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Not Speaking or Acting as Anti-Social Feminism and Unbecoming Woman

A Queer Reading of Silence in Agnes von Krusenstjerna's Tony Trilogy

Abstract: The aim of this article is to explore the queer possibilities of the silence in the depiction of the protagonist's love life in Agnes von Krusenstjerna's Tony trilogy (1922–1926). The silence in the trilogy is manifested through absence: the theme of "ingenting" (nothing), the protagonist not speaking or acting, and the aesthetic that is created by interruptions in the protagonist's dialogue, inner monologue, and narration. The analysis focuses on three passages: a depiction of an encounter between Tony and one of her suitors, her relative Frank Maclean, in Tonys läroår (Tony's Apprenticeship, 1924); the ending of the trilogy in Tonys sista läroår (Tony's Last Apprenticeship, 1926); and an epilogue to the trilogy, which was never included in it but later published in the second, expanded edition of En dagdriverskas anteckningar (The Notes of a Flâneuse, 1934). They are contextualised with references to the trilogy as a whole and compared to Krusenstjerna's previous novels Ninas dagbok (The Diary of Nina, 1917) and Helenas första kärlek (Helena's First Love, 1918). The method is a close reading with instead of against the grain, focusing on queer aspects of depictions of heterosexuality. It draws on theory belonging to the anti-social turn of queer studies and queer temporality studies. My conclusion is that Tony not speaking or acting can be read as anti-social feminism, with Tony as an anti-social feminist subject. Her queer life schedule can be interpreted as unbecoming woman. The "nothing," and implicitly the creativity, that her passivity leads to accomplishes the opposite of patriarchal and chrononormative structures. The narrative and its ending are queer in the sense that they refuse to cohere and to fulfil demands for a happy, emancipatory ending.

Keywords: love, coming of age, girls, heterosexuality, queer theory, the anti-social turn, queer temporality, girls' fiction, Agnes von Krusenstjerna, Jack Halberstam

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In Swedish author Agnes von Krusenstjerna's Tony trilogy, the young female protagonist Tony Hastfehr remains passive and silent, which leads to anti-climaxes in the narrative.¹ This may seem negative or even anti-feminist at first glance, but can her silence have its own potential? The aim of this article is to explore the queer possibilities of silence in the depiction of the protagonist's love life. The Tony trilogy – which consists of *Tony växer upp* (Tony Grows Up, 1922), *Tonys läroår* (Tony's Apprenticeship, 1924), and *Tonys sista läroår* (Tony's Last Apprenticeship, 1926) – was published for adults but has a close connection to the girls' book genre, as shown below.

Reflections on silence are recurring in both children's and young adult literature and research on it (Joosen 34; Druker et al.) as well as in queer studies of children's novels (Weldy) and adult literature (Franck, "Vampyrens"). Children's literature scholar Vanessa Joosen suggests that silence in literature can be a theme as well as an aesthetic (25), and in this article I refer to it as both. The silence in the Tony trilogy is manifested through absence: the theme of "ingenting" (nothing), the protagonist not speaking or acting, and the aesthetic that is created by interruptions in the protagonist's dialogue, inner monologue, and narration. Joosen demonstrates that silence can exist in the form of "gaps" in the text where the narrative flow is interrupted (26). In the Tony trilogy, such gaps are created by dashes that mark the interruptions.

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

In this article, I make a queer reading of the silence in the depiction of Tony's love life. Queer readings originated in the early 1990s and focus on challenging heteronormativity. They involve a multitude of reading practices that exist side by side. Early readings were heavily influenced by feminist methods of reading "counter" to texts, uncovering what presumedly is hidden, whereas later readings also have been inspired by the critique of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," concentrating on the text's surface and making "reparative" readings (Björklund, "Queer" 8–10). My queer reading of the Tony trilogy is primarily inspired by this later type of readings. Like them, it is a reading *with* instead of *against* the grain, focusing on understanding what is present in the text rather than trying to reveal its hidden ideological content (see Björklund and Lönngren 197).

In queer readings, the norm-breaking potential is typically linked to LGBTQ+ lives and experiences (Björklund, *Maternal* 23). However, this article explores the queer aspects of Tony's heterosexual

love life.² This follows recent scholarly efforts to expand the use of queer theory in exploring heterosexuality that does not conform to heterosexual norms (Björklund, *Maternal* 23–24). These efforts take place in an English (Jeremiah; Carroll; Björklund, *Maternal*; Österholm, “Rainbow,” “The Pain”) as well as Swedish-language context (Franck, *Frigjord*; Österholm, *Ett flicklaboratorium*; Jakobsson, *Jag*; Classon Frangos and Österholm). There are also scholars analysing heterosexuality as both normative and norm-breaking outside of queer studies (Beasley et al.).

My queer reading mainly draws on theory belonging to the so-called anti-social turn in queer studies and queer temporality studies. Jack Halberstam’s notion of anti-social feminism is used to analyse the silence in the Tony trilogy, whereas queer temporality theory is used to connect it to notions of growth and the “life schedule” (Halberstam, *In a Queer* 1). Halberstam is one of the theorists behind the anti-social turn in queer studies, where thinking shifts “away from projects of redemption, reconstruction, restoration and reclamation and towards what can only be called an anti-social, negative and anti-relational theory of sexuality” (“The Anti-Social” 140). This is the point of departure for Halberstam’s notion of “anti-social feminism,” also called “shadow feminism” (*The Queer Art* 124, 129). In *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Halberstam wishes to dismantle the logics of success and failure and explore what creative ways of being that are offered by actions considered negative, such as failing, losing, forgetting, undoing, unbecoming, and not knowing (2–3). Anti-social feminism, “a feminism grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence, and silence, offers spaces and modes of unknowing, failing, and forgetting as part of an alternative feminist project,” Halberstam claims (124).

Halberstam finds that failure, paradoxically, is often better than success when it comes to feminism. A successful femininity adheres to patriarchal standards whereas a gender failure can liberate one from patriarchal demands. Not succeeding at womanhood can therefore lead to unexpected pleasures. Falling outside of patriarchal norms means that it is possible to “re-create” the meaning of one’s gender (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 4). Halberstam claims that anti-social feminism for a long time has been the haunting shadow of “the more acceptable forms of feminism that are oriented to positivity, reform, and accommodation rather than negativity, rejection, and transformation” (4). This article investigates if the Tony trilogy’s silence, which at first glance may seem negative and maybe even anti-feminist, can be read as an expression of this anti-social feminism.

Queer temporality theory reveals that not only gender and sexuality but also time is of essence in terms of what is considered as conforming to and defying heterosexual norms. This for example regards the organisation of time in a life, such as getting married and having children when being of the “right” age. In *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), Halberstam demonstrates that certain life schedules make some lives seem more intelligible and valuable than others (1–21). Queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman coins the term “chrononormativity” to signify normativity connected to time. Freeman shows that chrononormativity is a process by which “institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts” and that for example schedules, calendars, time zones, and wrist-watches create “forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege” (3).

These theoretical notions form the basis of my queer reading of the Tony trilogy. Because of my anti-social feminist perspective, I analyse passages in the Tony trilogy that may be interpreted as negative or where previous studies have discussed their negativity, especially in relation to the trilogy’s ending. Consequently, my theoretical approach is the reason why I pay particular attention to the ending of the trilogy. I use feminist literature scholar Maria Margareta Österholm’s notion of a queer ending, which does not fulfil feminist literature scholars’ demand for a happy, emancipatory ending. Close readings of the following three passages are conducted: a depiction of an encounter between Tony and one of her suitors, her relative Frank Maclean, in *Tonys läroår*; the ending of the trilogy in *Tonys sista läroår*; and an epilogue to the trilogy, which was never included in it but later published in the second, expanded edition of *En dagdriver-skas anteckningar* (The Notes of a Flâneuse, 1934), a collection of short stories and other texts by the author first published in 1923. By *close reading* I refer to a reading close to the sources, where I examine them thoroughly, concentrating on details such as punctuation and its effect on the text’s temporality. I use Scandinavian languages scholar Alva Dahl’s ideas about punctuation, especially the use of dashes, to explore whether Krusenstjerna’s use of dashes is queer and what effect it has on the text. How the dashes influence the text’s temporality is discussed through children’s literature scholar Derritt Mason’s notion of an anxious “stall-and-start temporality” (18).

While these three relatively short sections of text are my focus, I contextualise them with references to the Tony trilogy as a whole to show that they are typical for it. Due to my anti-social feminist perspective, my aim is to let what can be perceived as negative, stay

negative. This brings with it a critical stance to some previous research that in my opinion has wanted to renegotiate the negativity by putting a positive spin on it, which I return to in the analysis. Because I draw on Halberstam's ideas about the potential of anti-social feminism, I focus on exploring what possibilities the negativity may bring.

In order to discuss whether the Tony trilogy's narrative and Tony's life schedule can be interpreted as queer, comparisons are made with Krusenstjerna's previous novels *Ninas dagbok* (The Diary of Nina, 1917) and *Helenas första kärlek* (Helena's First Love, 1918), with emphasis on their narrative structure as well as the protagonists Nina's and Helena Willner's life schedules.³ My doctoral dissertation's findings on *Ninas dagbok* and *Helenas första kärlek* function as a backdrop to this article's conclusions about the Tony trilogy, where applicable complemented by references to the two novels.

Reception and Previous Research

Krusenstjerna mainly published novels but also short stories, essays, and poems. She started her career in the late 1910s with the novels *Ninas dagbok* and *Helenas första kärlek*. They were received as literature for girls by her contemporary critics, although they had not been published specifically as such (Westin, "Patriarkatet" 20–22). "Flickbok" (girls' book) was at the time an established Swedish term primarily used for young adult literature aimed at girls (Westin, "Flickboken"; Theander 17–20). Although Krusenstjerna's first two novels were called girls' books, they really exist in a *borderland of the girls' book*. That is, a middle ground between young adult literature and adult literature where many works considered young adult classics are positioned under labels such as girls' literature, reading for girls, or romance. It consists of works that, like Krusenstjerna's, have been connected to girls even though they have never been published specifically for this age group. It also consists of texts that at some points in time have been published for adults and at others for young adults (Jakobsson, *Jag* 19–20).

When the Tony trilogy was published, Krusenstjerna was both criticised and praised for it. This differed from the reception of her previous girls' books, which were not taken as seriously. As opposed to *Ninas dagbok* and *Helenas första kärlek*, the novels in the trilogy were not received as girls' books by the reviewers. They were compared to the genre but regarded as unsuitable for girl readers because of their explicit depiction of sexuality and mental illness (Jakobsson,

Jag 22–27). The critic Anders Österling even called *Tony växer upp* a “flickroman – icke skriven för flickor” (girls’ novel – not written for girls).⁴ Tony was considered too curious about eroticism and the reviewers were resistant to seeing the protagonist as a representative for real-life girls. At the publication of the second part of the series, *Tonys läroår*, the critics were split into two groups: one that considered the depiction of illness important and credible, and another that criticised the novel for being too fixated on the subject. Among other things it was criticised for not separating health from illness and for not depicting Tony critically enough (Williams, *Från* 190, 193).

However, at the publication of the trilogy’s final part, *Tonys sista läroår*, where Tony’s illness culminates in her stay in a mental hospital, the critique changed. Critics found that what Krusenstjerna had wanted to depict all along was the trajectory to mental illness. Therefore, they were now more positive to the trilogy as a whole. Krusenstjerna was seen as immutably truthful and as an author who could go far. Although she had written about a young woman on the outskirts of everyday life, she was considered a modern portrayer of women, able to measure the psychological depths of humanity (Williams, *Från* 194). All in all, Krusenstjerna was considered to have deepened her writing since *Ninas dagbok* and *Helenas första kärlek* and the latter were, thereafter, referred to as her adolescent writing (Järvstad 19).⁵

The Tony trilogy was the first work by Krusenstjerna taken more seriously by contemporary literary critics, which is also reflected in earlier research. *Ninas dagbok* and *Helenas första kärlek* only started to receive serious scholarly attention in the 1990s. They had not been the key primary sources of any longer studies before my 2018 dissertation on Krusenstjerna’s early works, which criticised this (Jakobsson, *Jag*). The Tony trilogy is addressed in monographs and articles about Krusenstjerna’s authorship at large (e.g. Backberger, “Vi,” “Samhällsklass”; Mazzarella; Williams, *Från*). Furthermore, the trilogy is the main focus of attention in several articles and book chapters (e.g. Järvstad; Jakobsson, *Jag*). Rita Paqvalén and Jenny Björklund (*Lesbianism*) have made significant contributions to the queer studies on Krusenstjerna.

The girls’ book tradition as well as Krusenstjerna’s fondness for Louisa May Alcott are repeatedly mentioned in the research on her work (e.g. Svanberg; Mazzarella; Williams, *Från*), but only rarely explored as the sole subject of a study (Westin, “Patriarkatet”) until the publication of my dissertation. The dissertation positions Krusenstjerna’s early works in a girls’ book context and discusses the female protagonists’ coming of age in encountering love and sexuality. The

dissertation has a feminist and queer perspective on temporality and problematises notions of growth (cf. Trites) that recur in previous research on the Tony trilogy. It shows that it is typical for Tony not to speak or act in her romantic relationships and that this is especially the case with Frank, which is why their relationship is not even realised (Jakobsson, *Jag* 182–183). This article builds on these findings on Tony's and Frank's relationship and thereby expands the dissertation's discussion on silence as related to anti-social feminism.⁶

Sources and Background: Love and Coming of Age in Krusenstjerna's Early Novels

The Tony trilogy is narrated retrospectively by the protagonist Tony, who belongs to the Swedish nobility. Tony is an androgynous name, generally short for Anthony or Antonia. It was an unusual given name in Sweden when Krusenstjerna wrote the trilogy and did not catch on until mid-20th century ("Tony"). The series depicts Tony's life from childhood until she is just over 20 years old and focuses on her battle with hereditary mental illness. The diary novel *Ninas dagbok* is narrated by 18-year-old Nina chronologically and in intervals, whereas *Helenas första kärlek* about 20-year-old Helena is narrated in the third person. The novels depict the protagonists coming of age by encountering love, which is recurring in the girls' book tradition (Toft 9; Josefsson 262–263; Westin, "Patriarkatet"; Theander 91–123; Jakobsson, "Att skilja"). The protagonists Nina and Helena come of age as they are courted by two men, awakened erotically, and make a choice in love between the two suitors. Their maturation is generally marked by the word "kvinna" (woman), which is then used to describe them instead of the word "flicka" (girl) (Jakobsson, *Jag* 43–99).⁷ The choice of Mr Right over his seductive but dangerous foil marks the happy ending of both novels. Mr Right is an idealised man who, it gradually turns out, is able to provide the protagonist with everything that she wants and needs (Jakobsson, *Jag* 43–99).

The Tony trilogy initially follows the same narrative pattern, typical of the girls' book tradition, but differs from it in significant ways. Tony's sexual awakening is portrayed as risky and she has an erotically charged relationship with her classmate Maud Borck, who is later expelled from the all-girls school for having seduced a younger student. Although Tony is courted by two men, she does not make a choice in love. Her coming of age is thereby not depicted like Nina's and Helena's; instead it is looping and never reaches an endpoint (Jakobsson, *Jag* 103). When Tony realises that she is in love with

her relative Frank, she understands that she is a “kvinna” (woman) (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys läroår* 261). But later, when she is engaged to Herbert Holst and has been institutionalised in a mental hospital, she is called “en halv vuxen hysterisk flicka” (a half grown, hysterical girl) (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys läroår* 389). Tony is linked to women and womanhood in her romantic relationship with her doctor Thure Iller, but when the relationship ends and Tony is in another mental hospital, she is called a girl again (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys sista* 132, 136–137, 185; Jakobsson, *Jag* 103). Consequently, Tony fails to reproduce Nina’s and Helena’s chrononormative life schedules.

An Afternoon in Frank’s Room: Not Speaking or Acting as Anti-Social Feminism

Frank is Tony’s distant relative who lives in England. Tony meets him when they are both staying with their older relative Constance Hastfehr in the Swedish countryside, in an isolated house in the forest. Frank is described as a tall and broad-shouldered young gentleman, with an unusually beautiful, slightly pale face. He has a brutal, wilful mouth and a robust, round chin. Frank speaks Swedish but with a foreign accent that Tony finds charming (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys läroår* 249–251). In being beautiful and attractive at first glance, Frank resembles the seductive and dangerous foils in *Ninas dagbok* and *Helenas första kärlek* rather than their Mr Rights (Jakobsson, *Jag* 64–99). Krusenstjerna scholar Kristin Järvstad notes that Frank is like a fantasy and that the love between him and Tony seems impossible (49, 69). Similarly, Tony does not think of Frank as a husband-to-be but fantasises about him becoming her lover (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys läroår* 268). However, a relationship between them is depicted as impossible to realise.

The encounter between Tony and Frank that is explored here takes place during an afternoon when Tony visits Frank in his room in Constance’s house. Tony stands between Frank and his table to look at his photographs. The moment is charged and filled with erotic possibilities:

Men strax bakom mig, så nära att hans knän snuddade vid min kjol, satt Frank. Jag hade bara behövt stiga ett steg tillbaka för att vara i hans famn. Men jag stod orörlig. Den där famnen bakom mig lockade och drog. Å, att trycka sig in mot den tätt, tätt, så att mina lemmar skulle omslutas av de där andra, starka, att inandas den fräna cigarett-doften från rockuppslaget och veta, att den där älskade, underbara munnen log mot mitt hår...

(Just behind me, so close that his knees touched my skirt, was Frank. I only needed to take one step back to be in his arms. But I stood frozen. Those arms behind me enticed me and drew me in. Oh, to squeeze oneself against them tight, tight, so that my limbs were embraced by those other, strong, ones, to inhale the rank smell of cigarettes from his lapel and to know, that his beloved, wonderful mouth smiled against my hair...) (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys läroår* 272)

Instead of taking that one step back and realising these possibilities, Tony is immobile. Passivity is significant for Jack Halberstam's definition of anti-social feminism (*The Queer Art* 124). Whereas acting may be considered more feminist, not acting may also have consequences that change the turn of events, such as hindering or allowing something to happen. Here, the outcome is that nothing happens between Tony and Frank, although it could have, had Tony responded in another way. After freezing and thus hindering a possible erotic union, Tony starts to leave: "Jag vände mig om. Ingen av oss rörde sig på ett ögonblick, och så steg jag åt sidan och gick mot dörren" (I turned around. For a moment neither of us moved, and then I took a step to the side and went to the door) (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys läroår* 272).

Tony then remembers that she went looking for Frank as a favour for Constance. But the text never reveals what Constance wanted Tony to tell Frank because she stops speaking in the middle of a sentence: "Jag glömde mitt ärende, sade jag litet svävande. Constance ville visst - - -" (I forgot my errand, I said vaguely. I think Constance wanted - - -) (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys läroår* 272). The sudden interruption in Tony's dialogue is marked by three dashes. Alva Dahl claims that punctuation is an important but largely overseen part of literary textual processes and analysis. Dahl finds that the meaning of punctuation is dependent on its specific context, the text in which it occurs, but that there also are similarities between different works (11, 13). For instance, Dahl interprets the punctuation of Monika Fagerholm's experimental novel *Diva* (1998) as queer. Fagerholm mixes upper- and lower-case letters, as well as boldface and roman type letters. This creates an anti-system with vague and contradictory rules that makes previously invisible language norms visible, which Dahl considers queer (105).

However, Krusenstjerna's three dashes are not queer in the same way as Fagerholm's punctuation. In *Tonys läroår*, the use of three (and in some cases two) dashes highlights that something is omitted or interrupted, which according to Dahl is an established way of using dashes (166). The use of two or more dashes is most common in the first part of the trilogy, relatively common in the second part

(eleven instances), and less so in its last part. In *Tonys läroår*, most instances of two or more dashes occur in dialogue (seven) but a few are also included in the protagonist's inner monologue during the time of the events (two) or the narrator's account after the events (two). Usually – like in Tony's line about Constance's errand – the dashes mark what cannot be said or is difficult to say (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys läroår* 208, 227, 229, 265, 282, 303, 320, 387). This points back to what is written before the dashes, implying a possible inference and inspiring the reader to fill the gaps (Dahl 166, 179, 181). At the same time, by emphasising omissions and signalling that they carry a deeper meaning, the dashes increase the novels' impression of silence, which is typical for the concept of anti-social feminism (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 124).

Vanessa Joosen defines literary scholar Wolfgang Iser's term "*Leerstellen* or 'gaps' [...]" as moments when the flow of the narrative is interrupted and when various possibilities for combination and interpretation are opened up" (26). The dashes in Tony's dialogue create such gaps, interrupting both the flow and the temporality of the narrative. Derritt Mason shows that the contemporary queer young adult (YA) novels that he studies from a queer anti-social and temporal perspective are characterised by a "stall-and-start temporality" which he calls anxious and views as an expression of the queer child's desire for delay (18, 31). The dashes explored here reinforce this kind of anxious stall-and-start temporality that causes delay and is thus a part of Tony's queer life schedule.

The three dashes in Tony's dialogue can be compared to the use of multiple dashes in *Ninas dagbok* and *Helenas första kärlek*, which is not as extensive as in the Tony trilogy. Except for signalling interruption in dialogue or narration, the dashes tend to mark silence where a declaration of love could have been inserted. For example, in her diary Nina implies that she has already chosen one of her suitors but instead of explicitly writing it, this is marked by nine dashes (Krusenstjerna, *Ninas* 144). Similarly, in *Helenas första kärlek* thirteen dashes follow a mutual declaration of love ending with a kiss, instead of the narrator explaining what happens next (Krusenstjerna, *Helenas* 205). Children's literature scholar Boel Westin claims that girls' books contain a silenced and forbidden subtext about eroticism; the longing for touch, ardour, passion, and corporeality ("*Patriarkatet*" 29–30), in these two cases manifested in the use of multiple dashes. However, this is not the same silence as in the Tony trilogy, which is more explicit about sexuality. Tony's longing for eroticism is depicted in the novel, but a mutual erotic encounter

never comes to pass between her and Frank. Nothing is decided between Tony and Frank, the closest to a decision they get is an outcry from Frank just as they are about to leave his room to go to Constance:

Långsamt reste han sig:

- Det är väl bäst vi gå ned då.

I dörren vände han sig mot mig.

- Älskling! sade han plötsligt på sitt egendomliga sätt. Älskling!

Och det var, som om det där enda ordet brutit fram över hans läppar mot hans egen vilja.

(He slowly rose:

- I guess we better go down then.

He turned to me in the doorway.

- Darling! he suddenly said in his peculiar way. Darling!

And it was as though that one word burst from his lips against his own will.) (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys läroår* 272)

However, as this does not generate a response from Tony it does not lead to anything more.

The depiction of the afternoon in Frank's room is characterised by Tony not acting - by not taking a step back into Frank's arms - and not speaking - by not finishing her sentence about Constance's errand and not responding to Frank's half-sung declaration of love. Accordingly, the encounter between the two is shown to have possibilities that are never realised. This theme, which is recurring in the Tony trilogy, is marked by the word nothing: "Sedan blev det ingenting mer" (Then there was nothing more) (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys läroår* 272).

Tony not speaking or acting may come across as impotence. In the trilogy as a whole, Tony is not able to utter that which, as stated in the narrative, is inside her. Neither is she able to act according to what may seem like the narrative logic: to utter her thoughts, act according to her wishes, and be a cohesive subject (Jakobsson, *Jag* 138-151). This type of subject is typical for anti-social feminism. In the queer feminist genealogy that Halberstam calls anti-social, he finds "no feminist subject but only subjects who cannot speak, who refuse to speak; subjects who unravel, who refuse to cohere" (*The Queer Art* 126). This is characteristic of Tony - who does not speak or act, and who is not cohesive - but also of the narrative itself. In the depiction of the afternoon in Frank's room, the narrative builds up anticipation of a climax that never happens.

How, then, can this incoherence of the Tony trilogy itself and of its protagonist be understood? Through the notion of anti-social feminism, Halberstam wishes to find “feminist frameworks capable of recognizing the political project articulated in the form of refusal” and brings up a “politics of refusal” (*The Queer Art* 126). The term anti-social feminism thereby functions as a tool to recognise Tony’s and the narrative’s refusal to cohere as a political project. With Halberstam, Tony’s passivity and silence can be interpreted as the queer negativity and negation that anti-social feminism is preoccupied with (*The Queer Art* 129). It can even be seen as radical:

In a liberal realm where the pursuit of happiness [...] is both desirable and mandatory and where certain formulations of self (as active, voluntaristic, choosing, propulsive) dominate the political sphere, radical passivity may signal another kind of refusal: the refusal quite simply to be. (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 140)

The Trilogy’s Queer Ending: Queer Narrative and Life Schedule

The silence, as represented by the theme of “nothing” mentioned above, recurs in what I call the queer ending of the Tony trilogy:

På natten låg jag vaken och lyssnade till vågornas sorl. Jag blev själv ett med dessa oroliga, mörka böljor. Jag sjönk ned bland dem, slungades upp på fräsande vågkammar och dök in i svarta djup. Himlens ljusa och mörka skyar speglade sig i mig, vinden drev mig maktlös framåt eller kastade mig tillbaka. Jag längtade efter en strand att sjunka in mot eller en klippa att vila på, men jag fann *ingenting*.

Då grät jag, därför att jag inte hade något fäste.

(At night I lay awake and listened to the sound of the waves. I myself became one with these restless, dark waters. I sank down among them, was thrown up on their sizzling crests and dove down into black depths. The sky’s light and dark clouds were mirrored in me, the wind propelled me powerless forward or threw me back. I longed for a shore to sink into or a rock to rest on, but I found *nothing*.

Then I cried, because I had no solid ground.) (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys sista* 322, italics mine)

Järvstad sees development in a positive direction and a happy – or at least a promising – ending in the Tony trilogy. This is connected to Järvstad’s ambition to approach the series as a novel of development and argue against the view of it as deterministic (19–20, 82–87, 257). I, however, claim that these are expectations that the trilogy

refuses to fulfil, which is an aspect of its incoherence. In this sense, it is similar to the kind of narrative that Halberstam explores in the chapter “Dude, Where’s My Phallus: Forgetting, Losing, Looping” in *The Queer Art of Failure* (cf. Jakobsson, *Jag* 150). Here, Halberstam explores narratives characterised by incessant temporal loops with “new (and failed) attempt[s] to advance, progress, and accumulate knowledge” (61) but where there is no developmental logic (62). In this sense, the Tony trilogy’s narrative follows a logic of “failure” and is queer as opposed to chrononormative.

The whole trilogy is centred around the theme of “nothing” as well as Tony not speaking or acting. This is something that follows the Tony trilogy’s own narrative logic. The series highlights doing and finding “nothing” as well as the unbecoming that Halberstam describes (*The Queer Art* 129). Tony’s life schedule – in which she does not become a woman once and for all, but where the coming of age instead is looping and never reaches an endpoint – can be compared to queer scholar Kathryn Bond Stockton’s concept “growing sideways,” that is “ways of growing that are not growing up” (11). The term critiques normative notions of growth; growing until one is of full stature and “grow[ing] up” from innocence (Stockton 11–12; cf. Malewski). Tony’s life schedule can also be seen as what Halberstam terms “unbecoming women” (*The Queer Art* 125) and views as a result of losing the mother (123–125). The texts that Halberstam examines in relation to anti-social feminism “refuse to think back through the mother; they actively and passively lose the mother, abuse the mother, love, hate, and destroy the mother” (125). Anti-social feminism refuses the bond of mother and daughter, and thus ends the reproduction of patriarchal forms of power, although the resistance is passive (124).

In the diegesis, Tony loses her mother early on in a literal sense. Tony’s mother is an example of a horrifying female destiny. She is mentally ill and has never been able to see or communicate with Tony as she is completely apathetic. In the trilogy, this has a deeper meaning as it means that Tony has never been looked at with a loving gaze. When her mother dies in bed at the end of the first part of the series, Tony is still a young girl. In a sense, Tony is described as though she unbecomes along with her dead mother: “Tonys uppväxt var nu förbi; Tony skulle nu förbrinna” (Tony’s coming of age was now over; Tony was about to be consumed) (Krusenstjerna, *Tony växer* 367). In what seems like a psychosis, Tony wanders off alone after her mother’s funeral and is finally happy when she thinks that she sees her mother’s loving gaze before her. If Tony’s mother’s death implies

that Tony loses her and thereby unbecomes woman, in Halberstam's sense, it is obvious that it is positive for Tony to avoid repeating her mother's fate.

Outside of the diegesis, however, the protagonists of *Ninas dagbok* and *Helenas första kärlek* can be seen as Tony's precursors and thus mothers. This goes along with Halberstam's discussion of mothers and daughters in the feminist movement, not only in a familial sense (*The Queer Art* 124–125). In what way would Tony benefit from losing her mothers in this sense and unbecome woman, considering that Nina and Helena appear to be much more fortunate than Tony herself? In *Ninas dagbok* and *Helenas första kärlek* there seem to be only two choices for the young female protagonists: to choose one of the two men who courts her. Choosing Mr Right will lead to marriage and a happy ending, choosing his foil may lead to disaster. Both Nina and Helena, in a long line of girls' book heroines, manage to choose Mr Right and thus secure a bright future. But what if that future – marriage and starting a family – was not bright?

Halberstam discusses characters who, with feminine naïveté, refuse the two options that are portrayed as the only ones (*The Queer Art* 128–129). Halberstam writes:

I am proposing that feminists refuse the choices as offered [...] in order to think about a shadow archive of resistance, one that does not speak in the language of action and momentum but instead articulates itself in terms of evacuation, refusal, passivity, unbecoming, unbeing. (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 129)

This is precisely what Tony does, passively, by choosing neither Frank nor Herbert, who nonetheless later becomes her fiancé before they break up. Although the trilogy portrays love as liberating for the female subject (Jakobsson, *Jag* 134–137), Tony considers the actual possibilities for love and desire that she is faced with either impossible, as shown above with Frank, or boring, with Herbert. By not choosing between the two and thus refusing to follow in the footsteps of her forerunners Nina and Helena as well as of her mother in the diegesis, Tony refuses to partake in the patriarchal system of love. This is, in Halberstam's words, "a refusal to be or to become woman as she has been defined and imagined within Western philosophy" (*The Queer Art* 124). Tony tries to choose another, in the diegesis unarticulated, option.

One of many other examples of this shadow archive of resistance is the fate of Jo March in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868–

1869). Like many scholars have emphasised, Alcott did not want to marry Jo off but was pushed to do so by her publisher and readers (Quimby 9–10). Alcott was not able, like Krusenstjerna in the Tony trilogy, to let her protagonist refuse that choice. Nevertheless, as the author herself explained her heroine's destiny, Alcott "out of perversity went and made a funny match for her" (qtd. in Quimby 10). Accordingly, Alcott let Jo resist in the only way possible: by letting Jo marry an ugly, old professor instead of her close friend Laurie. In this manner, Alcott queers the ending and thereby the narrative of *Little Women* to the best of her abilities.

In the process of destroying the mother, Halberstam argues, anti-social feminists "produce a theoretical and imaginative space that is 'not woman' or that can be occupied only by unbecoming women" (*The Queer Art* 125). What space does Tony access in refusing the only choices offered to her? Tony's never-ending coming of age is difficult in the trilogy. When she does not choose either Frank or Herbert, she becomes mentally ill and spends time in mental institutions. She also finds herself in destructive sexual relationships and situations, where she is or risks to be used and abused. However, the theoretical and imaginative space that Halberstam outlines can be said to be occupied by the trilogy rather than Tony as an, in this sense, unfortunate character in the diegesis. Along the lines of Halberstam, I argue that the "nothing" that the trilogy is centred around has a value of its own. Although Tony cannot escape the patriarchal structures in the diegesis, she can refuse to act within them. Her only possible rebellion is passivity. The "nothing" that Tony's passive, silent position leads to constitutes the opposite of the position that the patriarchal structures, dictating the lives and possibilities of women of her time, construct as desirable. Tony thus terminates her maternal legacy of patriarchal love and marriage, which for her mother in the diegesis has led to ruin, but for her forerunners Nina and Helena seems to be joyful – although all-consuming. As opposed to Nina and Helena, Tony does not marry and also writes her own story in the form of the series.⁸ The Tony trilogy thereby "fails" to end by making Tony a happy or emancipated woman – she is unhappy, fails in love, and seems passive, but she is apparently a budding writer.

The ending of the Tony trilogy is, I argue, what Maria Margareta Österholm calls a queer – in her own words "skewed" – ending.⁹ In her dissertation, a queer reading of depictions of norm-breaking girls in contemporary Swedish-language literature for adults, Österholm defines a queer ending as an ending that is not utopian and

emancipatory although the narrative that precedes it may have such traits (*Ett flicklaboratorium* 284–286). Österholm builds on feminist literature scholar Lisbeth Larsson who shows that feminist literature research from different time periods requests a compulsory happy ending from its sources. What is considered an emancipatory, happy ending differs throughout history, but the demand for one remains (Larsson 22). Järvstad's wish to emphasise the positive aspects of the Tony trilogy and its ending can be understood from this perspective. I do not agree with Järvstad's claims that Tony's illness is no longer a threat at the end of the trilogy, that she develops in a positive way, and that Tony's lack of solid ground in the concluding lines shows that she is not firmly attached to her illness either (83–84, 257). Nevertheless, I agree with Järvstad's conclusion that the ending is open and complex (84). Järvstad writes that the end of the trilogy demonstrates that Krusenstjerna has written "beyond the ending," like other female authors from the same period who wanted to explore other possibilities for their heroines than being either married or dead (84, 258). The queer ending of the Tony trilogy is not a happy, utopian, and emancipatory one, and thus does not meet the demand from feminist literature research, identified by Larsson, of a compulsory happy ending. It is complex and does not provide any answers.

The Epilogue: An Alternative, Straight Ending

The open ending of the Tony trilogy made Krusenstjerna's contemporary literary critics ask if it would be continued. They created their own endings where Tony, through romantic requited love, would find solid ground to build her life on (Järvstad 19). Later Krusenstjerna published an alternative ending to the series in the form of an epilogue titled "Tonys epilog till Tony" (Tony's Epilogue to Tony) in the second, expanded edition of *En dagdriverskas anteckningar* (Edfelt, "Efterskrift" *Tonys sista* 348–349). Although the epilogue was published in 1934, it is dated May 1926, which is approximately six months before *Tonys sista läroår* was published (Edfelt, "Efterskrift" *Tonys sista* 349). If the date is accurate, Krusenstjerna could not have taken part of her contemporary critics' request for a new ending when she wrote the epilogue, even if their wish could have influenced her decision to publish the short text.

Johannes Edfelt, the editor of Krusenstjerna's *Samlade skrifter* (Collected Works), claims that she had intended to include the epilogue in the trilogy, but he does not discuss why she did not or why she later chose to publish it in *En dagdriverskas anteckningar* ("Efterskrift"

En dagdriverskas 543). In Krusenstjerna's letters from the late 1920s, after the publication of the Tony trilogy, it is apparent that she considers continuing the series. Krusenstjerna writes that she is not finished with the trilogy, although others may feel that way, and that she intends to prolong it, even though she obviously did not publish another part (*Och jag* 151, 162–163). While Krusenstjerna made small adjustments to the Tony trilogy before the publication of a new edition in 1938, she apparently did not add the epilogue (497).

In stark contrast to the open ending of the Tony trilogy, the epilogue depicts requited heterosexual love. This alternative ending is described as a present moment, after the events of the novels have come to pass, in which Tony examines what she has written:

– Du har inte skrivit om det sista, viskar en röst inom mig.

Nej, det har jag inte. Det är det närvarande. Det är nuet, som jag lever i. [...] Men jag är inte heller så säker på att jag inte yppat allt. Medan jag läser vad jag skrivit ned här, ser jag någon framför mig. Hans ansikte är lyssnande böjt emot mig. Det ansiktet är mig mycket kärt. Därför möter det mig vid varje blad jag vänder, fastän jag inte nämnt ett ord om det.

(– You have not written about the last thing, a voice inside me whispers.

No, I have not. That is the present. That is the moment, which I live in. [...] But all the same, I am not so sure that I have not revealed everything. When I read what I have written here, I see someone before me. His face is bent, listening, towards me. That face is most dear to me. Therefore, it meets me on each page I turn, even though I have not mentioned a word about it.) (Krusenstjerna, *En dagdriverskas* 319)

This is an example of another kind of silence than the one I have hitherto explored, which if taken into account rewrites the entire Tony trilogy. Whereas the silence I have discussed is manifested through absence, the epilogue wishes to fill this absence. The epilogue inscribes the face of a beloved “han” (him), which I interpret as a man not mentioned in the series itself, onto every page of it. It could, therefore, be seen as an attempt to straighten out the trilogy's queer narrative.

In the epilogue, Tony then summarises, in the past tense, that she has been drifting in a dark night, driven here and there by her anxious heart. She was close to being consumed by the shadow on her path but then, in the spring, she met the aforementioned man. She continues by recounting her memory of that spring as well as of going up the man's stairs to meet him, this time in the present tense:

Jag skall vara hans. Alla dessa trevande och sökande år äro slut, därför att han väntar på mig. Tyst, jag hör en dörr öppnas. Det är hans dörr. Äntligen är jag där! Ett par händer fatta mig och dra mig in genom den öppnade dörren.

(I shall be his. All these fumbling and searching years are over, because he waits for me. Be quiet, I hear a door opening. It is his door. I am finally there! A pair of hands grabs me and pulls me through the opened door.) (Krusenstjerna, *En dagdriverskas* 320)

Requited heterosexual love is thereby implied and portrayed as Tony's salvation and the happy end of her struggle, which is depicted in the trilogy. Had this been included in the Tony trilogy's ending, it would have been a straight as opposed to a queer one.

Krusenstjerna scholar Merete Mazzarella asks herself why the epilogue was not included in *Tonys sista läroår*. Mazzarella connects the man in the epilogue to Krusenstjerna's husband and speculates that the author might not have wanted to further emphasise the autobiographical traits of the trilogy, and that she might have had ambivalent feelings towards her husband. Additionally, Mazzarella reflects that the epilogue might have been too idyllic for Krusenstjerna's taste (69–70). However, I argue that the epilogue stands in stark contrast to the Tony trilogy as a whole. First, it does not fit with the beginning of the trilogy. In what is depicted as the present moment of her starting to write the series, Tony states that she does not know if she will live much longer despite her young age (Krusenstjerna, *Tony växer* 9). This statement of impending doom can be contrasted to the epilogue's stance that Tony "var" (was) close to being consumed by the shadow on her path but now "skall vara" (shall be) his. Whereas the beginning of the trilogy conveys that Tony does not have a future, the epilogue seems to, trustingly, look ahead. Furthermore, the epilogue does not follow the narrative logic of the series. The theme of "nothing" is recurring in the novels, as Tony writes in the trilogy's ending, discussed above: "jag fann ingenting" (I found nothing) (Krusenstjerna, *Tonys sista* 322). The epilogue, on the other hand, shows that there is indeed something for Tony: a straight ending through requited heterosexual love. Apart from straightening out the series' queer ending, the epilogue might also have straightened out Tony's queer life schedule, by inscribing on it that which marks the point of no return for her forerunners' coming of age in Krusenstjerna's previous novels: a stable, heterosexual relationship that is implied to last forever.

Conclusion

By not speaking or acting, Tony can be read as an anti-social feminist subject. Her queer life schedule can be interpreted as unbecoming woman. The “nothing,” and implicitly the creativity, that her passivity leads to accomplishes the opposite of patriarchal and chrononormative structures. The narrative and its ending are queer in the sense that they refuse to cohere and to fulfil demands for a happy, emancipatory ending.

Consequently, the trilogy’s anti-social feminism constitutes a move away from Krusenstjerna’s first two girls’ books. Several Krusenstjerna scholars, including myself, have claimed that Krusenstjerna in her collected works addresses issues related to women in feminist ways and thereby indirectly contributes to feminist theory (Williams, *Tillträde* 107–108; Paqvalén 13–14, 311; Björklund, *Lesbianism* 45–46; Jakobsson, *Jag* 33–36). In my dissertation, I show that *Ninas dagbok* and *Helenas första kärlek*, despite their heteronormativity, can be seen as part of a tradition where feminist authors, since the 19th century, prophetically present new, ideal forms of love. Feminist authors following this tradition could also, like Krusenstjerna in the Tony trilogy, criticise the institution of love and marriage (Jakobsson, *Jag* 33–36).

The only alternative to marriage that the trilogy finds for its female protagonist is “nothing” and, implicitly, creativity. However, in Krusenstjerna’s next long novel series aimed at adults, *Fröknarna von Pahlen* (The Misses von Pahlen, 1930–1935), there are other possibilities. The Pahlen series depicts several women of different social classes, ethnicities, and sexual orientations, and ends with a portrayal of an all-female commune, commonly viewed by Krusenstjerna scholars as utopian (see e.g. Svanberg; Mazzarella; Paqvalén; Björklund, *Lesbianism*; Williams, *Från*). Consequently, in the Pahlen series, the anti-social feminism of the Tony trilogy has been succeeded by a more social one.

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Notes

1 This article is based on a paper that I presented at the IRSCL Congress 2019. It is a translated and expanded version of a section in my doctoral dissertation (Jakobsson, *Jag* 173–178). Questions from the external reviewer, Jenny Björklund, during the defence have contributed to the writing of this article.

2 Tony is not necessarily a heterosexual character, but the romantic relationships that she has as a young adult are with men.

3 Nina's surname is not mentioned in the novel.

4 All translations from Swedish to English are my own. None of the novels in the Tony trilogy have been translated to English. The term "girls' novel" is not to be seen as something radically different than girls' book. The word novel was sometimes used to emphasise the maturity, length or complexity of a girls' book. However, that did not mean that it was not a girls' book but rather a way to distinguish between books within the genre (Theander 17–18).

5 For a more detailed overview of the reception as well as the picture of Krusenstjerna, see Jakobsson, *Jag* 20–23.

6 For a more detailed overview of the research on Krusenstjerna, see Jakobsson, *Jag* 23–28.

7 In *Helenas första kärlek*, different terms for girls and women are mixed throughout the novel to a larger extent than in *Ninas dagbok*, where there is a clearly identifiable moment when girl becomes woman (Jakobsson, *Jag* 51).

8 Nina stops writing in her diary when she finds a stable romantic relationship, and Helena does not write her own story (Krusenstjerna, *Ninas* 167–168; Krusenstjerna, *Helenas*).

9 For an English introduction to the Scandinavian queer-theoretical term "skev" (skewed), see Jakobsson, "Skev."

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