophobia toward male homosexuals in the 1950s. Karl-Erik Kejne was a pastor who very publicly accused gay men of making threats and attempts to kill him after he tried to put a stop to gay prostitution in Stockholm. A very public witch-hunt ensued, fueled by lengthy diatribes by famous author Vilhelm Moberg, in which Kejne accused various political figures of corruption. This widespread critique in the press of corruption and abuses of power during the 1950s was referred to as *rättsrötan* [the rot of justice]. This scandal increased awareness of homosexuality in Sweden, but also created an association between homosexuality, prostitution, and criminality. And although many came to his defense, Kejne was never able to clear his name.

The Kejne Affair and the Haijby Affair were fueled by a conservative witch-hunt after communists and homosexuals in the US led by Senator Joseph McCarthy and known as McCarthyism. Many American homosexuals were sought out, fired, and in some cases tried for treason. The Haijby Affair is significant in that it not only became public during this time but that it also involved the very conservative and traditional Swedish monarchy. A known criminal,

¹⁰ For further reading on this topic see Korn (2013).

Kurt Haijby alleged that he had had a sexual relationship with King Gustav V while he was in his employment. Whether or not his allegations are true is not known, but the scandal erupted when it came to light that the royal court had paid Haijby off for his silence. Haijby was sent first to Nazi Germany and then to America, but eventually returned and published a roman à clef, *Patrik Kajson går igen* [Patrik Kajson Returns] (1947). This novel describes the period of time when Haijby was committed to a mental institution for homosexuality in Sweden, as well as the criminal charges he faced for homosexual contact with young boys. Much of the novel is formatted as Kajson's recounting of events for his doctors in the insane asylum, including the incident in which the king kissed Kajson, and he was unable to say no (65-8). The royal court purchased the entire first edition and destroyed it, but it was printed again in 1952 and 1979.

Bengt Martin's trilogy, *Romaner om Joakim, ung och homosexuell i Stockholm* [Novels About Joakim: Young and Homosexual in Stockholm] (1968-70), is the only Swedish literary representation of the experience of male homosexuality during this time. Martin's trilogy follows Joakim from adolescence to adulthood, and the alcoholism, depression, self-loathing and even suicide that characterize his experience of this decade in Sweden. Although Sweden's largest gay rights organization, RFSL, was founded in 1950, it would be almost a decade until this organization gained greater visibility and political viability and legitimacy. This period, characterized by witch-hunts and public scandals, is one that produced an intense culture of homophobia in Sweden that would last until the Sexual Revolution in the 1970s. Author Knut Lagrup's autobiographical *Avvikelser* (1965) [Aberrations] depicts the difficulty of mental illness, depression, and the reality for a homosexual in Sweden in the intensely homophobic 1950s. I discuss this novel further in Chapter I.

The next social milestone that profoundly influenced the LGBTQ culture in Sweden actually came from the US. The Sexual Revolution, Second Wave feminism, the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement fostered a culture of radicalism among many young Americans. A similar culture of protest had erupted across France at universities and factories during 1968. In particular, the Stonewall Riots that occurred in 1969 at a bar in New York City is regarded as the pivotal moment in the history of gay rights in the Western World. Not only did Stonewall signal that homosexual people were beginning to stand up and be noticed, but it also is largely regarded as the turning point in gay identity politics, after which ‘gay’ began to be conceived of as an *identity*: no longer a reference to what one *does*, but rather something that one *is*. Author Bengt Martin also came out officially with his *sambo* [domestic partner] on Swedish television in 1968, a year before Stonewall, giving a new face to homosexuality in Sweden. The one literary representation of male homosexuality from this period is the first gay young adult novel in Swedish, Inger Edelfeldt’s *Duktig pojke* [Good Boy] (1977), which I examine in Chapter III.

Historian Jens Rydström notes in *Odd Couples* (2011) that the Stonewall Riots reinvigorated Sweden’s gay rights activists, who had become stagnant in the early 1960s (42). In this more radical sexual culture that developed during the Sexual Revolution, aided by the Pill and the Swedish institution of *sambo*, awareness of sexual equality was raised. In this new post-Stonewall era, gay Swedes not only stood up and participated in this discourse of sexual equality, but they did so while embracing a gay identity. For many years in Sweden, the discourse on homosexuality was largely defined by male homosexuality as I have outlined above. Public sex scandals and prostitution all centered around male homosexuality, while the female homosexual experience remained largely silent and invisible. Many theorists have noted that due to women’s place in the domestic sphere, their sexuality was doubly silenced. However during the Sexual

Revolution and the post-Stonewall discourse on gay identity, lesbians began to become more visible in the broader discourse on homosexuality. This phenomenon of silence and invisibility is depicted in the 1996 Swedish documentary *Väninnor: berättelser från garderoben* [Girlfriends: Tales from the Closet] directed by Nina Bergström and Cecilia Neant-Falk.

The more liberal perspective on sexual equality and a culture of gay positivity thus influenced medical discourses, and in 1979 *Socialstyrelsen* [The National Board of Health and Welfare] removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses. This was the result of an occupation of the National Board of Health and Welfare's staircase by a number of homosexual activists, including author Jonas Gardell. Although this is an important moment in resisting the idea that homosexuals are 'ill' or 'damaged' in some way, this relief would not last very long. Just three years after this monumental move by the National Board of Health and Welfare, the first AIDS case was reported in 1982 at Roslagstull Hospital in Stockholm. The arrival of AIDS to Sweden had profound effects on its newly established gay communities, specifically male homosexuals as was the case in many large Western cities like London, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York. AIDS thus ushered in a new era of homophobia and cultural panic.

Sweden responded to the AIDS crisis first as a public health concern and instituted two significant pieces of legislation during this time. The first is *Bastuklubbslagen* in 1987 [The Bathhouse Law], which forcibly closed all bathhouses that structurally facilitated sexual contact. This was not unique and was also undertaken by public health organizations in New York and San Francisco. Such legislation was hotly contested and controversial even within gay communities. The Bathhouse Law is significant in that it not only mandated that bathhouses are spaces in which gay men engage in sexual encounters, but they also popularized the idea that gay

male sexuality was dangerous and a threat to the general public. The second piece of legislation from that same year is inclusion of HIV under *Smittskyddslagen* [The Infectious Diseases Law], which again produces the idea of male homosexuals as an imminent threat to public health and safety. A significant cultural moment during this time was the public admission of internationally known Swedish fashion designer Sighsten Herrgård, that he was HIV-positive on Swedish television in 1987. Herrgård dedicated the next two years of his life to spreading awareness about AIDS in Sweden until his death in 1989. Herrgård's admission was not only important in that he gave a face to AIDS in Sweden, but it also emphasized that AIDS was a domestic problem rather than a foreign phenomenon. The only representation of male homosexuality and AIDS from this period in Swedish literature is Ola Klingberg's *Onans bok* [The Book of Onan] (1999), which I examine in Chapter II.

This intense and crucial moment in Swedish history is depicted in Jonas Gardell's 2012-13 trilogy *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* [Don't Ever Dry Tears Without Gloves] which chronicles the time when AIDS came to Sweden and its effects on a group of gay men in Stockholm. It also appeared in a three-part filmatization on *Sveriges Television* with record viewership. This trilogy is significant in that it not only broke the silence today about this largely forgotten period in Swedish history, but it also tenderly and realistically depicts the avenues and spaces through which gay men on the periphery of society were able to forge and maintain relationships. Gardell's novel demonstrates the ways in which public sexuality and romantic connections were essential to community building and solidarity during this time. This trilogy will be discussed and analyzed further in Chapter IV.

In *Odd Couples* Jens Rydström notes that the AIDS crisis had two important effects on gay rights movements in Sweden. Firstly, it gave a sense of urgency to the project of gay rights,

as homosexual men were dying in great numbers, and secondly, it gave a new legitimacy to gay rights organizations (67). This push to improve the life conditions of homosexuals ushered in a series of legislations that urged the assimilation of homosexuals into heteronormative institutions, particularly same-sex partnership in 1995. Soon more positive and less threatening representations of homosexuality began to appear in Sweden. Elisabeth Ohlsson Wallin's photo exhibition *Ecce Homo* (1998) stirred up a great deal of controversy, but also inspired a discourse around homosexuality and the Swedish church. This photo exhibition includes a number of well-known biblical scenes staged with homosexual characters, including a man dying from AIDS. It was even invited to be shown in the Uppsala Cathedral by Archbishop K.G. Hammar of the Church of Sweden in 1998.

The young adult genre also began to offer representations of homosexuality as positive and viable, operating under the Stonewall-produced notion of a gay identity. The Swedish-Norwegian film *När alla vet*¹¹ [When Everyone Knows] (1995) tells the story of a teenager who has a crush on his best friend. Although the feelings are not requited, the movie presents a sense that gay is 'ok' and that 'everything is going to be all right'. Lukas Moodysson's *Fucking Åmål* [Show Me Love] (1998) is one of Sweden's highest-grossing films to date in which teenage lesbians explore what it means to 'come out' in a rural setting in Sweden.

In 2009 same-sex marriage became legal in the Church of Sweden, for some the ultimate goal of the gay rights movement's ambitions. This new extension of equal marriage to all has largely been seen as an overall positive thing. However, the film *Patrik 1,5* [Patrik, Age 1.5] (2008) offers a critique of the homonormative and assimilationist tendencies of this gay marriage discourse. The film takes place in a picturesque Swedish suburb modeled in the cookie-cutter

¹¹ The Norwegian version of the film was released under the name *Sebastian*. The film was based on the Norwegian young adult novel *Svart kajal* [Black Eyeliner] (1988) by Per Knutsen.

style that parodies 1950s suburban imagery and caricatures of gender roles. The film ultimately stresses the family unit as the most important value, however, regardless of how the family appears in terms of gender or sexuality. In addition, this assimilationist tendency of dominant gay rights discourses in Sweden in the 2000s has sparked a huge trend of young adult novels in Swedish that explore, foster, and support this notion of gay identity, along with the idea of ‘coming out’ as a positive thing. These include *En av dem* [One of Them] by Ingrid Sandhagen (2000), *Bögslungan* [Manpurse] by Per Alexandersson (2008), *Ung, bög och jävligt kär* [Young, Gay and Hopelessly in Love] by Johannes Sandreyo (2010), *Regn och åska* [Rain and Thunder] by Håkan Lindquist (2011), and *Böjvävel* [Faggot] by Emma Björck and Marcus Tallberg (2011) and Kristofer Folkhammar’s *Isak och Billy* [Isak and Billy] (2011).

The final moment to consider is rather recent. On February 5, 2012, Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden presented Jonas Gardell with the “Årets homo” [Homo of the Year] prize by *QX* magazine to an overwhelmingly positive response. This moment will likely be viewed as historic in the near future, as the royal family has been notably silent on the issues of homosexuality. In addition, Crown Princess Victoria is honoring Gardell’s literary recollection of a very dark period in Swedish LGBT cultural history. While Crown Princess Victoria’s presence at *QX*’s Gaygala signals that gay culture is somewhat ‘normal’ nowadays, it also demonstrates a vastly diverse development over the past century.

Previous Research

Anthologies

Although not explicitly queer in language or terminology, *Böggjävlar* [Faggots] (2007) echoes the dissent among gay men that the essentializing tendency of mainstream gay and lesbian politics is both oppressive and limiting. This anthology is a collection of essays that reflects on contemporary Swedish gay culture. Stefan Ingvarsson notes in the introduction to this anthology that its authors are unanimous in that contemporary gay culture in Sweden is “självbegränsande, infantil och enkelspårig” [self-limiting, infantile and one-track minded], and that with these essays they hope to connect with “en fin gammal tradition av förbannade puggor” [a fine old tradition of flaming faggots] (Björck, 8). Ingvarsson also stresses that the media images of gay men today are limited to only the frivolous: the music genre of schlager, shopping, fancy galas, etc. This critique has been echoed by a number of queer discourses¹² resisting the male- and economic-dominated homonormative dynamics of dominant gay rights movement, including Gay Shame, a protest established in Brooklyn in the late 1990s that gained momentum also in Sweden. Gay Shame was organized in response to the over-commercialization of Stockholm Gay Pride from 2001 through 2004. Thusly, although queer theory as an academic framework is not employed in *Böggjävlar*, I understand it to be a queer text in the sense that it resists the status quo of homonormativity furnished by mainstream gay and lesbian politics.

Roger Wilson’s chapter from *Böggjävlar* “Vem är rädd för Bengt Martin?” [Who’s Afraid of Bengt Martin?] first inspired me to look at gay literature in Sweden with a queer approach. Wilson’s is the only voice in Sweden that points to this phenomenon of cultural amnesia as it relates to gay literature. He also does not explicitly speak from a space of queer or use the term

¹² See also Halperin and Valerie Traub (2009); Conrad and Nair (2010).

cultural amnesia, but he does briefly describe this phenomenon that claimed Martin and his work as its first victim. What Wilson does not describe is how this process was *done*; my analysis in the dissertation offers a nuanced genealogy of the waves of cultural amnesia that have acted upon various works of literature since Martin's trilogy about Joakim. Wilson uses this image of 'the big bad wolf' to describe how Martin was demonized and subsequently forgotten; the gay rights discourse that developed after his initial coming out as the movement gained traction became more self-conscious of its social and political role and Martin's writing and persona were at odds with this new image. My dissertation however, does not see this the idea of a nefarious character or force as invisible; instead my project will illuminate representations of homosexuality that have been forgotten.

Martin's personality, along with his honesty and openness about his homosexuality, became his ultimate downfall. Soon the gay rights movement quickly embraced a more likeable and marketable ambassador: author Jonas Gardell. Whereas Martin could be cantankerous, asocial and bitter, with his thick-frame glasses, Gardell was young, handsome, and charming. Wilson's chapter is styled as an apologetic letter addressed to Martin himself, and to the cultural amnesia that surrounds his work, penning this letter as an apology from the generation that has forgotten him (31). The title refers to the air of distaste and dismissal with which Martin's work was soon met, a 'big, bad wolf' in the gay imagination, as Wilson recalls that he was definitely warned about Martin but can't really quite recall why. For Wilson, Martin was the personification of the 'dirty old man' that his mother would have warned him about (31). Although Gardell was just as openly gay as Martin, Wilson remembers that he could get away with borrowing Gardell's books from the library under the guise of an interest in literature (32.) Wilson's use of the 'big bad wolf' metaphor of course reiterates the idea that the cultural

amnesia done to Martin's work was not a unilateral or singular political decision, but rather a phenomenon that occurred within a broader discourse, one that also managed to obscure its source.

Dominant gay rights discourses began seek more hip and palatable role models like Gardell, which in turn forced 'dirty old men' like Martin to fall by the wayside. In addition, the death of so many gay men from AIDS created a literal generation gap as nearly an entire generation of gay men had died. The political action of the 1990s further distanced itself from the horrors of the AIDS crisis, and instead focused on assimilation. The Swedish gay rights movement embarked on its most successful political offensive to date, which included pro-HBT legislation, openly gay politicians, and the liberalization of the church's views on homosexuality (33). This move toward openness and acceptance has had its price, and through the push to show that gay people are 'just like everyone else,' the unfortunate result is the demanding norms of this newly minted image of homosexuality. This project of assimilation and bourgeois political and social acceptance has come at the cost of those that do not fit the mainstream homonormative template. I examine this phenomenon in greater depth in the Chapter III of this dissertation.

The political offensive that was launched post-AIDS crisis in Sweden by gay rights activists has brought about many positive changes. One specificity to this gay rights movement is the *lack of history* that exists in gay cultural memory. Contemporary gay rights discourses look to watershed moments like the Stonewall riots or the passing of gay marriage to author a history, while at the same time martyring the history of AIDS or the important role that trans experiences have played in the political history of gay rights. Wilson describes how the youngest generation of gay men constructs much of its self-image through the idea that they are "den mest frigjorda,

mest accepterade, mest jämställda någonsin” [“the most liberated, most accepted, most equal ever”], which is true in many ways on paper, yet simultaneously under that smugness lurks a constant disdain for the past (34). Since the narrative of gay history has been selective and has forgotten the period of the AIDS crisis, contemporary gay politics have thus been able to exclude what they consider the deviant sexualities of pre-Stonewall as detrimental to their present project. The gap in the narrative seems to have allowed the political rhetoric to understand the closeted homosexual of the pre-Stonewall era as a completely separate phenomenon rather than an earlier historical iteration.

Some other anthologies have been compiled on homosexuality in Sweden, and have tended to focus on the historical, including *Scandinavian Homosexualities: Essays on Gay and Lesbian Studies* (1998) edited by Jan Löfström, as well as *Undantagsmänniskor: en svensk HBT-historia* (2008) [Exceptional People: A Swedish LGBT History], edited by Svante Norrhem, Jens Rydström and Hanna Winkvist.

Historical and sociological work on homosexuality have been the norm in the past, but the field of queer theory came to Sweden in the early 2000s and was quickly embraced by Swedish scholars. Don Kulick’s anthology *Queersverige* [Queer Sweden] (2005) introduced the term in Sweden, along with Fanny Ambjörnsson who wrote *Vad är queer?* [What is Queer?] (2006). As I have mentioned earlier, Stefan Ingvarsson’s *Böggjävlar* (2007) also echoed general queer sentiments and political approaches, but did not employ the term ‘queer’.

Academic Approaches to Homosexuality

In the past, the academic approach to homosexuality has differed considerably in Sweden and the US. Beginning in the late 1980s in the US, Gay and Lesbian studies began to be institutionalized

and soon became the academic space that principally took up issues of sexuality and gender. Since the early 1990s, queer theory has been the dominant academic framework through which questions of gender, sexuality, intersectionality and non-heterosexual identity have been examined and contested. In Sweden this has not been the case; gender studies exists as a discipline in Sweden and shares a much closer history with women's studies than it does with the institutionalized gay and lesbian Studies of American universities. Thus most of the academic work on homosexuality in Sweden has been spread throughout various disciplines including history, sociology, ethnography, and comparative literature.

Homosexuality in Literature

This dissertation is in fact the first in-depth study of male homosexuality in Swedish literature despite the relative preponderance of representations of male homosexuality since around the turn of the twentieth century. Daniel Berglund's master's thesis *Vad spelar sexualiteten för roll?* [What Role Does Sexuality Play¹³?] (2010) offers a queer analysis of the young adult novel *Spelar roll* [Playing A Role] (1993) by Hans Olsson, which I examine in Chapter III. Sebastian Nilsson Lindberg's master's thesis from 2011 *Att skriva, skriva om och skriva om sig själv: En komparativ undersökning av Inger Edelfeldts och Bengt Martins omarbetade berättelser om homosexualitet* [To Write, To Rewrite and Write About Yourself: A Comparative Study of Inger Edelfeldt's and Bengt Martin's Revised Stories About Homosexuality] is the only academic study completed in Sweden that examines these two authors' literature in depth.

Homosexuality in August Strindberg's works has also been examined by a number of academics. Göran Söderström, a respected Strindberg scholar and art historian, has written

¹³ This title is a play on words in Swedish. The phrase "spelar roll" can literally mean "to play a roll," but also "to matter" as in "it doesn't matter" ("det spelar ingen roll").

extensively on Strindberg and his work, discussing Strindberg's depiction of the homosexual Swedish King Gustav III in "Karaktären Gustav III" [The Character Gustav III] (1989), "Strindberg och homosexualiteten: En biografisk studie" [Strindberg and Homosexuality: A Biographical Study] (2002). Matthew Roy's 2001 dissertation *August Strindberg's Perversions: On the Science, Sin and Scandal of Homosexuality in August Strindberg's Works* responds to the analytical neglect of homosexuality in research on Strindberg and claims that Strindberg was actually successful in breaking the silence on the taboo topic of homosexuality in Sweden (245). Ann Sofi Lönngrén's 2008 dissertation *Att röra en värld: en queerteoretisk analys av erotiska trianglar i sex verk av August Strindberg* [Touching the World: A Queer Analysis of Erotic Triangles in Six Works by August Strindberg] examines multiple love triangles that appear in Strindberg's work and seeks to offer the new queer lens of analysis to such canonical literary works.

Jan Magnusson's chapter "Från tragiskt öde till fritt vald livsstil: Bögar och lesbiska i det sena nittonhundratalets svenska litteratur" ["From Tragic Fate to Freely Chosen Lifestyle: Gays and Lesbians in Late Twentieth Century Swedish Literature"], which appeared in *Homo i folkhemmet: Homo- och bisexuella i Sverige 1950-2000* [Homo in the People's Home: Gay and Bisexual Sweden 1950-2000] (2000), edited by Martin Andreasson, examines the evolution of homosexuality in Swedish literature in a broad sense, arguing that the novels in his study have seen a broad shift from "ett heteronormativt tvång att beskriva hur och varför den homosexuella inte inordnar sig i majoritetens sexualliv till att strunta i heteronormativitetens krav och istället gestalta en upplevd, homosexuell erfarenhetsvärld" [a heteronormative imperative to describe how and why the homosexual does not conform to dominant sexual norms, to ignoring the demands of heteronormativity and instead creating a lived homosexual world of experience] (75).

Magnusson also identifies the liberalism of the 1960s and 1970s that questioned heterosexuality as a norm as a pivotal moment in this development. I examine this concept in Chapter I.

While I agree with Magnusson's assertion that this was a critical point when the discourse changed, I argue that it is the general openness towards sexuality that brings about this change, as homosexuality was not central to the debate of the Sexual Revolution in Sweden. However Magnusson does claim that the most profound shift was in the understanding of homosexuality, which shifted from a medical discourse to a sociological one (75). Through sociological depictions of homosexual people, Magnusson argues, the focus then shifts from "orsak till uttryck" ["cause to expression"], ultimately resulting in depictions of how the homosexual life is shaped in a heterosexist world (75). Magnusson's chapter offers a short survey of Swedish literary representations (as well as some works translated into Swedish), which he divides into nine typological groups. Magnusson's assertion that the broader shift from medical/scientific discourse to a sociological one is not novel or specific to literature or the Swedish context and is generally understood to characterize the broader historical Western development of homosexuality. In comparison then, Magnusson's article offers an overview, while my study responds to the historical development in greater depth.

Although no in-depth study on male homosexuality in Swedish literature has been done, Jenny Björklund's book *Lesbianism in Swedish Literature: An Ambiguous Affair* (2014) examines representations of female homosexuality in works from 1930 up until the present. Like my project, Björklund's book combines literary and cultural studies with textual analysis and sociological research. Björklund argues that twentieth century Swedish literature on lesbianism both confirms and challenges sociopolitical discourses, and ambiguously contains "negatively charged references to the medicalization of homosexuality" alongside positive representations of

lesbianism (174). Björklund argues that in Swedish literature at the turn of the twentieth century that lesbianism was represented as medicalized, but also connected to a feminist project and superior alternative to heterosexuality; however in the new millennium the literary discourse on lesbianism is tolerant and open yet still contains ideas of lesbianism as informed by medical discourses (170). Thus an ambiguity exists as the title of Björklund's book suggests. The idea of ambiguity and medicalization is also interesting in the context of male homosexuality. The medical community was at times an oppressive force in the first half of the twentieth century, but during the AIDS crisis it was a stable and politically valuable institution.

One of the central premises of Björklund's book is that lesbianism has been an invisible identity in Swedish literary history up until very recently, and therefore the literary representations of lesbianism are essential to illuminating this marginalized history. She also argues that a "progressive understanding of homosexuality" ought to be broadened to include a literary discourse, which my project urges (2). On the other hand, male homosexuality has been much more visible. Historian Jens Rydström notes that lesbians and gay men have two rather different historiographies: lesbians tend to find the richest sources of their history in feminist histories, while historians of gay men "invariably find themselves trapped in a male world of crime and violence" (13). These disparate histories are the result of not only the marginalization of women in society in general and the greater visibility of men, but also the difference in the ways that state and social control has regulated male and female sexuality. Thus the histories of male and female sexuality are rather different, despite certain pieces of legislation that see male and female sexuality as the same (for example, the age of consent and same-sex marriage).

The visibility of male homosexuality, and the ways in which the Swedish state has regulated it, has also authored a disparate sociopolitical history that is reflected in literary

discourses on male homosexuality. The AIDS crisis in Sweden further exacerbated the different political interests between gays and lesbians, and many lesbians felt alienated by the focus on male sexuality that the epidemic demanded (Rydström, 170). Björklund's project and mine complement each other well in that they narrate a more complete history of homosexuality in Swedish literature; at the same time the diverging literary and sociopolitical histories that they examine illuminate the complex ways in which gender and sex has functioned within the discourse on homosexuality.

Male homosexuality in literature is a remarkably understudied academic topic in general, and very little has been published on the topic, even in anglophone literature. Les Brookes' 2009 dissertation *Gay Male Fiction since Stonewall: Ideology, Conflict, and Aesthetics* is the only in-depth study of its kind. Brookes argues that AIDS has pressured gay fiction to adopt a "positive social role" (190), and that gay young adult novels in particular tend to demonstrate an "assimilative impulse" and positive social values (189). Thus, not only does the young adult novel have a particular cultural function, but in the case of gay young adult novels, the fostering of a positive gay identity is also a main purpose. Brookes' project contains some interesting analyses but in many ways is a broader survey that draws some preliminary conclusions.

Anglophone gay young adult novels have been catalogued and organized under different typologies in two anthologies: Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins' *The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/lesbian/queer Content, 1969-2004* (2006) and Wilfrid R. Koponen's *Embracing a Gay Identity: Gay Novels as Guides* (1993). Cart and Jenkins' work approaches and categorizes this body of literature based on Sims Bishop's three-part model that was originally created to study inclusion of African American characters in children's fiction. They locate these young adults novels in the three categories: homosexual visibility, gay

assimilation, and queer consciousness/community. While this sequence at times aligns chronologically, this is not always the case. As a general trend in gay young adult novels, the authors note a shift from novels identifying homosexuality as a problem to inclusion of peripheral or secondary characters that “just so happen to be gay” (165). In addition, the topic of HIV/AIDS, and characters living with the disease, has been overwhelmingly absent. Cart and Jenkins note in their study that only males inhabited these characters, and only one depicts a young adult as the person living with HIV/AIDS (85). This is also true in Swedish fiction, which I examine in depth in Chapter III.

In Swedish literature, *HBT Speglat i litteraturen* [Homo Bi Trans Reflected in Literature] (2009), Dodo Paprikas authored a survey of homosexuality similar to Brooks. Paprikas’ book serves more as a roadmap for representations of both male and female homosexuality in Swedish literature and offers brief synopses of the plot as well as some media reception.

Sociological Studies

Much of the sociological work on homosexuality in Sweden has been conducted by historian Jens Rydström, whose *Sinners and Citizens: Bestiality and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880-1950* (2003) focuses on the two intertwined social developments of modernization of both sexuality and the judicial system in Sweden. In this work Rydström argues that a paradigmatic change has characterized the discourse on homosexuality during this seventy-year period, from a rural penetrative one to an urban masturbatory paradigm (316). Rydström also notes that this paradigmatic shift is closely connected with the medicalization of homosexuality and the rise of the homosexual identity (316). Rydström’s *Criminally Queer: Homosexuality and Criminal Law in Scandinavia 1842–1999* (2007), which he edited with Kati Mustola, examines the penal and

criminological history of homosexuality in the Nordic region. Although there are a few specificities to the national developments, Rydström and Mustola note that the Scandinavian emphasis on egalitarianism and the general belief in the ability of science to solve social problems, along with early decriminalization, laid the groundwork for the progressive laws on LGBTQ issues in the Nordic states today. Rydström's *Odd Couples: A History of Gay Marriage in Scandinavia* (2011) examines the historical development of same-sex marriage in the Nordic countries. This study focuses on the internal discussions within gay rights organizations, the ways in which these were received by mainstream political discourses, and the overall transition of gay people from "childless couples to rainbow families" (167). One of the key arguments Rydström presents is that the AIDS crisis was crucial in the understanding of broader discourse on the gay rights movement, while the other hand strengthening the idea that gay men's sexuality was in need of regulation (167).

Göran Söderström's *Sympatiens hemlighetsfulla makt: Stockholms homosexuella 1860-1960* [The Mysterious Power of Attraction: Stockholm's Homosexuals 1860-1960] (1999) is one of the largest projects on the history of homosexuality in Sweden and contains chapters from Jens Rydström, Dodo Paprikas, Greger Eman and Fredrik Silverstolpe. This study tells the history of homosexual life in Stockholm through narratives of criminality, art, clothing, nightlife, politics and activism. Söderström notes that the history is certainly dominated by the male homosexual experience, and the wealth of textual and historical evidence is the result of society's need to intervene in what were considered amoral and criminal activities (12). RFSL was awarded state funding for this historical study on the life of homosexuals in Stockholm in particular, as the historical circumstances led many homosexual people to move from the rest of Sweden to Stockholm (9).

Research on AIDS and Homosexuality

Broader scholarship on AIDS and homosexuality in the Swedish context have historically been conducted in the disciplines of public health or medical studies. However, some ethnographic and sociological studies have been published.

Benny Henriksson's social work dissertation *Risk Factor Love: Homosexuality, Sexual Interaction and HIV-prevention* (1995) examines how men who have sex with men negotiate their sexuality in the AIDS epidemic. Andersson's main argument is that unsafe sex between men is not the result of ignorance or irrationality, but rather dependent upon situational aspects and individual relationships. Anna Ljung's dissertation *Bortom oskuldens tid* [Beyond the Time of Innocence] (2001) examines how the Swedish media's depictions of AIDS has authored new meanings surrounding morality and security, and discusses the repercussions for those living with HIV/AIDS in Sweden.

Finn Hellman's master's thesis *Bastuklubbslagen: en studie av dess tillämpning och dess konsekvenser* (2001) [The Bathhouse Law: A Study of Its Implementation and Its Consequences] examines the 1987 law¹⁴ which forcibly closed all bathhouses operating in Sweden that were designed for sexual encounters. Hellman argues that this law has been difficult to enforce, rarely proven, and in all cases but one used to target spaces where men have sex with men. Hellman also notes that the law's function regarding HIV prevention is also been quite difficult to measure.

Theater scholar Dirk Gindt has also published several articles on the subject of AIDS; however, all of them examine American plays originally written in English. Gindt's master's thesis *Försvarssystem som ger vika: En queerteoretisk studie av diskursen kring AIDS*,

¹⁴ This law was repealed in 2004.

kommunism och maskulinitet i Tony Kushner's "Angels in America" och efterkrigstidens USA [Systems of Defense that Give Way: A Queer Theoretical Study of the Discourse Around AIDS, Communism and Masculinity in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* and Postwar USA] (2001). Here Gindt argues that similar metaphors of infection and disease were employed in the discourses of communism and AIDS, which were seen as alien viruses attacking the healthy, white social body of the United States. This thesis was also amended and published in the academic journal *lambda nordica* in 2002 under the title "Angels in America: Roy Cohn och konstruktionen av en frisk, heterosexuell samhällskropp" [Angels in America: Roy Cohn and the Construction of a Healthy, Heterosexual Social Body]. Gindt's 2008 article "Den teatrala vreden: Hiv/aids och gayidentitet i Larry Kramers drama *The normal heart*" [The Theatrical Wrath: HIV/AIDS and Gay Identity in Larry Kramer's Play *The Normal Heart*] examines Larry Kramer's 1985 play and the sexual and identity politics that it depicts. He also argues that queer theory ought to be situated in the particular sociopolitical context of the 1980s, and underscores the crucial role that HIV/AIDS has played in the shaping of new understandings around sexual identities.

Ingeborg Svensson's dissertation *Liket i garberoben: En studie av sexualitet, livsstil och begravning* [The Corpse in the Closet: A Study of Sexuality, Lifestyle and Burial] (2007) uses the funeral as a lens through which to examine the meaning of death when confronted with cultural meanings of homosexuality. Svensson argues that lovers survived by their partners are often unrecognized mourners, who use the funeral as a space of strategic re-signification and cultural meaning.

David Thorsén's dissertation *Den svenska aidsepidemin* [The Swedish AIDS Epidemic] (2013) is the most comprehensive study on the Swedish AIDS epidemic. Thorsén analyzes the

public response to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s and focuses on *Aidsdelegationen* [The National Delegation on AIDS], a committee appointed by the government in 1985. Most relevant to this dissertation is Thorsén's argument that the focus of the discourse on AIDS in Sweden shifted away from men who have sex with men quite early, shifting focus instead onto the prostitute and junkie (468). This early shift away from men who have sex with men has contributed to the general public's belief that AIDS is 'taken care of,' a concept which I examine in Chapter III.

Why Homosexuality In Literature?

Considering the many sociological and historical studies on male homosexuality in Sweden, along with the progressive status of LGBT politics in Sweden, why include literature in the discourse on homosexuality? The most salient response is that despite a number of legislative milestones like same-sex marriage in Sweden, the homosexual still remains ‘the other’ in many ways. Sara Edenheim’s dissertation *Begärets lagar: moderna statliga utredningar och heteronormativitetens genealogi* [The Laws of Desire: Modern Government Investigations and the Genealogy of Heteronormativity] (2005) examines twentieth century government reports on non-normative sexualities in Sweden. Edenheim argues that despite a progression in attitudes and tolerance, heterosexuality remains the norm, and homosexuality continues to exist as ‘the other’ to be assimilated into heterosexual norms. Male homosexuality as ‘other’ still remains the reality for many non-heterosexual men in Sweden, demonstrated by continuous threats of anti-gay violence,¹⁵ as well as the disproportionate way HIV infection affects men who have sex with men (“Hiv-statistik”). Thus this dissertation centers on the literary discourse on male homosexuality that in many ways acts as a space of resistance to the ‘otherness’ of male homosexuality.

Literary representations of homosexuality perform additional functions that other types of artistic representations do not. Literature has the ability to communicate ideas, thought, experiences, and psychological states from a subjective position that other media cannot. The literary imagination can cause the reader to empathize and sympathize with characters and situations one might otherwise never be privy to. Since the Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavia, the arts (novels and plays in particular) have enjoyed an elevated status as spaces in which

¹⁵ For more on anti-gay hate crimes in Sweden, see Hilton (2005).

complex social problems have been depicted, debated, and contested. I consider the novels examined in this dissertation to continue this legacy, which call for more progressive understandings of homosexuality to include the literary discourse on male homosexuality.

The cultural discourse in Sweden on lesbianism has until very recently been silent, whereas the male homosexual has been quite visible at various points in Swedish history. From the policing of public sexuality at the turn of the last century, the Kejne and Haijby Affairs in the 1950s, to Martin's and Sighsten Herrgård's public admissions, general ideas and stereotypes (usually homophobic) have circulated about male homosexuality. However, this information was only produced and distributed by either the state or the medical profession. The novels I study contest the unilateral production of information about homosexuality and provide not only the element of humanity to the topic, but also a voice that is neither state nor medical. I examine these significant sociopolitical points that informed general public discourse on male homosexuality later in this dissertation.

It is also important to mention that representations of homosexuality can serve different functions for heterosexual and non-heterosexual audiences. Representations of homosexuality in literature are of key importance for non-heterosexual people, not only in identity formation but also as a source of affirmation. Scholar Niall Richardson argues that representations of homosexuality in cultural forms can help shape a sense of identity for many homosexual people who grow up in isolation, outside of metropolitan areas, since they may never have met another homosexual person (Richardson, 2)¹⁷. Before the invention of the internet and online sex and dating apps, public anonymous sex in parks and public toilets were the only spaces available for men to meet other men for sexual contact. In 1970 when gay bars and clubs began to open in

¹⁷ Many thanks to Jenny Björklund from bringing this to my attention.

Sweden, the idea of simply making contact was hugely significant, demonstrated by the nearly 1,000 letters that Bengt Martin received after his coming out on Swedish television. More than half of the letters he received explicitly express the need for contact with other homosexual men.

In contrast to Björklund's assertion that representations of lesbianism in literature are particularly important because of its "real or imagined absence," male homosexuality in Swedish literature takes on an unusual importance because of the ways in which it contests the negative visibility that it has experienced historically (4). Male homosexuality has on one hand been visible in the sense that supposed truths about male homosexuality have been culturally circulated, but at the same time this information has been based on homophobia, misinformation from medical discourses, or panic and fear furnished by government organizations like Aidsdelegationen [the National Commission on AIDS]. This LGBTQ body of literature demonstrates a different function for heterosexual audiences, however, as representations of homosexuality may be their only contact with non-heterosexual people, and thus constitutes a reality of homosexuality for them. This is certainly changing but is still true in many rural areas.

One element that is specific to literature is that it is a solitary activity. One can certainly attend a museum exhibition, go see a movie or watch television alone, but these are usually activities that one does with other people. Reading a novel, however, is an activity that one does in solitude. Borrowing a book from the library on homosexuality is something one can do without being exposed to judgment or ridicule; visibility of homosexuality on television often does not afford this same privacy. Homosexuality first gained visibility with Swedish celebrities like Bengt Martin, Sighsten Herrgård, and Jonas Gardell, but these figures appeared only in print and television interviews. The historical value of literature is also an important element: the novels I study in this dissertation all either take place in or depict a time before television and the

internet were the principal sources of information that circulated on homosexuality (with exceptions of the novels *Jaktsäsongen* [Hunting Season] (2006) and *Bekantas bekanta* [A Friend of A Friend] (2007) by Mats Strandberg which ironically overemphasize the role of media representations of love, romance, and consumption). As such, these are the *only* source of information on homosexuality for many young people that resists the state- and medically-authored discourses on homosexuality. Openly homosexual characters on Swedish television have been uncommon up until very recently, and one of the only media representations of male homosexuality (often facetiously and self-deprecatingly so) is in *Melodifestivalen*¹⁸. For young people struggling with their own homosexual feelings, these representations do not leave much space for introspection.

The literary imagination as a secure space and resource on homosexuality is ubiquitous in the novels examined in this study. Authors like Bengt Martin, Jonas Gardell, and Inger Edelfeldt include scenes in which the protagonist seeks solace in the poetry of the lesbian poet Karin Boye. Boye is a celebrated poet and author whose struggles with mental illness, depression, and loneliness are present throughout her work, and she eventually committed suicide in 1941 at the age of 41. Her novel *Kris* [Crisis] (1934) details her personal struggle with religion and her own homosexuality. In Edelfeldt's *Duktig pojke* [Good Boy], Jim is depicted as reading Martin's trilogy about Joakim (93). In *Spelar roll* [Playing A Roll] (1993), Johan enjoys the Stockholm Public Library as a safe space where he can read about Alexander the Great and homosexuality in Ancient Greece (84). *Spelar roll* takes place in the 1990s, where a multitude of sources of information on homosexuality existed, yet Johan finds solace in just being able to read about

¹⁸ A national singing competition whose winner competes in the annual Eurovision Song Contest. This song competition, which launched the career of many well-known Swedish artists like ABBA, draws nearly four million viewers each year, a remarkable viewership for a nation of just under 10 million people.

“bögar” in secret (54). The presentation of homosexual characters as ‘normal’ and human are particularly valuable for younger readers, which I discuss in my analysis of gay young adult novels in Chapter III.

As visual, media, and internet culture has spread since the turn of the millennium, the circulation of information, ideas, and models of homosexuality have increased as well. However literature has remained a viable space in which to challenge depictions of male homosexuality and cultural memory—and also to spark widespread culture debate as demonstrated by Jonas Gardell’s *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* [Don’t Ever Dry Tears Without Gloves] (2012-13) trilogy. My study of these novels includes examination of the diffuse and diverse representations of male homosexuality that have increased with the visibility of homosexuality in general, yet still emphasizes this unique function of the literary discourse.

Theoretical Terminology

Cultural Amnesia

I defined my use of the term cultural amnesia earlier, but this concept has grown out of a broader discourse in other fields including trauma theory, gay and lesbian studies, and queer theory. The term cultural amnesia was first used in the context of the AIDS epidemic by Marita Sturken in *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (1997). Sturken characterizes our postmodern condition as “a context in which all sense of history is lost, amnesia reigns, and the past is vandalized by the pastiche forms of the present” (16-17). Sturken’s idea of pastiche is an important point of departure, as the cultural memory of AIDS has made ubiquitous such objects like the AIDS quilt and the red ribbon, while at the same time having erased the memory of 1980s widespread homophobia.

In this context however, cultural amnesia does not refer to the complete erasure of the AIDS crisis; rather it speaks to the cultural and media images that persist and haunt the present. The term ‘amnesia’ also connotes agency on the part of the subject who experiences it; aspects of memory are missing yet the subject still functions and retains cognition. Cultural amnesia also refers to the coexistence of certain paradoxes, demonstrated in my discussion of Andreas Lundstedt’s coming-out as HIV positive. His health and vitality are emphasized and celebrated, but as my discussion in Chapter III reveals, male homosexuality still bears the stigma of disease.

Other scholars have also used this term to describe the ways in which gay cultural memory has either ignored or purposefully forgotten this critical and pivotal period in gay history: *Michael Warner in The Trouble With Normal* argues that those who advocate for gay marriage have “induced widespread amnesia” regarding the radical activism of the 1970s and the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s (90). Daniel Harries uses the term in “collective amnesia” in *The*

Rise and Fall of Gay Culture in his discussion of the role of camp in gay male culture (21).

Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed examine the idea of a forgotten gay history in great depth in *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past* (2012). I discuss the circumstances that facilitated this process, and its subsequent effects, in Chapter III.

Heteronormativity / Homonormativity

My study examines cultural amnesia as one of the central tenets through which homonormativity functions. The term heteronormativity was first coined by Michael Warner in one of the first major works of queer theory, *Fear of A Queer planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (vii-xxxix) (1993). Warner describes this concept as the dominant heterosexual culture's belief in itself as "the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist" (xxix). This term underscores the reality that heterosexuality is a universal norm, and any relationship, institution, legislation, phenomenon, etc., that reaffirms and perpetuates such hegemonic relationships is heteronormative. This term is useful in describing many of the ways in which the homosexual still remains the 'other' in Western societies through diffuse relationships, despite progressive legislation or the visibility of gay people.

Homonormativity, however, is related to heteronormativity and seeks to identify hegemonic norms within gay culture itself. In *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2003), Lisa Duggan defines homonormativity as a "politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (50).

Duggan stresses that gay culture in many ways has reproduced the hegemonic relationships present within dominant heteronormative culture through the promise of certain projects such as gay marriage. This term is particularly useful in my study as cultural amnesia is one of the many enterprises that has facilitated the reproduction of hegemonic relationships within gay culture including classism, racism, male privilege, and misogyny. Duggan locates this phenomenon within the greater Western project of neoliberalism, which I described earlier has inspired resistance with organizations such as Against Equality, as well and Gay Shame¹⁹ protests. This concept is of particular interest to my analysis of the conspicuous consumption that characterizes Swedish gay culture in the decades after the AIDS crisis.

Identity

This dissertation's queer approach is founded on the premise that dominant gay rights discourses have furnished the illusion that 'gay' or 'lesbian' is a complete identity, an idea that queer theoretical frameworks have subsequently deconstructed. As my previous discussion of the shift in terminology demonstrates, both personal and cultural understandings of homosexuality have shifted considerably in the past fifty years, and did so rather quickly. Therefore, it is crucial to define the way in which I use identity in my analysis of these novels. In general I understand identity to be the way that one sees oneself, which is inevitably informed by a plurality of discourses such as citizenship, nationalism, heteronormativity, race, class, geography, etc. A multitude of tensions exist within this plurality, but when I discuss 'gay identity' or 'homosexual' identity, I refer to the way in which the non-heterosexual person sees his or her sexuality to be *in relation* to external discourses on sexuality that range from state-mandated to popular culture to

¹⁹ These were held in Stockholm from 2001-2004 in protest of the commercialization of Stockholm Pride.

gay rights discourses. The affirmation of gay as an identity that grew out of the visibility and activism of the gay rights movement has been contested by many non-heterosexual people, and the genealogy of the narrative at hand, underscored by a shift in language and terms, echoes this contention.

Male homosexuality

This dissertation examines a number of novels that span less than fifty years, yet the vocabulary, slang, cultural norms, and political realities have changed so significantly. As the term ‘gay’ has become so politicized in the American context, and for the most part neutral in the Swedish context, I chose to describe this project on male homosexuality in literature rather than ‘gay literature’. ‘Gay’ today in the US also refers to a particular political time, place, and cultural meaning. When used to describe historical circumstances it often obfuscates nuances and particularities of historical experience. This idea of ‘gay’ as an identity is a rather new sociopolitical production on the part of the gay rights movement. Foucault’s work on sexuality studied the medicalization of homosexuality that saw a transition from sodomite as a “temporary aberration” to a new species, which in many ways persisted until the late 1960s and 1970s when ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ began to be claimed as an *identity* (43). In the US today, for example, terms for gay men like ‘homosexual’ or ‘queer’ soon became replaced with ‘gay,’ and gay now carries a whole cornucopia of cultural and social associations and meanings.

Although I eschew the term ‘gay’ as shorthand for all things homosexual in this dissertation, I embrace all aspects of gay culture as informing the social and political reality of non-heterosexual people in my analysis. Terms for non-heterosexual people used by greater discourses, as well as the terms they use to identify themselves, have and continue to change.

However using 'gay' to describe the subculture inhabited by non-homosexual people continues to be central. Journalist and author Calle Norlén writes somewhat facetiously in his 1999 book

Bög – så funkar det! [Gay – This Is How It Works!]:

Jag kommer att generalisera skamlöst, samt använda mig av oprecisa begrepp som 'bögvärlden,' 'gayrörelsen och 'homokulturen' som någon sorts samlingsnamn på föreningar, företag, intresseorganisationer, krogar, barer, klubbar, fester och tidningar för homosexuella. Men det är inte så flummigt som det låter. Just detta nätverk av olika verksamheter utgör de facto vår kultur. Gayrörelsen är inte bara RFSL och bögvärlden består faktiskt av alla homokillar som träffas och gör saker tillsammans (9).

[I'm going to generalize shamelessly, and make use of ambiguous concepts like 'the gay male world,' 'the gay rights movement' and 'homo culture,' as some sort of collective term for organizations, businesses, interest groups, pubs, bars, clubs, parties and magazines for homosexuals. But it's not as nebulous as it sounds. It is this very network of various enterprises that constitutes our de facto culture. The gay rights movement is not just RFSL, and the gay male world includes all homosexual men who interact and do things together]

Norlén's assertion describes quite well the way in which I also use the term gay culture in this dissertation, as well as the institutions and spaces in which the gay rights movement has done its work.

Another aspect of my methodology in this project is to use the historically relevant terminology within each chapter and period in order to underscore the fact that gay rights is a historical discourse continually driven forward, rather than a project with the end goal of an essential truth that can be realized through state recognition. It is important to note that gay as a *culture* has only existed since the post-Stonewall era. Therefore it is no more appropriate, for example, to describe Joakim in Martin's trilogy as 'gay,' than it would be to describe the characters in Strandberg's novel from the 2000s as 'homosexuals' or 'homophiles'. In Swedish, the term gay is often used as an adjective to describe aspects of gay culture, such as clubs, bars, magazines etc., which points to the exportation of the American gay rights movement abroad.

This is even seen in extreme examples, such as in Strandberg's *Jaktsäsong* [Hunting Season] when Magnus uses the *svengelska*²⁰ term "att outas," referring to the English "to be outed," as in one's homosexuality being made public (166). However in the same novel, the protagonist Melinda's parents refer to Magnus as a "homofil," [homophile], demonstrating not only their isolation in rural Sweden (which is examined further in the novel) but also the huge shifts in the public discourse regarding homosexuality that have occurred between two generations (35). The term even takes on a somewhat offensive tone in the novel.

In my first chapter on Martin's trilogy about Joakim, I use the term 'homosexual' to describe Joakim and other homosexual men that appear in the novel. The narrative takes place during the 1940s and 1950s, and Joakim's first vocabulary for speaking about homosexuality is learned from his mother, who warns him to watch out for "såna typer" [one of those types] (27). This terminology was quite common at the time, "en sån" or "såna" echoing Oscar Wilde's infamous euphemism for homosexuality, "the love that dare not speak its name". This euphemism also appears throughout other works from the 1940s through the 1960s such as *Grabb på glid* (1949), *Patrik Kajson går igen* (1947), and *Avvikelser* (1965). However more official sources, as Joakim read in the newspaper,²¹ would use the term "homofil" [homophile], which was synonymous with murder and suicide (169). The term "bög"²² [faggot] appears a

²⁰ This term refers to written or spoken Swedish that contains frequent use of English syntax and vocabulary. This is not only common in everyday spoken Swedish, but even more common in the circulation of gay cultural images and memes that point to the exportation of American gay rights and cultural discourses.

²¹ Rydström has also written on the vocabulary used by the police to refer to male homosexuality at the time, one of the principal sources that circulated ideas about homosexuality in the 1940s and 1950s ("Polisen och perversa" 384).

²² The adjectival use of this term can almost always be translated as "gay"; the noun form can be translated into English as "fag" or "faggot," but the Swedish use of the term is less frequently used as a pejorative, and appears commonly in media and newspaper publications to refer to gay men.

number of times in the trilogy about Joakim, but it was not used by Joakim as descriptive of his identity; it was however synonymous with male homosexuality. Joakim sees it scrawled on the wall of a public toilet (75), refers to Frescati²³ as “bögberget” [fag mountain] (71), and notes that Oscar Wilde was indeed also one. However when Joakim comes out to his Aunt Molle, as well as to his landlady Carlsson (126), he describes himself as “homosexuell” [homosexual] (64),.

The term *bög* has a rather interesting history in Sweden but surprisingly has no connection with the English bugger or the French *bougre*. Gay historian Fredrik Silverstolpe observes in his article “Den historiska bakgrunden till ordet bög: vandringsmyter, ideologier och vetenskap” [The Historical Background on the Term *Bög*: Myths of Wandering, Ideologies and Knowledge] that as late as 1910, the word *bög* appeared in the dictionary as “en karl som är lätt at lura” [a chap who is easily duped] (52). The term became sexualized around the turn of the twentieth century as male prostitution grew, and young men in urban areas would either suggest the selling of sex and then rob the man, or actually engage in sexual acts for money. This seedy underbelly of Swedish urban life, characterized by juvenile delinquency, theft and prostitution before World War II, is depicted in Nils Hallbeck’s *Grabb på glid* (1949) and Ronnie Busk’s *Änglaskuggor* (1969). Silverstolpe notes that the English ‘gay’ and the German *schwul* also grew out of the “homosexuella köp- och säljkulturen” [homosexual buying and selling culture] at the turn of the twentieth century (55). This term continued to be circulated and associated with male homosexuality, which increased intensely during the 1940s and 1950s in which *pojktoprostitution* [boy prostitution] was at the center of the debate around male homosexuality in Sweden. This term appears in the trilogy about Joakim but is not associated in any way with identity; when

²³ Frescati is a well known park in Stockholm that has long been a place where men would meet for sexual encounters with other men. It is also mentioned in *Jaktsåsong* (42) and *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar*.

Joakim describes himself, he uses the term “homosexuell” (*Finnas till* 64) and attends what he describes as a “homofilklubb” [homophile club] (*Nejlikmusslan* 10).

The way that *bög* is used today in Swedish is the product of the 1970s gay rights project that sought to incorporate the term in the common vernacular. This strategy was to neutralize and reclaim the term in order to express pride and affirmation (Silverstolpe 56). This term differs from ‘gay’ as it refers exclusively to homosexual men. It can often be translated to the English ‘faggot,’ although this term has not been neutralized the way that ‘gay’ has been in English vernacular. This is still a very loaded and pejorative term in broader discourses, but within gay communities it is often reclaimed in order to strip the word of its meaning. The term ‘queer’ has also been reclaimed in a similar way, but as I described earlier, has thus been linked to not only the academic field of inquiry but also resisting the limits that the terms like gay and lesbian impose.

In Chapter II I use a term created by public health discourses in order to more efficiently reach those affected most by the AIDS epidemic: men who have sex with men (MSM). The terms ‘gay,’ ‘homo,’ and *bög* had indeed been circulating at this time as a result of visibility brought about by the gay rights movement. However the particular legislation that I examine in this chapter, The Bathhouse Law and The Infectious Diseases Law, operates within the medical and public health discourse that targets the sexual act rather than the cultural circumstances. The bathhouse was indeed an essential cultural fixture at the time, but the protagonist in *Onans bok*, Peter, is himself a doctor and understands his sexuality entirely through the medical discourse that is not only his professional vocabulary but also the same vocabulary that polices his sexuality and furnishes his internalized shame. Thus, in Chapter I use this term to emphasize the

ubiquity of the medical discourse in homosexual male consciousness, but also to underscore the ways in which this period pushed back on the idea of gay positivity and identity formation.

In Chapter III I use the term ‘gay’ as the novels examined in this chapter have occurred in the wave of cultural amnesia that occurred after the AIDS epidemic, and demonstrate the use of the word *bög* as an identity. *Duktig pojke* [Good Boy] (1977) takes place in the mid 1970s, when this use of the term began to be circulated within the discourse of gay positivity. The title of this novel comes from the scene in which Jim comes out to his mother, to which she replies: “Du är inte en sån; du är en duktig pojke” [You’re not one of those; you’re a good boy] (175). Jim admits to himself that he is “homosexuell” (93), but also refers to himself as a “böggjäväl” [faggot] (91), also a term uttered flippantly by his friend Uffe (59). However, in *Spelar roll* [Playing A Role] (1993), published only a little over a decade later, *bög* is fully understood as an identity to Johan; the novel begins with Johan already knowing at the age of nearly twelve that he is a “bög” (9). This term is present throughout the novel, but the idea of *bög* as a stable identity is solidified with his official coming out to himself, as he shouts “Jag är B-Ö-G” [I am a F-A-G-G-O-T] at the top of his lungs as he stands alone in a park (312). Depicted as the climax in this coming of age/coming out novel, this great self-realization on the part of the protagonist confirms that status of *bög* as now an identity with particular cultural meanings.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, this concept of recollection allows for a multiplicity of terms to function simultaneously. I employ a queer framework to examine the ways in which the witnessing and cultural recollection is done. However these novels depict a time before queer theory had crystallized; therefore, I use the terms ‘gay’ to describe the men in these novels. The period in which AIDS first arrived in Stockholm had previously been characterized by a vibrant nightlife and gay positivity and brought about by gay rights movement.

Many non-heterosexual people today use the term ‘queer’ to resist the labeling that dominant gay rights discourses mandate. In an academic analysis like this, however, I use queer to refer to the academic theoretical framework, and ‘non-heterosexual’ as a term to describe queer people. The fluidity of the term is crucial to its aim and use, but it speaks more clearly to the purpose of this project to distinguish between the two.

This adherence to the cultural and historically relevant terms for homosexuality, homosexual identities, and gay culture is an important element of the methodology that this project utilizes. The shift in terms for chapter to chapter again illuminates my assertion that the project of gay rights is a discourse that has been driven forward by various sociopolitical moments alongside the literary discourse. It is indeed a queer methodology in that it resists the tendency of the present to dehistoricize the homosexual experience as a singular one that can only be understood through the present, a grievance that Castiglia and Reed have adeptly lamented (9). While queer readings of texts like Martin’s trilogy might uncover many layers of meaning and consciousness, for the purpose of this study it would not be fruitful to describe Joakim’s queerness, as he certainly did not see himself as such; calling his experiences ‘queer’ would obfuscate the historical and sociopolitical circumstances that informed his self-understanding of his sexuality as a homosexual.

Methodology and Chapter Outlines

This dissertation is the first in-depth study of representations of male homosexuality in Swedish literature. However, it also offers other original contributions to literary studies, cultural studies, queer theory, and sociology. One key contribution that this dissertation provides is its analysis of the AIDS epidemic as a central phenomenon that has been essential to the project of gay rights. Some theorists, such as Marita Sturken, describe the AIDS crisis as culturally and politically significant as the Vietnam War in terms of shaping American political life and culture in. David Thorsén notes in *Den svenska aidsepidemin* (2013) that the American experience of the AIDS epidemic has been universalized, and influenced the Sweden experience despite its unique history (18). Rydström has also noted in *Odd Couples* how influential the epidemic was in increasing the political legitimacy of gay rights groups, eventually facilitating the passing of gay partnership laws (170). Wilson has described it as the gay community's own Holocaust (36). This dissertation contributes to these scholars' emphasis on the sociopolitical significance of this period, and its long-lasting effects, rather than the general *cultural amnesia* of this period. It also resists the belief that the AIDS epidemic is 'over,' an idea I explore in depth in Chapter IV.

Another original contribution of this project is one that is underscored through my use of language which I delineated above. Castiglia and Reed have mourned the lack of historicity through which queer theory understands gay history (9), and Patrick Moore studies in *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality* (2004) the sanitization that resulted from the AIDS epidemic, which created a generational gap. This dissertation seeks to contribute one aspect of gay cultural history, the literary discourse, in an attempt to connect contemporary dominant gay rights discourses to its complicated historical narrative.

This project is by no means exhaustive in its coverage of male homosexuality in Swedish literature, and many works have been left out of my study. These include a number of novels published before this period of visibility with which my study begins, as well as a number of memoirs published by homosexual men, and a number of pornographic novels that were published during the 1960s and 1970s. The novels that I have chosen are due in part to popularity and circulation, as my argument requires that these novels have been culturally and politically significant enough to drive the discourse on homosexuality forward. These novels have also all been written by non-heterosexual male writers, with the exception of Inger Edelfeldt. I refer to the coming out novel template that Edelfeldt established in Sweden, but my analysis of the coming out novel phenomenon focuses on Olsson's *Spelar roll* [Playing A Role] (1993), which provides a more culturally aware and nuanced narrative.

Chapter I focuses on the first period of true visibility of homosexuality, which began with Bengt Martin's coming out as homosexual on Swedish television with his partner in 1968. Martin appeared to promote his novel *Sodomsäpplet* [The Apple of Sodom] (1968), the first in a trilogy of novels about Joakim, "ung och homosexuell i Stockholm," ["young and homosexual in Stockholm"], which was followed by *Nejlikmusslan* [The Carnation Clam] (1969) and finally *Finnas till* [To Exist] (1969). This trilogy takes place in the 1940s and 1950s, the most explicitly homophobic period in Swedish history, which in many ways resembled the American McCarthyist witch-hunt for homosexuals. I begin with Martin's novels as they demonstrate a departure from previous representations of male homosexuality in literature, in that they created a new space in within which ideas about homosexuality could be contested. Previously, information circulated within broader public discourses came solely from state and medical discourses. In this chapter I argue that Martin's trilogy is so significant because of his emphasis on the hostile

social and political environment that produced and perpetuated this idea of homosexuality and mental illness. My reading of this trilogy focuses on the critique of the psychological community at this time present in Martin's narrative.

Chapter II examines the only novel in Swedish to explicitly deal with the AIDS epidemic, *Onans bok* [The Book of Onan] (1999) by Ola Klingberg. I provide an analysis of Swedish pop star Andreas Lundstedt's coming out as HIV-positive in 2007 as a point of departure that reveals the myriad ways in which associations of physical illness with male homosexuality still persist in Sweden. I also discuss two significant pieces of legislation that came into effect during the AIDS crisis in Sweden, inclusion of HIV under The Infections Diseases Law (1985) and The Bathhouse Law (1987), and examine the ways in which these have affected perceptions about gay male sexuality. My reading of *Onans bok*, in conversation with these pieces of legislation and Lundstedt's coming out, illuminates a number of ways in which these have been internalized in ideas about gay male sexuality in the form of anxiety and shame.

Chapter III examines two different types of literature that have been published in the most intense period of cultural amnesia of AIDS crisis in Sweden: gay young adult novels and gay chick lit. My discussion of gay young adult novels in Sweden focuses on Hans Olsson's *Spelar roll* [Playing A Roll] (1993), and to a lesser extent Inger Edelfeldt's *Duktig pojke* [Good Boy] (1977), as representative of this subgenre that is characterized by a remarkable preponderance. This preponderance points to the crystallization of gay men as a market demographic, which is also demonstrated by the seamless inclusion of gay men into the chick lit literary genre. My discussion examines not only the literal absence and 'amnesia' of the AIDS crisis from these literary representations, but also the greater sociopolitical separation of 'sex' from 'homosexuality,' which happened alongside this cultural amnesia. This phenomenon is

fostered in young adult novels through its emphasis on “gay” as an identity rather than a sexual act, and in gay chick lit as demonstrating conspicuous consumption in order to maintain the separation.

In Chapter IV, I examine Jonas Gardell’s remarkably successful trilogy of novels *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* [Don’t Ever Dry Tears Without Gloves]: *I.Kärleken* [Love] (2012), *II.Sjukdomen* [Disease] (2013), and *III.Döden* [Death] (2013). My examination of this trilogy, which takes place in the 1980s in Stockholm with the advent of the AIDS epidemic, has begun to resist this project of cultural amnesia with what I have called as cultural recollection. This chapter draws upon scholar Sara Edenheim’s queer theoretical critique of this trilogy as essential to its cultural significance, which is supported through state collective mourning, demonstrated by Crown Princess Victoria’s hugely significant presentation of Gardell with the *QX* magazine’s “Årets homo” [Homo of the Year] prize.

As I have chosen to focus on the visibility of homosexuality as essential to the idea of cultural amnesia as it relates to the project of gay rights, inevitably this dissertation will not include any analysis of literary representations of male homosexuality from before this period. Also, although this dissertation makes references to representations of male homosexuality in Swedish media, television, photography, and film, I hope that my approach to the sociopolitical history of homosexuality makes room for further academic inquiries into the ways in which filmic and other media representations of homosexuality have functioned within this discourse.

My earliest academic training is in the field of American Studies, which demands a critical and intersectional approach to the object of study with particular emphasis on race, class, and gender. My introduction examines the role of gender as it relates to the historical differences in lesbian and gay rights discourses; however, the body of literature examined in this study

unfortunately does not provide critical depictions of class or race in Sweden. In the US gay rights movement, questions of race and class complicated the Second-wave feminist movement as well as the gay rights movement—and they continue to do so today. Challenges to Sweden's homogeneity are much more recent compared with the US, and conversations about the complexities of being both queer and non-ethnically Swedish still remain peripheral. This study indeed focuses on the representations of non-heterosexual middle class white men as the object of study, but constantly seeks to destabilize this hegemony through an interrogation of the evolving terminology and cultural meanings of homosexuality.

I. THE COMING OUT REVOLUTION OF THE 1970S

Bengt Martin and the Apple of Sodom

In October of 1968, actor and author Bengt Martin (1933-2010) appeared with his longtime partner Hans Elfving on Lars Ulvenstam's debate talk show *Storforum* [Big Forum] and became the first public figure²⁴ to come out as homosexual in Sweden. Martin appeared to promote his new novel, *Sodomsäpplet* [The Apple of Sodom] (1968), on the one television channel that existed in Sweden at the time, TV1²⁵, along with the founder of RFSU, Elise Ottesen-Jensen, the then president of RFSL, Ove Ahlström, and Johan Cullberg, a psychiatrist²⁶. Although Martin received a fair amount of hate mail, including some homophobic letters with used toilet paper enclosed, he also received nearly a thousand letters from homosexuals and the friends and families of homosexual people in support of his courage to speak out ("Bengt Martin in memoriam" 1). *Sodomsäpplet* was the first installment of the trilogy of novels about Joakim Mander, a young homosexual man in Stockholm. It was followed by *Nejlikmusslan* [The Carnation Clam] (1969) and *Finnas till*²⁷ [To Exist] (1970). The latter contained a number of letters or portions of letters from lonely and desperate homosexuals commending Martin and eager to make contact.

²⁴ Allan Hellmans, founder of RFSL, was the first person to speak openly about his homosexuality in the Swedish media, but was not a well-known media personality outside of his political activism (Silverstolpe and Söderström 661-2).

²⁵ TV1 first began broadcasting officially in 1956, and it remained the only channel until 1969, when TV2 began transmission.

²⁶ This program even took up the then quite taboo subject of transvestitism as well as suicide (Ingvarsson, 34).

²⁷ This trilogy was also released in a number of editions, under the titles *Joakim* (1974) and *Sodomsäpplet och Nejlikmusslan. Berättelsen om Joakim* [The Apple of Sodom and The Carnation Clam: The Story of Joakim] (1984) (Paprikas, 48).

Martin became the first public homosexual figure producing literary work in this new era of *visibility* of homosexual people. RFSL was established in 1950 and began working for the rights of homosexual Swedes in cooperation with RFSU. *Revolt* magazine, established in 1971, operated very much within this radical idea of activism and openness, and became a new medium for discussions surrounding homosexuality; it also included personal political essays. Several other works with male homosexuality as a central theme were published in this era, as visibility quickly gained traction, including Knut Lagrup's autobiographical *Avvikelser* [Deviance] (1965); Ronnie Busk's *Änglaskuggor* [The Shadows of Angels] (1969). Both works depict the darker sides of male homosexuality, including criminality and prostitution. Neither of the novels was discussed nor widely read like Martin's trilogy, despite the fact that *Änglaskuggor* even won the prestigious publishing house Bonnier's "Nya Ord" [New Words] competition for new authors.

This dissertation uses Martin's trilogy about Joakim as a starting point because Martin's authorship, supported by his publicly homosexual celebrity, first began to drive the public discourse of gay rights in Sweden. RFSU has even described Martin as the impetus for the "kom-ut revolutionen" [the coming out revolution] with his admission on Swedish television (Hellgren). Earlier literary representations of male homosexuality (such as Hallbeck's *Grabb på glid* [Boy Gone Astray] (1949)) in many ways exist on their own as time capsules, a window into the seedy underbelly of criminality and juvenile delinquency in Stockholm's darkest streets and alleys. For the most part, these works reflect public opinion of male homosexuality as synonymous with prostitution and urban moral decay. The relative anonymity of their authors (Hallbeck even published some works under the pseudonym Jan Hogan) further contributed to the phenomenon of these novels standing on their own as a single experience.

Martin's authorship in this new era of visibility, however, created a *new* space in which to contest opinions, ideas, misconceptions, cultural norms and practices regarding homosexuality and the treatment of homosexual people. Previous discussions of homosexuality in Sweden were informed by the criminal and medical communities, circumstances which came to a particular head in the Haijby and Kejne Affairs of the 1950s, which erupted during this period in Sweden that came to be known as *rättsrotan* and which in many ways paralleled the American McCarthyist witch hunt for homosexuals. Martin's trilogy about Joakim is the first example of literature as impetus for the cultural debate surrounding homosexuality. This phenomenon of openness regarding homosexuality, and the ways in which certain works of literature contribute to and intervene in the cultural discourse, are of central importance in this study.

Martin was already fairly well known as an actor when he published his first book *Långsamvakenramsan* [The Rise and Shine Jingle] (1964), followed by *Den mjuka klon* [The Soft Claw] (1966). *Sodomsäpplet* was his first novel to contain homosexual themes. Suddenly a "kändis och dåtida riksbög" [celebrity and national gay personality] after his coming out on Swedish television, Martin continued to maintain this cultural visibility, awarded *Vi* [We] magazine's *Författarstipendium* [Author Scholarship] in 1970 and *Litteraturfrämjandet*'s [The Promoting of Literature's] stipend in 1970 and 1978, the prestigious Nils Plaque in 1979 for his autobiographical young adult novel *Bengt och kärleken* [Bengt and Love] (1979). Martin continued to live the rest of his life on a state-funded stipend for artists (Stenberg). Toward the later years of his life, Bengt continued to write about homosexuality from an autobiographical standpoint, as well as a book of letters written between himself and the iconic Swedish feminist poet Sonja Åkesson, *Vi ses!* [See you!] (1975). The idea of the visibility of gay people continues even today as a popular cultural phenomenon that quantifies the progress of the gay rights

movement (which I discuss further in Chapter III) and its political legitimacy, but it also created the new space in which to debate the ‘correct’ image of homosexuality. Martin continued to publish through the 1990s. He passed away in 2010.

Martin’s literature has had such a catalyzing effect on the popular discourse of homosexuality for two reasons: his literary treatment of homosexuality, which had not occurred previously in Swedish literature, but also his coming out on Swedish television. Martin ‘practiced what he preached,’ and wrote the trilogy of Joakim who comes out and learns to accept his homosexuality. His celebrity and acceptance among the cultural elite in Sweden echo the positivity with which Martin treats openness and visibility in his trilogy. Therefore, when I refer to the “coming out revolution” in this study, I am referring to both Martin’s persona and his literary contributions, which have been conflated in gay cultural narratives. The public persona of the most well known *riksbög* [national homo] today in Sweden, Jonas Gardell, in many ways also eclipsed his literary work with the publication of *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* [Never Dry Tears Without Gloves] (2012-13), which I examine in the final chapter of this dissertation. Martin became bitter and resented Gardell’s competition in the literary world; his bitterness led to silence in the press and he became quite reclusive in his later years (Stenberg).

Visibility is often seen as an indisputably good thing in the context of gay activism; the term is used with some degree of hesitation because it is so positively loaded. Since the early 1970s, the gay rights movement has engaged in the debate over which is the ‘right’ image or representation of homosexuality. This tension that exists not only within the gay rights movement, but also within broader cultural discourses is one that has been at the center of momentum driving the project of gay rights forward. This tension persists today and appears in one form or another in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation. Through the underscoring of

this tension in this study I will demonstrate that the project of gay rights is just that: a project, a purposeful political discourse that has been steered down various paths by a plurality of voices and discourses.

The discussion of Martin and his work in this chapter firmly locates Martin in this sociopolitical climate after the Stonewall riots and before the AIDS crisis spread to Sweden. A multitude of elements of Martin's work, as well as his public persona, have relegated him to this status of a 'dirty old man,' as well as making him a casualty of gay cultural amnesia. This chapter will examine the historical sociopolitical circumstances that have caused the public discourse to forget Martin's literary work because of negative depictions of homosexuality. Although Martin's persona as a public figure is an important element of my analysis, the examination of this trilogy is not intended to be autobiographical. Martin published his autobiography *Jag ångrar ingenting: en självbiografi* [I Regret Nothing: An Autobiography] in 1981, as well as a trilogy of autobiographical young adult novels with a young gay protagonist named Bengt: *Pojkar ska inte gråta* {Boys Don't Cry} (1977), *Bengt och kärleken* [Bengt and Love] (1978) and *Ljuva femtiotal* [The Sweet 1950s] (1979). This trilogy tells the same story as the trilogy about Joakim. However, Martin in truth hated that audiences interpreted everything he wrote as autobiographical (Ingvarsson, 32). The memoir or autobiography written by gay figures has been fairly common in Sweden, ranging from figures like Sverker Åström (1992) and Fredrik Eklund (2005), to Gabriel Forss (2012) and Andreas Lundstedt (2012). This is a substantial body of literature in the context of a small nation like Sweden, but this separate genre will not be considered in this project.

The trilogy about Joakim was originally released as novels for adults, but the 1984 edition was released as a young adult novels. Wilson notes that Martin's "dålig[a] rykte i

bögekretsar grundlades” [bad reputation within the gay community was established] with the release of the 1984 edition:

Tajmingen var fel. Aidskrisen var precis på ingång och det förgångnas självhat var helt enkelt lite för likt samtiden för att det skulle fungera. När bögvärlden upplevde sin egen Förintelse fanns det helt enkelt inte utrymme att ta in en gammal gubbes minnen om en ungdom fylld av angst. Inte när döden fanns överallt” (36).

[The timing was wrong. The AIDS crisis was just beginning and the self-hatred of the past was simply too similar to the present circumstances to work. When the gay world experienced its own holocaust there was quite simply no space to include a dirty old man’s memories of an angst-filled childhood. Not when death was everywhere.]

The plight of the young homosexual Joakim, suffering at the hands of both the homophobic medical community and a law that held a higher age of consent for homosexual acts, culminates with his suicide attempt at the end of *Sodomsäpplet*. Young adult novels that chronicle the coming of age and coming out process of gay young men actually saw quite a wave of popularity in the cultural amnesia after the AIDS crisis in Sweden, a phenomenon I examine in greater depth in Chapter III of this dissertation.

This trilogy of novels established literature as a valid space of negotiation and contestation on the topic of homosexuality; its honest, frank and psychological examination of homosexuality through the perspective of Joakim provides a window into this a hostile period in Swedish history. This trilogy also helped usher in the new and radical sociopolitical climate of the 1960s that contributed to the burgeoning gay rights movement in which Martin’s coming out and literary work was received and circulated.

The Homo Hunt

Sweden decriminalized homosexuality in 1944, but this hardly meant any kind of openness or security for homosexual people. In contrast to the coming out revolution, the visibility of homosexuals was met with a period of violent homophobia. European medical discourses around homosexuality in cooperation with criminal discourses facilitated the initial push toward decriminalization of homosexuality in Sweden began in the 1930s but did not see success until 1944. Decriminalization produced two important effects that have particular importance in the plight of Joakim. The first is that the new laws stipulated a higher age of consent for homosexual acts, eighteen years of age²⁸. The second is the visibility that came about from the debate over homosexuality in Sweden, which would allow for the high-profile homosexual sex scandals of the 1950s.

Although the trilogy about Joakim was released in the 1970s, it takes place about twenty years before Martin's coming out on Swedish television and depicts an altogether different political and social climate. The trilogy begins with sixteen-year-old Joakim in the year 1948 and ultimately concludes in the early part of the 1950s. Rydström observes in *Criminally Queer* (2007) that along with decriminalization came the stipulation that "all homosexual acts with a person under the age of 18 were illegal," and an additional prohibition was placed on homosexual acts with a person under the age of 21 if "one party was in a position of dependency on the other, the latter was to be punished²⁹" (204). Joakim forms a relationship with an older coworker, Nick, who is twenty-seven, and later with the doctor Björn who is twelve years his

²⁸ The age of consent for homosexual acts remained 18 years of age until 1978, when the age of consent for homosexual acts was now the same as heterosexual acts, 15 years of age.

²⁹ It is also important to mention that the new law explicitly includes women, which Rydström says "corresponded to the new approach to homosexuality as an inherent characteristic in individual men and women" (*Criminally Queer* 33).

senior. The illegality of these relationships, a source of constant strife for Joakim, and continues throughout all three novels in the trilogy.

Jens Rydström comments in *Criminally Queer: Homosexuality and Criminal Law in Scandinavia 1842-1999* that “the construction of the homosexual in the field of medicine together with the developments within criminal justice” resulted in the decriminalization of same-sex sexuality in Scandinavia between 1933 and 1948 (32). In addition, male homosexuality as an idea gained even greater prominence during this period with the publication of American zoologist Alfred Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948); the study not only introduced this idea that sexuality was not a hetero/homo binary and rather a fluid scale, but it also contained data that revealed 37% of American men had engaged in sexual contact with another man and that around 10% of the American male population was exclusively homosexual (656). *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* appeared in Swedish translation in 1949 and was an instant success. *Nejlikmusslan* begins with a reference from the Kinsey Report that echoes these two ideas of sexual fluidity as well as the greater percentage of homosexuality in humans than previously been believed (5).

This issue of the age of consent is of central importance in the trilogy and constantly contributed to the fear Joakim experiences in hostile and homophobic Sweden at this time. The homophobia, fear, anxiety, and isolation that Joakim experiences in postwar Sweden originate from a number of institutional and personal relationships in his life; however, this stipulation of a higher age of consent for homosexual sex is a crucial and tangible hurdle for Joakim. Joakim’s long-term relationship throughout *Nejlikmusslan* and *Finnas till* with Björn, a doctor twelve years his senior, is characterized by their inability to be together and their constant fear of being discovered. Upon leaving Björn’s apartment, Joakim takes certain measures to not be detected,

which he describes as “försiktighetsåtgärder” [cautionary measures] in which he “trycker försiktigt ned dörrhandtaget, håller handen emot att intet ett ljud må höras in till grannarna” [pushes carefully on the door handle, holding his hand against it so that not a sound can be heard by the neighbors] (*Finnas till* 195). Joakim lives constantly in fear that he will be discovered and reported to the police, even in public spaces. While waiting at Central Station in Stockholm to board a train to Germany together, Joakim sits nervously, thinking to himself:

Det var mödosamt, det var inte heller riktigt säkert att sitta inne i sig själv och iaktta. Inte ännu. Ännu lurade faror. Centralen – herregud! Det kan komma fram en snut och säga: vart ska ni ta vägen då? Små fikusar. Den grabben är inte gammal, det är lag på sånt. Det är nog ett slags dödstraff på kärlek av det slaget” (15).

[It was tedious, and I wasn't really safe to sit alone and contemplate. Not yet. Danger around every corner. Central Station – Jesus! A cop can come up and say: where you going? Little queers. That boy isn't old enough, there are laws against that kind of thing. There should be the death penalty for that kind of love.]

Joakim is certainly a character that demonstrates a depressive and anxious disposition, but his hyper self-awareness in both public and intimate spaces is indicative of the profound ways in which this legal stipulation informed the experiences of homosexuals at the time.

Joakim's first homosexual relationship is with his older coworker Nick, with whom he is spotted on a date at the opera by their homophobic boss, the accountant Mr. Granfelt (165). Back at work, Granfelt pulls Joakim into his office and warns him to stay away from “såna där” [those types] (196). Granfelt continues sadistically that

Vi kallade dem bögar . . . Vi hade klappjakt på dem, jagade dem. Anmälde dem. När jag var pojke. Vi lät någon göra sig bekant med en av dem. Lät honom tafsa på sig. Vi smög förstår du, stod bakom knuten och smög oss på . . . vi slet i dem, vi jagade dem . . . en efter en, så många vi kom åt” (196-7).

[We called them faggots . . . We hunted them like witches. Reported them. When I was a boy. We had one guy get to know one of them. Let him fondle the guy. We were sneaky, you see, and a cop was standing behind us . . . we went after them, we hunted them . . . one after the other, as many as we could get a hold of.]

Granfelt warns Joakim to keep the conversation private, which he refuses. Nick soon breaks up with him, ultimately driving the sensitive Joakim to attempt suicide with the gas stove in his mother's kitchen (*Sodomsäppet* 244-5)

Mr. Granfelt's admission to Joakim not only reveals the homophobic beliefs held by Granfelt himself, but it characterizes the greater cultural climate and dominant opinions held about homosexuality and homosexual people in the 1940s and 1950s in Sweden. Upon decriminalization and the increased age of consent for homosexual acts, it was stipulated that the discourse around homosexuality in major cities focused on young male prostitution. Rydström describes that initial discussions surrounding decriminalization characterized homosexuals as "the victims and the young boys who took part in this activity as blackmailers and petty criminals" (201). The judicial and medical community at this time agreed that blackmailers and male prostitutes posed a great threat to "decent homosexuals," but this also resulted in the conversation that a law ought to be put in place to defend young people from "having their sexuality influenced by older homosexuals" (201). This particular stipulation of homosexual age of consent came about during a broader wave of legislation in Sweden in the 1920s and 1930s that focused on protection of children. The resulting image was that of the older homosexual who influenced younger juvenile delinquents which in turn harmed themselves and society in general (201-202). The homosexual male prostitution in larger Swedish cities, often fueling juvenile

delinquency, blackmail and violence is depicted in Koch's *Guds vackra värld* (1916), Hallbeck's *Grabb på glid* (1949) and Busk's *Änglaskuggorna* (1969).

The new concept of the homosexual as not only an identity³⁰ but also a threat to youth gained greater traction with two homosexual scandals that erupted in Sweden in the early 1950s, a period which Söderström refers to as “homofiljakten” [homophile hunt] (485). This period saw a number of high-profile homosexual scandals, but the two most well known and influential were the Haijby and Kejne Affairs, both of which occurred in the first half of the 1950s. There exists, however, some special characteristics about the Swedish circumstances. During this time, a wave of moral activists in Sweden also called for higher moral codes among public officials and spread the idea that Sweden was a corrupt society. What makes this period unique is that both left and right political parties objected to rights for homosexuals. Another characteristic of this situation was that the idea of homosexuality as an upper-class phenomenon gained particular traction with the Kejne Affair. This idea was commonly-held in much of the Western world at the time, and the Kejne Affair confirmed suspicions that homosexuality was rampant in the highest echelons of Swedish society like the Royal Court, as well as officials in other institutions such as the police department.

The Haijby Affair was a blackmail scandal between King Gustav V and a former restaurant owner, Kurt Haijby. Rumors of the king's homosexuality were widespread (Joakim refers to him as “vår storpulla” [our big old queen] (*Sodomsäppet* 216), but concrete evidence of their sexual relationship was never found. However, a payoff from the Royal Court for Haijby's silence was made public, and the court also purchased the entire first edition of Haijby's roman à

³⁰ Foucault citation?

clef *Patrik Kajson går igen* (1947), which supposedly told Haijby's own story³¹. Haijby spent time in prison for extortion, as well a period in a mental hospital (which was common for those suspected of homosexuality at the time after decriminalization). The dubious actions on the part of the court in efforts to silence Haijby incensed the homophobic conservative political right, but the more liberal left also believed that this scandal confirmed their belief that Swedish authorities were conspiring to protect the King "and other high-ranking officials from being exposed as homosexuals" (203). The peculiarity of the entire Swedish political spectrum's unanimous homophobia underscores the desperation felt by homosexuals at the time, for example, Joakim, his painstaking care to undertake safety precautions when leaving Björn's apartment, and even his paranoia and fear experienced by just standing at Central Station.

The Kejne Affair was the second scandal that shaped this intensely homophobic period in Sweden, but this time the criminal justice institutions were under fire. Karl-Erik Kejne was a pastor doing social work to end male prostitution in Stockholm. His accusation of a coworker having sexual exploited young boys saw a particularly long investigation, which Kejne chalked up to the judicial system being "corrupted by homosexuals in high positions" (202). Public knowledge spread and fueled the scandal, and a government commission was formed to handle this matter. Four members of the commission were investigated but eventually "declared heterosexual" (203). The culmination of the scandal saw the resignation of the Minister of Ecclesiastic Affairs, Nils Quensel, because of his "odd sexual habits" (203). This period, despite the intense homophobia and political discourse around homosexuality, saw no new legislation,

³¹ The Haijby Affair has been characterized by many rumors and misconceptions, as well as even a novel "based on reality," *Ers Majestäts olycklige Kurt : en roman med verklighetsbakgrund* [His Majesty's Unlucky Kurt: A Novel Based on Real Events] by Lena Ebervall and Per E Samuelson (2008). However the most reliable and thorough study of this scandal is Dan Korn's *Kejne : verkligheten bakom 1950-talets rättsröteaffärer* (2013).

but it did result in a considerable increase in prosecution of homosexual acts with men younger than 18 (203).

The ubiquitous homophobia of 1950s Sweden is a constant force in the narrative of Joakim, but the manner in which the Kejne and Haijby Affairs appear in the novel demonstrates the ways in which homosexuality was presented and circulated for those *outside* of the secret homosexual underworld in which Joakim exists. The religious Auntie Molle confronts Joakim about his homosexuality before kicking him out of her home, sobbing: “Jag kan begripa tjuvar, i visa fall mördare och slinkor. Men de som är av samma kön och . . . nej, det är det största brott mot naturen som finns. Det är vad GUD säger” [I can understand thieves, in some cases even murders and whores. But those of the same sex . . . no, it is the greatest crime against nature that there is. That is what GOD says.] (*Finnas till* 19). She does not explicitly reference the Kejne Affair, but Joakim remarks to himself:

Det var apropå Kejnehistorien, det. En historia som fick varje homosexuell människa att uppröras, gripas av ett tyst vanmäktig raseri.

Som fick de ‘andra’ att än en gång vandra vilse över svarta ramaskrin på löpsedlarna.

Nångång i början av femtioalet (19).

[It was regarding the Kejne story. A story that upset every homosexual person, causing him to be caught in a silent, powerless rage.

It forced everyone else to yet again be misinformed by the headlines.

Some time in the beginning of the 1950s.]

Auntie Moller reveals the way in which ideas about homosexuality were circulated not only within her conservative Christian faith, but also within discourses of criminality and moral decay that include murder, theft, and prostitution. Joakim’s ironic mention that this was “sometime in the 1950s” also illustrates the disparate experiences of ‘the Other’ (homosexuals at this period)

and the majority (Auntie Moller). For the general public this was a media sensation, but for homosexuals like Joakim, this informed his miserable existence on the peripheries of society with the stamp of ‘criminal’ on his head.

Auntie Moller also explicitly refers to both the Kejne and Haijby Affairs, and the association with criminality and homosexuality that they have authored in the consciousness of the general public. Auntie Moller remarks: “Jag har läst om det här med Kejneaffären. Och Haijbyaffären . . . och en annan lort” [I’ve read about that Kejne Affair. And the Haijby Affair . . . and other dirty business], explaining that “Jag har också hört att såna där – du vet vad jag menar – såna där blir alltid indragna i kriminalitet.” [I have also heard that those types . . . you know who I mean – they’re always drawn into criminality] (71). Auntie Moller’s claim of criminality as inextricably facilitated and linked by one another is informed entirely by media discourse that covered the homosexual sex scandals of the 1950s, a discourse that was fueled by a political spectrum that united homophobic values and suspicions of corruptions.

Because this homosexual witch hunt focused on young male homosexual prostitution and the supposed moral corruption of Swedish institutions, actual homosexual people were not significantly affected or exposed, as most of the police’s investigations were based on the address books of prostitutes. Söderström also notes in his article “Kejne- och Haijbyaffärerna” that only a small minority of homosexual men were affected by the witch-hunt, and homosexual women not at all (117). However, the most significant effect of this period is one that is more dangerous because of its long-lasting and pervasive results. Söderström also notes that

Den viktigaste följden för Sveriges homosexuella var att man under lång tid kom att få en folklig stämpel som halvkriminella och motbjudande, en ställning liknande den som etnisk främmande grupper som judar och tattare hade haft (117).

[The most important consequences for Sweden's homosexuals was the long-lasting cultural stigma they were given as partially criminal and repulsive, a position similar to that of foreign ethnic groups like Jews and Gypsies in the past.]

The cultural stigma is one that persists even today, one that has been reinforced and challenged especially in the context of the AIDS crisis.

The assertion presented in this chapter that Martin's trilogy was one of the first voices in resisting the one-sided narrative underscores the importance of this trilogy and Martin's critical role in the coming out revolution. The trilogy of Joakim (in conjunction with Martin's coming out) acts as the first voice of contention and resistance to the singular homophobic political voice that was informed by the homosexual sex scandals of the 1950s. It also offers a window into the experience of a young homosexual who lives under the paranoia, fear, and oppression of this stigma.

The Coming Out of Bengt Martin

In contrast to the effects of the McCarthyist witch hunt in the US in the 1950s, in which homosexuals were blacklisted, denied employment or fired from their jobs, the Swedish homo hunt that focused on boy prostitution and political corruption did little other than to expose the evils of homosexuality as a myth (Andreasson, 117). The Sexual Revolution then sweeping the Western world allowed for more permissive attitudes toward sexuality and was facilitated by the women's movement as well as medical inventions like penicillin to cure syphilis and later, the Pill, approved in Sweden in 1964 (Åberg). The new culture of free love, which tried to break free from oppressive Christian moral codes, encouraged sexual expression outside of the traditional model of marriage and monogamy. The liberation of homosexuals was in no way a central focus or goal of this liberation, but permissive attitudes towards sexuality certainly allowed for an openness and acceptance of non-normative sexuality. In the Swedish context, the Sexual Revolution was in many ways a continuation of the discourse surrounding sexuality in the 1930s, and demonstrated a shift from the linking of sexuality to reproduction to instead pleasure (Björklund 57).

Although a sexual revolution would presumably include improvement of the sociopolitical situation for those inhabiting non-heterosexual sexualities, in Sweden this was not the case. Sweden also became known internationally for its sexual permissiveness by this time, driven in large part by the myth of the 'Swedish sin' disseminated by a few Swedish films released abroad, as well as Sweden's passing of compulsory sexual education in all schools in 1955³². In the earlier part of the 1960s in Sweden, radical and liberal voices argued for additional freedoms regarding sexuality, including free abortion, abolition of censorship, improved sexual

³² Sweden became the first nation in the world to implement compulsory curricula of this nature.

education, and reduced legislation around pornography (Björklund, 58). Surprisingly, however, both the RFSL and RFSU remained on the periphery of this widespread cultural debate.

Björklund also notes that homosexuality was indeed “debated in the Swedish sexual revolution, and many liberals argued for a more progressive attitude towards it, but homosexuals themselves were largely absent from the debate,” and both RFSU and RFSL “kept low profiles, and nobody entered the debate as openly gay or lesbian” (58). Thus the invisibility of homosexual people at this time suggests that this revolution was largely heterosexual and that the sociopolitical climate was still considered hostile (58).

As a result, the gay rights movement in Sweden did not begin until the 1970s and largely followed the American example of radical openness with regards to homosexuality. The Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969 was a crystallizing moment in what would become known as the gay rights movement. Homosexual people, almost exclusively men, were referred to in Swedish as “en sån” [one of those], echoing Oscar Wilde’s infamous euphemism for homosexuality, “the love that dare not speak its name”. The diffuse grassroots organizing of homosexual people suddenly found a political moment under which it could define and organize itself. Radical political movements in the US, spurred by Vietnam War protests and the Civil Rights Movement, won great interest among Swedes, and the burgeoning gay rights movement was no different. AIDS activist, author and journalist Bodil Sjöström comments that at this time not only were homosexuals in Sweden fascinated by gay rights movement in the US—there was also a general desire to be involved in the greater political project. This preoccupation with the newly formed American political project of gay rights encouraged a radical openness regarding homosexuality. This idea of openness is complicated by contemporary bourgeois ideas of

acceptability and heteronormativity within the gay rights movement, but in 1968 Martin's coming out was hugely significant.

Martin came out a year before Stonewall, coinciding with the release of *Sodomsäpplet*. The multiple factors described above, including the Sexual Revolution and the great interest in the blossoming gay rights movement in America, allowed for the amplification of Martin's celebrity. He would release the two subsequent novels about Joakim over the next two years and remained a media fixture for the next decade until the AIDS crisis demanded more innocuous and mainstream images of male homosexuality. Martin's depression, bitterness, and personal grudges became widely known, and he soon grew to separate himself from the gay rights movement as Gardell soon usurped the role of *riksbögen* [the national homo] (Wilson 36).

Homosexuality and Mental Illness

Decriminalization and the coming out revolution slowly but surely brought about a number of legislative and sociopolitical changes with regards to homosexuality, but one unfortunate legacy of this period is the labeling of homosexuality by *Socialstyrelsen*³³ [The National Board of Health and Welfare] as a mental illness. The medicalization of sexuality, a discourse which deemed non-heterosexual sexuality as deviant, gained widespread influence in the Western world at the turn of the twentieth century, a phenomenon which Foucault has examined in depth in *The History of Sexuality I* (1976). In the Swedish context, this process was particularly intense in the 1930s in Sweden (Björklund 18). RFSU was established in 1933 which focused on sexual hygiene and education, and Gunnar and Alva Myrdal's *Nation and Family* was published in 1934, which placed the regulation of sexuality and reproduction at the center of the discourse on the newly formed Swedish welfare state.

Although homosexuality was decriminalized in 1944, the diagnosis of homosexuals as mentally ill was used to castigate homosexuals, who were committed to mental hospitals until they were supposedly 'healthy' ("HBT-historia"). This institutional abuse is described in Kurt Haijby's *Patrik Kajson går igen*, in which Patrik was committed for extended periods of time for alleged sexual acts with two teenaged boys years earlier. In the novel, Patrik maintains his innocence, but the novel underlines the abuse of power demonstrated by the medical community at this time. The medical community was also explicit in its descriptions of homosexuality as a "psykisk störning" [mental deviance] that could be cured, an idea driven forward by a popular

³³ The National Board of Health and Welfare, which describes its mission as working "to ensure good health, social welfare and high-quality health and social care on equal terms for the whole Swedish population [. . .] with a very wide range of activities and many different duties within the fields of social services, health and medical services, environmental health, communicable disease prevention and epidemiology" (The National Board of Health and Welfare).

book by psychologist Gunnar Nycander from 1933, *En sjukdom som bestraffas* [An Illness That Is Punished]. Nycander also appeared on *Sveriges Radio*'s [Sweden's Radio] first program on the topic of homosexuality in 1951. In an interview with *Aftonbladet* he responded to the issue of whether or not RFSL ought to exist. Hellmans claimed that there are organizations for those with tuberculosis and for the blind, and homosexuals therefore cannot be denied "medborgerliga rättigheten" [the right of a citizen] (Silverstolpe and Söderström 661).

The movement towards the emancipation of homosexuals in the 1960s in the shadow of the Sexual Revolution demonstrates the first example of the gay rights movement's conscious public relations move: to dissociate homosexuality from mental illness. Allan Hellman, the founder of RFSL and the first Swede to ever come out as homosexual publicly, echoed similar sentiments that considered homosexuality an illness. Hellman described in an interview with *Aftontidningen*: "Det är inte konstigare att vi homosexuella sammansluter oss i ett förbund, än att sockersjuka och lungsjuka gör det" [It's not more strange that we homosexuals create an organization for ourselves, than diabetics or those with lung disease do] (661). Hellmann was ostracized from his hometown of Lysekil, but the greatest offense was the reaction against homosexuals themselves, and the membership of RFSL plummeted for fear of its list of members being made public. Söderström notes that Hellman understood that individual members of RFSL might have been angered by his interview but that he would never come to accept how other RFSL members betrayed him and blamed him for the organization's problems (662). This internal dissension within the gay rights movement over the 'right' image of homosexuality to be presented is the driving force behind the many waves of cultural amnesia that are demonstrated in this project.

This self-aware public relations project of homosexuals that began organizing at this time in Sweden also eschewed any association with the lawyer and author Knut Hansson's series of autobiographical novels, which he released under the pseudonym Knut Lagrup. *Avvikelser* (1965) was best known, contains many of the similar thematic and plot elements of the trilogy about Joakim, including the lonely childhood of bullying, public sex, and travel throughout Europe in search of other homosexual communities. However, Hansson's novels contain an altogether darker picture of homosexuality and explicitly link it to mental illness, which Hansson himself suffered for many years; he was committed to a mental institution for his "oförmåga till normala relationer till andra människor" [inability to maintain normal relationships with other people] (Silverstolpe and Söderström 705). Hansson admitted in a 1991 interview with Paprikas that "Homosexuella tycker inte om mina böcker. Jag är för realistisk. Dom vill alltid dölja en del. Och det gör inte jag" [Homosexuals don't like my books. I am too realistic. They always want to conceal some things. But I don't] (Paprikas 40). His writing was fairly well received in the press for its true depiction of a homosexual man's life, but his appearance on Swedish television in 1965³⁴ was met with negative reviews. The gay magazine *Följeslagaren* took issue with his "dyrbar[a] njutning ur självföraktet och själväcklets spasmer, vare sig han utlämnar sin skam åt läsaren eller sitt plågade ansikte åt den anonyma TV-publiken" [exquisite pleasure from the spasms of self-hatred and self-loathing, whether he reveals his shame to the reader or his tortured face towards the TV audience] (662). Hansson's darkness, self-loathing and his own mental illness that pervade his writing echoed the homophobic status quo, which caused not only ostracizing from his homosexual contemporaries, but also gay cultural memory.

³⁴ Although Hansson wrote under the pseudonym Knut Lagrup for fear of being exposed, he appeared on Swedish television under his real name (Silverstolpe and Söderström 662).

Bengt Martin's trilogy about Joakim was soon considered too dark in the radicalized sociopolitical climate in 1970s in which the gay rights movement really gained traction. He retells the story of Joakim, but this time with a boy named Bengt in another trilogy: *Pojkar ska inte gråta* [Boys Don't Cry] (1977), *Bengt och kärleken* [Bengt and Love] (1978) and *Ljuva femtiotal* [The Sweet 1950s] (1979). Like Joakim, Bengt is a young man interested in theater. He also has an older boyfriend with whom he travels to other countries, including Germany, and where he enjoys a certain freedom among sexual deviants outside of the rigid Swedish society³⁵. Hansson was rejected by the homosexual community because of his support of widespread homophobic beliefs that homosexual people are mentally ill; this belief was posed by both The National Board of Health and Welfare and the Swedish medical community.

In addition to the ways in which homosexuality as a mental illness is challenged in the trilogy of Joakim, Martin's coming out on Swedish television explicitly addresses this tension as he appeared on *Storforum* with one of Sweden's leading psychiatrists, Johan Cullberg. Cullberg openly described homosexuality as a mental defect that could be cured with psychotherapy. There are plot and thematic similarities between Hansson's *Avvikelser* and the trilogy about Joakim; however, Martin's trilogy underscores one important idea: the isolation, fear, anxiety, and depression that Joakim experiences are the *result* of his living a hostile and homophobic society. Hansson's writings, on the other hand, are ridden with self-loathing and contempt, and his homosexuality is to blame for his inability to connect with other people. Hansson's autobiographical writings often describe homosexuality as the root cause of his psychological

³⁵ Martin's rewriting of his work is examined in Sebastian Nilsson Lindberg's *Att skriva, skriva om och skriva om sig själv: En komparativ undersökning av Inger Edelfeldts och Bengt Martins omarbetade berättelser om homosexualitet* (2011).

problems. Thus, Martin's writing was embraced by the gay rights movement during this period because of the ways in which the psychiatric community is depicted and critiqued.

His timing, his coming out, and the way in which misconceptions about mental illness are contested in his trilogy made him the perfect figure for the newly minted gay rights movement, although his *riksbög* status was short-lived. Martin's authorship and likeability were invaluable tools in driving forward this coming out revolution and the gay rights movement that truly galvanized in Sweden in the 1970s. The National Board of Health and Welfare finally removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses in 1979 when, in connection with *Frigörelseveckan*³⁶ [Liberation Week] in Stockholm, its office building staircase was occupied by some thirty or forty homosexuals who had called in sick because of their homosexuality. The National Board of Health and Welfare removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses two weeks later (Andreasson 33). Although this idea of homosexuality as a mental illness persists in much of the Western world as well as in Sweden, homosexual men would soon be linked with physical illness, which arguably had much more damaging and long lasting ramifications.

³⁶ This would eventually come to be known as Stockholm Pride.

The Trilogy About Joakim: Young and Homosexual in Stockholm

Martin's trilogy about Joakim, 'young and homosexual in Stockholm'³⁷, depicts a dark time in Swedish history, when homosexual people were considered both criminal and mentally ill, and the first novel in the trilogy, *Sodomsäpplet*, ends with the protagonist Joakim's suicide attempt in his mother's kitchen gas oven. The trilogy explicitly engages this link between homosexuality and mental illness, psychiatry, depression, and medication. It also presents an honest depiction of the life of a homosexual young man during the late 1940s and 1950s in Stockholm. Martin's emphasis on the emotional, psychological, and social difficulties that a homosexual person faced in Sweden at the time hardly paints a rosy picture of gay life; this trilogy stands in stark contrast to the homonormative bourgeois images of gay life presented in Sweden today.

Wilson writes in his posthumous letter to Martin in *Böggjävlar*:

Det känns som om du aldrig kände kravet på dig att vara en förebild. Du skrev om sina knullisar (KK:n vi kallar det idag) Om spriten. Om misslyckandena. Utan att behöva känna att du var ambassadör för homonormativiteten. Eller kanske var det kanske just det du var? För en homovärld där även freaks och fyllon fick ta plats? (40).

[It feels like you never felt the demand to be a role model. You wrote about your sex friends (we call them 'fuck buddies' today). About alcoholism. About failure. Without the need to feel like you were an ambassador for homonormativity. Or maybe that is just who you were? For a gay world where even freaks and drunks can exist?]

Martin's compelling depiction of the character Joakim challenges the notion of homosexuals and mentally ill; at the same time it portrays Joakim as having many of the same commonly-held stereotypical traits associated with homosexual men that persist even today. And in contrast to the young gay male protagonists in more recent novels like Edelfeldt's *Duktig pojke* [Good Boy]

³⁷ In later editions, this trilogy was published as *Romaner om Joakim, ung och homosexuell i Stockholm*.

(1977) and Olsson's *Spelar roll* [Playing A Roll] (1991), Joakim is not popular, athletic or socially adept; he is feminine, has a nervous tic, has difficulty making friends, and is bullied and harassed throughout school. The trilogy challenges the homophobic assumptions about mental illness that persisted from the previous decade, while at the same time promoting a 'gay is good' sentiment by embracing the archetypal 'fairy' image and humanizing his plight for the reader.

The trilogy about Joakim is a smart and thoughtful narrative incorporating various political perspectives and discourses on homosexuality from its time in a narrative structure around a likeable and sympathetic character. *Sodomsäpplet*, Martin's best-known work, begins when Joakim Mander is a young teen, or "Fröken Mander" [Miss Mander] as he is known by his bullying classmates. The title *Sodomsäpplet* is defined in the novel's preface: "Frukten av ökenväxten *Calotropis procera*. Vackert gulfärgad på utsidan, torr inuti. Enligt legenden består frukten av aska till åminnelse av det uppbrända Sodom" [The fruit of the desert plant *Calotropis procera*. Yellow and beautiful on the outside, but dry inside] (5). An apple of Sodom is also a term for something that appears valuable but in truth is worthless; in biblical narrative it is the tree that grew from the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah, and whose fruit would turn to ashes and smoke if picked. This title offers many levels of interpretation, the most salient is to pose the question of the sodomite and the supposed demon that is his homosexuality.

Joakim lives in Sibirien, a neighborhood in Stockholm's Vasastan, with his depressive mother. His father was an alcoholic who died some years earlier. He has a strained relationship with his mother, who describes Joakim as abnormal from the very beginning:

Du är inte som andra pojkar, säger hon. Varför fick jag inte ett vanligt normalt barn? Du komplicerar så mycket, gör berg av småsten. Gräver i saker du har inte med att göra"

[You aren't like other boys, she says. Why couldn't I have had a regular, normal child? You complicate so much, make mountains out of mole hills. You delve into things that are none of your business.] (12).

This idea of young gay characters as not quite being 'like other boys' is a common phrasing that appears in many later Swedish novels as an early stage of the coming out and self-realization process. Joakim's hypersensitivity is a recurring theme, and reappears in his relationships with two characters, Nick and Björn. Joakim is first pointed out as abnormal in by his mother, and his home is just as homophobic as the outside world for him. While shopping for a new jacket (which his mother says looks like a "flickkappa" [girl's coat] (26)), Joakim's mother notices that the salesclerk is sympathetic towards him, and she suspects he is homosexual. She instructs Joakim: "Den du," [that guy] she whispers, "Akta dig för såna typer" [watch out for those types] (27). Before the coming out revolution, the terms "såna" or "en sån" were used to refer to homosexual men³⁸. Joakim is bullied at school and called "råtta" [rat] and "Fröken Mander" by his classmates (14). The hostility of his home compounded by that of the outside world are the first indicators in the trilogy that the harsh environment is to blame for Joakim's problems fitting in rather than his homosexuality.

Sodomsäppet follows Joakim's desperate and frantic journey towards accepting his homosexuality, despite the various institutions and relationships within *folkhemmet* [the folk home] that render him without citizenship. He acknowledges romantic feelings for Verner, the man who rents a room in the apartment he shares with his mother (45), and even senses a bit of

³⁸ This term referred almost exclusively to homosexual men. The terms *fikus* and *bög* also existed and both appear in *Sodomsäppet*, but did not become as widely used until after the 1970s when the gay rights movement reclaimed the term. See Fredrik Silverstolpe's article "Den historiska bakgrunden till ordet bög" ["The Historical Background of the World *Bög*"] (2001).

“gaydar” and sympathy with a male salesclerk at PUB³⁹ (26). Before he has any real-life contact, his knowledge of homosexuality is derived from a number of sources: the homophobic sociopolitical climate in which he lives, echoed by his mother who instructs him to watch out for “såna typer” [those types] (27); references to well known homosexuals in history to make sense of his feelings, such as Oscar Wilde (“Oscar var också bög [. . .] Det hade stått i tidningen. Oscar Wilde var homosexuell. Suttit i fängelse för det” [Oscar was also a fag [. . .] It was in the newspaper. Oscar Wilde was a homosexual. Went to prison for it.] (125); as well as Gustav III of Sweden, “vår storpulla” [our big old queen] (216); and *Nordisk Familjebok* [Nordic Family Book], where he looks up the term homosexual, and writes in his diary that

Det verkar inte så farligt i alla fall. Fast naturligt är det förstås inte. Man är abnorm, står det. Pervers. Jag känner mig inte alls sån och ändå kan jag låta bli att tänka på det här”

[It doesn't seem that dangerous in any case. But it's obviously not natural. One is abnormal, it says. Perverse. I don't feel that way at all, and yet I can't stop thinking about this] (83).

Among all of the negative information circulating around homosexuals and homosexuality, Joakim still sees himself reflected in this image, and finally says aloud (alone and to himself), “Jag är en . . . bög” [I am a . . . faggot] after having seen it scrawled on a bathroom stall door (177). Despite the homophobic climate of the period, he takes ownership of the space of *bög*, and at the same time rejects its moralistic and pathological fallacies.

Bengt Martin's style of weaving more complex political issues into the narrative is an important function that literary representations can perform and other media cannot. Joakim lands a part-time job at a newspaper and begins dating Nick, his coworker and first boyfriend.

³⁹ A department store in central Stockholm.

Nick is twenty-seven, at this time eleven years older than Joakim. The relationship progresses somewhat and Joakim falls in love with Nick, despite the fact that he is underage according to the age-of-consent stipulation of decriminalization. Nick is hesitant and cautious, exclaiming, “Sexton år. Bara sexton år. Du är inte lovlig Joa. Vet du att du är inte lovlig?” [Sixteen. Only sixteen years old. You’re not old enough, Joa] (147). “Står det i lagen?” [Does it say that in the law?] Joakim asks, to which Nick responds “Jag tror det [. . .] Förr var det tukthus på sånt här” [I believe so [. . .] It used to be jail for this] (147-8). Martin’s narration in the trilogy offers explicit critiques of certain political ideas or beliefs, that are humanized with Joakim’s own reasoning:

Kunde inte vara sant. Tukthus? För att två människor tyckte om varandra,
ville leva tillsammans?
Samma kön. Syndigt. Smutsigt.
Det gäller två människor. Vad spelar könet för roll? (149).

[That can’t be true. Prison? Just because two individual people liked each
other, wanted to live together?
The same sex. Sinful. Dirty.
It’s just between them. What does the gender matter?]

The complicated political questions of the moment are presented in a logical way by Joakim, a believable and sympathetic character rather than a demonized sodomite (or “en sån,” a social evil obscured by language and moral decency).

Sodomsäpplet ends with every figure and institution in his life alienating Joakim, who tries to commit suicide by the gas oven in his mother’s kitchen. Nick breaks up with Joakim for fear of criminal action when he is spotted at the opera by his boss. The usually callous Nick comes completely unglued, and Joakim recalls: “Fängelse. Jag får fängelse, hade Nick sagt en gång. Du går nog fri, dig tar barnavårdsnämnden och lägger rabarber på. Men du går fri, Joa. Får

bara ett litet koll på dig så du inte går och lägger dig med såna som jag” [Jail. I’m going to jail, Joa. You’ll probably be let go, they’ll take you to child protective services when they get their hands on you. But you’ll go free, Joa. They’ll take just enough care of you so you don’t go and sleep with guys like me] (166). Nick’s words demonstrate the arbitrariness of the age of consent law and its disparity with the commonly held beliefs about homosexuality at the time, such that one is a victim until the age of eighteen and then suddenly a predatory criminal. Nick calls in sick from work the day after the opera, and Joakim suspects he has committed suicide. He goes to Nick’s apartment and finds another boy there with him in nothing but his underwear. In a last ditch attempt at help, Joakim runs to the home of his teacher Mr. Bengtsson, whom Joakim suspects is also homosexual (“Vi är lika” [We are the same]), he is turned away by Bengtsson who refuses to help him, and “vill inte veta några detaljer” [does not want to know any details] when Joakim cries out that he is in love with Nick (62). By underscoring the desperate and hopeless circumstances suffered by young homosexual people like Joakim, Martin is demonstrating the ways in which homosexuality is not a mental illness; instead, mental illness is a symptom of living as homosexual in such a homophobic society.

Nejlikmusslan’s⁴¹ preface stands in stark contrast to the cryptic biblical reference that the title *Sodomsäpplet* makes; it immediately locates the medical discourse as the space in which homosexuality is primarily discussed in the novel. The novel opens with a section of the Kinsey Report that describes homosexuality as a social construct and concludes that 37% of the male population has had physical homosexual contact between puberty and adulthood (5). As described earlier, the Kinsey report was conducted in the United States, but the Swedish translation that appeared in 1949 began to shift ideas about the prevalence of male

⁴¹ Björn uses this term of endearment for Joakim (121).

homosexuality. The novel does not provide exact dates for the narrative but divides into two parts: the first begins in “en höst alldeles i slutet av fyrtioalet,” [an autumn in the very end of the 1940s] foreshadowing the dark period of Joakim’s self-acceptance (7); the latter half of the novel begins in “en vår alldeles i början av femtioalet” [a spring in the very beginning of the 1950s] after which his relationship with the character Björn has begun (117).

Nejlikmusslan opens in Joakim’s hospital room, with his eccentric Auntie Moller by his side. His overbearing mother has moved to the suburbs, and he now lives in Auntie Moller’s villa on Djurgården. She has been widowed for many years and becomes overinvested in Joakim’s life—frequently inserting her devoutly religious ideas into their interactions. Auntie Moller, who often echoes the previous generations’ ideas about homosexuality as unnatural and sinful (this appears much more explicitly in *Finns till*), even values faith above psychiatry. Although Joakim has refused to reveal his reasons for attempting suicide to anyone, including his doctor, Auntie Moller does offer that “GUD vet att du är klok” [GOD knows that you’re not insane] (35). This trilogy presents both religion and psychiatry as institutions that have failed Joakim but focuses much more on the psychiatric profession that dominated the discourse on homosexuality at the time the trilogy takes place.

Joakim’s psychiatrist Janne Bergman personifies the medical profession at the time, which was unsympathetic and dismissive. From their very first session, Joakim remarks that “Janne borde inte blivit psykiatriker . . . Det känns fel, hela Janne känns fel” [Janne should not have been a psychiatrist . . . It feels wrong, everything about Janne feels wrong.] (12). Dr. Bergman diagnoses Joakim with general depression, exacerbated by his domineering mother and his difficulties in school (13). Joakim continues to take the pills prescribed by Dr. Bergman, which make him lethargic. Dr. Bergman brings up the question of homosexuality, “utan intresse,

utan värme” [without interest, without warmth], which Joakim initially denies (13). Dr. Bergman’s reply suggests the medical profession’s understanding of homosexuality as an illness of preposterous results, assuring Joakim that “du är bara sexton år, Joa. Snart sjutton. Hela livet ligger öppet. Och ler” [you are only sixteen, Joa. Almost seventeen. Your whole life is ahead of you. And it’s smiling.] (13). Dr. Bergman’s response also points to the difference in the age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual relations during this period, which was 15 for heterosexual sex and 18 for homosexual sex.⁴²

Dr. Bergman also echoes many of the homophobic misconceptions from the time and fails to offer any deeper psychological counseling or advice. Joakim keeps his homosexuality secret from Dr. Bergman until a traumatizing incident in the apartment of a man he picked up in Humlegården⁴³ (I will discuss this incident later in this section). Joakim suffers from such intense crying fits that he calls Dr. Bergman in the middle of the night and eventually opens up about his homosexuality (48). Dr. Bergman admits that he suspected Joakim’s homosexuality, citing the way he walks and moves his hands as “flickaktig” [girlish] (51). Dr. Bergman also notes that homosexuality will result in terrible loneliness for Joakim, which will get difficult as he gets older (58). Though not uncommon beliefs about homosexual people at the time, Dr. Bergman’s ignorant comments portray the medical profession as just as ignorant as the general population, despite the fact that the medical profession was the principal producer of information on the topic at this time.

Instead of psychological support, or even more medication, Dr. Bergman’s recommendation for Joakim is to try and pursue relationships with women. He remarks that he

⁴² Rydström notes that the age of consent for homosexuality was 18, unless one party was in a position of dependency, which applied from 1944-1964 (*Criminally Queer* 39).

⁴³ A park in the Östermalm neighborhood of Stockholm used as a public meeting place for homosexual men.

wishes Joakim would have told him earlier, so that he could have been of some help. Joakim is terribly relieved: “Känner sig befriad. Vågade äntligen tala ut. Sa bara: jag är homosexuell. Inget mer, det räckte gott med det” [I feel relieved. Finally dared to speak out. Just said: I am homosexual. Nothing more, that was enough.] (48). However, the help that Dr. Bergman provides consists of recommendations on how to be heterosexual. He describes homosexuality as a common phase (51) and encourages Joakim repeatedly to try to establish a heterosexual relationship (55-58). Dr. Bergman continues to press Joakim for details on his relationship with Nick, but he still refuses to disclose details of the relationship in order to protect Nick from prosecution for sex with a minor.

Dr. Bergman’s advice to pursue heterosexual relationships facilitates the pivotal moment in the novel: Joakim’s affirmation of his identity as a homosexual. During a conversation with Dr. Bergman over Joakim’s disastrous singular experience with a girl, he blurts out: “Jag vill vara som jag är. Så är det med det” [I want to be who I am. And that’s that.] (55). Joakim’s statement echoes a hugely significant political shift that began with Martin’s coming out on Swedish television in 1968. Joakim has previously accepted his homosexuality to a certain extent, but this point in the novels marks the instance where he not only eschews the performance of heterosexuality but also affirms that he *wants* to act upon his feelings. After his admission, Dr. Bergman and Joakim end their weekly sessions, and in a grand cinematic gesture, Joakim dumps the entire bottle of medication down the sewer drain (59). The scene described above is one that explicitly sets Martin’s work apart from Hansson’s work. It is also a salient example of why Martin was embraced by the burgeoning gay rights movement in the early 1970s, which sought a bold and affirmative voice of gay positivity.

Joakim's affirmation of his own homosexuality does not result in immediate bliss and contentment; rather it drives him to explore the seedy subculture of male homosexuality that existed in Stockholm in the early 1950s. The subculture of male homosexuality consisted mostly of anonymous sexual encounters in public spaces such as parks and public toilets. Joakim's entire homosexual cultural competence was learned from Nick, and his introduction to this subculture begins with a trip to Humlegården. Nick describes Humlegården as "alla bögars paradis" [every faggot's paradise] (36), where lonely men wandered around "halvt galna av längtan efter en kropp" [half insane by the desire for a body] (44). Confounded, Joakim asks:

'Bara en kropp?'
'Har man tur kan man träffa en själ,' hade Nick svarat.
'Men själarna brukar undvika Humlegården.' (44).

['Just a body?'
'If you're lucky you can meet a soul,' Nick replied.
'But souls usually avoid Humlegården.']

Nick adds that the men in Humlegården are "sjuk[a] av längtan, Joa. Det blir en vana. Att trava omkring i pisshusen i Humlan⁴⁴. Många är rädda att fästa sig vid någon. Det finns risker, stora risker. De har kanske viktigt arbete." [sick with desire, Joa. It becomes a habit. Trotting around in the toilets in Humlan. Many are afraid to get close to anyone. There are risks, big risks. They might have important jobs.] (44). Joakim experiences the lack of emotion Nick describes on his first visit to Humlegården when he decides to go back to the apartment of a stranger he meets there in the dark. The man is attractive and twice his age, but Joakim is disturbed by the man's indifference to him, with eyes that "bryr sig inte om mig" [don't care about me] (45). Joakim's nerves overcome him as the man tries to remove his pants, and he anxiously asks the man if he

⁴⁴ Slang term that refers to Humlegården.

loves him twice before running out of the apartment and into the dark streets. This depiction is already at odds with Joakim's experience of his own homosexuality, which has been characterized up until this point by sentiment and romantic idealizations.

Martin's depiction of public sexual encounters underscores the human element that was lacking in the demonized depictions of pedophiles that were circulated in Sweden at this time. Earlier literary depictions such as Hallbeck's *Grabb på glid*, along with the intense homophobia of the 1950s, located homosexuality within a world of crime, prostitution, juvenile delinquency and corruption. However, Joakim's entry into the urban homosexual subculture is driven by loneliness and longing. He decides to go to another public meeting place for homosexual encounters, a hill near Frescati in Stockholm. Joakim states that one can't just wait for random encounters, not when

Jag är så sjuk av längtan.
Får lust av att säga det högt:
'Jag är sjuk av längtan.'
Provar på nytt och på nytt:
'Sjuk av längtan' (68)

['I am sick with desire.
I feel like saying it aloud:
'I am sick with desire.'
'I try it again and again:
'Sick with desire']

Joakim's intense loneliness and the desire to make contact with other homosexual men is above all driven by the desire to connect. As Joakim experienced previously, however, the anonymity and emotionlessness of public sexual encounters is mandated by fear of one's homosexuality being discovered, as well as the threat of criminal charges for sex with underage boys.

At Frescati, Joakim actually meets a character that embodies the stereotypical qualities of the male homosexual that were stigmatized and demonized in the 1940s and 1950s in Sweden. Mary-Roland acts as a foil to Joakim's fragile disposition, as well as his sexual insecurity: Mary-Roland wears makeup and bleaches his hair (94-96) and is nonchalant in admitting to Joakim that he is a prostitute: "Så enkelt är det. Det finns många som betalar skapligt för en natt" [It's easy. There's a lot of men who will pay handsomely for one night] (106). Mary-Roland takes Joakim to a club for homosexuals and introduces him to a whole cast of characters, even a man who sat in prison for two year's for sex with a minor (111). Rather than a space of acceptance and safety, Joakim finds the club to be a "köttmarknad" [meat market] and immediately feels alienated (98). However, he meets a man named Björn, to whom he drunkenly exclaims, "Jag vill inte bli som de!" [I don't want to become like them!] (referring to the motley cast of characters at the club) (116). After an altercation with Mary-Roland, Joakim leaves with Björn and the two return to Björn's apartment on Kungsholmen, where Björn demonstrates the tenderness and closeness that he desperately seeks by drying his mouth with a clean towel as he vomits.

Björn and Kaj Nord are two characters that depict a hopeful characterization of the medical profession and its treatment of homosexuality. Not only does Björn play an influential role in Joakim's happiness and recovery from depression (Björn is himself a surgeon), but he also puts him in contact with Kaj Nord⁴⁵, a psychiatrist who is also homosexual. Joakim describes him, in contrast to Dr. Bergman, as "en levande människa" [a living person] (126). Kaj Nord also begins to embrace the idea of gay positivity and self-acceptance that would

⁴⁵ Although Kaj Nord is a psychiatrist, Joakim refers to him by his full name, Kaj Nord, rather than Dr. Nord. This underscores Joakim's observation that Nord is "levande," and demonstrates his desire to distance himself from the medical profession.

characterize the coming-out revolution two decades later; he appears to do so in light of the information that the Kinsey Report provided. Björn tries to comfort Joakim: “Homosexualitet ligger latent hos alla” [homosexuality is latent in everyone] (178). Joakim receives only discouraging advice from Dr. Bergman on his “läggning,” [orientation] and wonders if one can even be sure if one is “bögg” (37). Kaj Nord suggests that Joakim must accept his orientation, and that “man måste bli lycklig trots att man är udda” [you have to be happy even though you’re different] (169). The novel ends with an exchange between Joakim and Björn that emphasizes the idea of gay positivity:

‘Björn? [. . .] Det är ingen skam?’
‘Vad min älskling?’
‘Att vara homosexuell . . . det är ingen skam. Men man måste ha vapen.
Alltid vara bättre kanske? Att vara allra bäst? För att bli accepterad?’ (207)

[Björn [. . .] It’s nothing to be ashamed of?”
What my darling?
Being a homosexual . . . it’s nothing to be ashamed of. But you’ve got to
have weapons. Maybe always being better? Being the very best? In order to be
accepted?]

Joakim’s realization comes right before the end of the novel, when Björn and Joakim “gör sin älskog⁴⁶” [make love] and fall asleep in each other’s arms (208). Joakim’s choice of words stands in stark contrast to the anonymous and emotionless sexual encounters that occurred in places like Humlegården. This tender scene also stands in stark contrast to the cold interaction Joakim had with the man he went home with from Humlegården and suggests that self-acceptance is the necessary step on the way towards healthy relationships.

⁴⁶ A formal and old-fashioned term for having sex.

Martin's depiction of Joakim's hostile environment explicitly locates homophobic Sweden in the 1950s as the cause of his mental illness, rather than vice versa. Joakim's anxiety and depression are linked throughout the novel to his difficulty in accepting his homosexuality, as well as the age of consent laws that threaten his relationship with Björn (this was also the reason Nick gave for breaking up with Joakim and leading to his suicide attempt). However, the bullying incident he endures at school is the most egregious example of the hostile environment for homosexual people in the 1950s in Sweden. Joakim is attacked by a few of his classmates, who pull off his pants to see if he has a vagina ([“Han har kanske fitta?” [Maybe he's got a cunt?] (154)), then urinate on him while he is held down, calling him “bögdjäväl” [faggot] and “fröken” [the lady] (152-3). This homophobia was even demonstrated by his teacher, who also referred to him as “Fröken Mander” (43). Joakim's classmates assure his silence with threats of reporting Björn to the police, whom they've seen drop Joakim off at school (“din lilla älskling, va? Han med Volvon?” [your little sweetie, huh? Him with the Volvo?](153)). Joakim indeed remains silent but profoundly affected by this incident. Kaj Nord encourages Joakim to let down the wall he's built up toward the outside world, but he refuses to tell either Björn or Kaj Nord how he was humiliated:

Muren är kvar.
Skam.
Det som hände.
Det går aldrig från mig. Om jag blir gammal med dig och alldeles geggig
är jag säker om att skräcken finns kvar. Ur den gömman kommer den ständigt
tillbaka – skräcken.
Skammen.
Naken.
Avklädd. (175-6)

[The wall is still up.
Shame.
From what happened.

It will never leave me. If I grow old with you and completely lose my mind I am sure that the fear will remain. From deep hiding it comes back constantly – the fear.

The shame.

Naked.

My clothes off.]

Joakim's introspection and trauma from this incident would evoke sympathy in any reader; they characterize the culture of homophobia as sick rather than Joakim because of his homosexuality. Kaj Nord prescribes Joakim medication after this trauma, and Joakim takes eight of them which he indifferently notes "åtta tabletter kan man kanske dö av" [you can probably die from taking eight pills] (165). Björn finds him in a stupor and forces Joakim to flush the pills down the toilet (167).

Nejlikmusslan was also ahead of its time in the way in which it discussed gay marriage. Same-sex marriage is presented in the novel with some irony, but still as an idea that was circulating in the discourse of gay positivity. Both Björn and Joakim also demonstrate the desire for same-sex relationships to be acknowledged by the state, which would not be sanctioned until 1994. Joakim gives a ring to Björn that he received from Auntie Moller in a gesture of commitment. Björn complains about colleagues pressing him on not being married, to which he remarks "Jag är gift. På mitt sätt." [I am married. In my own way.] (170). He also describes a mock wedding of a gay couple held at "Klubben"⁴⁷ [the Club], officiated by a gay priest, which was followed by the world's largest "pullskiva" [fag fest] (170). Martin hardly calls for the passing of same-sex marriage, but he does plant the seed of the state recognition of same-sex relationships that began circulating within the gay positivity discourse of the late 1960s and 1970s.

⁴⁷ Joakim uses the term "homofilklubb" [homophile club] (9), but the official name of the club is not given.

The playful subscription to the idea of Björn and Joakim as married continues in *Finnas till*, but in this novel Martin depicts their relationship as plagued by the same problems as any heterosexual couple. The novel begins with Björn and Joakim about to depart on a trip across Europe, which Björn describes as “vår bröllopsresa” [our honeymoon] since they are newly married (16). Björn takes on the traditional male breadwinner role and buys expensive new clothes for Joakim and finances their entire trip, pays for the room he rents after Auntie Moller kicks him out, and also pays for his theater school tuition (Joakim cannot live with Björn for fear of his colleague and neighbors discovering their illegal relationship (87)). Joakim takes on the traditional wifely role and complains that he and Björn are only truly close in bed (40) and that Björn is turned on by Joakim’s tears and vulnerability (86). Joakim remarks that he understands the plight of doctors’ wives and their loneliness, and he even wishes that he could carry Björn’s children (134). Martin’s depiction of their relationship appears universal, and normalizes a homosexual relationship for the reader, albeit through a heteronormative framework.

Martin locates the inequalities in Joakim and Björn’s relationship within broader Swedish feminist discourses that began in the 1960s. One of Martin’s close friends⁴⁸, Swedish poet Sonja Åkesson, had her breakthrough in 1963 with the poetry collection *Husfrid* [Domestic Bliss]. “Äktenskapsfrågan” [The Marriage Question], which appeared in the collection, is one of her best-known poems, and it critiques the oppressiveness of women’s roles confined to the domestic sphere. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) was published that same year and critiqued similar structures in the American context. Similarly, Joakim becomes entirely dependent financially upon Björn because of his circumstances:

⁴⁸ Martin and Åkesson released a book of their correspondence *Vi Ses!* [See you!] (1975). Martin also wrote her biography, *Sonja Åkesson* (1984).

Det finns gånger jag gör det helt kärlekslöst för att det ska så vara, för att du väntar dig det av mig.
För att du ska betala min skola.
Det finns tillfällen då jag känner mig [. . .] prostituerad (143).

There are times I do it completely without love because that's how it has to be, because you expect it of me.
Because you pay for my education.
There are times when I feel [. . .] like a prostitute.]

Martin observes that the same heteronormative patriarchal power structures also affect homosexual relationships, which in Joakim's case are compounded by a homophobic society that has left him homeless and dependent upon an older sympathizer with financial stability. The idea of homosexuals as targeting underage boys was a common cultural fear at the time, and the age of consent for homosexual contact was raised to twenty-one in the instance of dependency from 1944-1964 (*Criminally Queer* 39). Martin indicates in the novel that dependency is not endemic to homosexual relationships, but rather became necessary in a society and culture that alienated homosexual people. Martin also demonstrated this point with regards to mental illness by depicting the harsh sociopolitical climate that lead to anxiety, depression, and suicide for homosexual people, challenging the common belief that homosexuality itself was a mental illness.

Auntie Moller's reactions to learning of Joakim's homosexuality reflect the assortment of information that circulated about homosexuality in the 1950s, often contradicting one another. She is an eccentric and lonely figure who lives her glory day in the theater through Joakim. She lives very much in the past, which is confirmed by her dated knowledge about homosexuality, which she describes as "perverterade böjelser. Så kusligt, så omänskligt! [. . .] En abnorm. Det är så vidrigt så jag kan . . . inte tala om det. Ett förhållande till en äldre man" [perverted

inclinations. So creepy, so inhuman! [. . .] An abnormality. It is so vile that I can't . . . even talk about it. A relationship with an older man] (61). Although she does quote the bible's mention of homosexuality as a sin, Auntie Moller expresses contradictory knowledge about homosexuality as something one can catch: "Det är vidrigt, du är smittad – gå! Det är som pesten skulle kommit till mitt hus, jag vill tvätta mig ren. Å, jag vill tvätta mig ren" [It is so vile, you are infected – leave! It's like the plague has come to my house, and I want to cleanse myself. Oh, I want to cleanse myself!] (80). Auntie Moller's knowledge about homosexuality is also informed by the Swedish media coverage of the Kejne and Haijby Affairs, having read in the newspaper that that "såna blir alltid indragna i kriminalitet" [those types always get involved in crime] (71). Whether homosexuality is a sin, an illness one can catch, or membership in a criminal enterprise, Auntie Moller's reactions demonstrate the ways in which moral panic and fear circulated various ideas about homosexuality.

Despite the constant hostility Joakim experiences in homophobic 1950s Sweden, gay positivity still dominates the novel. Joakim comes out to his landlady, Carlsson, and he experiences a great epiphany:

Hon smeker honom över håret. För första gången i sitt liv är Joakim tillsammans med en 'utomstående' som vet. Som förstår och helt naturligt kan tala om det.

Det är viktigt. Det är något av det viktigaste som hittills hänt honom. Det måste finnas fler, tänker han. Det måste i själva verket finnas ganska många. Som kan tala lugnt, förstår" (127).

[She caresses his hair. For the first time in his life, Joakim is together with someone 'on the outside' who knows. Who understands and can talk about it freely.

It is important. It is one of the most important things that has ever happened to him. There must be others, he thinks. There very well must be quite a bunch. Who can speak calmly, understand.]

Joakim's coming out to Carlsson marks the beginning of the more hopeful tone that characterizes the rest of the novel. Afterwards, Joakim's anxiety and depression subside, and he even begins socializing with friends from drama school.

Martin reveals one of the central aims of the trilogy about Joakim on a film shoot for his first paid role as an actor: that airing the 'dirty laundry' of homosexual culture is actually a *good* thing. Joakim's role is ironically called "Tommy – fikus" [Tommy – queer] in the script (181). Tommy is a prostitute in Humlegården, who meets a stranger ("en bögdjäväl") in the public toilet and beats him up (182). During filming Joakim is met with almost comical instructions from his director: "Av med glasögonen för fan! En fikus har inte glasögon." [Off with the glasses, dammit! A queer doesn't wear glasses] (186); "Sen susar du in i pisshuset, stannar en stund" [Swish into the bathroom, stay for a bit] (187); "Vicka på arslet för helvete! Tänk på att du är en generalfikus!" [Wiggle your ass, dammit! Remember that you're a big queer!] (188). Joakim describes Humlegården as "vår Golgata" [our Golgatha], locating the park as the space in which male homosexuality is crucified culturally, where all of homophobic Swedish society's judgments are confirmed (186). Joakim feels like a traitor in playing this role, betraying one of other homosexuals' few spaces of making contact (189). This eerie meta-scene in which Joakim acts out his past shows how much Joakim has changed since he accepted his homosexuality. It also demonstrates the idea that confronting homophobic stereotypes reveals the foolishness and ignorance that inform them.

Finnas till ends on a hopeful note that foreshadowed the decade of gay rights activism that would follow its publication: the 1970s. Björn tells Joakim that "En dag. Vi får hoppas på den nya generationen . . . kanske nångång på sextiotalet? Eller sjuttiotalet – bara det händer nångång" [One day. We can hope that the new generation . . . maybe sometime in the 60s. Or the

70s – just as long as it happens someday] (199). Joakim also foreshadows the politicization of homosexual people that would come about in the 1970s, thinking to himself: “Man borde ställa sig upp på torget och vråla jag är homosexuell, vi är många, gör något! Låtsas bara inte som om vi inte existerade” [I should stand in the public square and shout that I’m a homosexual, there are a lot of us, so do something! Don’t pretend like we don’t exist!] (194). The conclusion of *Finns till* was unequivocally inspired by the Stonewall riots that occurred a year before its publication in 1970, as well as the outpouring of praise and letters Martin received after his own coming out with his partner on Swedish television in 1968.

The trilogy about Joakim offers an important contribution to the literary discourse on homosexuality because it refused to shy away from the negative associations and stereotypes about male homosexuality. Instead, it held a mirror up to the harsh sociopolitical climate of 1940s and 1950s Sweden, depicting it as the cause of such stereotypes and misconceptions that came about. Martin aired the ‘dirty laundry’ of the homosexual community, along with public sex, alcoholism, and abuse of prescription medication, in his ushering in of the coming out revolution. However, as we will see in the 1980s, the ‘dirty laundry’ of the gay community became a life or death situation, and Martin’s literary contributions would be erased from gay cultural memory in the face of AIDS.

II. THE AIDS CRISIS

Representations of AIDS in Swedish Literature

The gay positivity movement of the 1970s that fostered a lively gay subculture in cities like Stockholm and Malmö came to a screeching halt with the arrival of AIDS to Sweden in 1982. Homosexual Swedes officially shed the diagnosis of ‘mentally ill’ per The National Board of Health and Welfare’s definition in 1979. However this mysterious disease, which at first only seemed to affect men who have sex with men (MSM), quickly produced a stigma of *physical* illness for homosexual men. This stigma was reaffirmed and circulated by two particular pieces of legislation implemented during the AIDS crisis in Sweden, *Bastuklubbslagen* [The Bathhouse Law] and the inclusion of HIV under *Smittskyddslagen* [The Infectious Diseases Law]. This chapter will describe the historical circumstances and subsequent legislation that facilitated this association and then examine Ola Klingberg’s *Onans bok* (1999), a text that demonstrates the effects of this pathological process on the sexuality and identity of homosexual men, as well as the more broad and long-lasting effects of the pathologization of male homosexuality.

Onans bok remained for over twenty years the only work of fiction in Swedish that addressed the topic of AIDS until the publication of Jonas Gardell’s trilogy *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* [Don’t Ever Dry Tears Without Gloves] (2012-2013), discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation. The notable absence of *Onans bok* from the cultural debate around the AIDS crisis that Gardell’s trilogy established offers key insights into the way in which the gay community was dealing with AIDS at the time of its publication in 1999: by sweeping it under the rug and embracing the shiny, healthy, non-threatening and culturally savvy image of gay men. This is also demonstrated by the fact that the only other book to outsell *Onans bok* in

1999 at RFSL's bookstore was Calle Norlén's *Bög – så funkar det!* [Gay – How It Works!] a frivolous coffee table book that playfully attempts to articulate gay male culture in the 1990s. Klingberg's novel takes place from 1990-92 and is narrated in the first person by Peter, a twenty-six-year-old doctor working in Stockholm who has remained celibate for eight years due to his fear of contracting HIV. Although the publication of *Onans bok* went largely unnoticed by broader audiences, it still managed to place second on the 1999 bestseller list at RFSL's bookstore *Rosa Rummet* [The Pink Room]. The reputable *Albert Bonniers Förlag* [Albert Bonnier's Publishing House] has also printed two additional editions since the original. While commercial success certainly factors into the value and function of literature in my study, the modest success of this novel is rather telling when compared to the phenomenal success of Gardell's trilogy two decades later. That trilogy employs a number of thematic and formal similarities, including frequent flashbacks, actual media coverage by the Swedish press at the time, and the focus on public sex as a component of gay male culture.

The subject of AIDS is almost entirely absent from the general Swedish literary discourse. Aside from *Onans bok* only one other novel exists in Swedish, *Till vännen som inte ville rädda mitt liv* [To the Friend Who Didn't Want to Save My Life] (1992) by Hervé Guibert, which was translated from French in 1992. Aside from these two works of fiction, only three memoirs exist in Swedish that deal with HIV/AIDS. First is Lars-O. Westerholm's memoir *Fångad i flykten* [Trapped in Flight] (1989), which describes a young Finnish man's experience living with AIDS in Sweden before effective retroviral cocktails were discovered in 1996. Another is AIDS activist Walter Heidenkamp's autobiography *I sin skugga* [In Its Shadow] (2004), which describes his experience of being HIV positive in Sweden for fifteen years. Bodil Sjöström's *Happy holiday*⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Sjöström's book is written in Swedish but the title is in English.

(2013) is based on her experiences working with the Swedish AIDS organization Noaks Ark, and deals with her recollection of her friend Christian who died from AIDS.

However, *Onans bok* fills a void in ways other than simply its inclusion of HIV/AIDS into the Swedish literary discourse. *Onans bok* explores a notably under-studied topic: the way in which discourses surrounding AIDS, moral panic, and public sex in Sweden have affected gay male sexuality. One might argue that the novel is not specifically *about* AIDS itself; none of the characters has contracted HIV and none of them endures the physical, emotional and cultural traumas associated with a positive diagnosis that, in the early 1990s, was still equated with a death sentence. *Fear of AIDS* is unequivocally central in the novel, however, and the ways in which this fear controls, regulates and informs decisions, sexual practices and relationships is integral to this analysis provided in this chapter. Whereas Gardell's trilogy focuses on the experience of those infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS, *Onans bok* depicts the ways in which this moral and sexual panic affected those that have *not* been infected: MSM.

First a brief history of AIDS in Sweden is provided, along with several ways in which particular legislation influenced and informed discourses of male homosexuality in the 1980s. My textual analysis of *Onans bok* highlights the ways in which medical discourses and rhetoric of disease are present in the sexuality and sexual consciousness of the characters. Finally, this chapter offers an analysis of pop star Andreas Lundstedt's interview from *QX* magazine in 2008 in which he comes out as HIV positive; my analysis of his interview highlights the ways in which the medical and political discourses that have linked gay male sexuality with disease are still present two decades after the implementation of these pieces of legislation. This chapter explores the following inquiries: How did The Bathhouse Law and inclusion of HIV under The Infectious Diseases Law function to furnish the culture and rhetoric of self-contempt and sexual

shame among men who have sex with men? How is the Swedish case specific in the context of HIV/AIDS during this time? What does the novel format offer that sociological approaches to the topic cannot? In what ways does this novel present homosexuality as a physical illness and depart from earlier works that engage homosexuality as a mental illness?

AIDS Comes to Sweden

The 1970s in Sweden was characterized by a great air of possibility, and Sweden became much more present on the world stage in areas like fashion, music, and sports. This generation also saw the challenging of social conventions in the 1960s: political, cultural and sexual conventions were being reevaluated and challenged, including monogamy and heterosexuality. The Pill⁵⁰ allowed women the freedom to experiment with their sexuality, and penicillin was able to treat sexually transmitted diseases. Sexual experimentation, promiscuity, and drug culture were not specific to the gay male community but rather characterized much of Western culture in the 1970s during the disco era. Susan Sontag argues that this period of “risk-free sexuality” was “an inevitable reinvention of the culture of capitalism,” which was made possible by medications such as penicillin (165). Gay male culture thrived in this air of sexual freedom and capitalism, and nightlife grew to be the central fixture of gay culture. In Sweden it became much more visible during this time, and the gay neighborhoods in large US cities like New York and San Francisco inspired this desire for a sense of community in Stockholm (which in the 1970s had clubs like Cityclub, Piperska Muren, Tom Tom, Timmy, Skeppet and After Dark)⁵¹. In larger cities like Stockholm it was even considered “inne att vara gay eller bisexuell och läckert att vara fjollig” [in to be gay or bisexual and cool to be femme], and the androgynous look that blurred gender and sexual norms was celebrated by rock stars like David Bowie (18).

AIDS activist and author Bodil Sjöström observes that

det var en fascination över vad homosexuella gjorde i USA. Det fanns en längtan att vara med homosexuella frigörelsen, att kunna leva som gay, att få vara sig helt och fullt i en omgivning som delade detta (21).

⁵⁰ Oral contraception was available throughout Sweden since 1964.

⁵¹ After Dark was a gay club that was also an exclusive club for Swedish celebrities, much like Studio 54 in New York.

[there was a fascination with what homosexuals were doing in the US. There was a desire to be part of the gay movement, to be able to live openly gay, to be able to be completely and fully ensconced in the company of those who shared that desire].

Sweden still felt small and stifling compared to other Western countries, and many Swedish homosexual men at the time moved to New York to be a part of this new and exciting gay world that was being created. This new gay world centered around nightlife, public sexuality in spaces like bathhouses and parks, promiscuity, and drug use. Patrik Moore argues that these spaces functioned in many ways as safe spaces for sexuality and community building; however we know now that this subculture of promiscuity was the ideal environment that allowed HIV to spread (21).

Towards the end of the 1970s some gay activists began to critique the gay male culture as too fixated on promiscuity and partying. Larry Kramer's novel *Faggots* (1978) critiqued the decadent gay subculture that flourished in New York and on Fire Island in the 1970s; Kramer describes the intense backlash in an interview with Eric Marcus for his book *Making Gay History* (2002):

The one thing I was asked all the time was, 'Are you writing a negative book? Are you going to give us a good image?' I began to think, my God, people must really be very conflicted about the lives they're leading. And that was true. I think people were guilty about all the promiscuity and all the partying (196).

Kramer would go on to become a founding member of ACT UP and the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), and a celebrated playwright with *The Normal Heart*⁵² (1985), which portrays the early AIDS crisis in New York between 1981 and 1984. Kramer's outspoken persona made him a contentious figure in the gay community in New York, as many felt that

⁵² This Tony Award-winning play was also filmatized on HBO in 2014.

Faggots aired their dirty laundry. Kramer's prescient novel stands as a finely written window into this period of gay cultural history, the circumstances of which allowed the AIDS epidemic to reach MSM in such great numbers.

Sjöström notes that many homosexual men returned to Sweden after living in this gay urban subculture, citing a distaste for the American individualist society of 'every man for himself'; there was also an underlying fear or suspicion that they had become infected with what became known in Sweden as *bögpesten* [the gay plague] (21). Originally referred to by the medical community as Gay Bowel Syndrome or Gay Related Immuno Deficiency (GRID), little was known about how it was transmitted, or even how to test for it in the beginning⁵³. Many even believed that it was caused by poppers⁵⁴. Sjöström also notes that, from the very beginning, many homosexual men thought that AIDS was something that affected someone else, somewhere else, even among Swedish homosexual men who were living in the US. The small "ankdamm" [duck pond] of Sweden thus seemed a safe refuge from this terrifying disease, and many homosexual men returned home to Sweden (21). Upon return to Sweden, many homosexual men who took safety measures, including avoiding promiscuity, the use of poppers and sexual encounters in bathhouses, then went on living with the sense that AIDS was something that would not affect them. In an attempt to suppress the fear and uncertainty of GRID (as it was known at the time), the body-positive fitness culture, which first began to flourish in the gay communities in the US, became a space in which homosexual men could demonstrate their health and vitality. Finnish graphic artist Tom of Finland's⁵⁵ erotic (and increasingly

⁵³ The first HIV test was licensed in the US in 1985 and also became available in Sweden that same year (Svéd, 231).

⁵⁴ A slang term for the chemical compound alkyl nitrites. Poppers can be recreationally inhaled to relax smooth muscles throughout the body and enhance sexual pleasure.

⁵⁵ The artist's real name was Touko Laaksonen.

pornographic) drawings of healthy, muscular, and jovial men reflected this movement and became more widely circulated at this time. In Sweden this fitness culture fostered the idea that “bara man var solbränd, vältränad och i karriären, kunde inget hända” [as long as you were tan, fit and career-driven, nothing could go wrong] (22). In contrast to the 1970s culture of gay solidarity and community, the early 1980s were characterized by teenage naiveté and self-centeredness (22). This culture of fitness and vitality allowed the AIDS crisis in the US to seem even farther from Sweden and maintained the misconception that if one appeared healthy on the outside, then one cannot be infected with HIV.

The first AIDS case in Sweden was reported at Roslagstull hospital in Stockholm in 1982. Although the AIDS crisis broke the silence about a lively gay subculture in larger Scandinavian cities like Stockholm, the cultural visibility that gay people, particularly gay men, consequently began receiving was anything but positive (Sörberg 48). A ‘healthy’ nation with universal healthcare for its citizens as a cornerstone of its *folkhem* agenda, Sweden initially responded to the AIDS crisis as a public health concern. RFSL, the first to respond to the disease, began circulating detailed medical information in spaces like the gay magazine *Revolt* as early as 1983 (Voss). RFSL also cooperated with *Aidsdelegationen* [The National Commission on AIDS], formed in 1985 to handle the epidemic under the Swedish Minister of Health, Gertrud Sigurdson. In contrast to the US context, which was characterized by moral panic and governmental silence⁵⁶, the Swedish government responded first through public health measures.

Information about AIDS came to Sweden in the early 1980s; the disease was initially understood as a largely American urban epidemic. The idea of America as the source of infection persisted through media like The National Commission on AIDS’s 1987 campaign poster that

⁵⁶ Ronald Reagan did not mention the disease publicly until 1987.

read “Vad hände i New York 1983, Peter?” [What Happened in New York in 1983, Peter?], and many MSM were found to have been infected while abroad in cities like San Francisco and New York (Johannisson). As in the US, there was also the sense in Sweden that the response was not quick enough because the most significant group affected was MSM. The National Board of Health and Welfare called a meeting of Swedish epidemiological experts in 1982; by 1983 it allowed epidemiological surveillance, recommended that MSM no longer donate blood, and established health clinics specifically for MSM. During the earliest period of the AIDS crisis, Swedish gay activists involved in discussions around AIDS included the disease as a main part of the project of gay rights. However Thorsén notes that this resulted in the maintenance and strengthening of not only the link between male homosexuality and AIDS, but between homosexual male contact and infection as well (94).

Although resources had been allocated to groups like MSM for information and specialized health clinics for MSM, fear still dominated the public discourse. AIDS activist George Svéd comments in “När aids kom till Sverige” [When AIDS Came to Sweden] that the disease was first described in the Swedish press as “bögpesten” [the gay plague] and that “bögcancern” [the gay cancer] and was even compared to the Bubonic plague (230). Because AIDS disproportionately affected groups already marginalized in Western society (homosexual men, junkies, prostitutes), it immediately became linked with morality. This is unique among other illness, as Susan Sontag notes in *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989): “More than cancer, but rather like syphilis, AIDS seems to foster ominous fantasies about a disease that is a marker of both individual and social vulnerabilities. The virus invades the body; the disease (or, in the newer version, the fear of the disease) is described as invading the whole society” (153-4). The fear of AIDS invading society was echoed by medical and religious voices in Sweden and is

examined in the *Sveriges Television* documentary *Smittad: När aids kom till Sverige* [Infected: When AIDS Came to Sweden] (2012). Dr. Lita Tibbling of Linköping⁵⁷ University Hospital suggested that mandatory HIV tests for every person over the age of fifteen ought to be conducted annually and even suggested that all persons infected with HIV be deported to Gotland and kept in isolation. Lund Hospital assistant Surgeon General Dr. Jonas Blomgren publicly advocated for the tattooing of all persons infected with HIV/AIDS in the armpit in 1985 (Cronoberg). Other religious voices preached that AIDS was homosexuals' punishment, like Swedish priest Bengt Birgersson who claimed in an interview with *Aftonbladet*⁵⁸: "Aids kan ha en god sida – om det drabbar homosexuella och får dem att vända om . . . Har man drabbats av aids och kommer till insikt om att det var fel att leva homosexuellt – då har sjukdomen tjänat ett syfte" [AIDS can have a plus side too – if it infected homosexuals and gets them to change . . . If someone is infected with AIDS and comes to the realization that it is wrong to live as a homosexual – then the disease has served its purpose] ("Så skapades"). Media coverage of the AIDS crisis was central to the discourse at this time; Thorsén says that it functioned as "en arena där olika föreställningar och tolkningar av den svenska aidsepidemin, vad den innebar och hur den skulle bemötas, kom att utvecklas, etableras, ifrågasättas och förstärkas" [an arena where various ideas and interpretations of the Swedish AIDS epidemic, what it means and how it should be handled, developed, established, questioned and strengthened] (95). Other scholars like Gabrielle Griffin have observed the particular importance of media in the understanding of the AIDS epidemic, which I will examine in Chapter III.

Swedish photographer Elisabeth Ohlsson Wallin's 1998 wildly controversial exhibit "Ecce Homo" explicitly addressed the homophobia of the period, and the failure of the church in

⁵⁷The protagonist in *Onans bok*, Peter, reads this article in *Svenska Dagbladet* (171).

⁵⁸A Swedish daily newspaper.

reaching out to those most in need. This exhibition depicted queer people in a number of biblical scenes. Ohlsson Wallin uses the classic *Pietà* image to insert AIDS into the religious discourse. This image proved to be one of the most controversial: set in Stockholm South General Hospital's Avdelning 53 [53rd Ward], the infectious diseases ward, the mother figure is played by a nurse, holding the frail body of a man dying from AIDS. The national uproar and media controversy centered on the church and homosexuality and was absent of any mention of AIDS, despite the fact that the loss of a personal friend to AIDS inspired her to do the exhibition. Ohlsson Wallin had been a volunteer for many years at the Swedish HIV/AIDS organization *Noaks Ark*, and the church's failure to reach out at this time conflicted with the religious values she was taught during her strict religious upbringing (Ahlström 89). This image was even used in *Dagens Nyheter's* review of the first novel in Jonas Gardell's trilogy (Liljestrand).

The initial measures taken by the National Commission on AIDS to focus on MSM allowed the Swedish AIDS discourse to shift its focus away from MSM by 1985. These measures included the distribution of information about HIV/AIDS for MSM, specialized health clinics targeted towards MSM, and the recommendation that MSMs refrain from donating blood. David Thorsén notes in his dissertation *Den svenska aidsepidemin* [The Swedish AIDS Epidemic] that although The Bathhouse Law (1987) clearly targeted this demographic, this was not representative of the discourse at this time; instead the female drug-using prostitute was targeted as the main vehicle for spreading HIV (473). The junkie and the prostitute still remained 'the other' in many ways in Sweden, but this shifted attention away from gay and bisexual men, who were the initial target audience of the National Commission on AIDS's focus and resources and who were, at least in dominant cultural discourses, considered to be 'taken care of'. The idea

of AIDS as ‘taken care of,’ as far as the general public was concerned, also occurred on a larger Western scale. This will be discussed in Chapter III in greater depth.

The National Commission on AIDS, the most important political actor at this time, acted as the space in which the official Swedish response to AIDS was formulated; it assembled the political and civil elite, but also volunteer and interest groups that were connected to the epidemic (333). Internationally known Swedish fashion designer Sighsten Herrgård came out as HIV positive on Swedish television in 1987; Herrgård dedicated the rest of his life to awareness surrounding the disease before his death in 1989 and gave a face to the Swedish AIDS epidemic that was still characterized as something outside of Sweden. However one positive political victory from this period was a new anti-discrimination law based on sexual orientation (334).

Despite the initial measures that The National Commission on AIDS took to address this disease that infected a disproportionate number of Swedish MSM, the fear, panic, homophobia and ignorance disseminated by the American discourse still dominated the discourse in Sweden. Thorsén observes that, during the 1990s, AIDS began to grow as a media and popular cultural phenomenon, one which became increasingly Americanized to the point that “de amerikanska erfarenheterna genom press, vetenskap, och populärkultur ofta gjordes till en grundton eller referenspunkt även i andra länders uppfattningar av epidemin [the American experiences through press, science and popular culture often set the tone or acted as a reference point in even other countries’ perception of the epidemic] (18). However, he also notes that the Swedish experience is unique among its European neighbors and the United States in that the public debate shifted away quite early from a focus on gay and bisexual men and onto the female junkie prostitute.

Although AIDS affected significant number of Swedes by the early 1990s, the disastrous epidemic that was predicated did not materialize. The National Commission on AIDS was

dissolved and phased over to *Folkhälsoinstitutet* [Swedish National Institute of Public Health] in the summer of 1992. General cultural fear over AIDS subsided in the later half of the 1990s, and the arrival of effective antiretroviral cocktails in 1996 became life-saving for many living with HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS was no longer a death sentence at this time, which undoubtedly contributed to the general cultural silence surrounding this period. I will examine other reasons for this in Chapter IV.

The horrors and loss experienced during the AIDS crisis did, however, produce two positive effects. The first was the sense of urgency of the gay rights movement, as people were dying in considerable numbers from AIDS. The second is that it legitimized and elevated the status of gay and lesbian organizations (*Odd Couples* 67). Although the public health panic of the 1980s brought about by the epidemic produced new fears and homophobias in Sweden, Rydström notes that in addition to these two effects, the state's "wish to control gay men's sexual behavior" resulted also in greater visibility of homosexuality overall (50). The discussion in the subsequent sections of this chapter examines the new fears and homophobias that the AIDS epidemic produced in Sweden and analyzes the ways these manifest in the cultural and literary discourses.

Although HIV/AIDS may have a greater association with male homosexuality in the United States, and a richer history of activism surrounding the epidemic when compared with Sweden, the group with the highest rates of HIV infection still remains MSM in both countries (CDC 2012; Sörberg 2008, 160). In addition, in both the US and Sweden, new HIV infections had been steadily decreasing in this demographic for many years but have actually begun increasing again among gay men since 2007 (Sörberg 2008, 160). As of 2012, 2,182 people have died from AIDS in Sweden, and around 500 HIV infections occur in Sweden each year, most

through heterosexual contact or intravenous drug use. Nearly 6,000 people are living with HIV in Sweden, and half choose to keep their HIV positive status a secret (Williams 2012). While there are millions of heterosexual people worldwide who are HIV positive, there persists in Sweden, as elsewhere, a seemingly irrevocable cultural association of male homosexuality with public sex and HIV/AIDS. However *Folkhälsomyndigheten* [Public Health Agency of Sweden] reports that just under one quarter of all HIV cases diagnosed in Sweden are the result of homosexual contact⁵⁹ (“Public Health Agency of Sweden”).

⁵⁹ For additional Swedish and global statistics on HIV/AIDS see “Hiv i Sverige” (2012) and “Global Report: UNAIDS Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic” (2013).

The Infectious Diseases Law and The Bathhouse Law

Smittskyddslagen [The Infectious Diseases Law] and *Bastuklubbslagen* [The Bathhouse Law] are two pieces of legislation that have circulated and perpetuated epidemiological and cultural fear surrounding male homosexuality in Sweden. Implemented at the height of the AIDS crisis, these pieces of legislation reflect the sociopolitical climate of the time, which saw homosexual men and female junkie prostitutes as the agents of contagion; they also reflect the state's desire to control the sexuality of these two 'others' in Swedish society. The effects of these pieces of legislation are demonstrated in my analysis of *Onans bok*; my analysis of Andreas Lundstedt's coming out as HIV positive also demonstrates the presence of the medical discourse in cultural ideas surrounding gay male sexuality.

Although homosexual men were not central in the debate about The Infectious Diseases Law, they would still suffer the political and cultural consequences of this law. HIV was included under The Infectious Diseases Law in 1985, but homosexual men were not the main target. The junkie prostitute became a symbol of the reckless spreading of HIV; inclusion of HIV under this law included mandatory medical examinations, the possible quarantine of persons refusing to either abstain from or practice safe sex, and registration and epidemiological tracing (Thorsén 473). While the closing of bathhouses during the early years of the AIDS crisis is not specific to Sweden, the criminal laws surrounding infection and disclosure under The Infectious Diseases Law are unique. Today it is impossible to keep one's HIV/AIDS status private in Sweden. Physicians are legally required to report a positive status to healthcare authorities, and those who test positive are required to report sexual encounters and partners regularly to a doctor. Incarceration is even possible without a trial in the case that a doctor believes an HIV-positive patient is unwilling to inform his or her sexual partners of their status. Swedes living with

HIV/AIDS are forced by the healthcare system to confess their sexual partners as well as all of their sexual encounters to their doctors (Kulick 208).

The Infectious Diseases Law is a contemporary mechanism that exercises what Michel Foucault refers to as “bio-power” (140): this term describes the nation-states’ exercise of the control of sexuality and bodies, which is integral to the nation and capitalism (140). Sweden has been considerably more invested in the sexuality of its citizens than other nations since the 1930s, with the establishment of the *folkhem* and the implementations of Gunnar and Alva Myrdal’s ideas in *Nation and Family* (1934). Sweden is touted on a global scale today for its exercise of bio-power, with benefits like *pappaledighet* [paternity leave]. However, in the case of The Infectious Diseases Law, the mandated confession allows for the state control of sexuality; the information it collects from its subjects allows for the shaping of policy, the allocation of resources, and general understandings about sexuality. In contemporary discourses, The Infectious Diseases Law does not single out MSM sexuality as a threat to the greater good, but it does perpetuate the notion that persons with HIV/AIDS are criminals and agents of infection.

Furthermore, under The Infectious Diseases Law authorities straddle the public and private boundaries in the way the law exerts control over Swedes living with HIV/AIDS. Swedes who test positive for HIV are also legally required to inform their sexual partners of their status, including even those with whom they engage in oral sex, and they are legally required to use a condom when engaging in anal or vaginal sex (209). This mandate establishes a curious circular narrative of guilt that has obvious political and criminal implications, but it also introduces personal and sexual shame into the gay male sexual subconscious. The Infectious Diseases Law understands the person engaging in an unprotected sexual act with a partner as the active criminal. However, if the person were to transmit HIV to their partner, is the supposed ‘victim’

of this crime both the victim and the perpetrator at the same instant? This is not to argue legal nuances or semantics, but this complicated idea introduces yet another level of shame into gay male sexuality. And this stipulation of The Infectious Diseases Law scripts and regulates the most intimate confessions between people, reflecting a profoundly powerful instance of state control over bodies and sex. My analysis of *Onans bok* demonstrates the presence of medical discourses in gay male sexuality that have been inserted into gay male sexuality.

The autumn of 1986 saw the widespread debate in the Swedish press over *bastuklubbar*⁶⁰ [bathhouses] in Sweden. RFSL had cooperated for years with the owners of bathhouses to distribute information about safe sex, but journalist Peter Bratt's 1986 article in *Dagens Nyheter*⁶¹ now gave a moral dimension to these spaces of homosexual male contact. Bratt's article called for politicians to close these "homosexklubbar" [homo sex clubs] because of the abominable acts they facilitated. AIDS activist George Svéd explains in his article "När aids kom till Sverige" ["When AIDS Came to Sweden"] that Bratt's campaign stressed the idea that homosexual men did nothing more than have sex (237). Other headlines from the late 1980s echoed Bratt's homophobic claim, including "Här får man sprida aids" [Here Is Where AIDS Is Spread], "Stoppa smitthärdarna" [Stop The Agents of Infection], "Män kopulerar i bänkraderna" [Men Copulate in Rows of Seats], "Stäng aidsbordellerna" [Close the AIDS Bordellos], and "De som sprider aids är mördare" [Those Who Spread AIDS Are Murders] (237). Bratt's anti-bathhouse campaign was successful; in 1987 The Bathhouse Law was passed and forcibly closed

⁶⁰ *Bastu* in Swedish literally means "sauna club," but the term bathhouse is commonly used in English to refer to public saunas patronized by men for the purpose of sexual contact with other men. The term commonly used at the time as *gaysauna* [gay sauna], but the term *bastuklubb* became more widely used as a result of the politicization of bathhouses in the Swedish media. Klingberg uses the term *gaysauna* in *Onans bok*, as it would have been called in 1990 when the novel takes place (Paprikas, 93).

⁶¹ Sweden's largest daily newspaper.

all bathhouses operating in Sweden. This decision is unique as the Swedish parliament instituted this law without the usual referral of propositions to governmental committees for discussion and recommendations to Swedish parliament. It saw little resistance or debate in neither the Swedish press or nor within parliament.

Although it is easily argued that bathhouses functioned solely as a place for anonymous sexual encounters, they also served additional functions within gay culture. Michael Bronski argues that bathhouses provided “a sense of physical, emotional, and psychological safety,” such that they acted as a refuge in an altogether harsh social and political climate for homosexual men (xix). Much of the anti-bathhouse rhetoric in Sweden described bathhouses as places for nothing more than anonymous sexual encounters or “copulation” (237). This may be true for some patrons, but Bronski also argues that the bathhouse culture of the 1970s created a space of vibrant sexual culture and “queer shamelessness” which was essential in resisting the shame that dominate gay male sexuality (xx). On the other hand, bathhouses acted as a space in which men who were completely in the closet, who had otherwise no involvement in gay culture, could make sexual contact with other men. The closing of bathhouses, where information on MSM safe sex was distributed, thus severed the connection to the demographic of MSM that did not in any way identify with gay culture.

The forcible closing of bathhouses in Sweden was similar to the public health measures taken in the US. The political project of state intervention in public sex also occurred in larger US cities including San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, and San Diego in 1984 (Thorsén, 210).

The sauna has been a longtime Nordic cultural fixture, as well as a social space associated with health and vitality. However The Bathhouse Law did not close all saunas or

bathhouses in Sweden. The law stipulated that a premises which is “särskilt ägnad att underlätta för besökare att ha sexuellt umgänge i lokalen eller på platsen med annan besökare” [specifically designed with the purpose of allowing customers to engage in sexual contact with another patron] is subject to this law (“Om förbud”). As described in the introduction, this law has been difficult to enforce, and in all cases but one used to target spaces where men have sex with men (42). The law’s specific targeting of male homosexuality has also been demonstrated by its near exclusive focus on male homosexual bathhouses, while spaces like heterosexual swingers’ parties and BDSM clubs have not been targeted by police. Journalist Lars Jonsson (2001) notes in his article “Bastuklubbslagen fyller inget syfte och bör avskaffas” [The Bathhouse Law Is Pointless and Should Be Abolished] that only a handful of clubs were closed down in Stockholm and Gothenburg with the passing of The Bathhouse Law, but police raids of nine different bathhouses continued from 1992-96 (Jonsson). Public sex persisted in video clubs, bathrooms, parks, and other public spaces after this legislative measure, yet they were no longer politicized in the same way (Sörberg 55). The Bathhouse Law was repealed on July 1, 2004 (“Om förbud”).

The forcible closing of bathhouses had broader affects on the cultural links between male homosexuality, public sex, and disease. Svéd insists that this culture of panic blamed promiscuous homosexual sex as the culprit, and those who visited bathhouses were themselves considered “moraliskt besudlade” (morally soiled) who, without consideration, would spread AIDS “till oskyldiga, ovetande, gifta, och bisexuella män och genom dessa smittar man familjefädernas fruar och barn. Därför är homosexuella ett hot mot allmänheten” [to innocent, unknowing, married and bisexual men thus infecting their wives and children. That’s why homosexuals were [seen as] a threat to the general public] (239). The ‘sick’ individual represents a blatant threat to the commonly shared identity of healthy Swedish nation-builders. And

although homosexuality was no longer officially considered a sickness of the *mind*, the arrival of AIDS in Sweden then offered the general public a way to pathologize homosexuality as a *physical* manifestation.

The discourse of the institutions described above, including the Swedish legal system, The National Commission on AIDS, and the Swedish healthcare system, produced the cultural and political association of male homosexuality and disease. Through implementation of a law that affected bathhouses frequented by almost exclusively men, Swedish parliament thus defined bathhouses as sites of public homosexual sex and also asserted that they are spaces where HIV was transmitted. Through state support of these homophobias, those that have little or no access to homosexual people or gay culture are provided an entire vocabulary to ascribe to homosexual men, their (public) sex lives, the danger they pose, and the ways in which they are a threat to Swedish society.

The Swedish healthcare authorities first pathologized the idea of diseased homosexual male that threatened the well-being of others through the closing of bathhouses. In conjunction with the inclusion of HIV under The Infectious Diseases Law, medical and criminal discourses served only to perpetuate the fear that male homosexual contact was the avenue of infection. Although The Bathhouse Law has been repealed and The Infectious Diseases Law affects a greater number of heterosexual subjects in Sweden today, my analysis of Andreas Lundstedt's coming out as HIV positive in the end of this chapter demonstrates that the link between male homosexuality and disease persists.

***Onans bok* by Ola Klingberg**

The Bathhouse Law and the inclusion of HIV under The Infectious Diseases Law informed cultural, moral and sexual supposed truths linking male homosexuality and physical illness. *Onans bok* provides evidence in the literary discourse of the ways in which the link between male homosexuality and illness has been inserted into the homosexual male subconscious; it also demonstrates how the anxiety and fear produced by the rhetoric of AIDS crisis discourses in Sweden have affected gay male sexuality. The novel is unique among the others in this study in that it lacks the message of gay positivity; rather it acts as a cautionary tale, a narrative of the ways in which the fear and anxiety surrounding AIDS caused the isolation of the protagonist Peter and the dissolution of his romantic relationships.

The medical discourse is inserted immediately into the narrative through Peter, an emergency room doctor. The novel begins in 1990, one of the darkest periods of the AIDS crisis, when new infections and deaths were at a record high. Peter's work in the emergency room not only suggests the urgency of his plight but also legitimizes his consuming anxieties surrounding sex and transmission of HIV: he is an educated and trained medical professional. Peter's paralyzing fear of contracting HIV has driven him to abstain from all sexual contact:

Under de åtta åren jag levde celibat föraktade jag mig själv, mer och mer vartefter åren gick, och jag plågade mig själv med omständliga tankekonstruktioner av typen: Människor föds till att ha sex; vi är alla begåvade med utrustningen och viljan, men jag har inte ändå sex. Kan man då verkligen anse att jag är människa?" (179).

[During the eight years I lived in celibacy I loathed myself, more and more as the years went by, and I tormented myself with tedious thoughts like: *Human being are born to have sex; we are all given the equipment and the desire, but I still don't have sex. Can I really consider myself human?]*

Peter's pondering reveals the additional level of plague that the AIDS crisis has furnished among homosexual men: self-loathing and the loss of humanity. The sociopolitical symptom of disease that affects even those that are not infected with HIV arose from a particular set of circumstances and events that transpired in the 1980s in Sweden. Peter does not contract HIV in the novel, nor do any of his sexual partners or acquaintances. However, HIV remains an invisible specter that haunts Peter's sexuality.

Onan is a minor biblical character that appears in the Book of Genesis and is killed by God for refusing to follow God's mandate to impregnate his dead brother's wife. Although Onan initially agrees, he instead practices *coitus interruptus* and spills his seed on the ground rather than impregnating his brother's wife. The plight of Onan has been interpreted and taken up in a number of ways, including biblical justification of the death penalty and biblical evidence of the sinfulness of contraception, masturbation, and any other non-reproductive aims of sexual intercourse⁶². While sitting in a hotel room in Copenhagen, Peter comes across the story of Onan, and remarks that "Det slog mig att jag kunde göra honom till mitt skyddshelgon, ett skyddshelgon för alla som har misslyckats" [It struck me that I could make him my patron saint, a patron saint for all those who have failed] (8). Thus Peter decides to become an Onan figure himself; upon learning of a mysterious new disease affecting homosexual men, he makes the decision to remain celibate. He does so for eight years, but eventually gives in and has a cold, anxious sexual encounter with the man he begins dating, Christopher.

Like many characters in the novels in my study, literature serves as an introductory space for homosexuality. Peter relates how his discovery of Jean Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers* first

⁶² The term 'onanism' exists in English but is rarely used, however in Swedish *onani* [masturbation] and *att onanera* [to masturbate] are fairly common, albeit more formal terms, for masturbation.

helped him articulate his homosexual attraction: “det som fanns innanför de pärmarna på Genets bok blev min hemlighet, min fantasivärld, parallell med den vanliga världen där jag bodde med mamma, pappa och syster i en villaförort till Stockholm” [All that was within the covers of Genet’s book became my secret, my fantasy world, parallel to the ordinary world in which I lived with my mother, father and sister in a Stockholm suburb] (36). The fantasy world of homosexuality that Peter imagines in a literary space parallel to his own become more real when he travels to Copenhagen alone and compartmentalizes yet another separate world: the bathhouse.

The emotionless and cold manner in which Peter loses his virginity at seventeen in a Copenhagen bathhouse is indicative of his fragmented sexuality seen in the rest of the novel. In “de anonymas universum” [the universe of anonymity], which he finds both “äcklande och lockande” [repulsive and alluring], Peter has sex for the first time:

Det var alltså så det gick till när jag förlorade min svendom. Där fanns ingen förälskelse och ingen romans, och debuten var ingen bedrift som jag skulle kunna skryta med inför mina polare – jag skulle inte ens våga *bekänna* den för dem. Inte heller var den en spännande hemlighet mellan två, för man blir snabbt bortglömd på en sauna. Det skulle snart bara finnas en enda person i hela världen som kände till min debut: mig själv.

[That was pretty much how it went when I lost my virginity. There was no falling in love and no romance, and my first time was no great achievement I would brag about to my friends – I wouldn’t even dare to *admit* it to them. Neither was it an exciting secret between two people, because you’re quickly forgotten at a sauna. There would soon be only one person in the whole world who knew about my first time: myself.]

Klingberg’s description of Peter’s first time offers a harsh critique of the culture of male homosexuality that was entirely focused on sexuality. Peter does not identify his experience as trauma, but it unequivocally informs his sexuality through his adulthood.

Peter's sexuality is only able to exist as a separate entity from himself in the novel. He describes the dichotomy of his "dubbelliv" [double life] as "hemma: total avhållsamhet; i Köpenhamn: den mest absurda skörlevnad" [home: complete abstinence; in Copenhagen: the most absurd promiscuity] (80). Although a number of men with whom he had anonymous sex in Copenhagen's bathhouses gave him phone numbers and expressed the desire to meet outside of this fantasy world, Peter says that "Jag ville inte ha med mig några spår därifrån. Att ringa upp någon som jag hade träffat där inne, det vore att öppna en förbindelse mellan mina två liv, och det vågade jag inte" [I didn't want to bring any trace from there. To call up someone I had met there, would be to create a link between my two lives, and that I didn't dare] (81-2). Peter's anxiety over his two worlds colliding is fueled by the shame, secrecy, and anonymity of homosexuality. Peter's experience of homosexuality, which exists separately in Copenhagen bathhouses, reflects much of the dominant discourses surrounding the AIDS crisis in Sweden: that AIDS exists outside of the comfortable and protected *folkhem*.

Peter's double lives, however, are no longer manageable with the arrival of AIDS to Scandinavia. A few weeks after his fourth trip to Copenhagen, Peter reads an article in *Svenska Dagbladet* that describes 160 AIDS cases that have been identified in the US (82). Although he notes that the US is very far away, a *Dagens Nyheter* article a few weeks later relates that four homosexual men in Denmark have been infected with an unknown disease that caused severe pneumonia and some forms of cancer, with a death rate of over twenty percent (82-3). Again echoing his fantasy of homosexuality as far away, Peter ponders: "Varför i Danmark av alla länder? Varför just i denna skandinaviska avkrok som jag hade besökt fyra gånger det senaste året, så långt från USA? Det blev överkligt. Någoting gick inte ihop" [Why in Denmark of all countries? Why here in this Scandinavian backwater that I've visited four times in the past year?

It was unreal. Something didn't make sense.] (83). The media coverage of this new virus put a sudden end to Peter's double life, and thus began his eight years of celibacy. The incorporation of actual newspaper articles and media coverage of AIDS into the narrative was also employed frequently by Jonas Gardell in *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar*, which underscores the crucial role played by the media at this time.

Klingberg stresses the central role of the medical discourse in the novel through Peter's profession as an emergency room doctor, as well as the hospital setting where much of the novel takes place. Peter, a twenty-six-year-old doctor working at Huddinge Hospital in Stockholm, meets Christopher, a masculine and muscular taxi driver, in the waiting room at his hospital; they are both taking part in a medical study of muscle biopsies. Christopher serves as a sexual foil for Peter: he is sexually open and has lived in New York, often sharing his sexual experiences at bathhouses and sex clubs with Peter. Peter's abstinence has also infected his soul, and he has difficulty connecting physically and sexually with Christopher. The relationship between the two men supplies the central source of tension in the novel, as well as the catalyst for Peter's sexual fear to subside slightly. On a spontaneous trip to Paris the couple meets a young artist, Jérôme, and begin a brief relationship as a threesome. Christopher eventually returns to New York to reunite with his boyfriend there, while Jerome moves to Stockholm to live with Peter.

The Bathhouse Law, along with the homophobic sociopolitical discourse at the time, created what Peter describes as a sexual "kastsystem" [caste system] in which "[jag] befann mig allra längst ned, bland de oberörbara [. . .] Till och med våldtäktsman stod högre än jag" [I found myself at the very bottom, among the untouchables [. . .] Even rapists were above me.] (180). In an attempt to exist in this caste system, Peter sublimates his sexual impulses with his medical studies and the aspects of his life that are separate from his sexuality. Reports of AIDS

cases in Denmark during Peter's final year of gymnasium initiate his eight years of celibacy. As described above, Peter's compartmentalization of his sexuality makes him feel inhuman.

Peter's sexuality is entirely dominated by medical information; when he finally does engage in sexual contact, he describes sex as becoming "som ett sterilt kirurgiskt ingrepp – tekniskt genomförbart, men svårt att njuta av" [like a sterile surgical procedure – technically feasible, but difficult to enjoy] (179). Peter experiences sex through the medical information circulated about HIV and infection. When he first has sex with Christopher after eight years of celibacy, he comments: "Jag minns den salta smaken. Tre månaders oro för en så kort njutning. Det var inte rimligt." [I remember the salty taste. Three months of worrying for such a short pleasure. It was unreasonable.] (101). Rather than connecting with his sexual partner, Peter instead counts cases of reported AIDS cases in Sweden and ponders the likelihood of his being infected. Like the biblical character Onan, he also practices *coitus interruptus* and does not ejaculate during oral sex (179). Rather than experiencing closeness with his partner or erotic titillation, body fluids are exclusively a source of anxiety for Peter:

Helt säker sex, där ingen kroppsvätska från den ene kom i kontakt med någon slemhinna hos den andre, hade sina begränsningar . . . Det var inte bara kyssar man fick avstå ifrån; dessutom skulle man hålla reda på vilken hand som varit var, vilken hudyta som ännu var obefläckad och vilken som var kontaminerade och av vems kroppsvätska. Har mitt finger med hans försats varit i kontakt med hans bröstvårta? Då får jag inte suga på den (179).

[*Completely safe sex, where no bodily fluids from the one came in contact with the mucous membranes of the other, had its limits [. . .] It wasn't just kisses that you had to abstain from; besides you had to keep track of whose hand had been where, which skin surface was unsullied and which was contaminated by whose bodily fluid. Did my finger with his precum come in contact with his nipple? Then I can't suck on it.*]

Peter's stream of consciousness demonstrates the medical discourses surrounding HIV that have permeated his sexuality. Klingberg's depiction of Peter's fear and anxiety about HIV perhaps represents an exaggeration, but it does underscore a profound way in which the AIDS crisis has affected gay male sexuality. Peter's hesitance to connect sexually and emotionally has maintained the separation of his sexuality from the rest of himself. His obsession with HIV (as Christopher claims (181), eventually leads to the loss of both Jérôme and Christopher in the end of the novel.

Another important effect of the AIDS epidemic that the novel demonstrates is the loss of any gay community or positivity. My analysis of Bengt Martin's trilogy about Joakim illustrates the rise of the visibility of homosexuality and the era of gay community, solidarity, and positivity that the 1970s fostered. However, AIDS caused the movement towards visibility to reverse: homosexual men like Peter remained in the closet due to fear, shame, and self-loathing. The community support that Joakim gained through contact with other homosexual men does not exist for Peter in *Onans bok*. He lives an isolated existence, and his only contact with other homosexual men is through sterile, robotic, disconnected sexual encounters. Gay community existed for many men, as portrayed in Jonas Gardell's trilogy, but this was not the reality for all.

Andreas Lundstedt Comes Out As HIV Positive

Although attitudes toward homosexuality have changed drastically in the past two decades, openly gay Swedish pop star Andreas Lundstedt's coming out as HIV positive in *QX*⁶³ magazine in 2008 allows us to see that the cultural association between male homosexuality and illness persists. Lundstedt is well-known from the Swedish pop band *Alcazar* and has also appeared in *Melodifestivalen*⁶⁴ a number of times as a solo artist. This also stands as concrete example of cultural amnesia: the subject of AIDS has been shrouded in silence in Sweden since the early 1990s, in a sense 'forgotten,' but the *legacy* of the pathologization of male homosexuality remains in popular discourse. Lundstedt confirmed media rumors that he was indeed HIV-positive in the January 2008 issue of *QX* (Öhrman 16). Lundstedt was the first public figure in Sweden to come out as HIV-positive since fashion designer Sighsten Herrgård in 1987.

Lundstedt emphasizing health and wellness as a gay man appears to be a direct response to the lingering image in cultural memory of the male homosexual as associated with disease. This image has been informed by AIDS-crisis political rhetoric and The Bathhouse Law, as well as the stipulations of forced disclosure under The Infectious Diseases Law, both examined earlier in this chapter. The seemingly irrevocable cultural association of male homosexuality with public sex and HIV/AIDS that persists is confirmed through Lundstedt's addressing a gay public in *QX*. The media discourse upon his 'coming out' with HIV, coupled with his status as an openly gay public figure in Sweden, reaffirms this idea of the discursively produced 'diseased homosexual'; at the same time Lundstedt stresses that much misinformation and ignorance still surround HIV/AIDS in Sweden. In addition to emphasizing his wellness, he has stated in

⁶³ Sweden's largest gay publication.

⁶⁴ A national singing competition whose winner competes in the annual Eurovision Song Contest.

interviews that many are under the misconception that having HIV/AIDS means that you are going to die (Backlund 2008).

Lundstedt also addresses the notion of stigmatization associated with HIV/AIDS. He asserts first that “Jag vill visa att man inte behöver se sjuk ut när man har den här infektionen, man kan se bra ut och vara framgångsrik och jag önskar att jag kan inspirera andra att våga berätta” [I want to show that you don’t need to look sick when you have this infection. You can look great and be successful and I hope I can inspire others to have the courage to speak about it] (Öhrman 16). Lundstedt directly challenges the identity of a ‘diseased individual’ that AIDS-crisis rhetoric has authored in Sweden. In this excerpt, it appears as if Lundstedt purposefully uses the word *infektion* [infection] rather than *disease* (17). Disease implies death, contagiousness, and incites fear and panic. The word ‘infection’ connotes more innocuous afflictions, ones that are manageable and even curable. This distinction has even been commonly made in the US healthcare system, which now describes venereal diseases or sexually transmitted diseases as sexually transmitted infections (STIs). *Venhälsan*, a clinic for men who have sex with men, was established at *Södersjukhuset* during the dawn of the AIDS-crisis in Sweden in 1982. *Venhälsan* has even begun using this terminology that lessens the stigmatization of STIs and HIV/AIDS (Södersjukhuset 2013). While a statement of confidentiality is provided for *Venhälsan* patients, the statement also acknowledges that HIV/AIDS information *must* indeed be recorded on the patient’s documents (Södersjukhuset 2012). More than anything else, Lundstedt’s interview explicitly addresses ignorance around HIV/AIDS, demonstrating that knowledge around infection is either lacking or *forgotten* in contemporary gay discourses. Thus a curious disconnect exists, so that little is known about HIV/AIDS except for its association with male homosexuality.

Lundstedt's confession of his HIV-positive status not only highlights certain homophobias that still exist surrounding HIV/AIDS in Sweden but also illuminates a number of ways in which contemporary gay political discourses have either obfuscated or purposefully ignored this profoundly significant period in history until very recently. Since Lundstedt's original interview in 2008, he has also published a memoir titled *Mitt positiva liv* [My Positive Life] (2012). Although his interview did not reveal specific details surrounding his contraction of HIV, the media discourse that ensued continued to focus on topics like his health and whether or not he has infected his partner. Although he did not disclose how he contracted HIV or in which context, Lundstedt speaks to the homonormative gay politics of partnership, emphasizing that he is in a happy committed relationship with his partner who is HIV-negative.

Lundstedt's admitting his HIV-positive status to *QX* is a double-edged sword: On one hand, this admission confirms society's homophobia and prejudgment of gay men as AIDS-infected blemishes on the complexion of a healthy, modern society of individually self-accountable Swedes with access to universal healthcare and the most advanced medical knowledge. Michael Warner discusses shame as the greatest hindrance to prevention of HIV/AIDS today: it permeates the supposed knowledge that everyone possesses about the disease. He claims that contracting of HIV through sex is no less shameful now than it was during the early years of the epidemic, as those who contract AIDS today are still deemed "irrational," or "sexually addicted," which many gay men then internalize (196). While access to healthcare is race- and class-based in the US, this assertion holds even greater weight in the context of Sweden where healthcare is guaranteed universally (for the most part) and the privileged access argument cannot be made. With such resources at his disposal, the gay man

who contracts HIV is easily stigmatized as a subject who has somehow *failed* to benefit from the universally inclusive system.

Like Jonas Gardell, Andreas Lundstedt was also awarded QX magazine's "Årets homo" prize ["Homo of the Year"] in 2008 after his coming out as HIV positive. Lundstedt's interview demonstrates how cultural amnesia can function: AIDS is completely absent from the public discourse, despite the fact that the sociopolitical link between male homosexuality and disease is still widespread. This is demonstrated by Lundstedt's affirmation of his health and wellness. He also held the interview with a gay magazine, *QX*. Lundstedt's interview appearing in *QX* thus reminds audiences that AIDS is a *gay* issue that affected gay and straight communities differently. Lundstedt's coming out as HIV-positive both challenges and reaffirms misconceptions about the disease and the institutional realities that have informed them. Lundstedt's confession of his HIV-positive status in a gay publication, however, implicates perhaps the most significant force acting upon this inquiry: the tenuous relationship between contemporary gay culture and AIDS.

III. CULTURAL AMNESIA OF THE AIDS CRISIS

The Gay Lobby and *Destroyer* Magazine

The newly elevated status that gay rights organizations experienced in the wake of the AIDS crisis generated a contentious discussion over the proper image of homosexuality that would be presented in broader cultural discourses. The literary discourse on male homosexuality also acted as a space in which the debate over the proper representations played out. This chapter examines two bodies of literature published in the two decades after the most critical period of the Swedish AIDS crisis (roughly 1985-2007): young adult novels and gay chick lit. The discussion examines the broader and more long-lasting cultural effects of the AIDS crisis in Sweden and locates these two bodies of literature within the post-AIDS cultural reality. Two key effects drive the discussion: the rhetoric of AIDS activism that spread the idea that “anyone can get it,” resulting in a universalization of the AIDS subject, and the subsequent commodification and kitschification of AIDS as a disease that thus crystallized gay men as a market demographic.

The scandal that erupted in 2006 over *Destroyer* magazine demonstrates the contention that came about within gay rights discourses over the *proper* image of male homosexuality. *Destroyer* was published by the Swede Karl Andersson from 2006-2010 and, among other content, contained nude or semi-nude photo spreads of seemingly underage young men. From an outsider’s perspective, it may appear that the seamless cooperation of dominant Swedish gay rights voices and political enterprises resulted in several political achievements that sought to improve the lives and inclusion of non-heterosexual Swedes in public and state-sanctioned ways (registered partnership, same-sex marriage, etc.). The following analysis illustrates the instability

of gay male identity, despite the dominant gay rights rhetoric, and thus illuminates the underpinnings of these enterprises that exist in tension with one another.

Destroyer was not the first example of the dissention within gay rights discourses over the proper way to “do” male homosexuality: Allan Hellmans of RFSL was spurned by fellow gay activists; the literary production of Knut Hansson and Larry Kramer were also accused of airing the gays’ dirty laundry. A more recent example is the Gay Shame event held in protest of Stockholm Pride from 2001-2004. Designed as an alternative to the Gay Pride events in various North American and European cities, David Halperin and Valerie Traub explain in *Gay Shame* (2009) that the event was intended “to call attention to, and to shame, members of the local gay and lesbian communities who had sold out their queer comrades to profit, property values or electoral popularity” (9). Halperin and Traub also note that another function of Gay Shame events was to “affirm aspects of practices of homosexuality that seem increasingly marginal” to official Pride celebrations which are tailored to “the civic and political requirements of gay pride” (9). First established in Brooklyn in 1998, the Gay Shame event was held as an alternative to Stockholm Pride from 2001-2004, demonstrating that Swedish gay rights discourses were still inspired by the Western discourse on homosexuality that emanates from the US.

The misconception of a unified gay rights agenda was debunked by the scandalous response to *Destroyer* magazine. Andersson’s magazine was published in ten issues from May of 2006 until February of 2010. The debate over the magazine was so intense that Andersson wrote a book to document the conflict which played out in the Swedish media, *Bögarnas värsta vän*⁶⁵: *historien om tidningen Destroyer* (2010). He also wrote the English translation *Gay Man’s Worst*

⁶⁵ This title is taken from the segment of the television show *Böglobbyn* that covered the magazine, which aired on December 4, 2006

*Friend: The Story of Destroyer Magazine*⁶⁶ in 2011. Andersson explains that he created *Destroyer* as a “celebration, in words and pictures, of the Boy – that is, the adolescent male” (7); *Destroyer* includes a number of articles of various pop cultural phenomena such as boy bands in Japan, but also includes erotic pederastic stories and photos of adolescent boys that appear much younger than the legal age of eighteen. While the immediate objections from a number of groups may be obvious on several levels, the most outrageous and emphatic objections actually came from Swedish gay rights organizations. Mouthpieces of both *RFSL* and *QX* have condemned the magazine, and Pride House at Stockholm Pride 2006 refused to sell it.

The most emphatic example of condemnation of *Destroyer* appeared during a segment of *Böglobbyn* [The Gay Lobby], a program which ran for eight episodes on *Sveriges Television*⁶⁷ in 2006. In *Expressen*, the journalist Anders Backlund described the series title as intended to be a “en mer ironisk benämning, eftersom det är något högerextrema och högkyrkliga gärna använder sig av för att chikanera bögar” [more of an ironic name, since it is a term that ultra-conservatives and Christian fundamentalists use to insult gay men] (1). Manu Seppänen Sterky first pitched the concept to *Sveriges Television* of a program that examined masculinity from a “bögperspektiv” [gay man’s perspective] (Ingvarsson 2006 1). The program was originally hosted by the straight comedian Olle Palmlöf and by Sverker Åström, the well-known and respected Swedish diplomat. Åström came out as homosexual at the age of 87 in a final chapter added to the 2003 edition of his autobiography *Ögonblick: från ett halvsekel i UD-tjänst*⁶⁸ [Moments From A Half-Century in

⁶⁶ The English version was translated from Swedish by the author and is “slightly abridged compared to the Swedish original, and contains an extra chapter” on reactions to the book release in Sweden (2-5).

⁶⁷ A national public broadcasting channel in Sweden funded by all Swedes that own television sets, and according to SVT’s website is, along with Sveriges Radio the “most trusted” of all Swedish media (Ahlgren).

⁶⁸ The first edition appeared in 1992.

the Service of the State Department], and gave an exclusive interview to *Svenska Dagbladet* with journalist Karin Thunberg (Thunberg). Åström provided not only a humorous element to the program but also a high-brow element, as he was such a respected diplomat and public figure.

The eight episodes that ran explored topics that included cruising in public parks, schlager culture, drag culture, male homosexuality in rural Sweden, asexuality, and the persecution of homosexual men seeking asylum in Sweden. However, Åström quit the program after two episodes, claiming for *QX* that what he saw thus far was “vulgärt och smaklöst” [vulgar and tasteless](Gad). In a letter to *Sveriges Television* management Åström explains that

Jag ville medverka till att öka förståelsen för de homosexuellas situation och motarbeta homofobi. Jag tycker inte att programmet lyckas med det, de två program som visats ökar snarare fördomarna. Därför har jag sagt upp samarbetet” (“Sverker Åström hoppar av Böglobbyn” 2006).

[I wanted to contribute to the increased understanding of the situation of homosexuals and to work against homophobia. I don't think this program succeeded with that; rather the two episodes that aired confirmed those prejudices. Therefore I've backed out of the collaboration.]

Åström was soon replaced by Farao Groth, a 21 year-old drag queen and makeup artist who in many ways played into the stereotypes of a non-threatening, feminine gay male. The decision to hire a younger, more flamboyant voice was quite indicative of the cultural climate in 2006, which pushed aside the experience of homosexuals like Åström for the appeal of a younger and more pop cultural savvy perspective.

The sixth episode of this series was entitled “Bögarnas värsta vän?” [Gay Man’s Worst Friend⁶⁹?] and presented an interview with Karl Andersson at his home in Prague⁷⁰ by journalist Johan Hilton. Although he is openly gay, Hilton’s tone during the voiceover of the program was disdainful and condemning; his presentation of *Destroyer* in *Böglobbyn* conveyed the message that respectable gay voices like his wanted nothing to do with *Destroyer*. Other ‘respectable’ voices like RFSL president describe it in the episode as “gubbsnusk” [“filth for dirty old men”] (Andersson 64). Reb Kerstinsdotter (2008) examines the *Destroyer* scandal from a sex-radical perspective in *The Beautiful Boy, The Destroyer* (2). Kerstinsdotter is unsure whether or not *Destroyer* is sex-radical, but she notes that the discourse surrounding it is relevant in that “den tangerar många frågor som ofta inte tas upp inom etablerade HBTQ-forum: ålder, HBTQ-världens självbild och pedofilers plats eller ickeplats inom sexualpolitiken” [“it addresses many questions that are often taken up in the established LGBTQ forum: age, the LGBTQ world’s self-image and the place or non-place of pedophiles within sex politics”] (5). My study supports this claim; it uses *Destroyer* as a peripheral perspective that illuminates the norms that exist at the center of the discourse on male homosexuality.

But what did *Destroyer* contain that aroused such heated debate? Andersson took the title from the chapter in Camille Paglia⁷¹’s *Sexual Persona* (1990), “The Beautiful Boy As Destroyer,” in which Paglia examines the function of the young boy that destroys his mentor in canonical

⁶⁹ This is the translation provided by Karl Andersson in his English version of his book that documents the history and media discourse on the scandal of *Destroyer* magazine. This appears to be an awkward translation, and would probably be expressed in English as gay men’s “worst enemy” or the more colloquial “frenemy.”

⁷⁰ Andersson recounts this experience in *Gay Man’s Worst Friend* (58-68).

⁷¹ Paglia’s own controversy, both as an academic and a personality, adds an interesting layer to this discussion. Paglia stated that pedophilia “is an increasingly irrational issue in America. Gays must valiantly defend their cultural tradition by carefully articulating its highest meanings” (Stanley).

works of literature (12). Andersson observed that the assimilation into normative heterosexual roles and relationships that was supported of the gay rights movement was actually achieved by distancing itself from ‘deviant’ expressions of homosexuality: namely pedophilia. The “dark side” of the success of the gay rights movement therefore produced shame, he argued, for “male attraction to young men⁷²,” and no longer considered this homosexuality (12). *Destroyer* contained a number of interviews with authors and art collectors, letters from readers, homoerotic stories involving young men, book reviews, and political editorials. However, most controversial were the photo spreads of nearly or entirely nude young men. Andersson maintains that these models were all above the age of eighteen and notes that this is the standard in heterosexual men’s magazines like *Slitz*⁷³, where young women are dressed and retouched to appear much younger (30). The scandalized reactions to the *Destroyer* photo spreads in particular reveal the contradiction of heterosexist society’s objection to the display and commodification of the male body, whereas female objectification in this way is celebrated. The ardent rejection of this expression of homosexuality on the part of dominant gay rights discourses, à la “the lady doth protest too much,” reveals that the cultural visibility of male homosexuality is a project that needs to be constructed and maintained.

Gayle Rubin’s theory of sexual hierarchy is useful in explaining the fervent rejection of *Destroyer* by Swedish gay rights voices. In her now famous 1984 article “Thinking Sex,” Rubin explains that sexuality exists as a hierarchy, which she argues is constituted by a “charmed circle” with “outer limits” (9166); the *Destroyer* scandal locates ‘good’ homosexual sex as state-

⁷² Andersson notes explicitly: “Not children, but teenagers” (12).

⁷³ This Swedish men’s magazine contained increasingly scantily clad women in an attempt to boost magazine sales before publication was ceased in 2012. It had a readership of 200,000 at the time of the *Destroyer* scandal (Andersson 30). Andersson has also worked for *Slitz* (Torén Björling “Bögarnas”).

sanctioned and monogamous, and 'bad' homosexual sex as pedophilia and/or pederasty. Rubin argues that one of the key elements of the sexual hierarchy is "the need to draw and maintain an imaginary line between good and bad sex" (165). The anxious need to maintain the line between good and bad sex drives the tension in the discourse surrounding *Destroyer*. The drawing of this line is demonstrated by gay rights voices like Johan Hilton, who have much to benefit politically, socially, and economically when this line is clear and pronounced. Rubin comments that

All these models assume a domino theory of sexual peril. The line appears to stand between sexual order and chaos. It expresses the fear that if anything is permitted to cross this erotic demilitarized zone, the barrier against scary sex will crumble and something unspeakable will skitter across (165).

The idea of 'skittering' explains the uproarious outrage on the behalf of gay rights advocates. Homosexual couples were granted registered partnership a decade prior in 1994 in Sweden; the bourgeois acceptance of homosexuality was thus tenuous. The anxiety over the outdated yet lingering suggestion that homosexuality and pedophilia were related bearing any truth is the barrier to which Rubin is referring. The tension along the culturally determined barrier between 'good' and 'bad' sexual expressions is demonstrated in the scandal of *Destroyer* magazine and the outrage it sparked within gay rights debates.

Rubin's point is more salient in the discussion of *Destroyer* because of the relatively rapid border-crossing of hierarchical situations that homosexuality saw in the Swedish context since the AIDS crisis. However, the sanitization and removal of sex from homosexuality has seen notable success in the Swedish context with legislation like The Bathhouse Law, as well as registered partnership/same-sex marriage and the ability of gay couples to adopt children. Thus, the idea of the homosexual as located in the 'the outer limits' today is dubious. Rubin describes further complexities that developed and solidified even more; Rubin uses the idea of "the modern

gay man” as an example,

who may migrate from rural Colorado to San Francisco in order to live in a gay neighborhood, work in a gay business, and participate in an elaborate experience that includes a self-conscious identity, group solidarity, a literature, a press, and a high level of political activity. In modern, Western, industrial societies, homosexuality has acquired much of the institutional structure of an ethnic group. (171).

The mainstreaming continues to spread, and the monogamous, married homosexual couple continues to head into the charmed circle and further from the outer limits. The discussion of *Destroyer* in this chapter reveals that mainstreaming has been done with male homosexuality through the demonization of pedophilia.

The analysis of *Destroyer* magazine offers an interesting snapshot of the political climate of the two decades after the most critical period of the AIDS crisis in Sweden. It uncovers the political forces informing gay male identity and culture, highlighting the ways in which homosexuality has become more of an active political project than a stable identity. While many histories of homosexuality or post-Stonewall gay activist narratives tend to glorify this period of elevated cultural and political legitimacy, the history of *Destroyer* and its interaction with *Böglöbbyn* offers an alternative account of this period as one of intense contestation and internal strife of values, representations, and political objectives.

Cultural Effects of the AIDS Crisis

Although Sweden's experience of the AIDS crisis had its specifics, this experience was informed and amplified through the American experience; therefore, the American discourse is of central importance in examining the cultural effects of the AIDS crisis. The Americanization of the experience of the AIDS crisis was also exacerbated by the discourse on homosexuality in Sweden; not only had the US been the impetus for the coming out revolution in the 1970s in Sweden, but the US also experienced the AIDS epidemic earlier and on a much larger scale. A central phenomenon in the discussion of the cultural effects of the AIDS crisis is the universalization of the AIDS victim, resulting from the "anyone can get it" rhetoric that occurred in both Swedish and American discourses.

Magic Johnson's public admission that he was HIV positive in 1991 marks a significant shift in the understanding of who could get HIV. Several other homosexual celebrities were also revealed to have AIDS in the 1980s: American audiences were shocked by the revelation of Hollywood heartthrob Rock Hudson's admission and subsequent death due to AIDS-related complications in 1985; Freddie Mercury, lead singer of the British rock band *Queen*, also died from pneumonia caused by AIDS in 1991 (Mercury's bisexuality was widely known). However, in 1991 when celebrated American basketball player Magic Johnson came forth publicly and announced that he was HIV-positive it was a major headline. Although he did have a reputation for promiscuity, Johnson vehemently denied being bisexual or homosexual. Los Angeles Lakers point guard and 1992 Olympic gold medalist, Johnson is considered one of the NBA's greatest players of all time. He was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame in 2002. As a man who inhabits the space of idealized American heterosexual masculinity (complicated somewhat by his race), Johnson's admission of his HIV-positive status, and his subsequent activism and

campaigning on safe sex, propelled the shift in cultural discourse on HIV/AIDS. Johnson says in his interview with ESPN: “We sometimes think only gay people can get it, that it's not going to happen to me [. . .] And here I am saying that it can happen to anybody, even me, Magic Johnson” (Weinberg). The shift brought about great awareness of HIV/AIDS and contributed to a cultural discourse on safe sex. It lessened the stigma of those living with HIV/AIDS, contributed to the acceptance and normalization of homosexuality, and allowed for the fundraising and allocation of public and private resources to AIDS organizations and charities. The shift also facilitated the universalization of the AIDS subject.

The 1990s rhetoric that preached that AIDS was a disease that could affect anyone began to have the opposite of its intended effects for those living with HIV/AIDS; it perpetuated the idea of the AIDS subject as ‘other’. In the 1990s, AIDS activist rhetoric produced tangible results such as increased funding and the passing of anti-discrimination legislation; however, Gabrielle Griffin notes in *Representations of HIV and AIDS: Visibility Blue/s* (2000) that the idea of a universalized AIDS subject has actually served to maintain its “otherness.” Griffin argues that the result of having spread the word that HIV can infect anyone is that we

have learnt to live with HIV/AIDS in the sense that is it no longer ‘new’ and therefore ‘noteworthy’ to us. HIV/AIDS remains fraught with uncertainties but these have not affected white western heterosexual populations in the ways that reduce the complacency which underlies films like *Philadelphia*. On the contrary: the image of the person with HIV/AIDS remains firmly “other.” (193)

Griffin continues that the initial locating of HIV/AIDS in the gay community and the Third World that led to this othering has never been challenged (179). White Western heterosexual populations are told that anyone can get AIDS; however, since HIV/AIDS cases are a rarity in their communities and cultural representations, the absence of AIDS in their communities and

the sense that AIDS only happens in marginal communities is reaffirmed. The idea of the AIDS subject as other is firmly supported by the demographics of HIV infection today, in which ‘the other’ in Western society is still at greatest risk for infection (even at increasing rates), such as black women and men who have sex with men, and ‘the other’ in the global context, sub-Saharan Africans.

Griffin’s example of the film *Philadelphia* (1993), directed by Jonathan Demme, illustrates well the phenomenon of the othering of the AIDS subject. The film dramatizes the wrongful termination of a gay man with AIDS by his law firm (played by Tom Hanks) who is defended in court by the admittedly homophobic lawyer played by Denzel Washington. The heterosexual Hollywood stars Hanks (whose lover is played by heterosexual Antonio Banderas) and Washington obscure homosexuality as a central tension, and instead the film focuses more on Washington’s character’s struggles in overcoming his homophobia and misconceptions about AIDS. The AIDS subject, played by Hanks, is thus the “other” that can teach audiences about difference, discrimination, and prejudice.

Media representation during the AIDS crisis played an especially crucial role in shaping public opinions about AIDS, as governmental action was either non-existent or notably lacking. In the US context, Ronald Reagan’s egregious neglect has been noted repeatedly. The Reagan administration’s crucial role in the history of AIDS has been well-documented in the Oscar-nominated *How to Survive a Plague* (2012) directed by David France, which depicts the early years of the AIDS epidemic and the efforts of activists groups ACT UP and TAG. Larry Kramer’s 1985 autobiographical play *The Normal Heart* dramatized this period of governmental neglect in the context of New York City. Griffin observes that the silence “generated a need for representation, a need stimulated by the particular patterns that were constructed by the medics,

the media, the 'general public' in the western world and, to some extent, the gay communities of the world, from the medical evidence which was made public knowledge" (31). Griffin notes that AIDS in the early 1990s was at the height of its public visibility, "signified by the proliferation of its cultural (re)presentation" (1). The speed at which certain media could be produced and circulated also contributed to its importance. Plays, novels, and films played an integral role in the AIDS crisis, but their production is not nearly as quick as that of billboards, pamphlets, posters, and media advertisements that could reach large audiences quickly. Thorsén argues that the media also played this crucial role in the Swedish context as well (15).

The gap between those directly affected by AIDS and those whose sole information source on the disease is derived from the media has grown since the early 1990s. Griffin argues that although HIV/AIDS is a "major catastrophe" for millions of people, the general public is largely unaware of it (178). The diverse cultural images and information from the 1980s and 1990s that required engagement with the topic have "receded into fringe theatres, sexual health centres, voluntary and statutory sector organizations dealing with HIV/AIDS, the inside and back pages of newspapers away from mainstream television and cinema" (178). Griffin also asserts that this idea of AIDS as a 'fringe' concern was also brought about by the volunteer and philanthropic organizations to deal with the crisis, which has generated a sense that AIDS is taken care of, as well as "the 'failure' of HIV/AIDS to take hold in mainstream communities as initially predicted" (179). The assertion that the general public considers AIDS to be "taken care of" has greater resonance in the context of Sweden, where AIDS activism was handled on the governmental level and the National Commission on AIDS was formed to deal with the crisis. In Sweden activism came from the highest levels of government; in the US AIDS activism was a grassroots movements for many years.

The urgency and ubiquity of media representations during the AIDS crisis resulted in the elevated status of media as an integral part of the gay rights movement; media representations of homosexuality became exalted as the space in which gay identity and politics were constructed and contested. Actor Tom Hanks's depiction of a man with AIDS won him an Academy Award for the film *Philadelphia* (1993), and more gay characters began to appear in television and film. The radical gay activism of the 1980s and early 1990s was replaced in dominant discourses by the commercialization and commodification of gay male identity, fueled through media representations which no longer included the subject of HIV/AIDS.

Media representations of homosexuality today are given a much greater cultural significance and act as the main space in which discourses on homosexuality are held. In the American context, the progress of minority groups is often discussed through visibility, which can be measured by tangible figures like the number of characters on network television shows. The idea of media representation as a numbers game seemed to gain particular momentum in the US in the 1980s with depictions of television and film characters of color that began with television programs like *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992). This practice soon extended to include non-heterosexual characters on television shows like *Will & Grace* (1998-2006) and *Queer as Folk*, which first appeared as a British series (1999-2000) with an American version appearing on Showtime (2000-2005). Nowadays inclusion of characters of color and non-heterosexual perspectives and character is the norm; openly gay celebrities like Ellen DeGeneres and Anderson Cooper are celebrated as gay heroes, indicative of the changing sociopolitical climate.

The subject of HIV/AIDS, however, became absent altogether in the late 1990s and 2000s from the idealized media representations of male homosexuality that sought to depict a

positive image. Representations of male homosexuality became aspirational, as demonstrated by the sitcom *The New Normal*⁷⁴ (2012-13), which portrays a wealthy Hollywood white gay male couple's struggles with surrogacy. The lifestyles of a whitewashed and homonormative married gay couple on this sitcom hardly reflects the reality of most queer people, socially, economically, or politically; at the same time it is considered a measure of gay progress. Although these are American examples, the rise of social media and the availability of streaming television and film, allows Swedish audiences to consume American media as if it were their own. Swedish gossip magazines follow the goings-on of American celebrities, and gay media sources in Sweden like *QX* frequently contain reviews of American television and film, as well as interviews with American celebrities.

Although AIDS saw devastating effects on communities in large Western cities, one unique aspect of the history of gay rights is its reliance on commercial spaces and media. The American journalist Dennis Altman noted already in 1982 in his book *The Homosexualization of America* that “No other minority has depended so heavily on commercial enterprises to define itself: while the role of moment papers, dances, and organizations has been significant, it has been overshadowed, especially for gay men, by the commercial world” (74). Even before the AIDS crisis began, men and women within the gay rights movement had already begun working towards different objectives through different media. While lesbians found more political common ground within women's rights movements and critiques of the family as the source of patriarchal power, gay men thus began to rally politically in public commercial spaces. In *Fear of A Queer Planet* (1993), Michael Warner explains that gay activism and community building have been centered around market-mediated spaces from their early beginnings, including bars

⁷⁴ This series aired on Swedish television in 2013.

and urban commercial spaces, and are thus limiting, exclusive, and class-based (Warner 1993, xvi-xvii). The historical reality of gay male activism as economically driven is reflected in the media representations of homosexuality: these representations tend to be white and male, that is, those who have the most capital. Spaces for public sex such as bathhouses that were closed down in many Western cities, but bars, clubs, and urban gay neighborhoods could now serve this political function of community-building and cultural development. Thus an economic element was inserted into gay activism.

The AIDS crisis also allowed for the crystallization of the gay community as a consumer demographic. In *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*, scholar Daniel Harris observes that “AIDS has perversely legitimized the gay community as a group of consumers, making us an object of pity that can be openly addressed through advertising and thus welcomed into the fold of conventional shoppers” (218). Harris describes the result of inadequate federal funding (or none at all) as a “kitschification” of AIDS, driving the epidemic to be sold and marketed, as AIDS activists, “desperate for private contributions,” thus turned the disease into a commodity” (223). This commodification yielded quite a bit of money, while at the same time creating a “new philanthropic elite, consisting not of the dour, religious benefactors of the turn of the century, but of the hip iconoclasts of an entirely secular demimonde” (222). Soon the international face of AIDS was represented by glamorous celebrities like Elizabeth Taylor, who founded the AIDS organization amfAR. Thus the memory of the AIDS crisis persists only in name; the AIDS quilt or the Red Ribbon became circulated as kitsch objects that no longer retained the political viability of AIDS activism. The crystallization of gay men through the kitschification of AIDS is examined later in this chapter.

Calle Norlén's *Bög – så funkar det* (1999) serves as a perfect example of the crystallization of gay men as a consumer demographic. Norlén's bok, described as a "handbok för homokillar och deras vänner" [a handbook for gay guys and his friends] on its cover, is intended to be tongue-in-cheek. The pink and white cover features a muscular man in a bubble bath and holding up a drink containing a mini cocktail umbrella. Norlén explains to RFSL's Greger Eman: "Vi har aldrig haft något sådant i Sverige tidigare. Svensk litteratur har en tendens att problematisera homosexualitet och det blir gärna tungsint" [We have never had something like this in Sweden before. Swedish literature has a tendency to problematize homosexuality and it becomes pretty heavy] (Eman). This handbook includes chapters on pop divas, archetypes of gay men, grooming practices, relationships, etc. One might argue that this frivolous fluff is not worthy of critical analysis, but its absurd frivolity demonstrates a profound shift in the way gay men in Sweden see themselves as consumers and the way in which they are looked upon by advertisers.

The levity with which Norlén treats the subject of AIDS is indicative of gay rights discourses' tenuous connection with the cultural memory of the disease. Norlén's book is peppered with casual mentions of AIDS and pop culture figures that have died from the disease. The most compelling appears in a section entitled "Straights 10 vanligaste frågor" [Straight People's 10 Most Common Questions]. "Är det mycket aids och sånt?" [Isn't There Lots of AIDS and Stuff?] is the third question listed, to which Norlén replies:

Eh, vad svarar man på det? Jo, många är HIV-smittade och naturligtvis har detta påverkat bögvärlden – inte minst genom att många bögar tvingas se ett orimligt stort antal av sina vänner gå bort på tok för tidigt.

Den stora beundran jag känner för alla som vid 45 års ålder redan varit på flera begravingar än sina 90-åriga mormödrar, men ändå lyckas behålla livslusten, optimismen och ja, gayglädjen. Det är också ett gott betyg åt bögssamhället att vi trots en fortfarande grasserande epidemi håller humöret,

energin och framför allt kärlekslusten uppe. Kondomen är en genial uppfinning (107)

Eh, how can you answer that? Sure, a lot of people are infected with HIV and naturally it's affected the gay community – at least in the sense that many gay men have been forced to see an unreasonable number of friends die too young.

The great admiration I feel for all of those who at the age of 45 have already been to more funerals than their 90-year-old grandmothers, but still manage to maintain their zeal for life, optimism and yeah, gay *joie de vive*. It's also a good testament to the gay community that despite the rampant epidemic, we have been able to keep our humor, energy and above all, sexual desire. The condom is a genius invention.]

Norlén's use of the term "gayglädje" [gay *joie de vive*] points to the ways in which consumerism has targeted gay men. This trend has been observed by other scholars. For example Harris notes that

The gay market is so appealing to manufacturers not only because homosexuals are psychologically predisposed to shopping as a means of redressing social inequalities through displays of tastefulness, or because we can easily be as a bridge market, but because the current health crisis has afforded a convenient solution to a recurrent image problem affecting corporations (235).

Furthermore, what Norlén describes as 'gay joy' in truth is the gay male fantasy of schlager, shopping, glamorous red carpets, expensive resorts, etc., as fueled by unprocessed psychological trauma of growing up in a harsh culture that abhors deviant sexuality, is also observed by Ingvarsson in *Böglävlar* (7).

The AIDS crisis was experienced differently by gay men and lesbians. Beginning in the 1970s, Rydström note in *Odd Couples* (2011) that already "an ideological conflict between socialist and liberal forces and between male and female interests" within the gay rights movement began to take shape, and lesbians began to splinter off from men (46). Lesbians developed a "woman-identified lesbian separatist ideology," which further divided gay men and

lesbians within the movement (46). Rydström notes that the AIDS crisis “contributed to separatism and made lesbians even less inclined to support a male project of getting a law on registered partnership, a situation diametrically opposite to that in the United States, where the AIDS crisis resulted in closer ties between lesbians and gay men” (77). The passing of registered partnership and same-sex marriage has improved the quality of life, societal recognition, and justice of LGBT persons from a white middle-class perspective (175). However, from a queer and lesbian feminist perspective, Rydström explains that “the fear that the family - the cornerstone of patriarchal society - would be strengthened has proved right, at least within a small minority of lesbians and gay men,” (175). He adds that:

Strengthening of family values for same-sex couples has entailed a loss of variety in alternative lifestyles and a further marginalization of ‘bad’ sex. State recognition of the LGBT community has served to discipline a group which, before, moved beyond the boundaries of ‘decency.’ Sexual practices that Gayle Rubin placed on the lower half of the sex hierarchy scale (‘lesbians in the bar, promiscuous gay men at the baths or in the park, transvestites, transsexuals, fetishists, sadomasochists, for money, cross-generational’) are still, even more, excluded from “decent” society. (176)

It is precisely the tension between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ expressions of non-normative sexualities that began to characterize gay identity politics in the late 1990s and 2000s in Sweden and still continues today.

The AIDS crisis also furnished a profound generational gap among homosexual men. Daniel Harris comments that the AIDS epidemic “has created a profound generational strife between the ancient regime⁷⁵ and the X generation, between opera queens and grunge rockers, who are not driven apart by absurd, irrational, and potentially deadly equations of youth with

⁷⁵ Harris is referring to gay male culture that existed before the AIDS crisis.

health, maturity with disease,” resulting in “a kind of generational apartheid, exploiting the widening breach between these two sectors of the gay male population and capitalizing on the mythologizing of youth as the embodiment of hygiene, of wholesomeness” (72). The generational break thus sparked what Castiglia and Reed refer to as a “persistent melancholy” of gay male culture and “contributed to a sense of absence or melancholy that theorists misconstrued as a timeless feature of the queer condition rather than recognizing as traumatically historical” (148; 162). This idea is rather interesting in the context of consumption, as consumerism preys upon the psychological weaknesses and shortcoming of its market demographic—in this case not on the trauma of the gay male’s lack of history and generational connection, but also the trauma of growing up different in the homophobic Western world.

The cultural and political forces discussed above that drove both dominant and gay discourses to either forget or selectively remember the history of AIDS is what my study refers to as cultural amnesia. Although the ideas of ‘forgetting’ and ‘amnesia’ are both practiced in a sense, the discussion above expands these effects of the AIDS crisis as part of this project of amnesia. Thus, use of the term cultural amnesia is not literal in every example, yet the broader name for the symptoms and results produced by the AIDS crisis that have removed it from memory—including universalization of the AIDS subject that obscures realities of the disease today; commercialization of gay male identity that values conspicuous consumption as a way to demonstrate cultural capital rather than a historical narrative of identity; generation gap that has resulted, either from death or gay pride rhetoric—has hindered a dialogue between generations of gay men and contributed to the cultural amnesia of the history of AIDS.

Young Adult Novels

The cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis discussed in the previous section not only facilitated a generation gap in the sense that many homosexual men had died but also meant that a whole new generation of homosexual men grew up in both a world and a gay subculture that tried to forget the AIDS crisis. The young adult novels in this section contain no mention of HIV/AIDS or any other sexually transmitted diseases. The complete lack of any mention of HIV/AIDS is a salient example of the cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis. However, my discussion of young adult novels published in the two decades after the AIDS crisis examines its effects on the discourses of male homosexuality and gay identity; analysis of the discourse surrounding *Destroyer* magazine that gay identity and cultural representations of it were hotly contested in the 2000s.

Although the two previous chapters of this dissertation examined representations of male homosexuality characterized by a notable lack, the body of literature examined in this chapter is characterized by a remarkable preponderance. With the exception of Inger Edfeldt's *Duktig pojke*⁷⁶ [Good Boy] (1977) (which has appeared in a number of amended versions since its first publication), a wave of young adult novels featuring a gay male protagonist began in the 1990s after the most critical period of the AIDS crisis. Beginning with Hans Olsson's *Spelar roll* (1993), however, a slew of young adult novels were soon published in Swedish: *En av dem* by Ingrid Sandhagen (2000), *Bögslungan* by Per Alexandersson (2008), *Ung, bög och jävligt kär* by Johannes Sandreyo (2010), *Regn och åska* by Håkan Lindquist (2011), and *Böggjävel* by Emma Björck and Marcus Tallberg (2011).

Despite the preponderance of gay young adult novels in Swedish, this body of literature is rather homogenous. Dodo Paprikas observes in *HBT Speglat i litteraturen* (2009) that the

⁷⁶ This novel has appeared in an amended version in 1983, and new editions appeared in 1994 and 2000.

“komma-ut romanen är en av tonårslitteraturens mest slätstrukna genrer” [the coming out novel is one of young adult literature’s most undistinguished genres] and that since *Duktig pojke* “har bibliotekshyllorna varit fullproppade av epigoner” [bookshelves have been crammed with imitators] (255). While the quality and originality of these works constitute an entirely separate discussion, it cannot be denied that young adult novels serve a particular function (both therapeutic or didactic), although the genre itself is hard to define. The American scholar of young adult literature Stephen Roxburgh argues that in young adult literature “you often see this transformation: it is an organic, inherent manifestation of the change the protagonist is undergoing. It is not at all typical of the adult novel where the reliability of the narrator tends to remain consistent” (5). Roxburgh also states that while there are some distinctions to be made between them, there is no real difference between the young adult novel and the adult novel. He further remarks that the young adult novel is the only art form that is defined by its audience, which is complicated in that our cultural is also unable to agree on what a young adult is (1). Thus, in the case of gay young adult novels, one can assume that the audience is at least interested in sexuality, if not chiefly concerning young people still questioning or experiencing sexuality that lies outside of the norm.

But why the sudden wave of young adult novels in a language and culture with literary representations of male homosexuality that could previously be counted on one hand? Historically and still today, arguments against homosexuality and its visibility cite protection of ‘the children’ as its main impetus (this idea appears in Chapter I with age of consent for homosexual sex in Sweden). However, one of the many functions of the gay young adult novel is to promote the idea, at least among young queer people, that homosexuality is not only normal, but acceptable. As discussed in the introduction, the function of literature as a safe and

anonymous space in which to explore feelings or ideas about sexuality is ubiquitous in the literary discourse.

It makes sense perhaps that an LGBTQ pioneer and prolific producer of progressive children's literature like Sweden would seize the trend of gay young adult novels; however, the explanation is not so simple. From an outsider perspective, it may appear that the seamless cooperation of dominant Swedish gay rights voices and political enterprises resulted in a number of political achievements that sought to improve the lives and inclusions of non-heterosexual Swedes in a number of public and state-sanctioned ways—and that the trickle-down effect of Sweden's 'pioneer status' as a champion of gay rights has produced such wide-ranging ripple effects as a rich body of gay young adult novels. Another reason to consider is Sweden's phenomenal output of children's literature, in which one in ten books are children's literature (The Swedish Institute). Swedish children's literature is also well known *outside* of Sweden for its sensitive yet direct treatment of difficult issues like domestic violence, death, and homosexuality. This wave of gay young adult novels speaks also to the commercialization of "gay," in that a market exists for such literature. In addition, the form of the young adult novel itself, one that often centers on the character's quest for identity and self-realization, contributes to this idea that gay male identity is an active project that can be fostered, developed and affirmed through reading these novels.

This section examines *Duktig pojke* and *Spelar roll* in conversation with one another; rather than discuss these two as separate moving parts in a greater equation, the discussion focuses on these two novels as representative of this wave of copycats as Paprikas observes. These two novels have not only been the most widely praised within this subgenre, but they also were published at critical points in the history that my project considers. They are unique in that

they have been translated into other languages and have been released in a number of editions by Sweden's largest and most prestigious of publishing houses (editions of *Duktig pojke* have been released by Norstedt's and Rabén & Sjögren, and the most recent edition of *Spelar roll* was released by *En bok för alla* [A Book for Everyone], a publishing house that "med statligt stöd ge ut kvalitetslitteratur till lågt pris" [with state funding publish quality literature at a low price] (*En bok för alla*)). Swedish literature is often printed in limited editions, with the exception of classical and canonical works. Therefore, these two novels have been institutionalized as classic representatives of this genre, and their broader dissemination and readership speak to the way in which the phenomena discussed in this chapter have an increasingly profound social, political, and cultural impact.

Duktig pojke stands as the exception among the other works of literature in this study in two ways. Firstly, Edefeldt is the only woman author of any literary work examined in this project. This is not hugely significant, as authors write from vastly different subjective positions and perspectives in all literary fantasies. Upon its original publication in 1977, Edefeldt's status as a heterosexual woman came into question, but Paprikas claims that Edefeldt still became a "homohjältinna" [gay heroine] immediately (255). He also notes that contemporary queer discourses have embraced Edefeldt's work, describing her as a "queerförfattare" [queer author] who produces literary works that are "gränsöverskridande" [[able to] transgress borders] (256). Journalist Anders Backlund observed in *QX* that a recurring theme in her extensive body of work encourages the reader to dare to "vara den man är, även om man i andras ögon kan verka avvikande" [be who one is, even if it seems deviant in the eyes of others] (Paprikas 256). Countless reviews and descriptions of *Duktig pojke* remark how relevant this novel continues to be, including Anders Öhrman, the *QX* editor in chief and author of *Komma ut: berättelser från*

garderoben [Coming Out: Tales from the Closet] (2006). He describes it as a “fin och stark roman om ung homosexuell kärlek” [great and powerful novel about young homosexual love] that is still relevant thirty years later (Paprikas 357). Edelfeldt remarked that despite some complaints that there was too little sex in the novel, she still encounters people who thank her for writing it (Paprikas 256). The other factor that renders *Duktig pojke* unique is its appearance in a significantly amended edition since its original 1977 publication. Sebastian Nilsson Lindberg’s *Att skriva, skriva om och skriva om sig själv – En komparativ undersökning av Inger Edelfeldts och Bengt Martins omarbetade berättelser om homosexualitet* (2011) examines these amendments in greater depth. Thus, the amending of *Duktig pojke* demonstrates the development and evolution of homosexuality through literary representations.

Duktig pojke continues to be a popular text and has appeared in a number of artistic forms since its original publication in 1977. Edelfeldt published the first edition of *Duktig pojke* at the age of 21. It also appeared as a radio play in 1979. Most recently it appeared as an opera at Göteborgsoperan during the 2011-12 season (Norrman). “Duktig” [good⁷⁷] describes the titular character, Jim Lundberg, whom the novel follows from childhood through a few years after he graduates from gymnasium. Jim is “duktig” in the sense that he sublimates his homosexual desires and fears into academic pursuits. The term also takes on another dimension in the poignant conversation in which Jim comes out as a homosexual to his mother, to which she replies: “Du är inte en sån; du är en duktig pojke” [you’re not one of those; you’re a good boy] (175). Thus a contrast is drawn, in that one cannot be both duktig and homosexual. In the novel, the term “en sån” is used both by Jim and others; “fikus” is used by Jim’s friend Leif in a pejorative sense to describe Mats (139); and “bögg” is also used by Jim in some instances, which

⁷⁷ This term is also used for child that is conscientious and does what is expected of him/her.

demonstrates the gay positivity that characterize the 1970s when this term began to be used as a space of pride. Jim's mother's voice is also very present in the novel, and each chapter begins with a brief passage in which she describes her anxiety and worry over Jim's peculiarity and difficulty in making friends. Jim's father, on the other hand, is proud of Jim's academic performance, yet homophobic and distant, a sexual double standard that Jim resents when he learns of his father's chronic infidelity to his mother.

Duktig pojke demonstrates that the gay positivity, spread by the coming out revolution in the 1970s, began to shift ideas about homosexuality; however, it also demonstrates that broader cultural acceptance was years in the future. Jim, who is also bullied relentlessly as a child, diverts all of his energy towards his studies. After a failed forced relationship with Katarina, he eventually meets Mats at a party and they have a brief sexual encounter away from which Jim nervously flees. The two eventually end up in a relationship together, and after a weekend away together Jim thinks to himself: "Jag älskar dig, Mats, tänker jag. Och kärlek kan aldrig vara löjlig" [I love you, Mats, I think. And love can never be foolish] (156). While this sentiment is uplifting, the original edition is rather cynical. Jim's relationships with his parents are strained, his openness about his homosexuality has destroyed all of his friendships, and even his boss at work instructs him: "Var inte så öppet" [Don't be so flamboyant] (203). Although there are some uplifting scenes in the novel, and it concludes with Jim in a stable relationship, it was a dark narrative for young adults grappling with this issue at the time of its publication.

The more optimistic ending in the 1984 edition of *Duktig pojke* demonstrated that cultural acceptance of male homosexuality was still increasing. Although it was first released in 1977 as a novel for adults, the second edition was released as a young adult novel. Edelfeldt has explained that she was unhappy with the editing and release at a smaller press and was happy to

amend this edition with a new publisher. Edelfeldt also provided the illustration for the cover of the new edition. Edelfeldt did however maintain that the shift in intended audience did not affect her amendments to this novel (Nilsson Lindberg 75). One scene that has been changed significantly in the amended versions occurs at the end of the book when Jim overhears some of his friends in a urinal saying homophobic things about him. This scene contributes considerably to the pessimistic tone of the original edition. However in later editions the scene only happens in Jim's imagination, and he is later accepted by a friend who formerly distanced himself from Jim.

Despite the tone of these versions moving toward a more positive template of self-acceptance, there are a number of elements that keep the novel firmly located in the mid 1970s when it takes place. Jim, consumed with internalized homophobia, even refers to himself as a "böggjäväl" [a faggot] (91). He describes transsexuality as "äckligt" [repulsive] (107), he likes to distance himself from what he sees as the 'wrong' kind of homosexuals, which he calls "sminkbögar" [fags who wear makeup] who can be found at Club Timmy in Stockholm, speaks judgmentally of feminine homosexual men (121), and is very resistant to being immersed in the gay subculture or attending gay clubs with Mats (161). Jim has internalized the cultural abhorrence of those outside what Gayle Rubin has described as the 'charmed circle' and tries to eschew any cultural association of homosexuality with his own identity. The link between this idea of broader sexual deviancy is introduced in Jim's first coming out scene: in an interaction with a prostitute on a bench waiting for the train, Jim is able to say for the first time that he is a homosexual. In addition, this novel takes place at a time when homosexuality was still considered a mental illness by the National Board of Health and Welfare. Edelfeldt states that homosexuality was still considered a mental illness when she first wrote the novel, which didn't

change until “folk började stanna hemma från jobbet och sjukskriva sig för homosexualitet!” [people started to stay home and call in sick to work for homosexuality!] (Norrman). The trope of the prostitute seems to function as a safe space for Jim in the novel, demonstrating the fact that he has nothing to lose in coming out to her, as they are both sexual deviants, both ‘sick’ according to dominant cultural discourses.

Hans Olsson’s *Spelar roll* (1993) contains many of the same plot elements as *Duktig pojke*, namely its structure as both a coming-out and a coming-of-age novel. A new edition of *Spelar roll* was released in 1997 by *Alfabetta förlag*, and the most recent edition was published in 2006 by *En bok för alla*, a Stockholm publishing house that receives state funding to provide quality literature at a low price. The history of both *Duktig pojke* and *Spelar roll* saw initial publication by smaller, independent publishing houses, but were eventually published on a broader scale and distributed much more widely. In contrast to *Duktig pojke*, *Spelar roll* was written as a young adult novel from the very beginning. *Spelar roll* was nominated in 1993 for the esteemed Augustpriset [August Prize], named after the famous Swedish author August Strindberg and one of the most celebrated and prestigious literary Prizes in Sweden Augustpriset was established in 1989 by the Swedish Publishers’ Association to “institute an annual award for the best Swedish books of the year in order to increase public interest in Swedish contemporary literature” (Augustpriset). The prize is awarded annually in three categories: Best Swedish Fiction Book of the Year, Best Swedish Non-Fiction Book of the Year, and Best Swedish Children’s Book of the Year. *Spelar roll* was nominated for Best Children’s Book but lost to Mats Wahl’s *Winterviken* (1993).

In contrast to the fay and awkward Jim in *Duktig pojke*, Johan Alexander is the typical jock who defies stereotypically male homosexual traits. *Spelar roll* follows Johan Alexander,

who we first meet at the age of twelve, and the novel concludes just before he turns sixteen. Johan is known to his friends as Johan and called Alexander by his family. Johan's stable homosexuality identity is not questioned in the novel, and a great portion of the novel deals with the agony and strife he experiences having to perform affection and interest in girls, a struggle which comes to a head with his clingy and needy girlfriend, Maria. Like many other literary characters in the novels of this study, Johan's escapist distraction is in literature, particularly his book on Alexander the Great, who "omgavs av män av maskulinaste manlighet [. . .] som det stod i en bok, var nämligen en sån – en bögl!" [was surrounded by men of the most manly masculinity [. . .] like it said in a book, he was one of those – a faggot!] (30). After yet another tedious interaction with Maria, Johan comments

Det enda som fångade mig var mitt intresse av böckerna om Alexander den Store. Och jag ville läsa om mig. Jag menar, läsa om . . . att det ska vara så svårt att ta det ordet i munnen. Det är ju ett ord vilket som helst bland alla andra jävla ord . . . Vad jag skulle säga var att jag ville läsa om bögar. De finns ju massor, överallt, det har jag sett på TV. Fel av mig: Vi finns överallt (54).

[The only thing that captured my interest in the books about Alexander the Great. And I wanted to read more. I mean, read about . . . it's so hard to speak the word. It's just any old word among all the other damn words . . . What I should say is that I wanted to read about faggots. There were lots of them, everywhere, that I've seen on television. Correction: We are evyerwhere.]

Discussion of Johan's fantasy world that exists in literature occurs frequently throughout the novel, and the Stockholm Public Library is a place of refuge. Johan's anguish and fear of those around him not accepting his homosexuality drives him to locate himself in the space of 'outsider,' explaining that we "[homosexuella] hörde till en annan värld; till getton i San Francisco, eller till det gamla Grekland" [[homosexuals] belonged to another world: to the ghettos in San Francisco, or to Ancient Greece] (131). This fantasy of San Francisco as a gay

ghetto was exported to other Western nations after Stonewall and unequivocally cemented in the Swedish consciousness as one of the first cities to experience the AIDS crisis on a large scale. Olsson's depiction of Johan not only demonstrates the increase in the cultural acceptability of homosexuality; it also echoes the cultural images of male homosexuality's link with health, vitality and desirability that circulated in the 2000s. Johan is depicted as a polar opposite to Jim: Johan is attractive, popular, athletic, and has no trouble with girls. He has never been a victim of bullying, and instead strikes his friend Perra in the face when he remarks that "Man får faktiskt tycka att bögar är äckliga" [It's okay to think that faggots are disgusting] (293). Johan is also more comfortable with sexual experiences. Sex and masturbation are commonplace in the novel (in contrast to *Duktig pojke*), and Johan has sexual experiences with both women and men. Johan's first sexual experience occurs in a sauna with Thomas, causing him to wonder if he is already in love (26). He has another sexual encounter with a girl named Ann-Louise, but Johan's nerves cause him to lose his erection (41). Although he distances himself from Thomas after their initial sexual encounter, in another drunken incident he and Thomas are lying in a bed at a party and Thomas reacts angrily to Johan's physical advances, forcing dramatic thoughts of suicide through Johan's head (117). In their final sexual encounter, however, Thomas asks Johan to masturbate him, which Johan declines. This scene demonstrates the key moment in which Johan comprehends yet another level of his gay identity, one that inhabits not only the sexual dimension. Thomas pleads that "jag är inte bög om du är rädd för det!" [I'm not a faggot if you're worried about that], and the two engage in playful conversation:

'Skulle det göra någon skillnad om du var det?' frågade jag tonlöst.
'Om jag var bög? Självklart! Då skulle du väl aldrig vilja göra det. Ja, jag skulle inte vilja det i alla fall. Nä, det skulle vara äckligt på nåt vis [. . .]
'Tänk om jag är det då.'

[‘Would it make a difference if you were?’ I asked flatly.
‘If I was a fag? Of course! Then you’d never want to do that. Well, I wouldn’t at least. Nah, it would be kind of gross [. . .]
‘What if I am though.’]

Thomas persists in trying to convince Johan to give in, the stability of Johan’s heterosexuality necessary for him to engage in mutual masturbation. Johan thinks to himself: “[Thomas] var ett avslutat kapitel i min pinsamma historia. Även om det inte skulle betyda någonting just att göra det. Och jag drömde om någon som kändes rätt att göra med. Det var inte Thomas” [[Thomas] was a closed chapter in my embarrassing story. Even if it wouldn’t mean anything just to do it. I dreamed about doing it with someone that felt right. That was not Thomas] (261). Although Johan is coyly attempting to be honest with Thomas, he notes that Thomas “bestämde sig tydligen för att jag inte var bög, eftersom det var otänkbart. Jag, idrottsgrabben och tjejtusaren, kunde inte vara bög” [decided that I obviously wasn’t gay, since it was unimaginable. Me, the jock and the ladies’ man, couldn’t be a fag.] (262). This scene demonstrates a realization on Johan’s part that situates a perplexing dichotomy. The affirmed heterosexuality of both Johan and Thomas is necessary for Thomas to engage in sexual contact; conversely, Johan is seeking homosexual contact with another man who is *also* homosexual. This maturation towards the end of the novel is one of the many nuances that illustrate how Johan’s sexual and social identity are in development like those of any teenager.

In stark contrast to the sexual encounters with the heterosexual Thomas, Johan has some sexual and romantic experiences with other young men that are mutual. Johan meets Tom at a party through his friend Perra’s older brother Jack; Tom is confident and comfortable with his sexuality, teasing Johan when he asks whether or not his is open:

‘Vet Jack om att du är . . . att du är . . . ?’ klämde jag fram till sist. Gråten var så nära. Att det skulle vara så svårt att ta det där ordet i munnen. Det var en helt annan sak att skriva det.

Bög, menar du. Man kan faktiskt säga det. Say after me, please: bög,’ mässade han mig som en övervintrad engelsklärare. ‘What did you say? I couldn’t hear you. Speak out, please. Once again: bög!’

[‘Does Jack know that you’re . . . that you’re . . . ?’ I blurted out finally. I was on the verge of tears. That it would be so difficult to say the word. It was a whole other thing to write it down.

‘Gay, you mean. You can actually say it. Say after me, please: gay,’ he chanted like a seasoned English teacher. ‘What did you say? I couldn’t hear you. Speak out please. Once again: gay!’]

Tom eventually responds that, yes, “Jack vet. Syrran vet, mina föräldrar vet. Alla vet” [Jack knows. My sister knows, my parents know. Everyone knows] (287). Despite Johan’s initial nervousness, he and Tom eventually begin to kiss shirtless in bed, which differs tremendously from the perfunctory sexual encounters with Thomas. Johan describes the scene:

Det känns överkligt. Alldeles för bra. Hans sköna händer, skrevet som han pressade mot min hårda kuk så det pirrade i hela kroppen, hans smekningar och vänliga blickar. Jag kände mig älskad – han ville ha mig. Som den naturligaste sak i världen höll han om mig och njöt av att vara tillsammans med mig, en kille. Och han fortsatte som om detta var det enda som existerade (288).

[It feels unreal. Way too good. His beautiful hands, his crotch that he pressed against my hard dick so it tingled in my whole body, his caresses and friendly glances. I felt loved – he wanted me. Like the most natural thing in the world, he held me and enjoying being together with me, a guy. And he continued like it was the only thing that existed.]

However, when Tom begins to remove Johan’s pants, his nerves and insecurity take over and he loses his erection. “Skam och äckel” [shame and disgust] he thinks to himself, “Jag hånglar med en grabb. Eller vad då, han hånglar med mig, det är inte mitt fel. En främmande grabb! Ta mig

häriifrån!” [I’m hooking up with a guy. Or he’s hooking up with me, it’s not my fault. A stranger! Get me out of here!] (289-90). He jumps out of bed, gets dressed, and rushes out of the room.

Olsson’s depiction of Johan’s relationship with Anders, which emphasizes the romance and relationship aspect of homosexuality, reflects the focus of the registered partnership discourse which officially recognized same-sex couples two years after the first publication of *Spelar roll*. These two encounters above differ still from a third homosexual relationship, which is not sexual at any point during the novel: his relationship with Anders. In spite of initial conflicts, Johan’s feelings for Anders grow stronger; he leaves a note for Anders that says, “Jag är kär – ring mig. Johan” [I’m in love – call me. Johan] (314). It is this homosexual relationship, rather than the two previous sexual encounters, that not only brings Johan great relief, but also provides the key moment in the novel where John is completely open with himself and others. After pondering the long and agonizing spring, Johan goes for an early morning run in the park and finally lets out the stress of the past season and screams at the top of his lungs: “‘Bög,’ ropade jag. Jag spände kroppen, det gick rysningar genom den, jag kände mig omväxlande kall och varm. Jag satte händerna till munnen och formade dem till en tratt [. . .] Jag – är – bög! B-Ö-G, bög!” [‘Gay’ I shouted. I tensed my body, and shivers ran through me. I felt alternating chills and warmth. I put my hands to my mouth and formed a megaphone [. . .] I – am – G-A-Y, gay!] (311-12). Then in the final scene of the novel, Johan has returned home after distributing all of the letters to his friends. His mother remarks: “Värst vad du ser nöjd och glad ut” [My goodness, you seem happy and content] to which he replies: “Jag är kär, morsan” [I’m in love, Mom] (317). This interaction underscores that romantic and relationship aspects of homosexuality are the source of Johan’s happiness, whereas sexual encounters are nevertheless complicated.

Olsson's intentions for writing the novel illustrate the crystallization of gay male identity within gay cultural discourses, even if cultural acceptability had not yet caught up. The introduction to the 2006 edition of *Spelar roll* states that Olsson wrote the novel because he wanted to portray a young man's feelings about homosexuality, stressing "att det är rädslan för omgivningens reaktioner som är det svåra" [it is the fear for the reactions of those around you that is the difficult] (Olsson 2). He also explains that he intended to write both a humorous and serious novel that did not solely focus on the difficulties of coming out ("Hans Olsson"). This denotes a clear departure from the previous young adult novels in the Swedish canon, including *Duktig pojke* and Bengt Martin's works. The introduction continues to separate itself from its predecessors:

Det är inte bara för homosexuella ungdomar en bok som *Spelar roll* kan vara nödvändig genom att den sätter ord på känslor och erfarenheter som sällan syngliggörs.

[It's not just young homosexual people that a book like *Spelar roll* can be necessary for because it gives words to feelings and experiences that are seldomly made visible.

Olsson also notes that 40 percent of the anti-gay hate crimes in Sweden are committed by people under the age of eighteen, which he hopes could be lessened through Johan's experiences and thoughts (Olsson). The broader audience that Olsson anticipates with this novel not only indicates this differentiation from its predecessors, but it also points out a new phenomenon that is symptomatic of the greater political and social visibility of gay people, a result of the AIDS crisis (as Rydström has noted in his study of gay marriage in Norden).

The passage above also describes perhaps the greatest distinction between *Spelar roll* and *Duktig pojke* in its study of gay identity. In its focus on the fear of others' reactions as the central

tension stands in stark contrast to the internal struggle within Jim in *Duktig pojke*: to accept his own homosexuality; to reconcile the internalized homophobia that he has undergone, including his fear of gay clubs and bars; his contempt for feminine gay men; and his shame surrounding homosexual sex. As discussed above, *Duktig pojke* concludes with Jim's boss instructing him to conceal his homosexuality in the workplace, his parents having difficulty accepting him, and nearly all of his friendships destroyed. However, in *Spelar roll*, Johan's acceptance of his gay identity is almost immediate. And rather than an elusive reference of "en s n," [one of those], Johan's friend Perra describes someone as "en b g," [gay] and Johan immediately blushes, demonstrating not only his knowledge and acceptance that "b g" is a legitimate identity with cultural meaning, but also that he indeed inhabits this discursively authored space (9).

The fact that the novel differentiates between these homosexual relationships demonstrates the separation of sex from homosexuality that gay identity presupposes. Johan's ultimate acceptance of his homosexuality is the result of his emotional feelings and connection with another man. Sexual encounters with Thomas and Tom only contribute to his anguish over how his homosexuality will be received by his friends and family. This distinction also speaks to the evolution of the cultural discourse around homosexuality—in this example more strikingly that openness and visibility are psychologically and politically valuable practices. The separation of 'sex' from 'homosexuality' is also a project that has developed in the wake of the normalization and assimilation encouraged by dominant gay rights discourses.

But what of HIV/AIDS in these two novels? As discussed earlier in this chapter, cultural amnesia is practiced in the literal sense in that there is absolutely no mention of HIV/AIDS in either of these novels. *Duktig pojke* was first published in 1977, five years before the first AIDS case was reported. However, each subsequent edition was published in a world and a culture that

knew very well that AIDS was a reality. And the same goes for *Spelar roll*. Still, the question of why AIDS is absent from these novels remains. The development of gay men as a market demographic certainly speaks to the preponderance of these novels (there have also been a number of lesbian ‘coming out’ novels, but not nearly as many). The gay adult novels often function not only as a *Bildungsroman* but also focus on the ways in which the coming out process factors into this typical psychological and moral evolution in the protagonist.

Gay young adult novels have an additional function reflected in both Jim and Johan’s safe literary fantasy world where homosexuality exists for them. The cultural amnesia of AIDS has been accomplished simultaneously with the political and social visibility of gay people, a process that has necessitated the eschewing of the history of AIDS. It seems that these gay young adult novels have not only participated in this tendency, but have also actively perpetuated this project through their employment as tools assisting in gay male identity formation. On the other hand, the young adult novel would seem like a fantastic resource in terms of political resistance for younger generations of queer people. However, the function of the gay young adult novel, to communicate to the reader that homosexuality is both normal and acceptable, seems as if it may be at odds with resisting both the white and cisgender privilege that dominates gay culture. In an attempt to present homosexuality as ‘normal,’ reproducing dominant media representations seems quite likely.

Gay Chick Lit

The seamless replacement of gay male characters and settings in the subgenre of chick lit explicitly demonstrates the role of consumption and media in negotiations of gay male identity that came about in the new millennium. The crystallization of gay men as a consumer demographic offers some explanation for the substantial body of gay young adult novels published in Sweden. However, the popular cultural form of chick lit underscores the discussion about surrounding the cultural images of male homosexuality that circulated in the 2000s, images that promoted idealized, white, attractive, middle-class, and urban representations of male homosexuality. The mentions of HIV/AIDS that appear in gay Swedish chick lit depict the disease as an anxiety-inducing legacy of the 1980s and 1990s, one that complicates the idealized images of male homosexuality.

Mats Strandberg's first two novels *Jaktäsöng: Hur hittar man kärleken bland sex, lögn och dvd-boxar?* [Hunting Season: How To Find Love Among Sex, Lies and DVD boxes?] (2006) and *Bekantas bekanta* [A Friend of A Friend] (2007), take place in Stockholm's gay nightlife subculture. Although *Jaktäsöng* is arguably located more exclusively in terms of its specific setting at well known Stockholm gay bars like Torget and Rio, both of these novels, through their characters and physical setting, fit the quite rigid chick lit formula. A number of media outlets used this term 'gay chick lit,' including *Litteratur Magazinet* [Literature Magazine], *Nyhetsmorgon* [Morning News], *Sydsvenskan*, and even RFSL's online book shop. Swedish *Elle* described Strandberg as "Sveriges svar på Jackie Collins" [Sweden's answer to Jackie Collins] (MånpoCKET). *Bokborgen* has also described *Jaktäsöng* as "Marian Keyes på svenska. Det här är chick lit när den är som bäst - underhållande, rolig, varm och lite crazy"

[Marian Keyes in Swedish. This is chick lit at its best – entertaining, fun, warm and a little crazy] (Bokborgen).

The ‘gayness’ of Strandberg’s chick lit novels was an essential part of its marketing. Ida Lännerberg says in an interview with Strandberg for the release of *Jaktsäsong* that “Det är ingen slump att hans bok kommer just nu. Den släpps mitt i Stockholm Pride, den årliga festivalen som går i regnbågens färger” [“It’s not coincidence that his book is released now. It comes out in the middle of Stockholm Pride, the annual festival of rainbow colors”] (Lännerberg). Both the hardcover book jacket and paperback cover for *Jaktsäsong* are covered in a rainbow of fuschia, orange, blue, and purple, with the silhouette of a rail-thin woman sipping from a martini glass, as well as a small silhouette of a man in typical red carpet pose. Strandberg explained that he is ambivalent over whether or not to describe his work as chick lit, but the Swedish media was unanimous (Lännerberg). This term is used in the discussion of these two novels not only because the Swedish media unanimously baptized this subgenre with the term, but also because the accessibility and use of the term ‘gay’ in various media captures quite well the way in which male homosexuality post-AIDS crisis is mediated, negotiated, informed, and defined almost exclusively through media representations like these two novels.

Chick lit is a subgenre of contemporary literature whose name has been hotly contested since its first circulation in the late 1990s. And although both the name and the quality of this body of literature have frequently been called into question, the genre’s popularity certainly has not. This wildly bankable subgenre of literature first began with British author Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996) and was based on the author’s newspaper columns (Merrick, viii). This book also became a successful film with a sequel based on another of Fielding’s books. In 1996, Candace Bushnell’s *Sex and the City* was published, also based on the author’s newspaper

columns, which in 1998 appeared on HBO as an acclaimed television series that lasted for six seasons, as well as two films. These two cultural phenomena not only established this literary and cultural trend, but they also seemingly calcified the form, setting, and content of these novels.

In the introduction to *This is Not Chicklit: Original Stories by America's Best Women Writers* (2006), the American scholar Elizabeth Merrick states:

Chick lit is a genre, like the thriller, the sci-fi novel, or the fantasy epic. Its form and content are, more of less, formulaic: white girl in the big city searches for Prince Charming, all the while shopping, alternately cheating on or adhering to her diet, dodging her boss, and enjoying the occasional teary-eyed lunch with her token Sassy Gay Friend. Chick lit is the daughter of the romance novel and the stepmother of the fashion magazine. Details about race and class are always absent except for, of course, for the protagonist's relentless pursuit of Money, a Makeover, and Mr. Right." (vii-viii).

This description obviously sounds like the framework of apolitical, disposable beach reading—and chick lit has often been dismissed as just that. However, scholar Stephanie Harzewski comments in *Chick Lit and Postfeminism* (2011) that this subgenre has a much more respectable history, harkening back to canonical woman authors like Jane Austen and Edith Wharton. Harzewski explains that this genre marries “elements of the popular romance with the satiric aspects of the novel of manners” and extends Jane Austen’s comedic legacy and brings elements of adventure fiction to the contemplative tradition of the novel of manners. Chick lit revisits the ‘class without money’ conflict central to the novel of manners tradition” (4). Daniel Harris also discusses the ‘idea of class without money’ that informed many gay cultural norms in the twentieth century (26).

An important effect produced by the popularity of chick lit is the crystallization of single women as a bankable consumer market. Chick lit has been lauded for its feminist (albeit

superficial and lacking nuance) function; it supposedly empowers the demographic of women it depicts and celebrates. However, some of its negative effects have also been noted; the subgenre was judged “as a pink menace to both established and debut women authors who perceive it as staging a coup upon literary seriousness and undoing the canonical status of earlier works from *Pride and Prejudice* to *The Bell Jar*” (5-6). Merrick also notes that another destructive function of this trend is that it has obscured quality authors and texts whose work does not fit into this rigid format (ix). This point is moot in the Swedish context, as Mats Strandberg’s two novels are the only two of its kind ever published in Swedish. Harzewski’s study focuses on chick lit published in the US and the UK, noting that “chick lit is primarily a transatlantic phenomenon, with an energetic crossexchange among these novels and their media counterparts with regard to audiences, their general formulas, and their imbrications in commodity culture” (17). This transatlantic Anglophone phenomenon is also likely the reason that in Swedish the English term chick lit is used rather than a translation into Swedish. Harzewski’s study obviously does not include Swedish sources, but it is important to emphasize the saturation of Swedish media with both undubbed American television and film.

Chick lit has produced some positive cultural effects, however. Harzewski notes that chick lit is an underanalyzed body of “postmodern fiction” that “serves as an accessible portal into contemporary gender politics and questions of cultural value. Since the turn of this century, chick lit has been a lively topic of debate in American culture wars” (5). This idea of chick lit as an accessible portal is the principal reason that this genre is useful in my study—what Harzewski also describes as “an ethnographic report on a new dating system and a shift in the climate of feminism (4). The discussion in this section considers Strandberg’s two chick lit novels to serve this ethnographic function in the context of Swedish gay male culture in the 2000s.

The seamless placement of gay male characters in roles traditionally held by women in chick lit reflects the shift in cultural representations of male homosexuality caused by cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis in the 2000s. Strandberg's *Jaktsäsong* and *Bekantas bekanta* fulfill all of the formal and thematic requirements of the chick lit genre, yet feature gay male protagonists and locate most of the novels' central tensions in the Stockholm gay subculture. The fact that these novels are so easily able to swap out 'single girl in her thirties in the Big City' for 'single gay white male in the Big City,' all the while retaining their rigid form and content, is a curious phenomenon. In this section I will examine Strandberg's two novels as not only accessible portals into Swedish gay culture, but also as a prime example of the ways in which cultural treatment of homosexuality has evolved alongside consumerism to allow for such a seamless transplant of the gay white male for the straight, single thirtysomething urban woman. Therefore, the greater question presents itself: What does the cultural synonymy of these two demographics reveal about the shift in gay culture that so closely aligned itself with the cultural values of single, urban heterosexual women? And how is this traced to the lasting effects of the AIDS crisis?

The chick lit phenomenon has also seen success in the Swedish context, in addition to the importation of Anglophone texts, films, and television. Malin E. Lundhag's *Svensk chick-lit 1996-2006: En undersökande genrediskussion av svensk chick-lit* [Swedish Chick Lit 1996-2006: An Investigative Analysis of Genre] (2007) examines chick lit published by twelve Swedish authors. Lundhag notes in her study that although Swedish chick lit is very much in the international conversation of chick lit dominated by Anglophone texts, Swedish chick lit is much more grounded in realistic depictions (27). Lundhag also notes that closer readings of Swedish chick lit reveal a more broad and diversified body of literature. In *Chick lit: från glamour till*

vardagsrealism [Chick lit: From Glamour to Mundane Realism] (2008), Maria Nilson notes that consumption is indeed an important element in Swedish chick lit, which requires its setting to be Stockholm or other large Swedish cities (13). Nilson's study also includes Mats Strandberg's novels, supporting my claim that these do not queer the genre in any way but rather employ all of the conventions that characterize the genre of chick lit.

Chick lit is no stranger to homosexual characters, who appear almost exclusively as gay men. And although seemingly progressive, the sassy gay friend appears as a trope in many chick lit novels, functioning as "a guide to classy consumption for the straight woman but then is made to move out of the picture" (197). In a 2006 interview with *Sydsvenskan* to promote *Jaktsäsong*, Strandberg describes the lack of literature that depicts "gayvärlden" ["the gay world"], noting that

det finns ju en del romaner med 'komma-ut-historier,' men de tycker jag personligen är ganska ointressanta. Och dyker det upp en bög någonstans är han ofta bara en tokrolig bifigur. Men att min bok utspelar sig i gayvärlden beror främst på att det är den världen jag känner till" (Lännerberg).

[There are a few novels with 'coming out stories,' but I personally think they're pretty uninteresting. If a gay character pops up somewhere he's usually just a comical sidekick. But the fact that my book takes place in the gay world is mostly because that's the world I know.]

The interviewer explains that Strandberg is a torn over whether or not to describe his novel as chick lit, because he has some issues with *Bridget Jones* and other similar novels, whose pitiful characters have all of their problems solved once they meet a man (Lännerberg). While Strandberg may take issue with some of the formal aspects of the genre, his novel unequivocally mimics the format of chick lit novels. *Jaktsäsong* was also describes as chick lit by virtually every news source that reviewed it, including *Aftonbladet* and *Damernas Värld* ("Jaktsäsongen").

Although he inserts gay and bisexual male characters into the roles usually inhabited by straight women, Strandberg does little to queer the format itself: both novels conclude with the ‘guy getting the guy,’ which traditional chick lit and romantic comedies depict as the ultimate goal.

Second-wave feminism has also produced a similar effect on the solidification of women as a consumer demographic (albeit resulting from less a less severe impetus than AIDS). One of the many positive effects of Second-wave feminism grew out of the feminist rhetoric that preached financial independence from men as a key to gender equality. The greater number of women in the workforce, earning salaries of their own, has thus understood financial independence as a form of feminism. This is unequivocally true in many ways; however, the conspicuous consumption pervasive Western culture to demonstrate this feminism also allowed women consumers to crystalize as a consumer market. Women have certainly been a target consumer group for many decades before this, but Second-wave feminism praised this as an unquestionably good thing. Although Second-wave feminism and the AIDS crisis began in different eras, they both saw this crystallization as a market demographic around the same time in the late 1980s and 1990s (after Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher’s dubious economic reforms and more women began entering the workplace than ever before). The remainder of this section examines Strandberg’s first two novels as ‘ethnographic accessible portals’ through which to examine a number of ways in which the AIDS crisis has served to crystallize gay men as a consumer market, one of its most profoundly transformational effects, a phenomenon that resulted from Second-wave feminism, allowing these two groups to meld as a consumer group in this genre.

Chick lit has been vaunted for its examination of contemporary gender roles, feminism, sexuality, love, and relationships. Although plot and setting may vary somewhat within the genre,

the form and content are often quite consistent. In *The Great Escape: Modern Women and the Chick Lit Genre*, Maureen Cooke notes that the typical chick lit “heroine” is “white, urban professional in her late twenties or early thirties” (11); her family

lives somewhere in the suburbs, popping in and out of the novel as an annoyance in the heroine’s life and sometimes as an obstacle between her and the hero. Life in the city consists of working in an uninspiring office job, going to happy hour with co-workers, shopping, and drinking with her friends on a Saturday night (or any other night of the week for that matter) (11-12).

Harzewski also notes that these

protagonists wrestle with a barrage of the city’s material temptations, particularly fine apparel, and often succumb to hefty credit card debt. Not surprisingly, Manhattan and London, as publishing capitals and shopping meccas, figure prominently in both Anglo and American texts (4).

This consistent setting in ‘the Big City’ is rather interesting, as the genre locates the urban setting as the place to realize all of the single woman’s dreams. As I described in the first chapter of my dissertation, ‘the city’ has long been associated with all types of social evils, namely homosexuality and places where men meet for homosexual encounters. Since around the turn of the century, Swedish cities like Stockholm and Gothenburg served as such places.

Jaktsåsong fulfills all of the above mentioned genre norms, with two central heroines of equal importance in the novel: Magnus and Melinda. The novel takes place during 2005 in Stockholm, and Magnus and Melinda are best friends who work together at a website that reviews television series. Melinda is the typical “fag hag,” who longs for actual girlfriends, rather than “en skock bögar som inte förmår lämna bögaras Bermudatriangel av Torget,

Kharma-fredagar och Lino-lördagar⁷⁸” [a clique of gays that are unable to leave the gay Bermuda Triangle of Torget, Kharma Fridays and Lino Saturdays] (23;15). She has lived abroad and lost touch with her friends from high school, and her only romantic prospects are her neighbor Chrippa whom she contacts intermittently for casual sex. While Melinda claims that she could never be content with a typical *Svenssonliv*⁷⁹, Magnus describes this life as “rena drömmen . . . Pelargoner i fönstret. Storhandling på helgerna. Skaffa hund. Aldrig mera behöver vara ensam” [“the true dream . . . Geraniums in the window. Shopping on the weekends. Get a dog. Never have to be alone.”] (50). Both main characters embark on a romantic journey in the novel: Magnus eventually ends up with his friend, the attractive and well known author Sebastian, who breaks up with his married boyfriend Joshua who is in the closet; Melinda ends up engaged to Andreas, the bisexual from Norrland who begins working at Melinda and Magnus’s website. A fight early on in the novel between Magnus and Melinda causes a rift between the two and last throughout much of the novel, as Magnus scoffs at the idea of Melinda being in a relationship with a bisexual man and insists that he’s gay.

The reception of *Jaktsäsongen* was not all positive, and its normative and stereotypical depictions of gay men were criticized. Journalist Natalia Kazmierska observed in *Expressen* that Strandberg’s depiction of gay men in *Jaktsäsong* is “ett desperat, äckligt och humorbefriat jägarfolk som pratar bebisspråk och hänger ut snorren på vädring känns mest som något Åke Green⁸⁰ läser som godnattsaga” [a desperate, disgusting and humorless race of hunters who talk babytalk and air their dicks out in the open feels mostly like something Åke Green reads as a

⁷⁸ Stockholm gay bars and clubs.

⁷⁹ Swedish term for the middle-class dream of a partner, house and a dog, known in Swedish the ‘three Vs’: *Volvo*, *villa* and *vovve* [Volvo, house and a dog]

⁸⁰ The well-known Swedish Pentecostal pastor who was acquitted in 2005 after being charged with hate speech for his sermons that preached against homosexuality

bedtime story] (Kazmierska). Kazmierska's dismissal of the novel's unflattering and simplistic portrayal of gay men in Stockholm is warranted in some ways, yet this critique is not one that the genre of chick lit has not heard before: too materialistic, too fluffy, etc. Also, as I mentioned earlier, media representations of homosexuality have taken on an elevated importance; it appears Kazmierska is holding Strandberg's representation to a higher standard than other novels that take the same form. Chick lit has also been dismissed because of its superficial treatment of deeper and more complex issues that concern women. *Jaktsäsong* is guilty of this as well, offering brief nods to heavier topics that concern gay men, such as gay sex shame (27), public sex (42), video clubs (43), gay men's body image issues (66; 69), and gay male barebacking culture (131), as well as broader issues like the direction of gay activism (109) and the sustainability of *Svenssonlivet* with Melinda's childhood friend Susanne, whether or not bisexuality actually exists. It is important that Strandberg takes note of these questions, but it appears he is unfortunately bound by norms of the genre that force these questions to take the back seat.

Bekantas bekanta fulfills the setting and formal and thematic elements present in *Jaktsäsong* but focuses less on the gay Stockholm nightlife scene. *Bekantas bekanta* takes place during the 1990s, a period described by the character Joshua as

vår kollektiva baksmälla efter åttiotalet. Det här är vad lågkonjunkturen gjort med oss. Konsumtionen är folkets nya opium. Jag shopper, alltså finns jag! Filofaxen är fullklottrad, därför är jag betydelsefull. Skit i dem som är mindre lyckligt lottade, de får skylla sig själva! (48-9)

[our collective hangover efter the 80s. What the economic recession did to us. Consumption is the new opiate of the masses. I shop, therefore I am! My calendar is full, therefore I have meaning. Screw those who are less fortunate, they have themselves to blame!]

Strandberg uses popular song titles from the decade to punctuate the novel, what he describes as “pärlor från eurotechs guldålder,” [gems from the golden age of Eurotech] in the novel’s introduction, its writing driven by nostalgia for the decade (6). This novel is truer to the conventions of the chick lit genre and centers on Camilla, the model and singer who returns to Stockholm from New York in the beginning of the novel, her dreams of success in the Big Apple having hit a low point when she turns a trick as a high class escort in order to buy a flight back home to Sweden. She left after cheating on her great love, Carlos, but returns to Sweden to win him back.

The superficiality of gay male culture at the time is emphasized by the overweight, insecure drag queen, Daniel. He plays the sidekick to the protagonist Camilla, the ‘chick.’ Daniel remarks that “drugan är aldrig en huvudroll, bara en tragikomisk bifigur som oundvikligen drar sin sista suck på sjukbädden, bara för att de verkliga huvudpersonerna ska ha något att samlas runt . . . en fet, klängig fjolla” [the drag queen is never the protagonist, only a tragicomic sidekick who inevitably draws her final breath on her deathbed, just so the real protagonists can have something to gather around . . . a fat, clingy old queen] (263). Ironically, this is also the role that Strandberg has assigned to Daniel in this novel. Daniel’s little sister Lilly comes to Stockholm with the dream of becoming famous and begins dating a theater director named Joshua. In *Jaktsäsong* we learn that the two have gotten married, and Joshua is actually the closeted married man that Sebastian breaks up with. Melinda also makes a brief appearance (244-5). Most of the characters in the novel are quite unlikeable, with the exception of Daniel, the only character to ‘get the guy’ and end up happy. The novel ends with the Stockholm Pride parade, a tired and saccharine trope that is the final scene of countless gay television series and films.

This novel provides even fewer mentions of deeper cultural and political questions, and it offers a critique of media and fame, and the desperate measures some will go to attain it. Some perfunctory examinations of Daniel's low self-esteem due to the oppressive physical standards within the gay community appear, as well as Daniel's stepfather Gunnar's homophobia, but there are few passages that scratch the surface of any politically weighty conversations. In one scene, Joshua wishes to be penetrated by Lilly wearing a strap-on dildo, causing the reader to seriously question Strandberg's simplistic understanding of sexuality (156). One significant passage describes Lilly's coming out as bisexual in the gay magazine *Barrikad* [Barricade] (196). A paragraph is dedicated to examining Lilly's interview and the way in which gay identity and public figures that support gay rights have commodified both gay people and being an ally as a way to get good press.

Still, how does AIDS appear in these gay chick lit novels? And if so, how does AIDS, or at least its cultural memory, function in them? Actual sex happens infrequently in both novels, and the descriptions are also brief and usually cut short once they've begun, either to skip to the postcoital conversation or another scene altogether. Mention of AIDS appears a handful of times in *Jaktsåsong*, beginning first with an exchange between Magnus, Melinda, and Andreas about the double periled plight of gay male dating, noting that approximately ten percent of the male population is homosexual. If Magnus were to run into a man he finds attractive in the laundry room, there is only a one in ten chance that he's gay, odds further reduced by whether or not this man is attracted to him, and lastly that he be "hel, ren och frisk" ["single, clean, and healthy"] (32). 'Frisk' is a fairly vague term meaning healthy, fresh, or wholesome, but among men who have sex with men in Sweden it is used euphemistically to mean 'STD-free,' but HIV negative most often. This is an interesting way to insert the topic of AIDS into the novel—not the *love*

that dare not speak its name, but rather the *disease* that dare not speak its name. This is a literal and semantic example of the way in which gay sex shame and the unprocessed trauma of the AIDS crisis is circulated within gay male sexuality and the vocabulary that informs the discourse surrounding it.

The next mention of AIDS actually comes from a heterosexual onlooker. Melinda observes that Sebastian's usual critique and abhorrence of gay culture is contradicted by his inability to exist outside of it. Sebastian gossips that a "folkkär" [loved by the people] schlager star, "den kramgoa lilla mysbögen som sätter hjärtat i brand på både småflickor och deras mammor" [the huggable little homo that sets the hearts on fire of little girls and their mothers alike], actually has frequent group sex in the bushes by Frescati with his boyfriend (42). Recalling to herself the tales of public sex and video clubs that she has heard from Magnus, she responds that the straight dating world is no better nowadays but quickly grows uncertain:

Men hon undrar ändå. När hon började hänga på gayklubbar i början av nittiotalet – vilket för övrigt innebär att hon varit i just den lokalen långt innan Magnus och Sebastian använde den som jaktmarker – var alla livrädda för aids och hon fick intrycket att folk var besatta av sex utan egentligen ha det (42).

But she wonders anyway. When she started hanging out at gay clubs in the beginning of the 1990s – which incidentally means that she was around long before Magnus and Sebastian used them as hunting grounds – everyone was terrified of AIDS, and she got the impression that everyone was obsessed with sex without actually having it.]

Melinda's pondering to herself is interesting here in that this is the only instance where AIDS is mentioned in the novel that offers deeper critique or even acknowledges the broader cultural effects that it has produced. The guilt and sexual shame disseminated by The Bathhouse Law and The Infectious Diseases Law, which I examined in the previous chapter, appear fairly frequently

in this novel, but this is the only example in which a correlation is made with AIDS. It is also compelling that the character in the novel who offers this observation is a heterosexual woman, in this context, the outsider looking in in two ways. Firstly, she is not herself homosexual and thus observes the situation as a heterosexual onlooker. In addition, she is a woman. The centrality and obsession with sex in gay male culture often points to the reductive and misogynistic cultural myth that men are more sexual than women, and two men together incontrovertibly yields twice as much sexual energy and prowess. Thus, Melinda functions as somewhat of an unbiased observer whose judgment is clouded by neither sexual urges nor sexual identity.

Melinda's heterosexuality also functions as a device through which the idea of STDs and HIV/AIDS are framed as specifically gay male concerns. After waking up for the third morning in a row in Andreas's bed, Melinda and Andreas are giggling about the elephant in the room:

- Otroligt, eller hur? säger han och hon nickar.
- Men hur trevlig är lukten av bränt gummi i sovrummet?
- Inte speciellt. Om du vill kan vi gå och testa oss. Så behöver vi inte känna den här lukten mer sedan (153).

[-Unbelievable huh? She says and he nods.
-How lovely is the smell of burnt rubber in the bedroom?
-Not especially. If you want we can go get tested. So we don't need to experience the smell anymore.]

This is hardly an adequate analysis of the complexities of condom use and HIV prevention, but Melinda is quietly happy that Andreas' proposition means that he wants to continue seeing her "även om det är ett väldigt modernt och egentligen sorgligt sätt att befästa att man håller på att inleda en seriös relation. Hon önskar att hon hade fått uppleva det glada åttiotalet på riktigt, innan någon någonsin hört talas om hiv" ["even if it's a very modern and quite pitiful way to

reassure that it's the beginning of a serious relationship. She wished she'd gotten to live in the happy 1980s for real, before anyone had heard of HIV"] (153). On the one hand, this is an exchange that demonstrates some of the ways in which the AIDS crisis has affected sexuality and relationships, both homo- and heterosexual, but more importantly it points to the huge disparity in experience and reality between gay male sex and heterosexual sex, a phenomenon that Griffin has claimed in many ways resulted in the universalizing of the infected. The conversation about HIV status and condom use at one point in time was and still is a literally lifesaving measure for many gay men, yet in this very frivolous mentality, it provides peace of mind for a straight girl with a crush. Melinda's heterosexuality allows for the luxury of levity regarding the topic of AIDS, a reality that has allowed her to experience AIDS with the same frivolity:

- Men du vet, säger hon retsamt, jag är faktiskt en flicka. Och du är en pojke. Vilket betyder att vi måste skydda oss mot annat också. Otrevliga saker. Barn.
- Det förstås.
- Jag skojar bara. Jag käkar p-piller. Håller mensen i schack (153).

[-But you know, she says teasingly, I am actually a girl. And you are a boy. Which means that we have to protect ourselves from other things as well. Unpleasant things. Children.
-Of course.
-I'm just kidding. I'm on birth control. Regulating my periods.]

Andreas then goes on to playfully propose to Melinda in a mock marriage proposal that the two go get tested together, which Melinda accepts with "halvt spelad lycka" ["half-hearted happiness" (154). This exchange underlines the fact that both sexual partners are at risks in different ways, but remarkably it is the heterosexual couple that actually discusses HIV and getting tested. The fact that Andreas has had sex with men in the past allows him to function as a trope through

which STDS are inserted into the discourse, a tendency within the genre of chick lit. Harzewski notes that “references to STDs and STIs from heterosexual behavior are negligible. Instead of adding scope and gravity to the chick lit novel, the intermittent references to AIDS come off as token gestures of social awareness” (Harzewski 197). It is indeed Andreas who proposes that the two get tested, but the universal relevance of HIV testing echoes Griffin’s assertions.

In contrast to the presentation of AIDS in the heterosexual relationship between Melinda and Andreas, HIV/AIDS manifests itself as a chronic anxiety in the consciousness of the homosexual Magnus. His insecurity and constant need for affirmation characterize most of his behavior in the novel; however, disquiet over the way in which HIV/AIDS could effect his life characterizes much of his worry over relationships with men. I already mentioned above how HIV in a broad sense informs his general parameters for dating, that a potential date must be “frisk,” indicating that HIV would discount a potential partner from consideration (this is a phenomenon called serosorting, in which people with HIV only engage in sexual contact with partners that have the same HIV status as themselves – I’ll discuss this in the conclusion). Magnus and Sebastian book a trip to New York together, at which point their relationship is still platonic. Magnus has had feelings for Sebastian for some time, and in his stream of consciousness anxiety over “alla katastrofer som kan hända” [all the catastrophes that can happen”], (135) he effusively worries to himself

Scenerna spelas upp en efter en . . . han och Sebastian har sex och det visar sig att Sebastian har hiv, det visar sig att han själv har smittat Sebastian med hiv han inte visste han hade, eftersom han inte vågat testa sig på flera år . . . Alltsammans är välbekant och på något sätt lugnande (136).

[The scenes play out one after the other . . . he and Sebastian have sex and he finds out that Sebastian has HIV, that he’s infected Sebastian with HIV he didn’t know

he had, since he hasn't dared to get tested in a few years . . . It's all too familiar and in some way calming.]

Magnus is perhaps a more anxious person than most, but the quotidian manner in which HIV/AIDS exists in his consciousness not only echoes the idea examined in the previous chapter, but it also contrasts this concept of cultural amnesia. The cooperation of the simultaneous enterprises of gay male sex shame and the commodification of the demographic as a commercial market appear to have exacerbated one another. The anxiety, fear, and worry over contracting HIV have been internalized by gay men, yet the promises of conspicuous consumption, materialism, and physical perfection all serve to obscure this anxiety. Consumer culture's main aim is to spread the idea that acquiring material things can cure the physical, spiritual, and social shortcomings we have or are convinced we have. The presence again of possible HIV infection as a mundane anxiety in the gay male consciousness appeared as a paralyzing anxiety with Peter in *Onans bok*. However, all gay men are certainly not celibate for nearly a decade like Peter. Instead, amnesia is performed, and Magnus has refused to get tested for many years.

And although *Bekantas bekanta* takes place some time during the 1990s, there is only one single reference to HIV/AIDS in the entire novel. This reference is also presented as a mundane anxiety just as in *Jaktsäsong*. Daniel begins dating a man named Jimmy, whom he met at his job at a video store, and with whom Camilla then set him up. Insecure as usual, Daniel cannot understand what Jimmy sees in him, and after an awkward interaction with Jimmy followed by Jimmy's silence, Daniel begins to fret:

Daniels hjärna fortsätter gå på högvarv, analysera varje ansiktsskiftning, varje tonfall, väga teorier mot varandra . . . Kanske Jimmy har hiv men inte vågar säga nåt? Tanken har slagit honom men han vågar inte fråga. Inte för att han är rädd för svaret, åtminstone enligt Hollywoods logik (262-3)

[Daniel's brain continues on overdrive, analyzing every facial movement, every inflection, weigh theories against one another . . . Maybe Jimmy has HIV but is too afraid to say something? The thought struck him but he doesn't dare to ask. Not because he's afraid of the answer, at least according to Hollywood's logic.]

The logic is that the "fet, klängig fjolla" [fat, clingy queen] is a trope, some kind of martyr (262-3).

Strandberg's novel is set in the 1990s yet only makes one brief mention of HIV. The absence of HIV/AIDS in the most simplistic sense points to the cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis. AIDS appears as an anxiety that manifests within Daniel, yet this experience is exclusive to this character. In the broader sense, Lilly offers evidence of the ways in which AIDS was not experienced by the dominant culture, at least not in the same way. In a conversation with Camille, Lilly remarks in *Bekantas bekanta*: "otrohet är inte så mycket att tjafsa om. Det är ju nittiotial, liksom. Det är bara politiskt korrekta människor som tror man kan ha sex med en och samma person hela livet" [infidelity isn't such a big deal. It's the 90s. Only politically correct people believe that you can have sex with the same person your entire life] (63). The vast dissonance in the experience of AIDS among communities of gay men versus dominant straight culture was discussed earlier in this chapter.

Strandberg's introduction inserts a human element into the discussion on cultural amnesia and begs the question: who would want to remember such a traumatic period in time? He writes:

Älskade, hatade nittonhundranittiotial. Några av mitt livs bästa stunder har utspelats under årtiondet. Några av mina värsta också. Att skriva den här boken var som ett resa bakåt i tiden och återuppleva gamla minnen. Och det var inte bara nostalgi – det var rena ångestattacken ibland. Nittiotial. Så nära men ändå så långt bort. Och ett decennium är naturligtvis inte bara årtal och exakta fakta. Det är också en känsla, en mentalitet . . . jag har låtit nittioalet vara en plats, mer än en tidslinje (5).

[Beloved, hated 1990s. Some of my life's best moments happened during this decade. Some of my worst also. Writing this book was like a trip back in time to relive the old memories. And it wasn't just nostalgia – it was purely anxiety attacks sometimes. The 1990s. So close yet so far away. And a decade isn't just dates and facts. It is also a feeling, a mentality . . . I have allowed the 90s to be a place, more than a timeline.]

The quote speaks to an interesting idea that has not yet been considered in my discussion. This chapter discusses the cultural and political effects of the AIDS crisis and a number of ways in which these effects have facilitated cultural amnesia. However, the passage above from Strandberg's introduction inserts a very human dimension into the discussion, in that Strandberg's nostalgic look back in time at this decade is notably free from HIV/AIDS (except for the one mentioned above). The healthy and attractive images of male homosexuality that circulated in the late 1990s and 2000s were hopeful and idealistic; however, they are much more appealing to a culture whose history is marked by violence, disease, and marginalization. Who would *want* to re-live the trauma and loss all over again? And to what end? It seems this human dimension, compounded by the marketization and commodification of gay culture, has fueled the resistance to remembering.

IV. CULTURAL RECOLLECTION OF THE AIDS CRISIS

Cultural Images of Male Homosexuality in the New Millennium

Cultural and media representations of male homosexuality in Sweden during the 2000s moved further from the stigmas of disease and promiscuity that dominated the 1980s. Male homosexuality became a valuable cultural commodity, and gay male consumers evolved to become an economically powerful demographic. The popular American television series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003-2007) reaffirmed the cultural stereotypes of homosexual men as persnickety tastemakers: five gay male ‘connoisseurs’ counseled heterosexual men who demonstrated remarkable cultural *incompetence* in areas like grooming, fashion, interior design, wine, and cuisine. The American series aired on Swedish television in 2003 and sparked the Swedish version *Fab 5⁸¹ Sverige* in 2004, which remained very close to the American version (Nylén). The gay connoisseurs cast in the Swedish iteration appeared on the March 2004 cover of *QX* and demonstrated salient commonalities: they were all young, white, fit, and attractive. The cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis produced the squeaky clean cultural image of male homosexuality; this issue of *QX* is some fifty-five pages long, but the only two mentions of HIV/AIDS are a phone number and meeting times of a support group for HIV-positive men in Stockholm (43), and one ad for a MSM clinic holding open hours for HIV testing which took up about one sixth of a page (45).

Visibility of homosexuality also circulated through several state-sanctioned measures that were implemented. The registered partnership in place since 1995 was amended in 2009 to include same-sex marriage, which was also sanctioned by the Church of Sweden that same year.

⁸¹ *Fab 5* was the nickname for the five gay male cultural “experts” in the American series. It aired in Sweden under the title *Fab 5 Sverige*.

In addition to state-recognition of same-sex couples as legitimate, the Swedish government also supported same-sex couples as legitimate parents: the registered partnership law allowed same-sex couples to adopt; in-vitro fertilization was allowed for lesbian couples as of 2005. The global research firm Ipsos conducted a survey on overall approval of same sex marriage in 2013 in which Sweden topped the list of all the countries surveyed with 81% approval of same-sex marriage; an additional 9% favoring some other form of recognition of same-sex couples (“Same-sex Marriage” 4). Swedish film *Patrik, Age 1.5* (2008) dramatizes the cultural and political effects brought about by the legislative focus on same-sex couples as families. The film tells the humorous story of a homosexual male couple who intends to adopt a child that is a year and a half old; instead they become the parents of a homophobic fifteen-year-old with behavioral difficulties. The film illustrates the broadening interpretations of the nuclear family that were being reimagined into the Swedish mold of marriage and family in the 2000s.

Jonas Gardell’s trilogy of novels *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* [Don’t Ever Dry Tears Without Gloves] (2012-13) contested the dominant cultural image of male homosexuality and demanded a cultural recollection of the AIDS. Although pop star Andreas Lundstedt’s coming out as HIV positive in *QX* in 2008 broke the silence that surrounded the subject of HIV/AIDS in Sweden since the late 1980s, his focus in the interview on health and wellness did little to challenge the dominant cultural images of male homosexuality described above (Lundstedt’s coming-out is described later in this chapter). The debate inspired by Gardell’s trilogy forced audiences not only to question their misinformation and ignorance about HIV/AIDS, but to also question how and why the dark period of the AIDS crisis in Sweden was forgotten by both dominant and gay discourses. Gardell’s trilogy marks a definitive turning point

in my study, as this trilogy broke out of the 'gay literature' niche and informed and inspired dominant cultural discourses on homosexuality and the history of AIDS.

The Gardell Debate

Respected and well-known Swedish author and comedian Jonas Gardell's *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* [Don't Ever Dry Tears Without Gloves] (2012-13) received ubiquitously positive praise from both dominant and gay press outlets. The first installment *1.Kärleken* [Love] was released in 2012, and *2.Sjukdomen* [Disease] and *3.Döden* [Death] were released during 2013. These three novels comprise some 1,000 pages that chronicle the lives of a group of young gay men in Stockholm when AIDS first came to Sweden. Gardell focuses on the romance between two young men, Rasmus and Benjamin: Rasmus is from the rural town of Koppom, and Benjamin is a devout Jehovah's Witness from Stockholm. Before the second and third installments were released, a film version of the entire trilogy appeared on *Sveriges Television* in the autumn of 2012 to a record 1.2 million Swedish viewers in October of 2012 ("Torka aldrig tårar fick rekordpublik"). The television series was also written by Gardell and directed by Simon Kaijser. The series was awarded the 2013 *Kristallen* award for best television drama ("Vinnare"). Gardell notes in a 2013 interview with Siss Vik on the Norwegian television program *Bokprogrammet* [The Book Program] that with the viewership of nearly 2 million people and over 100,000 copies of the first novel sold, the trilogy is enjoying the success usually reserved for Scandinavian crime novels ("Bokprogrammet 12.02.2013").

The filmatization of the trilogy also received international attention; the rights to the series have been sold in all of the Scandinavian countries, and BBC agreed to purchase the series in the autumn of 2013 (BBC; Asp). *Variety*, which also reported that *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* will be adapted for theatrical release, has described the series as a Scandinavian *Angels in America* (Asp). A number of similarities exist between Gardell's trilogy and Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1993 play, and 2003 HBO miniseries adaptation, most notably the central

struggle between faith and homosexuality, which in Kushner's play is demonstrated by Joe Pitt, a closeted gay Mormon married to a woman. However, Gardell explained that he has taken the characters Benjamin and Rasmus from his play *Ömheten*, which appeared on *Sveriges Television* in 1989 which follows the 48 hour period from when Rasmus tells his parents he has AIDS and his untimely death (Åkerö). This play premiered at Stadsteatern in Stockholm in December of 2012 ("Ömheten").

Media coverage of the trilogy became so ubiquitous that news outlets like *Dagens Nyheter* began referring to the cultural discourse as "Gardell-debatten" [the Gardell debate] ("Gardell-debatten"). Between the ubiquity of the novels and streaming access to the miniseries on *Sveriges Television* Play, one in eight Swedes had at least seen—if not read—the miniseries. *Sveriges Television* producer Maria Nordenberg explained in *Variety* magazine in 2012 that since so many Swedes had already seen the filmatized version, the focus had turned to distribution in international markets (Asp). Gardell was very present in the cultural debate, and discussed the trilogy and the history of AIDS in several television, radio, and print interviews, as well as newspaper editorials. Gardell ironically described the trilogy as his own version of *The Emigrants* (1949-59), the canonical epic tetralogy of Swedish emigration to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century by Wilhelm Moberg (Wallenberg 3). The trilogy is worthy of this ambitious comparison for the political, medical, and cultural breadth that it incorporates into the discourse on homosexuality and AIDS.

Gardell's literary style combines documentary and fiction to communicate the specific political and cultural context in which the characters experience the AIDS crisis. Jens Liljestränd writes in *Dagens Nyheter* that the trilogy is

“researchad och faktaspäckad på ett sätt som närmar sig dokumentärromanen. Gardell tar på sig dubbla roller som berättare och historiker, kliver ur fiktionen för att redovisa statistik, årtal, citat och pressklipp, för att sedan återvända till romankonstruktionen och låta figurerna sitta på RFSL-puben Timmy vid Mariatorget och läsa högt ur samma artiklar. Det känns, just, konstruerat. Men det funkar” (Liljestrand).

[researched and crammed with facts in a way that borders on the documentary novel. Gardell takes on the dual role of narrator and historian, stepping out of fiction to present statistics, dates, citations and press clips; he then returns to the novel structure and lets the characters sit at the RFSL pub Timmy by Mariatorget⁸² and read the same articles aloud. It feels rather contrived. But it still works.]

The cultural references and factual information that punctuate the novels, actual quotes from politicians and official documents, as well as various press clippings and actual events describe the forces that informed not only political and sexual culture of the 1980s in Stockholm, but also the ways in which this cultural discourse around homosexuality and AIDS affected a particular clique of gay men.

Although Gardell’s celebrity status as author, comedian and *riksbög* [national homo] at times eclipsed the trilogy, it did contribute to its popularity. One drawback is the way it universalized his experience as *the* homosexual male experience of AIDS. At the same time, Gardell’s celebrity status facilitated the debate to be taken up so widely. In *Svenska Dagbladet* in 2012 Gardell cheekily baptized the trilogy as “bögarne eget nationalepos” [the gay men’s national epic] and explained that much of the trilogy was based on his own personal experiences (Brandel). Gardell’s comment was intended to be tongue-in-cheek, but the press discourse suggested that the trilogy is absolutely necessary reading and/or viewing for all Swedes. The discourse also praised Gardell’s depiction of homosexual male culture at the time and its ability

⁸² A neighborhood in Stockholm.

to capture the experience of being a homosexual man during this tenuous period in Swedish history. Gardell commented in *Dagens Nyheter*: “Jag var med, det är min tid, min stad och jag är författare. Det är min plikt att skriva, ett slags hedersuppdrag.” [I was there, it was my time, my city and I’m a writer. It is my duty to write, a sort of honorary task.] (Torén Björling). He also acknowledges his unique and privileged position in the Swedish literary and cultural discourse: “Jag har i alla år vetat att jag ska skriva den här boken. Jag var med och jag överlevde. Jag kan skriva. Och jag har plattformen. Vilken annan svensk författare skulle skriva boken?” [I’ve known for many years that I was going to write this book. I was there and I survived. I am able to write. And I have the platform. What other Swedish author would write this book?] (Torén Björling). Gardell’s words demonstrate a responsibility he feels as an author, along with his solitary status as homosexual male author in the Swedish literary discourse. Gardell’s status as the singular gay voice in Swedish literature today points to the exclusion of previous literary representations of male homosexuality examined in my study.

Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar is an example of cultural recollection, because it inserts a previously forgotten cultural history into the contemporary discourse on homosexuality and AIDS. The trilogy resists the dominant cultural images and representations of male homosexuality and offers a genealogy of the previous two decades of gay culture. The vacuum of memory and history is filled by Gardell’s trilogy in a number of important ways and resists the discursive trend that has been the status quo since the late 1990s in Sweden, which was thus further institutionalized through the state-sanctioning discussed above.

The idea of the AIDS crisis as a *collective* trauma facilitates the discussion in this chapter. Earlier accounts and artistic representations of AIDS in the Swedish context tend to focus on the personal and individual suffering rather than a collective experience of trauma and loss.

Gardell's trilogy, on the other hand, bears witness to this collective trauma. The discussion in this chapter also engages Thomas Keenan's idea of the double trauma of the AIDS crisis, which locates trauma both in the fact that death was widespread among a particular subset of already marginalized and stigmatized groups of people and in the sense that the dominant culture neither wanted to acknowledge the suffering nor would agree to hear testimony of it happening at all (258). The discussion also includes Sara Edenheim's 2012 *Dagens Nyheter* editorial which critiques the way Gardell's testimony is *done* and the way in which it has been consumed and circulated within the Swedish media. This chapter will also examine the following questions: How is Gardell shaping the experience and memory of the AIDS crisis? Does his narrative inform the entire cultural memory of this period? In what particular ways does Gardell's text bear witness?

The Trauma of the AIDS Crisis

Another reason why the AIDS crisis has been erased from cultural memory is that it was experienced as a *collective trauma* within gay male culture. A great disparity exists between the ways in which marginalized communities experienced the AIDS crisis compared with the general public; the disparity compounded the effects of those directly affected by HIV/AIDS with the dominant culture's refusal to recognize the trauma being experienced. The analysis provided in this chapter engages the experience of the AIDS crisis as collective trauma and discusses the ways in which the disparity in experiences between gay and dominant cultures also resulted in a *double* trauma.

The AIDS crisis profoundly effected an entire generation of gay men, even if those who had not been infected with the disease. The burgeoning gay subculture that flourished in the 1970s, which began to form a sense of community for many homosexual men, allowed for even those physically not affected by HIV/AIDS to experience the AIDS crisis as a traumatic event. In the Swedish context, Ingeborg Svensson notes in *Liket i garderoben: Bögar, begravningar och 80-talets hivepidemi* [The Corpse in the Closet: Gay Men, Burial and the 1980s HIV Epidemic] (2007) that

Eftersom hiv kom att drabba en diskriminerad grupp som omgav sig med alternativa gemenskaper fick man som böger en kollektiv erfarenhet av sjukdom och död. Man drabbades av något som även andra bögar drabbades av. Förlusten var alltså kollektiv (285).

[Since HIV only affected a discriminated group that formed a community, gay men had a collective experience of disease and death. You were affected by that which other gay men were affected by. Thus the loss was collective.]

HIV physically affects all the central characters in Gardell's trilogy, but the survival of the protagonist Benjamin reveals a profound sadness for the personal and cultural losses he experiences as a result of AIDS. Benjamin survives his partner Rasmus with the help of antiretroviral cocktails⁸³, but the trauma he experiences is easily sensed: Benjamin, who has remained single since the passing of Rasmus, has been unable to visit his grave until the very end of the trilogy.

Cathy Caruth argues in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) that the AIDS crisis differs from other traumatic experiences, such as the Holocaust, Hiroshima or September 11th, in that dominant culture does not want to *hear* the testimony of this trauma. In the book Caruth and scholar Thomas Keenan hold a conversation, entitled "The AIDS Crisis Is Not Over" (256-271), with scholar and AIDS activist Douglas Crimp, artist and AIDS activist Greg Bordowitz, and psychotherapist and director of the Columbia University Health Service's Gay and Lesbian Health Advocacy Project Laura Pinsky. Caruth begins the interview by stating that "traumas can be experienced in at least two different ways: as a memory that one cannot integrate into one's own experiences, and as a catastrophic knowledge that one cannot communicate to others" (256). The AIDS crisis can be described as both types of trauma, but the discussion in this section focuses on the latter.

In addition to the physically traumatic experiences of those affected by HIV/AIDS, one of the greatest sources of trauma is the general public's failure to recognize it. Douglas Crimp argues that the AIDS crisis differs from other traumas in that "certain people are experiencing the AIDS crisis while society as a whole doesn't seem to be experiencing it at all" (256). Crimp also notes that, apart from the physiological ways in which people experience HIV/AIDS, a great

⁸³ Several retroviral combinations had been attempted, but the addition of a protease inhibitor decreased AIDS-related mortality rates by over 60% (Chaisson and Moore).

deal of the resulting trauma is “socially-produced” (257). The filmatization of *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* (2012) identifies the socially produced aspects of the trauma of the AIDS crisis in its ominous voiceover⁸⁴ that precedes the opening credits:

Det som berättas i den här historien har hänt. Och det hände här, i den här staden. Det var som ett krig som utkämpades i fredstid. I en stad där de flesta fortsatte att leva sina liv som om inget hänt insjuknade unga män, magrade av, tynade bort och dog. (Kaijser).

[This is a true story. It happened here, in this city. It was like a war was being waged during peacetime. In a city where most people continued living their lives like nothing happened, young men began to become ill, wither, waste away and die.]

The failure of the general public to recognize the trauma of AIDS is emphasized by the footage of Stockholm life that plays during the voiceover, which shows the ‘general public’ going about the most mundane activities: taking the subway, shopping, walking on the street, working in banks, etc. These images are abruptly contrasted by the brief footage of a disco, and then to Benjamin applying ointment on Rasmus’s dry, cracked lips as Rasmus lies in hospital bed. The juxtaposition of these images of cultural realities is more dramatic in the filmatization; it underscores Crimp’s observation of the disparity in the way the AIDS crisis was experienced by the general public in contrast to the way it was experienced by homosexual men and gay communities. The trilogy communicates the disparity well throughout, but the voiceover above that begins the filmatization serves as a succinct and explicit message. Gardell’s literary style of weaving historical facts and media coverage additionally emphasizes the disparity in experience between the newly formed gay community and the general public.

⁸⁴ The narrator of the series is anonymous but is the omniscient voice that weaves together the documentary and fictional aspects of the trilogy.

Keenan describes the disparity between the ways in which certain communities experienced AIDS versus the general public as a “double trauma” as (258). Keenan argues: “On the one hand, there's a cataclysmic event, which produces symptoms and calls for testimony. And then it happens again, when the value of the witness in the testimony is denied, and there's no one to hear the account, no one to attend or respond—not simply to the event, but to its witness as well” (258). Both the denial of testimony and the absence of a witness are demonstrated by various structural and narrative elements in *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar*. A number of characters in the trilogy are completely cut off from their families when they come out as homosexual; the refusal to witness appeared in the form of those who died of AIDS, described as having suffered from cancer, or Benjamin being refused to attend Rasmus’ funeral. This amplified trauma is experienced due to what Crimp refers to as “the incommensurability of experiences” (256). Not only is Benjamin not allowed to mourn the loss of Benjamin in a culturally symbolic way (the funeral), but he also is unable to communicate this “catastrophic knowledge” as Caruth describes it; his familial ties have been completely severed by the Jehovah’s Witnesses congregation, and his gay family has nearly all perished.

The title of the conversation between Caruth, Crimp, Bordowitz, and Kennan—“The AIDS Crisis Is Not Over”—illustrates a complication presented in discussions of the AIDS crisis as it is certainly not over; AIDS continues to ravage developing countries with little or no access to antiretroviral medications. AIDS continues to disproportionately affect already marginalized communities like MSM and people of color in the US. The demographics and geography of the epidemic has shifted; rather it has shifted demographics and geographical locations, but it has not ended in the sense that dominant cultural discourses describe it.

Trauma theory suggests that the experience of trauma needs to cease in order to begin the process of reclaiming or recalling the experience as much as one can. However, the AIDS crisis has not demonstrated clear delineations or finite borders. It has been described as “over” since the arrival of effective cocktails of antiretrovirals in 1996, when being HIV positive was no longer equated with a death sentence; this idea was further promulgated by gay rights discourses in the 1990s that preached against promiscuity in the gay community and demanded inclusion into bourgeois institutions like marriage and military service. And although AIDS is still a tenuous global issue that presently sees most of its victims in poor Global South regions, this issue that takes place far from home in many ways buttresses the idea that the AIDS crisis is “over” as it is no longer a problem *here* in the West.

The field of trauma studies looks to literature as an important space for bearing witness to trauma. The field first began with the witness and testimony of survivors of the Holocaust. In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992), Shoshana Felman observes that when recalling trauma in the context of the Holocaust “literature becomes witness, perhaps the only witness, to crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated, witnessed in the given category of history itself” (xviii). Felman also suggests that art and literature offer “a precocious mode of witnessing” or “accessing reality” that inscribes “*what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events in our times*” (xx). Felman’s assertion resonates deeply in the discussion of Gardell, who began writing this trilogy fifteen years ago (Brandel). The ‘what we do not yet know’ in terms of broader cultural memory is quite profound, demonstrated by the shock of Swedish audiences who were completely ignorant of the history depicted in Gardell’s trilogy. However Gardell explained this gap in time:

Jag behövde den här distansen för att se mönstret, för att se de tydliga linjerna. Och jag tror även att samhället behövde den här tiden. Jag tror inte man hade tagit emot de här böckerna på samma sätt för tio eller femton år sedan. Jag tror det hade varit för många försvarsmekanismer som hade kopplats in (Liljefors 113).

[I needed this distance to be able to see the pattern, in order to see the clear lines. And I actually believe that society needed this time. I don't believe these books would have been received in the same way ten or fifteen years ago. I believe that there were too many defense mechanisms that would have been activated.]

Gardell's explanation identifies another result of the trauma of the AIDS crisis: defense mechanisms. It also explains the relative unpopularity of *Onans bok* which was published thirteen years before Gardell's trilogy; Klingberg even employed the documentary elements that Gardell did, such as historical information, medical facts and press coverage. Klingberg's inclusion of historical and medical information is woven more seamlessly into the text and differs from Gardell's documentary approach to the trilogy.

Caruth argues that literature has a unique ability to explore and bear witness to trauma. She argues in *Unclaimed Theory: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) that literature "like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet." (3). This idea of knowing and not knowing is rather compelling in the context of the AIDS crisis and the cultural memory surrounding it. Although the trauma and loss of AIDS has a rich history in visual arts, particularly in art communities like New York and San Francisco that were affected most profoundly, literature has shown a considerable absence. Some mainstream American films have depicted the AIDS crisis, including *Longtime Companion* (1989), *Philadelphia* (1993), *The*

Hours (2002), and *Angels in America*⁸⁵ (2003). Two recent American documentaries, *We Were Here* (2011) and *How To Survive A Plague* (2012), began to piece together a narrative through testimony and interviews about this period; in many ways they present the culture of traumatic experience that developed. In the Swedish context, however, literary and filmic representations of AIDS are nearly nonexistent; apart from the several memoirs described in the introduction, Bodil Sjöström's *Happy holiday* (2013) is the only novel that deals with the AIDS crisis in Sweden. Like Gardell, Sjöström's novel encourages cultural recollection, and much of the narrative is constructed through the protagonist Maggan's flashbacks of her time working at Noaks Ark⁸⁶ and the death of her close friend Christian to AIDS.

The focus of Gardell's trilogy on the collective trauma of the AIDS crisis illustrates a departure from previous media representations. Filmic and literary representations have up until recently tended to emphasize the *personal* trauma of losing partners, friends, loved ones, etc. Gardell's trilogy does explore the personal trauma, but the period of cultural silence around the AIDS crisis has allowed multiple levels of trauma to become more apparent. Caruth states that literary witness to trauma provides a "narrative of belated experience" (7); the time spent processing thus allows not for the "telling of an escape from reality" but rather has the ability to "attest to its endless impact on life" (7). Thus Gardell's trilogy, with the help of thirty years of retrospection, has the ability to bear witness to historical events as well as the longer lasting impacts on gay culture and memory.

Gardell uses the annual gay Christmas Eve celebration held at the apartment of Paul, the one Jewish character, to demonstrate both personal and collective loss in the trilogy. Ingeborg

⁸⁵ The miniseries was based on Tony Kushner's Tony Award-winning 1993 play.

⁸⁶ Founded in 1986, Noaks Ark is an HIV prevention organization that provides support, counseling, testing, and information for those living with HIV/AIDS (Noaks Ark)

Svensson argues that alternative structures of community outside of the heterosexual nuclear family also facilitated collective trauma: the literal and figurative breakdown of alternative spaces of community that were destroyed. The idea of the dissolution of alternative community and familial structures continues throughout Gardell's trilogy; the annual gay Christmas Eve celebration held by the Jewish character Paul acts as a literary device that punctuates the trilogy and demonstrates the multiple stages of the breakdown of community. Rasmus and Benjamin first meet at Paul's Christmas Eve dinner, a tradition they maintain for years, and both continue to spend Christmas with their new family rather than their biological families. Decadent celebrations with lobster and champagne and a full dinner table are eventually replaced by juice, smoked salmon, and powdered mashed potatoes served on paper plates (*3.Döden* 260-6). Thus AIDS has affected the newly formed gay family such that a number of members have either died or are too ill to attend; the final Christmas Eve dinner is attended by Paul and two other guests demonstrating both how AIDS ravaged the health and lives of homosexual men at this time and also effected the breakdown of gay male communities that only began to form a decade earlier.

Healthcare is the one institution that does not break down in the trilogy and, although the medical discourses produced some panic about the epidemic, the institution of healthcare is stable, sympathetic, and constant. The title of the trilogy comes from the opening scene in *I.Kärleken* in which an older and a younger nurse change the bedsore dressings of a man dying of AIDS. After finishing changing the dressings, the younger nurse removes her protective mask, smock, and gloves. Impulsively she dries a tear running down the face of the man with her bare hands; the older nurse is incensed and scolds the younger girl voraciously: "Det finns inga undantag. Sjukhusets rutiner måste i varje ögonblick stå över det mänskliga. Är det uppfattat? [. . .] Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar!" [There are no exceptions. The hospital's routines must

in every moment take priority over the humane. Is that understood? [. . .] Don't ever dry tears without gloves!] (7). The older nurse's stressing that public health regulations are of greater importance than humane concerns stresses the overall reaction of the state and the general public; however, the younger nurse's display of sympathy and humanity demonstrates that this was not always true. Other institutions like the church, the then strictly heterosexual institution of marriage, and social democratic politicians fail to perform their supposed function during this time, due to both ignorance and widely accepted homophobia. Although the experiences of Paul, Reine, Seppo, Lars-Åke, and Bengt serve to depict a variety of experiences of gay life, sexuality, and AIDS during this time, Benjamin and Rasmus are the two protagonists whose fate offers the most clear instances of the ways in which the double trauma of their experience occurs.

Gardell has in recent years become somewhat of a figurehead for the success of inclusive HBT politics and a new, modern, and liberal Sweden. Gardell's family, including two children and partner Mark Levengood, became a poster family for the heteronormative gay politics that flourished in Sweden in the time after the AIDS crisis. Gardell explains that

“Jag var kul, jag var snygg, jag var intelligent och rolig och ihop med ett jävla mumintroll! Begåvad också för all del - men med den här distansen kan jag se att jag var allt de behövde. Jag var bögen som det gick att älska. Mark var ju dessutom bögen som till och med mormor kunde älska. Jag har läst intervjuer med mig och Mark från den tiden och upptäckt att vi ju aldrig påstått oss vara tvåsamma eller monogama, utan detta har lästs in i oss för det var den bög man behövde. Så *Dagens Nyheter* kunde visa att de inte bara hetsade utan ‘här skriver vi också en helsida om det här härliga bögpåret’” (Wallenberg 7).

[I was fun, I was attractive, I was intelligent and funny and together with a freaking Moomintroll⁸⁷! By all means talented – but in retrospect I can see that I

⁸⁷ A character from the Finno-Swede Tove Jansson's series of children's books. Swedes often lovingly describe the dialect of Swedish spoken by Finno-Swedes this way as “Mumintrollsvenska” [Moomintroll Swedish].

was everything they needed. I was the gay who you could love. Mark was the gay that even grandma could love. I've read interviews with Mark and me from that time and I discovered that we never said that we were a couple or monogamous, but rather we were designated as such because that was the gay man that people needed. So *Dagens Nyheter* could show that they weren't just being provocative but rather 'we can write a full page spread about this lovely gay couple.']

This cultural shift in the period after the AIDS crisis, along with the need for a media-friendly and asexual image of gay people, is discussed above and apparent in the casting of *Fab 5 Sverige*. Considering Gardell's dual role as not only an openly gay public figure but also the author of this significant literary contribution enriches the discussion. It also offers a response to the question Gardell posed as to which other Swedish author could possibly have written this work. Gardell continues to be somewhat less provocative and less in-your-face than when he was younger; he has also become more normalized and thus less threatening to Swedish audiences. The reality of normalization and assimilation is a double-edged sword; Gardell's bourgeois respectability facilitates greater access to his work. However, it also allows for the reproduction and greater circulation of a dominant voice that in many ways has already become the representative one for a subset of the population. The reification of homonormativity done by Gardell's celebrity and literary production opened him up for some criticism, which is examined later in this chapter.

Don't Ever Dry Tears Without Gloves

I.Kärleken [Love] introduces Gardell's literary style, which continues throughout the trilogy. As the title indicates, the first novel in the trilogy focuses on the romance between Benjamin and Rasmus to anchor the greater narrative. All the characters are introduced by an omniscient narrator who punctuates the narrative with historical facts, media snippets on AIDS from Sweden and the US, as well as quotes from Swedish politicians and priests. The historical elements are often woven into the text but at times appear in separate sections in a documentary approach, such as the history of homosexuality and mental illness (78-86). In *I.Kärleken* readers are introduced to various aspects of gay cultural knowledge about Stockholm in the early 1980s. An entire gay subculture is described, one that inhabited mostly public spaces and that, for the most part, existed unnoticed by the general public. Public sex is described in Stockholm parks like Humlegården and Kronobergsparken⁸⁸. Other known watering holes included the RFSL club Timmy, the large central balcony in Central Station referred to as Bögringen⁸⁹ [The Gay Ring], and Klara norra kyrkogatan, a street lined with sex shops where homosexual men would congregate and court johns cruising by in cars (183). Although dominant discourses often characterized this underworld of casual sex by anonymity, these spaces facilitate the community building that brings together this network of friends. One of the first homosexuals Rasmus sees when he steps off the train from Koppom is Paul at Bögringen; he nervously lights his cigarette before hurrying away in fright. In Rasmus's rural fantasy Stockholm functions as a place where homosexual men live, and the narrator states: "Han är här nu. Han är framme. Bland bögarna." [He's here now. He has arrived. Among the gays.] (73).

⁸⁸ A park on the island of Kungsholmen in Stockholm.

⁸⁹ A circular balcony in Central Station in Stockholm that looks down onto a lower level.

The trilogy makes use of frequent flashbacks in the lives of several characters, which stresses memory and recollection for the reader. Much of the events in the trilogy take place in the 1980s in Stockholm, but the narrative eventually ends in the present day. The very frequent flashbacks to childhood moments in Benjamin's and Rasmus's life remind the reader of the importance of memory, forcing the reader to engage in the exercise that this trilogy mandates: the insertion of memory into present consciousness. At times the flashbacks seem superfluous, yet their function as a device to emphasize the power of memory becomes more apparent as the trilogy progresses. The frequent flashbacks also emphasize contrasts within the text. Memories of bathing in the lake near Benjamin's family's summerhouse are replaced with happy times with his new family, Rasmus, with whom he sunbathes nude at Långholmen⁹⁰.

The second novel focuses on the effects of HIV/AIDS on not only the physical health of several characters but also on the way the disease begins to dissolve the community and family previously formed by the characters. *II.Sjukdomen* [Disease] takes up right where *I.Kärleken* leaves off. *II.Sjukdomen* begins with a brief preface that not only foreshadows the events to transpire in the novel, but one that also broadens the scale of the trauma at hand:

I mitten av åttiotalet på ett sjukhus någonstans i USA låg ett barn döende i infektionssjukdomen aids. Barnet var övergivet av sin familj och därför ensamt. På sängens kortsida var ett anslag uppsatt: Får ej vidröras. (50).

[A child lay dying of AIDS in the middle of the 1980s at a hospital somewhere in the US. The child was abandoned by his family and is therefore alone. Posted on the foot of the bed was a card that read: Do not touch.]

⁹⁰ An island in central Stockholm.

The preface refers to the widespread idea in Sweden in the early 1980s that AIDS was an American phenomenon. The cautionary sign also predicts the preexisting cultural stigma that the disease would be associated with: homosexual males, as sex workers and intravenous drug users, or the ‘untouchables’ in Swedish society. This stigma persisted until the mid-1990s when American figures including Magic Johnson, Kimberly Bergalis, and Ryan White began to challenge this misconception.

The fate of the character Reine demonstrates the earliest period of hopelessness within the gay community during the AIDS crisis. *II.Sjukdomen* offers a richer backstory to the characters Reine and Lars-Åke and also describes the way in which AIDS appeared in the Swedish media. Paul reads aloud an article from *Göteborgs-Posten* entitled “Nu är även Sverige drabbat” [Now Even Sweden Is Affected], which states not only that AIDS is described by the conservative rights as God’s punishment for homosexuals, but also “en sak är säker: det är som pesten brutit ut” [one thing is sure: it is as if the plague has broken out] (55-56). Gardell repeats the key themes that permeate the ominous article “Guds straff. Skräck. Hysteri. Ingen bot.” [God’s punishment. Fear. Hysteria. No cure.] (57). As Paul continues reading the article aloud, Reine hears what he already has known, realizing that “Inga böner hjälpte, ingen medicin. Hans läkare kunde inget göra. Det hade redan hänt. Och det var sant som det stod: det var rätt åt honom” [No prayers helped, no medicine. His doctor couldn’t do anything. It had already happened. And it was true what it said in the paper: he deserved it.] (57). Reine is the first member of this community to succumb to AIDS, and his situation is also unique. While other characters in the novels are shunned by their families or cast out in different ways, Reine has internalized the shame and guilt so profoundly that levels of the trauma he experiences are self-inflicted.

Despite the gay positivity brought about by the coming out revolution in the 1970s, many people were not living as completely open homosexuals by the 1980s. The cultural ignorance and fear that surrounded homosexuality and AIDS at this time drives Reine to complete self-isolation and a lonely death. Gardell describes his deplorable and agonizing physical state of emaciation, Kaposi's sarcoma, bed sores and constant diarrhea, yet these physical manifestations of the disease are almost secondary to the emotional and spiritual agony he experiences due to the isolation and loneliness that he has chosen (84-5). Gardell describes the shame and self-blame that resulted from the general discourse on AIDS in the early 1980s: "Det är han som själv har valt isoleringen och ensamheten" [It's he himself who has chosen the isolation and loneliness], challenging the preface that began this novel (85). He continues that

varken vännerna eller familjen har fått veta. För om hans mamma och fosterfar kom till honom skulle de förstå att han var homosexuell, och det måste han skona sina föräldrar ifrån. Så han håller dem utanför, liksom han alltid hållit dem utanför. För skammens skull. Den obärliga skammen" (85).

[neither his friends nor his family found out. If his mom and stepdad came to see him they would understand that he was a homosexual, and he has to spare his parents that. So he keeps them in the dark, like he always had. For shame's sake. The unbearable shame.]

Reine's unbearable shame compounds the trauma of isolation and disease. The trauma he suffers is not only due to the friends, family, and community that refuse to hear his testimony, but also stems from his unbearable shame. The shame and fear of discovery by his family of not only having contracted AIDS, but also being a homosexual, are so terrifying that he chooses a lonely, isolated death in an infectious diseases ward. Reine's death at this point in the narrative demonstrates the earliest stages of AIDS and those who died from it, one characterized by shame,

secrecy, isolation, and silence. The last time Reine sees his new Stockholm family is at that café near Vasaparken;⁹¹ he is even more silent than his usual quiet self as Paul reads aloud the *Göteborgs-Posten* article. And no one hears from him again (58).

After Reine's death is suggested in the text, Gardell interrupts the narrative with ten pages of historical information that describe the cultural climate and perspectives of the period, including Swedish newspaper articles, historians, religious voices, actual Swedish political figures:

det hände här. De läkare, journalister, chefredaktörer, ledarskribenter, politiker, poliser, präster, jurister, och myndighetspersonaler som gjorde sig skyldiga till dess övergrepp – inte någon av dem har någon gång fått stå till svars för det lidande och den förtvivlan de åsamkade en redan från början utsatt grupp. (98)

[It happened here. Those doctors, journalists, editors in chief, head writers, politicians, policemen, priests, lawyers, and civil servants were guilty of this abuse – not one of them has ever been held accountable for the suffering and despair they incurred on an already marginalized group.]

The idea of shock and awe that it 'happened here' characterized much of the discourse around *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* upon its release.

The moral associations with HIV/AIDS occurred very early on, even within a highly secular nation like Sweden. Gardell also says that the phenomenon of AIDS "fick en moralisk laddning" [given a moral dimension] such that "i den sekulariserade värld som växte fram i och med upplysningen omformulerades tanken om sjukdomen om Guds straff till att sjukdomen var självförvållad" [in the secularized world that came about as a result of the enlightenment, the thought about the disease as God's punishment was self-inflicted.] (91). The reality of AIDS as morally charged profoundly affects the fates of both Rasmus and Benjamin in the second novel.

⁹¹ A park in Stockholm.

While Rasmus's relationship with his parents is not severed as suddenly as Benjamin's, their biological families fail both of these characters when they learn that their sons are homosexual.

In the early 1980s, the circulation of information about AIDS was thought of as a way to stifle the gay positivity movement and the coming out revolution. Rasmus's mother Sara calls him to warn him about "den nya pesten" [the new plague] described in an article in *Nya Wermlands-Tidningen*, mentioning that the foremost risk group is homosexuals (237). While Rasmus becomes increasingly angry, impatient and indignant, Sara continues: "Så, det här homosexet som börjat du med när du kom till Stockholm . . ." [So, this gay sex that you started with when you moved to Stockholm . . .]; Rasmus interrupts Sara and she adds that "vi vet att du inte är en sån" [we know you're not one of those] (237-8). After Gardell describes Rasmus as livid at the world, society, his parents, AIDS, and at his own fear as well as anger over his infected friends, he calls back his mother and shouts into the phone: "De har prackat på oss den här jävla sjukdomsskiten för att skrämma oss tillbaka in i a garderoben . . . Men det kommer inte att hända, mamma! . . . Ni kan acceptera det eller ni kan dra åt helvete!" [They've imposed this fucking disease bullshit on us in order to scare us back into the closet . . . But it's not going to happen, Mom! . . . You can accept it or you can go to hell!] (238). Sara apologizes and this is the last we hear Rasmus speak about the topic with his parents until his death.

The reality of AIDS actually acts as a catalyst for the modest and conservative Benjamin to come out to his family. Benjamin's devout Jehovah's Witness parents have a much harsher reaction than Rasmus's parents. After Rasmus tells Benjamin that he tested positive for HIV, Benjamin runs directly home and immediately blurts out to his mother, "Jag är homosexuell" [I am a homosexual], something he knew since he was little (266). His mother replies, "Det är möjligt men du *måste* inte vara det" [That may be true, but you don't *have* to be], explaining that

“man kan kämpa emot. Det finns det flera andra som har gjort” [you can fight it. There are others who have done it] (267). Benjamin also confesses that he has fornicated, but he feels neither guilt nor regret, nor does he feel that he has sinned (267). Turning down his mother’s offers to help him, he also announces that he has decided to leave the congregation. The scene ends with Benjamin telling his mother that he won’t be alone, since he has found someone to love (268).

The final scene in which Benjamin interacts with his parents is a symbolic and literal break from his biological family. Soon after his coming out, Benjamin’s parents come by unannounced with flowers and a cake to speak with their son, to confirm one last time that he is sure of his decision. Benjamin realizes that the flowers and cake are for his “egen begravning” [own funeral] and his parents leave while Benjamin lay sobbing in the doorway (288-9). Later Benjamin meets with the elders in his congregation to communicate his decision to leave. In a later scene his mother sits at her desk and writes to him: “Benjamin, min son. Du har skrivit igen. Jag har bett dig att inte skriva och jag ber dig ännu en gång. Du måste förstå. Jag älskar dig. Jag hoppas du mår bra. Men jag låtsas att du inte finns.” [Benjamin, my son. You have written again. I have begged you not to write and I beg you yet again. You must understand. I love you. I hope you are well. But I pretend that you don’t exist.] (293). Although Benjamin’s parents never learn that their son has contracted HIV as they cut off all contact completely, their refusal to acknowledge their son’s existence due to his homosexuality parallels the greater societal denial of not only homosexuality but the way in which HIV/AIDS is affecting this community at this time. Benjamin is abandoned by his family and his congregation at a time when he most needs them, yet another level of trauma present in this narrative.

3.Döden [Death] depicts the hopelessness and death of spirituality as a result of this collective trauma. The novel begins with a quote from the Book of Samuel, in which King David

has defeated the Moabites and randomly draws lengths of rope in order to arbitrarily decide who shall be executed and who shall be his new subjects (5). The biblical reference not only denotes a sense of urgency as this narrative progresses, but it also reminds the reader of the way in which religion as an institution fails Benjamin. Benjamin also recites a biblical text early in *Kärleken*, one from the Book of Revelation 21:4: “Och han skall torka varje tår från deras ögon, och döden skall inte finnas mer; inte heller skall sorg eller skrik eller smärta finnas mer. Det som en gång var är borta..” [And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away⁹²] (116). Spoken at a time when Benjamin was still faithful and active in his congregation, Gardell demonstrates another way in which religion fails to perform its intended function in society. This Bible quotation is also the source of the title of the trilogy.

The suicide of Bengt, the young, attractive, talented, and promising actor, reminds the reader that the trauma of AIDS was never separate from the shame and cultural condemnation of homosexuality. *3.Döden* develops a richer history of the reader’s relationship with Bengt, who first began turning tricks on Klara norra kyrkogatan but has now become a well-known stage and television actor. However closeted, with his best friend Madde as his beard, Bengt continues to live a double life until he learns he is HIV-positive. In the wake of fantastic reviews of his latest play and interest in his talent shown by a famous Swedish director, Bengt hangs himself on a summer day in his apartment (281). Bengt’s suicide is another example of this self-inflicted trauma, in that the reality of audiences knowing not only the he is a homosexual, but that he also has contracted HIV, is so unbearable that he elects to end his life on the verge of achieving his dreams of fame and success as an actor.

⁹² The New King James Bible

Bengt's funeral demonstrates a profound example of the ways in which witness and testimony are denied and erased. The theme of young, vital lives being cut short by AIDS is stressed throughout the narrative. At Bengt's funeral, the priest speaks about Bengt's life and stressed the great presence of love—only love for those at his drama school, however, love for the theater, and love for “hans närmaste och käraste vänner” [his nearest and dearest friends] (42). No mention of his gay friends, or what Gardell describes as “hans homosexuella vänner, de som tog hand om honom när han behövde det som mest och som varit hans Stockholmsfamilj i alla år” [his homosexual friends, those who took care of him when he needed it most and who were his Stockholm family for many years] (43). The priest makes no mention of his sexuality or of his cause of death. Thus, not only is Bengt's homosexuality denied, but AIDS as well. Madde, Bengt's beard at public appearances and his film premier, sings a tearful song for Bengt to which the priest replies, “Vi tackar Bengts flickvän för den vackra sången” [We thank Bengt's girlfriend for that beautiful song] (51). Bengt's friends grumble amongst themselves, but Bengt's family, classmates, and the rest of the world are only privy to a false testimony removed of any mention of homosexuality or AIDS. Later on Seppo notes that “de gör oss hetero igen efter att vi dött . . . Det är kanske det enda sättet de kan sörja oss på” [they make us hetero again after we've died. Maybe it's the only way they can mourn us.] (81). This process of sanitizing the life and memory of an AIDS victim from stigma and illness characterizes the earlier part of the AIDS crisis that contrasts sharply with Paul's spectacular funeral that concludes the trilogy.

The funeral soon becomes the key space of contention in which levels of trauma are enacted in *3.Döden*. Rasmus becomes more ill after his diagnosis and suffers from shingles, fungal infections, and pneumonia. His disease strikes fear even in his once hip and liberal artist aunt Christina, who serves wine in plastic cups at their home, obviously due to fear of

contracting HIV from her nephew Rasmus (69). When Rasmus is close to death, his parents travel down from Koppom and are almost sympathetic and tender with Benjamin. When Rasmus dies, Benjamin and Rasmus's father Harald even share an embrace while Benjamin sobs (139). Earlier on, Rasmus's mother Sara admits to Benjamin that "På sätt och vis skulle man kunna säga att du har blivit som en son för oss . . . Ja, svärdotter kan jag ju inte säga . . . Inte svärson heller" [In one sense you could say that you've become a son to us . . . Yes, I can't really say daughter-in-law . . . Not son-in-law either.] (89). She is unable to articulate Benjamin's place in her life, or least in her son's life, but she acknowledges that he is more than a friend.

Rasmus's funeral, however, becomes a point of contention and the space in which Rasmus's homosexuality and his relationship with Benjamin are both denied. Although Benjamin tells Harald that he and Rasmus have discussed the obituary and the funeral, he refuses to let Benjamin be part of either one; Harald admits that "Som vi ser det ska vi meddela att vår son avlidit, inte att han var fikus" [As we see it we want to communicate that our son has died, not that he was a queer.] (141). Benjamin pleads with Sara and Harald, and although they admit that they understand that he and Rasmus loved each other, Harald says to Rasmus: "*Vi* vet det, Benjamin, *vi* förstår det. Men andra, tror du *andra* förstår? [. . .] "Du tillhör inte familjen . . . Folk skulle undra. Vem är det där? Vad gör han här? Det går inte. Det måste du förstå" [*We* know that, Benjamin, *we* understand that. But everyone else, do you think *they* will understand? [. . .] You're not a part of our family . . . People would wonder. Who is that? What's he doing here? It wouldn't work. You have to understand.] (143-5). The funeral serves as a symbol, therefore, for the cultural denial of AIDS and homosexuality, but also a space in which Rasmus's parents can mourn their son separately from the two.

The collective trauma of negation and denial of experience occurred in the moment, but it also continued in a greater historical sense up until the testimony and witness that the trilogy demands. Gardell explains the reaction of families and friends in the 1980s and 1990s who completely turned their backs on those dying from AIDS through Harald, who says:

Koppom är ett litet samhälle, och du måste förstå, hela släkten kommer att vara där. Alla skulle ju få reda på det. Du måste ändå förstå att det skulle bli någon värdig begravning, utan ett *bögspektakel*. Det vill väl inte du heller? (144).

[Koppom is a small community, you must understand, the whole family is going to be there. Everyone would find out. You still must understand that it should be a dignified funeral, not a gay spectacle. You don't want that either, do you?]

Harald's explanation speaks to the profound stigma and shame surrounding homosexuality and AIDS at the time. Sara and Harald's refusal to allow Benjamin to attend Rasmus's funeral demonstrates the active way in which denial of memory was accomplished. Sara and Harald become increasingly anxious and out of control from the very first time Rasmus left for Stockholm; barring Benjamin from Rasmus's funeral seems to be the only way in which they can control the way Rasmus will be *remembered*.

Paul's funeral, however, challenges the funeral as a space of denial, through what can only be described as a gay spectacle. Paul has submitted his own obituary, consisting of the three words "JAG HAR LEVAT" [I HAVE LIVED], and also meticulously planned his own funeral (265). The format and content of Paul's funeral resist this negation of homosexual experience and vacuum of memory. The emcee of the funeral, Peter, a classmate of Bengt's at drama school,

begins the ceremony: "Idag, mina vänner, ska vi inte tänka ett skit på Cancerfonden"⁹³ . . . För att Paul dog inte i cancer." [Today my friends, we are not going to give a shit about the Cancer Foundation . . . Because Paul did not die of cancer.] (275-6). He continues that

Paul dog inte i cancer. Han dog i en sjukdom som tagit många andra av våra vänner de senaste tio åren. Och liksom homosexualiteten varit den kärlek som inte vågat säga sitt namn, har aids varit den sjukdom som förnekats, vars namn inte uttalats högt utan viskats i skam och i smyg. Det dröjde många år innan USA:s president ens kunde förmå sig att ta ordet i sin mun. Guds straff för synden. Bögpesten. Aids. (276).

[Paul did not die from cancer. He died from a disease that took many of our other friends in the past ten years. And just like homosexuality has been the love which dare not speak its name, AIDS has been a disease that has been denied, who named has not been spoken aloud but whispered in shame and secrecy. It took many years before America's president was even able to say the word. God's punishment for sin. The gay plague. AIDS.]

Peter addresses the way in which many funerals for those who had died from AIDS lacked any acknowledgment of the deceased's homosexuality or their having died from AIDS. Rather, their cause of death was listed as cancer, and donations were made in their name to *Cancerfonden* [The Cancer Foundation], which was the case at Lars-Åke's funeral (215).

In one of the final scenes of the trilogy, the stage that is holding Paul's casket is soon enveloped by a diverse cast of characters including drag queens, half of Stockholm's Gay Choir, leather daddies, a man dressed as the pope, two priests, a man dressed as an Orthodox Jew, male gogo dancers, four young children, a butch lesbian carrying Bengt's cat, a female police officer, and two of Paul's doctors, among others. They flood the stage and join in singing a song called

⁹³ Peter is referring to other homosexual men's funerals in which donations were encouraged to be submitted in the deceased's name, another way in which to deny homosexuality and HIV/AIDS.

“Mitt enda liv” [My one life] (278). Although one of the most saccharine moments of the trilogy, this shallow celebration of sexual diversity is important in that the lyrics of the song demand witness of Paul’s life:

“Mitt enda liv.
Det enda liv jag kommer få.
Det enda liv jag nånsin velat ha.
Mitt enda liv!” (278).

[My one life.
The only life I’m going to get.
The only life I’ve ever wanted.
My one life.

Both Paul’s funeral and his obituary loudly bear witness and offer testimony to the life that he has lived; they emphasize homosexuality and his suffering from AIDS as part of his testimony.

The analysis above demonstrates the number of ways the exercise of recollection has revealed multiple traumas that have thus affected a particular community in a *collective* way. Even those that survived the AIDS crisis were still subject to the stigmatization: the trauma of their friends and loved ones’ deaths being either ignored, concealed, or described as having succumbed to cancer. The disease that was responsible for destroying their community and newly constructed family structures was almost entirely ignored until it began affecting those that did not belong to certain marginalized risk groups. And, as demonstrated by the case of Rasmus, even those that suffered the collective trauma were forbidden to bear witness or offer testimony for their own loved ones at the time of their death.

Jonas Gardell Cries Only for the Men

Although most Swedish voices and press outlets (both both normative and queer) lauded Gardell's recollection of such a taboo period of history in Sweden, the way in which recollection is *done* in the trilogy was met with some controversy. Swedish scholar Sara Edenheim's editorial "Gardell gråter bara för männen" [Gardell Cries Only for the Men] appeared in *Dagens Nyheter* on November 21, 2013 and eruditely challenged the seemingly universal praise given to *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar*. Edenheim offers a queer critique of both the way in which recollection is handled by Gardell, and also several anti-queer comments Gardell made in an interview with *Faktum* magazine.

Edenheim's critique is important in this discussion because it embodies the key bones that queer theory has to pick with gay liberation and essentialist gay politics that flourished in Western discourses in the post-Stonewall era. One scholar's editorial response in *Dagens Nyheter* might seem frivolous in comparison to both the political and economic force behind the *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* phenomenon. However, the differences in perspective between Edenheim and Gardell exist only because they work with academic versus dominant discourses respectively; the generational difference that exists between them and their political perspectives is one that has also come to define gay politics today. Edenheim's critique can also be applied in a broader sense to Western gay male culture today and to the ways in which Gardell's trilogy and the ensuing cultural discourse furnish and promote problematic and privileged experiences of white men under the guise of oppression and marginalization.

The minor political spat between Gardell and Edenheim is most interesting to my study because both are valid. Gardell's trilogy and the complex questions and tensions it illuminates serve an invaluable function in the recollection and discussion on HIV/AIDS that is ongoing.

The discussion continues both as a Western urban phenomenon troubled by racial inequalities, sexual shame, and homophobia, as well as a global epidemic politicized by pharmaceutical companies and the Global South's access to healthcare. However, queer theory and the tangible and abstract ways in which it has improved the livability and articulation of genders, bodies, and expressions outside of normative conceptualizations also serve an important purpose. Not only does the reconciliation of Edenheim and Gardell's perspectives serve to strengthen the viability of both exercises, but the analysis in this chapter examines what Castiglia and Reed refer to in as the "persistent melancholy of gay male culture" (148). The melancholy that characterizes contemporary gay culture developed as a result of the cultural vacuum of the 1990s and was brought about by the sanitation of gay male sexuality as discussed in Chapter III (148). The sanitation of gay male sexuality was not only a political project, but also one that targeted public sexuality explicitly in both large cities in the United States and Sweden.

A central component of Edenheim's critique is Gardell's representation of male homosexuality. Edenheim points out that the characters in the trilogy are all "vackra vita män"⁹⁴ [beautiful white men] ("Gardell gråter"). Their experience is that of middle-class homosexual men in Stockholm during this time. The homogeneity that existed in Sweden is largely responsible for Gardell's racially homogenous depiction. Ethnic homogeneity in Sweden, especially in larger cities like Stockholm, has decreased significantly today. However, Edenheim's observation is important in that this experience is still the dominant narrative, despite the complexities and diversities of gay political projects today. Gardell's claiming of this narrative as his own experience, and the way in which the clique of gay men in the trilogy purport to exemplify the diversity of experience of this time, serve to inform a certain truth and

⁹⁴ The characters in the novel are all ethnically Swedish, with the exception of Seppo who is Finnish.

legitimacy to Gardell's recollection. Gardell states in *2.Sjukdomen* that "Homokulturen är i ännu högre utsträckning än samhället i övrigt fixerad vid skönhet och vid ungdom" [homo culture is to an even greater extent overly fixated on beauty and young than the rest of society], which is a reality for a number of reasons (58). Edenheim's critique in the context of Gardell's trilogy is one that should not be limited to gay male culture. In Western capitalist societies, whiteness, youth, and beauty are not only valued by many dominant cultures as well as subcultures, but often comprise the norm in representations in television and film. Edenheim's critique of gay male culture today, characterized by conspicuous consumption, white privilege, male privilege, and what Judith Halberstam includes as "fatigue, ennui, boredom, ironic distancing, indirectness, arch dismissal, insincerity and camp," is indeed appropriate (824). However, as discussed in Chapter III, the state of normative gay politics today is due to the period of cultural panic during the AIDS crisis recalled by Gardell in his trilogy, and the political and cultural response to this period. This vacuum of memory and experience in the consciousness of both dominant and queer cultures that allows for certain elements in Gardell's trilogy, is met with such critique.

Edenheim offers a queer academic critique of the Gardell debate, which is at odds with dominant gay rights discourses. Edenheim's article offers a critique that is both valid and rich, and seeks to emphasize two points. First, she underscores the sexist and anti-queer comments that Gardell made in his *Faktum* magazine interview that criticize the contemporary LGBT movement's use of the acronym, which erases the gendered experience of the AIDS crisis and gay liberation. Secondly, she aims to illuminate the ways in which the press discourse surrounding this universal praise of Gardell's trilogy further makes invisible the marginalized groups that suffer from HIV/AIDS today. Edenheim's article also underscores the point that this press discourse explicitly communicates: "den bög som vi anses kapabla att sörja nu (trettio år

för sent) är vit och vacker” [the gay man that we consider ourselves capable of mourning (thirty years too late) is white and beautiful], thus rendering “homosexuella [som] alla män och homofob är den som inte tycker att Gardells historia är särdeles behjärtansvärd” [homosexuals [as] all men and homophobes as he who does not think Gardell’s trilogy is particularly deserving [of such mourning]] (1-2). In short, Edenheim’s critique locates Gardell’s trilogy as *unqueer*, as it mourns exclusively the homonormative, white gay male, thus silencing the experience of those that suffer from AIDS today on the largest scale: black heterosexual women. She also notes that the discourse became so publicized that anyone at all who critiqued Gardell’s trilogy is demonized. Although Gardell’s glib comments inarguably express a number of anti-queer sentiments, the process undertaken by *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar* in itself invites active participation in what Castiglia and Reed describe as an exercise of memory.

Since the early 1990s, queer theory has been the dominant academic framework through which questions of gender, sexuality, and non-heterosexual identity have been examined and contested. Although valuable work has been done by queer academic movements, Castiglia and Reed note that, aside from a few theorists (like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Douglas Crimp), this new academic discipline accused those who “kept company with the past” as guilty of “naïve essentialism” (Castiglia and Reed, 146). Castiglia and Reed also note that “Just as newly ‘respectable’ gays and lesbians who repudiated the immature self-indulgences of the past became more acceptable within mainstream politics,” the first generation of queer theorists thus “found themselves enthusiastically welcomed at the curricular table at prestigious universities” (146). In addition, the purposeful break from the past of the radical sexual culture of the 1970s was advocated by louder conservative American gay voices including Andrew Sullivan, Leo Bersani, and Gabriel Rotello in the 1990s. The separation of sex from homosexuality thus became an

academic norm within many queer theoretical discourses, but also echoed on a larger level via political platforms including gay marriage and the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” Thus, the queer preoccupation of dissolving the gender binary has not only erased the experience of the era of the AIDS crisis; the period of political viability came from a great investment in gender binaries. But academia, along with many conservative gay political voices, has deemed the gay positivity culture of the 1970s and early 1980s in which AIDS arrived self-destructive, immature, and in many ways, *unqueer*.

Gardell addressed the erasure of the era of gay positivity in an interview in *Faktum* magazine in September 2012, which sparked some critique from Edenheim. Gardell’s explained AIDS as a phenomenon that explicitly affected homosexual men, rather than the gay community in general. Gardell’s comments were explicitly anti-queer in that they not only understand the category of gender as stable; Gardell also critiqued the use of the acronym HBTQ rather than the term *bög* which in the past was reclaimed with pride (Wallenberg 7). Gardell explains of the 1980s:

Hbt är ett begrepp som överhuvudtaget inte fanns då. Folk säger att hiv drabbade hbtsamhället. Nej, det drabbade inte något hbtsamhälle för det fanns inget sånt. Vi var homosexuella. Det hette Homosexuella frigörelseveckan. Det var inga lesbiska som dog i aids. I hela Pride och hbtqkoret finns både ett avsexualiserande och avbögifierande som är direkt skrämmande. Där börjar det bli dags att tala klarspråk. Det var män som hade sex med män som dog i aids. Oavsett om de identifierade sig som bögar så var det män som hade sex med män. Det var inte lesbiska och i relativt liten utsträckning transpersoner. Det var bögar. Låt oss säga ordet. Det där ordet som var ett skällsord som vi gjorde till ett stolt ord, men som vi knappt får säga i dag eftersom vi måste säga en bokstavskombination (7).

[LGBT is a concept that in general didn’t really exist then. People say that HIV affected the LGBT community. No, it didn't affect the LGBT community because there wasn’t one. We were homosexuals. It was called the Homosexual Liberation Week. There weren’t any lesbians who died from AIDS. In the whole Pride and

LGBT parade there's both a desexualization and a defaggotification that is downright scary. Then it became time to speak plainly. It was men who had sex with men that died from AIDS. There were no lesbians, and to a very limited extent transpeople. It was gay men. Let us say the word. That word was an insult that we made into a term of pride, but we can barely say it today because we have to say an acronym.]

Gardell's comments on the erasure of the cultural memory of AIDS within the gay community are important here; they exemplify Castiglia and Reed's claim that the academy's embrace of queer theory has produced cultural amnesia even within gay rights discourses. However, Edenheim considers Gardell's comments within broader queer and Third-wave feminist discourses that offer intersectional critiques of the ways in which race and gender factor into the discourse.

Although the political project has seen considerable legislative success in the US, and more so in Sweden, the increased visibility and political weight of queer people have come at a price. Not only has this movement of homonormativity eroded the sense of community and activism that gained momentum during the height of the AIDS crisis, but it has also mandated what Castiglia and Reed refer to as collective traumatic "*unremembering*" (1). In addition, the *unremembering* on a large scale has produced a generational cut off for younger queer people and dehistoricized the queer experience (9). Most importantly, Castiglia and Reed claim that this "prophylactic amnesia" has produced the "single-minded normative fixations that too often characterize sexual politics today" (25). These assertions on the effects of the AIDS crisis are particularly crucial in regards to Edenheim's critiques not only of the mourning of exclusively attractive white men, but also offers an explanation of just how this homonormative standard came to be.

Edenheim also claims that society's guilt for what is happening in the *present* is assuaged by the mourning of the past, which Gardell's trilogy does. Edenheim's critique also invokes the additional concern that it is journalists who have brought this particular history to the forefront of the discourse, thus further marginalizing and doing a disservice to white homosexual men's "antites" [antithesis], which is black, heterosexual women, underscoring that in this instance that "historiens skuld används för att glömma samtidens skuld" [the guilt of history is used to forget the guilt of the present] (Edenheim). Edenheim also claims that "hur traumatiskt denna historia än var då, har den nu blivit en narcissistisk historia som inte kan få nog av sig själv" [as traumatic as the history was then, it has now become a narcissistic story that just can't get enough of itself] (Edenheim). Edenheim's critiques are valid and legitimate, but more so than a critique of Gardell's work, she offers a useful critique of gay male culture that values consumption, whiteness, and emulation of heteronormative temporalities and modes of existence. Edenheim also notes that the Gardell debate is "ett skolboksexempel på hur samtidens dåliga samvete kan lindras genom att man berättar en historia om hur hemskt det var förr" [a textbook example of how the guilty conscience of the present can be alleviated by telling a story of how horrible it was in the past] (Edenheim). The mourning of the loss of the life and vitality of the white male body at this point in time facilitates the recollection of the homophobia of AIDS-crisis Sweden without one specific perpetrator.

Edenheim's original editorial appeared to explicitly target Gardell and his trilogy, but she explained that her critique was meant to address the media discourse. Edenheim followed up with another article nine days later in *Dagens Nyheter*: "Kritiken riktade sig huvudsakligen mot journalister" [The Critique Was Directed Mainly at Journalists] (Edenheim). In this editorial she clarified her original intentions and reiterates that her critique was directed primarily at

journalists who mourn attractive white men at the expense of those who are actually suffering from HIV/AIDS today. The fact that beautiful white men are celebrated is largely a symptom of consumption-driven gay culture that reifies and amplifies dominant societal values that demand assimilation and normalization from queer people. The dominance of the attractive, white homosexual male in the discourse was discussed in the discussion above with *Fab 5 Sverige*.

The political conflict between Edenheim and Gardell is not only academic versus popular culture; their opposing perspectives are also the result of a generational difference. Gardell directed a comment on Gay Pride in Sweden in his *Faktum* magazine, noting that in “hela Pride och hbtq-köret finns både ett avsexualiserande och avbögifierande som är direkt skrämmande” [the whole Pride and LGBTQ parade there is a de-sexualization and a de-faggotification that is downright scary.] (Wallenberg). Queer theorists like Michael Warner have also observed this phenomenon of the erasure of ‘sex’ from ‘homosexuality’ in dominant gay rights discourses. Gardell’s comments are all over the map, yet his critique of the academic institutionalization of queer theory is spot on. He states that

Det är så löjligt! Hela queer-grejen. Den var ju jag. Hela jag var ju queer. Sen kommer några satans akademiker och snor begreppet och gör det till teoretisk disciplin. Grejen var att vi inte ville bli definierade och sen ägnar de hela sin karriär åt att bygga en identitet av det. (Wallenberg).

[It’s absolutely ridiculous! The whole queer thing. That was me. All of me was queer. Then some goddamned academics come and steal the whole concept and made it a theoretical discipline. The idea was that we didn’t want to be defined, and now they build their whole career on constructing an identity out of it.

The comment not only demonstrates the generational disconnect between generations of gay people before and after the AIDS crisis, but also melancholy and anger over the past, as well as Gardell’s own guilt of having survived the AIDS epidemic when so many close friends were lost.

Thus Gardell has described his trilogy as a sort of restitution. Edenheim's critiques of both the white-centric narcissism of Gardell's trilogy as well as the shortsightedness of the press discourse are compelling. However, Edenheim criticizes gay male culture as if it is formed in a white, misogynistic vacuum; it further proves the point of Gardell's trilogy, which is that cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis facilitated the cultural norms that Edenheim critiques.

Edenheim's critique delineates the shortcomings, voids, melancholy, and dehistoricization of gay culture produced by that collective unremembering of the AIDS crisis. This is an incredibly important discussion to have, but there is also an alternatively valuable function of *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar*. Gardell's trilogy accomplishes a number of things. Firstly, it highlights the tension that persists between queer theoretical discourses, older generations of gays and lesbians, and HIV/AIDS today. Secondly, it allows us to challenge the homonormative images circulated within Sweden today and illuminates the historical relationship between the mourned past and the dehistoricized present. In *Odd Couples: A History of Gay Marriage in Scandinavia*, Rydström observes that the AIDS crisis, while traumatic and devastating to Nordic gay communities, forced the Nordic governments to hear and cooperate with gay and lesbian activist groups in Sweden, thus giving them an elevated political legitimacy they hadn't enjoyed prior (67). Despite this relationship, the experience of HIV/AIDS has been notably absent from partnership and same-sex marriage debates in Sweden. Lastly, although the media discourse surrounding Gardell's trilogy has perpetuated the centrality of white, attractive gay men's experience, the recollection of this time interrupts the contemporary narrative of sameness, assimilation, homonormativity, racism and sexism that often characterize gay politics in Sweden today.

Royal Recognition and National Mourning

On February 4, 2013, Sweden's Crown Princess Victoria presented Jonas Gardell with *QX* magazine's "Årets homo" [Homo of the Year] prize at its annual Gaygala⁹⁵. The Crown Princess received a standing ovation, as the royal family has previously been notably silent on the issue of homosexuality and gay rights. Crown Princess Victoria's appearance at *QX*'s annual Gaygala provides Gardell's cultural recollection with a newly elevated legitimacy as it is in effect state-sanctioned—what Judith Butler refers to as "grievable" life (20). Through this public and state-sanctioned mourning, Butler claims that "loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all" and that "each of us is constituted politically, in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies" (20). Crown Princess Victoria invokes this shared collective mourning in her speech before presenting Gardell with the "Årets homo" prize, addressing Gardell as "inspiratören" [He who inspires] and claiming: "Ditt budskap är tydligt. Räta på ryggen. Sträck ut handen. Vi ska torka varandras tårar. Vi ska torka varandras tårar med öppna hjärtan och våra bara händer" [Your message is clear. Straighten your back. Reach out your hand. We shall dry each others' tears. We shall dry each others' tears with open hearts and our bare hands.] ("Victoria"). Crown Princess Victoria's use of 'we' in her speech explicitly includes the previously unacknowledged AIDS victims as worthy of mourning by the general public. Through the *collective* mourning that Victoria encourages, institutional blame is displaced, as well as the cultural and institutional homophobia of the AIDS crisis Sweden. Edenheim's critique is salient here, in that contemporary guilt is absolved through this nationalized mourning of past offenses in which no one perpetrator is guilty.

⁹⁵ This gala is broadcast annually on Swedish television and held since 2001. Awards are presented in several categories, such as the year's best gay song, club, television program, novel, etc.

Although Edenheim's analysis raises some important points, it also demonstrates a number of ways in which the growth of queer theory as an academic discipline has done a disservice to both the queer community and queer psyche today: it has dehistoricized the queer experience and contributed to the generational disconnect that mainstream gay political platforms have facilitated through normalization and assimilation. Edenheim has stressed that the more pressing issue today is to focus this discourse on the plight of black, heterosexual women regarding HIV/AIDS. At the same time, thirty-one percent of new cases of HIV infection in Sweden in 2012 involved men who have sex with men, a significant portion considering men who have sex with men are such a small sample of the general population, demonstrating that AIDS still affects this demographic in a disproportionate way ("137 MSM").

CONCLUSION

From AIDS to Assimilation: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Swedish Literature has argued that the literary discourse on male homosexuality in Sweden has, and continues to be, a space in which the dominant discourse on homosexuality is contested. It also argues, through analyses of internal debates within gay rights discourses, that dominant gay rights discourses have in many ways been propelled by a public relations project that seeks to present the ‘proper’ image of male homosexuality. The novels examined in this study were published in the past fifty years (1968-2013), a period which saw not only broader dramatic political and cultural changes in Western culture, but also dramatic shifts in the general acceptability and political legitimacy of homosexual people, same-sex couples, and non-normative families. My study brings the literary discourse into broader historical and sociopolitical understandings of male homosexuality, and emphasizes the crucial role played by the AIDS crisis in the formation of the historical and sociopolitical narrative of homosexuality in Sweden.

The discussion has considered several key legislative, medical measures and cultural events in its examination of the novels and linked these moments to the literary discourse. The analyses provided in the first two chapters are more historical and sociological in their approach, because cultural ideas about homosexuality were informed and circulated through concrete legislative and medical measures taken by the Swedish state. The last two chapters employ more theoretical cultural studies perspective in their approach to both the novels and the sociopolitical moments considered; this focus not only points to the more complex and nuanced understandings of sexuality and identity that began circulating in the 1990s after the AIDS crisis, but also the

more sophisticated academic inquiries that were posed regarding the understanding of homosexuality, gay identity, and the political and cultural effects of the AIDS crisis.

My study also underscored a few key differences between the US and Swedish historical and political contexts regarding homosexuality and AIDS that have influenced the discourse on homosexuality in each country. In the US, AIDS activism was largely conducted by grassroots organizations, compelled by governmental silence and neglect. However, in Sweden, the spreading of information about the disease, safe sex practices, and specialized health clinics for MSM came from the government. The grassroots nature of US AIDS activism also facilitated a coming together of gay men and lesbians, which allowed for the remarkable success of the gay rights movement in the US. In Sweden, however, the AIDS crisis was divisive among gay men and lesbians, as lesbians felt alienated by the political focus and economic resources devoted to gay men. However, in both the US and Sweden, gay rights discourses have and continue to be dominated by white, middle class men since the late 1990s.

Chapter I demonstrated the role that Bengt Martin's trilogy about Joakim played in establishing literature as a space in which dominant ideas about male homosexuality could be challenged. Unlike previous literary representations of male homosexuality in Swedish literature before the trilogy about Joakim, which reaffirmed the widely-held idea that homosexuality was a mental illness, Martin's trilogy demonstrated that the harsh sociopolitical climate in 1950s Sweden was responsible for the anxiety, depression, and isolation that characterized cultural images of homosexuality. Martin's coming-out on Swedish television in 1968 began the coming-out revolution that facilitated the gay positivity movement of the 1970s, and his celebrity contributed to the phenomenon of literature as a space in which to debate homosexuality.

Chapter II proposed that the Bathhouse Law and the Infectious Diseases Law have produced the cultural association of male homosexuality with disease, which in turn was internalized by homosexual men. The discussion of *Onans bok* revealed the fear and anxiety caused by AIDS crisis rhetoric within the homosexual male psyche, demonstrated by Peter's abstinence. The persistence of the cultural association of male homosexuality with disease is shown in the discussion of Andreas Lundstedt's coming-out interview, in which he explicitly addresses the cultural association through emphasis on his health and wellness.

Chapter III argued that the response on the part of dominant gay rights discourses to the AIDS crisis produced cultural amnesia about the history of the disease, which was facilitated by internal debates within gay rights discourses to promote a "proper" image of male homosexuality. The analysis of the discourse surrounding *Destroyer* magazine argues that a sanitized image of male homosexuality was achieved through demonization of other 'bad' expressions of non-normative sexuality, namely pedophilia. The subsequent discussion of the literary discourse has shown that the sanitization and normalization of homosexuality allowed it to gain mainstream acceptability: gay young adult novels support gay identity as something that ought to be embraced; gay chick lit novels support conspicuous consumption as a medium through which to express gay male identity. The result is a double-edged sword: although overall visibility and acceptability of homosexuality has increased, a homonormative image of male homosexuality has been created, one that demonizes other non-normative expressions of male homosexuality. As my discussion demonstrated, it has also favored the most assimilated and normative expressions of male gender and homosexuality, namely those that are white and bourgeois.

Chapter IV examined Jonas Gardell's literary recollection of when AIDS came to Sweden and showed that the trauma of the disease was compounded by the general public's

refusal to recognize it. The cultural images of male homosexuality at the turn of the millennium embodied normative, white, middle-class values and state-recognized relationships. The discussion in this chapter demonstrated how Gardell's trilogy not only interrupted contemporary cultural narratives of male homosexuality, but it rejected the cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis and offered a new history of gay rights in Sweden. The subsequent discussion of critique of the trilogy reveals the tension that exists between contemporary queer discourses and Gardell's literary recollection: queer theory seeks to dissolve boundaries of sex, gender, and identity, while Gardell's trilogy underscores the gendered reality of the AIDS crisis.

The analyses of several sociopolitical moments in the history of male homosexuality provided in my study reveal that the project of gay rights has been driven by internal debates that sought to present the 'correct' or 'proper' image of male homosexuality. The first two chapters of my study examine representations of the 'wrong' image of homosexuality: Bengt Martin's depiction of Joakim as an anxious, mentally unstable young man who abuses alcohol and pills; Ola Klingberg's emergency room doctor Peter who visits bathhouses in Copenhagen for anonymous sexual encounters, followed by eight years of paranoid abstinence and unstable non-monogamous relationships. The debates within Swedish gay rights discourses over the correct image of male homosexuality began with the gay positivity of the 1970s and gained the greatest momentum with the advent of AIDS to Sweden. My analysis of the literary discourse after the AIDS crisis in the two latter chapters of my study demonstrates the persistence of the debate surrounding the proper images of male homosexuality, promoted through cultural images like the men in *Fab 5 Sverige*, yet contested by demonized expressions of homosexuality such as pedophilia in *Destroyer* magazine.

My study draws an altogether different conclusion from Jenny Björklund's study on lesbianism in Swedish literature. Björklund observes that despite the dramatic shift in broader understandings and visibility of homosexuality that have occurred in the last century, an ambiguity still exists in that contemporary representations of lesbianism in Swedish literature are still informed by medical discourses despite increased openness and tolerance (170). The analysis provided in my study shows a particular emphasis on psychological and medical discourses in Martin's trilogy about Joakim and Klingberg's *Onans bok*; however, an abrupt cessation of literary representations of male homosexuality informed by medical discourses occurred after the AIDS crisis. Depictions of male homosexuality in *Duktig pojke* and *Spelar roll* resist the idea of homosexuality as deviation, and instead support the coming-out process as a healthy and necessary step towards self-discovery; they also support the idea of homosexuality identity as something to be embraced. Mats Strandberg's gay chick lit novels also support the embrace of gay male identity and underscore the sameness of same-sex relationships that are depicted alongside heterosexual relationships. And lastly, although Jonas Gardell's trilogy engages medical discourses as active in historical conversations about AIDS and male homosexuality, the trilogy celebrates gay male identity and culture and their influence on the legacy of 1970s and 1980s. Thus, representations of male homosexuality in Swedish literature during the last fifty years demonstrate a distinct departure from being informed by medical discourses after the AIDS crisis and, instead, support gay male identity and culture as spaces through which an authentic self is expressed.

The general visibility and acceptability of homosexuality in Sweden has allowed for the literary discourse to become a valid source of information about homosexuality. Literary discourse on male homosexuality first began to challenge information and knowledge produced

unilaterally by medical and psychological discourses with Bengt Martin's trilogy about Joakim (1968-70); conversely, in 2013 Jonas Gardell's trilogy about the time when AIDS came to Sweden informed dominant discourses surrounding homosexuality, AIDS, and cultural memory. Previously a peripheral space of resistance to dominant discourses around homosexuality, the success of Gardell's trilogy and its ability to inform national debates over the history of homosexuality and AIDS support the idea that literature has the ability to inform dominant discourses.

The shift in the understanding of male homosexuality from mental illness to physical illness to state-sanctioned expression of identity has demonstrated a shift in the role of medical discourses in these novels. Martin's trilogy of novels about Joakim interrogated the psychological profession and its treatment of homosexuality as a mental illness, as well as the age of consent legislation that enforced the profession's understanding of homosexuality as a mental illness. Klingberg's depiction of Peter presents an ambiguous picture of medical discourses during the AIDS crisis; although medical institutions were one of the few stable and supportive spaces for homosexual men, the circulation of medical information through the National Commission on AIDS and the Bathhouse Law has affected gay male sexuality in adverse ways. In contrast to other institutions, such as the church and the nuclear family, Gardell's depiction of the healthcare institution presents it for the most part as sympathetic, but at the very least a stable and objective extension of the Swedish state. When all other institutions have broken down for characters like Benjamin in *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar*, sympathetic nurses and doctors, and the literal space of the hospital, become the sole support system.

The analysis presented in this study contests dominant gay rights discourses that consider state recognition of same-sex couples and non-normative families its ultimate goal. The

discussion has illuminated several instances in which the discourse has acted as a public relations project that seeks to present the ‘proper’ image of male homosexuality. The emphasis on the sociopolitical evolution of homosexuality as a discursively produced idea resists the dominant belief deployed through contemporary ‘born this way’ rhetoric, which celebrates the visibility and state recognition of same-sex relationships; the rhetoric also understands gay identity as incontrovertible. In the US context, the celebration of the essentialization of gay identity has been critiqued by queer theory; it has also been considered a symptom of neoliberalism in the way it examines the project of gay marriage and gays in the military. Warren J. Blumenfeld has critiqued the homonormativity within contemporary politics in his 2011 article “Revolution v. Reform: Moving beyond the ‘4 Ms’ of the LGB⁹⁶ Movement” and efficiently defined the four central tenets: marriage equality, military inclusion, media visibility, and making money (Blumenfeld 2011). My study has examined the ways in marriage equality, making money, and media visibility have played out in the Swedish context; military inclusion is absent from the Swedish discourse as gays have not been actively excluded from military service in Sweden. Dominant gay rights discourses in the US still focus on these 4 Ms; however, in the Swedish context, where economic status, the right to marry, and media visibility have been achieved, the discourse has shifted to exportation of these values to places like the Baltic States and Russia.

Unlike Jenny Björklund’s assertion of ambiguity in the literary discourse on lesbianism, my study demonstrates that the literary discourse on male homosexuality has seen a distinct break. Literary representations that appeared after the AIDS crisis have unanimously depicted both male homosexuality and gay identity as valid, legitimate, and stable. Jonas Gardell’s *Torka*

⁹⁶ Blumenfeld purposefully leaves out the ‘T’ from the commonly used acronym LGBT, arguing that not only is he unable to identify any sort of “mainstream” trans movement, but also that 4 Ms in their current LGB mainstream construction exclude trans people” (Blumenfeld 2011).

aldrig tårar utan handskar continues in the same vein, despite its setting thirty years in the past. Sara Edenheim's critique of the media discourse surrounding the trilogy incorporates approaches of queer theory and intersectionality into the debate, yet Gardell's trilogy and the recollection it demands are firmly rooted in the historical and political context of the 1980s.

Jonas Gardell's trilogy marks a crucial turning point in the history examined in my study and is the first work of gay literature that was not only consumed by broader audiences, but also by virtue of its ability to stimulate dominant cultural discourses. However, the overall cultural acceptability and assimilation of homosexuality in Sweden that facilitated the cultural discourse around Gardell's work today has not come without a price. The political and cultural rewards that come with assimilation have favored images of male homosexuality that mirror dominant bourgeois values, including conspicuous consumption, whiteness, and traditional displays of masculinity and maleness. Although Gardell's recollection only reflects the historical reality of AIDS for a particular segment of society, it has also inspired important and overdue conversations about race and class within gay rights discourses and the history of HIV/AIDS in Sweden.

Dominant Western discourse has been remiss in its recollection of the AIDS crisis as a centrally informative historical set of circumstances; my study rejects not only the dominant cultural amnesia of the AIDS crisis, but also the project of cultural amnesia undertaken by neoliberal and homonormative discourses. Dominant and gay cultural history in both Sweden and the US chart their genealogy to the visibility of homosexuality brought about by the Stonewall Riots in 1969, which resulted in state-sanctioned recognition of same-sex couples today. My analysis of the sociopolitical history and the literary discourse on male homosexuality in Sweden shows that the AIDS crisis played a central role in the production and circulation of

cultural understandings of homosexuality; it also produced several effects that necessitated the legal recognition of same-sex couples and the sanitization of cultural representations of male homosexuality.

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