

## ABSTRACT

Camilla Brudin Borg: *A Play of Shadows. Image Critique and Icon Aesthetics in the Authorship of Lars Gyllensten*. ISBN 91 7217 077-8

Dissertation in Swedish with an English summary, 302 p.

Department of Literature, Göteborg University, Sweden, 2005.

This dissertation addresses, on the one hand, Lars Gyllensten's fundamentally critical relationship to imagery and image interpretation. Throughout his literary career, in his fiction as well as in his polemic criticism in the press, Gyllensten has performed the role of iconoclast. On the other hand, his writing has continually involved the investigation and creation of images, often with the help of the visual arts. What is the relationship between Gyllensten the iconoclast and Gyllensten the creator of images – between image criticism and aesthetics? Contrary to earlier research, this thesis maintains that Gyllensten did not abandon his critique of imagery in the mid 1960's but rather continued beyond that period to act as image critic as well as image defender. The conclusion becomes apparent if the author's entire oeuvre – fiction, essays and critical articles – is considered.

The dissertation is ordered into three sections: Part One demonstrates how certain central metaphors can be understood to function as critical tools, rhetorical devices and 'meta-images', i.e. images reflecting the process of image-creation or representing the act of representation. From Gyllensten's early work, the text, the staged event and the metaphorical function of 'Camera obscura' are analyzed. Thereafter, the central metaphors 'Flesh' and 'Dance' in *Carnivora* (1953) are examined. The texts involved in this collection of fragments are seen as unified language games which, via metatextual strategies, offer interpretative instructions on various levels to the reader. The manner in which the text engages the visual arts is also explored in relation to *Carnivora* and to critical essays from early on in Gyllensten's writings. Part Two investigates the author's polemic cultural criticism in articles written for the press. Here it is shown that, even in this context, Gyllensten uses metaphorical language games. Particular emphasis is placed on his uses of the key iconoclastic concepts 'iconoclasy' ('ikonoklasi'), 'idol' and 'idolatry'. In so doing, the contemporary critical context relating to the positively-charged concept of icon is exposed. Part Three proposes to show how *In the shadow of Don Juan* (*I skuggan av Don Juan*, 1975) involves a meta-critique, i.e. a criticism directed at fruitless iconoclasm, which upheld the author's image criticism while displaying an attitude of image creation. The function of the concept of icon as another meta-image in the following novel, *Return of the shadow* (*Skuggans återkomst*, 1985), is then examined. Through the analysis of that novel's excessive use of meta-textual strategies, the aesthetics is shown to guide the reader's reception in the same way as was done in *Carnivora*. To that end, the investigation involves the analysis of a number of ekphrases whose function in the novel is to guide interpretation as well as to free it from mono-dimensionality. The novel's narrative structures are then compared to the orthodox church and its holy icons. Thus it is shown how the author allows conditions from the metaphor's (the icon's) original context to structure the way in which *Return of the shadow* can be opened for a myriad of interpretative paths. The result is a demonstration of a 'multi-dimensional' aesthetic offering the possibility of creative involvement in producing the work of art.

### Key words:

Lars Gyllensten, Don Juan, Goya, Toulouse-Lautrec, Cézanne, Degas, camera obscura, image, meta-image, metaphor, critique, theory of knowledge, aesthetics, ekphrasis, icon, iconoclasm, epiphany.

Department of Literature, Göteborg University, Box 200, SE-405 30 Göteborg, Sweden.

### Distribution:

Artos och Norma bokförlag, Kyrkstadsvägen 6, SE-931 33 Skellefteå, Sweden  
www.artos.se