

ABSTRACT

Katarina Leppänen: *Rethinking Civilisation in a European Feminist Context: History, Nature, Women in Elin Wägner's Väckarklocka*. Ph D Dissertation in English. 264 p. Department of History of Ideas and Theory of Science, Göteborg University, Göteborg, 2005. ISBN 91-7346-530-5

The purpose of this study is to analyse the ideas of the Swedish journalist, feminist, and literary author Elin Wägner (1882–1949), as conveyed in her book *Väckarklocka* (1941), in a European feminist context. This context is presented in terms of three elements. Firstly, the German sociologist/educationalist Mathilde Vaerting and her sociology of power played an important role in Wägner's development of a theory of matriarchy. Secondly, the influence of the Austrian feminist Rosa Mayreder and her theory of masculine civilisation and feminine culture are analysed in relation to Wägner's development of what might be called an early ecological feminism. Thirdly, the mainly unknown Women's Organisation for World Order (WOWO) is presented.

A central argument in this study is that by reading *Väckarklocka* in a European context, rather than a purely Swedish context, many of the ideas of the book appear more clearly as part of a larger political project which entailed a re-evaluation of the prevailing social order. The argument of *Väckarklocka* is part of the European feminist debate on matriarchy in the 1920s and 1930s, which wanted to strengthen women's position and confidence as political citizens by providing them with a historical past where women ruled (matriarchy). Thereby they not only reinvented a past, but also relativised the emergence or eternity of patriarchy.

These women discussed the possibility of women offering an alternative to the prevailing order. A special analysis is made of Mayreder's and Wägner's way of discussing what woman is and in what ways she can challenge the system. Both argued that women ought to have the same rights and duties as men, but that this should not require them to adapt to the distorted male system. This study argues that this position, easily characterised as "essentialist" in modern feminist terms, is in fact functional and strongly emancipatory in its time and context.

KEYWORDS: Elin Wägner, Rosa Mayreder, Mathilde Vaerting, Women's Organisation for World Order, Johann Jacob Bachofen, feminism, matriarchy, feminist essentialism, anti-essentialism, 1920s, 1930s, critique of civilisation, ecological feminism, eco-feminism, nature.