

—Otto Fischer—Archives of Emotion.  
Archives of Power—

As scholars of history, we turn to the archives for a number of reasons. But more often than not they tend to answer different questions than the ones we originally intended. Indeed, reading an archive is in many respects similar to the reading of a literary text. Which of course should come as no surprise, since archives, like any human products, will reflect (consciously or inadvertently) the interests, ambitions, desires, fears and indeed fads and fallacies, of the very humans that established them, tended them and used them. This means that much as a literary text, the archive will not always respond willingly to the questions we think we want to put to it, but rather provoke different questions, give rise to different impulses, and inspire different fantasies, than we would expect and are accustomed to.

A couple of years ago I gave a course on Swedish Fascism and Antifascism. My ambition was to avoid focusing on the usual narrative of the minuscule rise and uneventful fall of Swedish Fascism and Nazism in the 1930s and 40s. Rather, I wanted to know how the threat from fascism was perceived in the political everyday life on a grass root level. How was it discussed, and what efforts, if any, were taken to counter it? Accordingly, I set out to trace such discussions and such efforts in the Social democratic youth organization – SSU (Sveriges socialdemokratiska ungdomsförbundet). I was particularly interested in seeing what happened at the most basic local level; that is on the level of the individual local clubs (the organization was organized geographically, and in Stockholm several local clubs existed within each city district).

It is not always an easy task to find out something about the everyday political activity of these clubs. Some of them formed extensive well-ordered archives, whereas some are represented in

the archival repository – the Worker Movement’s Archive in Hud-dinge in Southern Stockholm – by what appears to be the scattered remnants of an archive – if there ever was one to begin with.<sup>1</sup> This could of course reflect that original records have been lost, but it is equally possible that the club was more or less dormant. My choice of material was accordingly to a very large extent guided by these circumstances. But even within the clubs that had left archives behind, these were organized in heterogenous and often thoroughly unorthodox ways, something which is of course not surprising since these archives were once formed and maintained by teenagers – with quite diverse levels of experience, ambition and zealously.

As frustrating as this heterogeneity and unorthodoxy was for me as a researcher interested in the activities of the young socialists of the 1930’s, as fascinating was it for me as a researcher interested in the history and the dynamics of the archive. The material did not actually reveal much about the anti-nazi political activities of the respective clubs, but I learned a lot about the usage of archives.

In one of the clubs, Birkastans Socialist Youth Club in the north-western part of the Stockholm inner city, minutes were kept in a very orderly fashion, but once I started to go into the contents of the minutes, they revealed something that appeared to have very little to do with the political activities of the club. The club president, also functioning as secretary, filled minute upon minute with vehement accusations against his treacherous former comrades, who had gone off to form a new club without him. This betrayal would leave him no peace, and according to the minutes, the rumination on this matter was the chief concern for the club during the entire period I studied.

Now things like this happens all the time, whenever people cooperate or, rather, fail to cooperate with one another. I think anyone

who has been involved in an organization of this kind, political or otherwise, will recognize the situation, and as a bystander, more than 80 years later, it is quite easy to empathize with both parties. The president certainly comes across as a bitter and quarrelsome person, whose resentment still oozes from the meticulously kept minutes, but on the other hand: betrayal is betrayal and it hurts.

The point I would like to make is that the minutes here, although it in all formal respects adheres to the set formula of a political club record, nevertheless becomes the vehicle for something quite different. It becomes the vehicle for the documentation of a very personal conflict, and it becomes the conveyor of feelings and attitudes, that we cannot help but respond to.

In another social democratic youth club, Eriksdal on Södermalm in the southern part of the Stockholm inner city, the archive was a mess. And not only did the archive lack any traces of organizational principles, the minutes themselves were equally messy. In fact, it was hard to reconstruct the proceedings they were supposed to document, and at best they could be described as haphazard annotations, adorned with doodles and caricatures. It became increasingly clear that the secretary was either thoroughly incompetent or appallingly unambitious.

However, after a while I discovered a possible reason, why he nevertheless continued to attend the meetings of Eriksdal’s SSU. In his accounts of the activities of the club one name resurfaced regularly: a girl named “Bitten”, an affectionate short form for the then very common women’s name “Birgitta”. Not only did almost every account revolve around the doings and sayings of this Bitten, she was also the most common motive among the caricatures. In an account of a picnic in a nearby natural resort the secretary recounts that Bitten had made sandwiches and that she sang an invigorating

song as they were walking back to town. On another occasion Bitten sprained her ankle, and so on and so forth.

The minutes had very little to say about the political activities of the club, but it said a lot about the emotions of the young man or boy wielding the pen. In fact, taken together the minutes form a little novella of young love, or at least a thorough documentation of a boy's infatuation with a girl.

I don't know what became of Bitten and the young secretary, nor do I know what eventually became of the president of Birkastan's SSU and his former comrades in the club. Nor did I actually learn very much about the presumed anti-nazi activities of the Social democratic youth organizations in Stockholm in the early 1930's. In fact, the only solid trace of any such activities I found in the material I went through actually comes from Eriksdal's SSU. The club's members had distributed anti-nazi leaflets on Götgatan – on of the main streets on Södermalm on a number of consecutive Saturday afternoons in the spring of 1936. And yes, Bitten was there, according to the minutes.

But I do know a lot about what a couple of apparently completely ordinary young men felt during a couple of years in the early 1930's. When leafing through the material one still feels the thumping of the heart of the infatuated secretary, just as strongly as the sense of resentment and isolation of the embittered president. And especially, I learned a lot about what the use and abuse of archival practices can consist in.

These two archives might be described as involuntary examples of "archives of emotion", that allow us to encounter emotional expressions in a conserved form. In the first case the presence of the emotions might be seen as the result of an emotional leakage; although the minutes are kept in a very orderly fashion and on the

surface adhere to the formulaic requirements of the minutes of a political congregation, the emotional disposition of the person responsible for the minutes cannot be prevented from permeating the text he is writing. The second case could perhaps be described as a more flagrant abuse of the genre of political club minutes; the secretary was apparently much more preoccupied with his emotions than with the political transactions, such as they were, of the club.



My third example, the family archive of the Eighteenth Century librarian, book seller, editor, publisher, collector and author, Carl Christofferson Gjörwell, a central figure in the literary and intellectual life of late Eighteenth-Century Sweden, on the other hand was at the very outset deliberately created as an archive of emotions, or expressions of emotions. Rather it's an archive that has been explicitly designed to collect, order and process such expressions.

Gjörwell was, by profession, a librarian and collector, editor of a large number of learned journals, and he published extensive collections of historical and biographic documents of various sorts. He also upheld a vast national and international correspondence, predominantly focusing on literary and learned matters. Besides these professional activities, he applied the same methodology to his personal life, and put together an extensive documentation of the life of himself and his family. In his study there were two voluminous archival cupboards: one contained his historical and literary manuscript collection, and the other his family archive. The latter being, in Gjörwell's own words, the crown piece of the "Collectio gjörwelliana".<sup>2</sup>

The family archive gathered letters, congratulatory poems, invitations, and just about every kind of writing that was produced

in, or in connection with, the family. The archive, thus, became the storage-place of the elusive tender moments and the volatile emotional sensations of intimate life. More than anything else, then, the archive became an archive of emotion.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, there had previously been family archives, often fulfilling administrative or judicial objectives of varying kinds. But no such recognizable purpose can be discerned in this historically new form of family archive that the Gjørwell archive represents: it merely documents the everyday life of a rather ordinary bourgeois Stockholm family, with special consideration for the emotionally charged moments in this life. Historically new as this was, it is a practice that is easily recognizable to us. After all that's it what most of us still do – although these documents tend to take pictorial rather than scriptural form. In the early Twentieth-Century families tended to gather around photo albums – in the sixties and seventies slide shows was a popular family weekend pastime – and today we fill up not only our hard drives and mobile phones, but also our social media feeds with documentations of precisely this kind of emotionally charged, but generally uneventful, moments of our personal life.

Gjørwell's family archive, however, was not only ahead of its time. In its scope and its level of ambition it still surpasses by large what most of us would consider a reasonable documentation of family life. Gjørwell was a professional archivist and zealously applied his professional skills to this collection as well. The documents are ordered according to certain principles, letters and poems are supplemented with explanatory remarks,<sup>4</sup> and on occasion he uses the services of professional scribes to make copies of the contents of the archive. Occasionally, he also saw it fit to edit and amend the letters stylistically and in respect of content, before admitting them to the

archive.<sup>5</sup> Principles from professional archivalization are accordingly applied to a material where we would not expect them.

The archive purportedly documents the everyday emotional life of the members of the family. It becomes an important infrastructural device in the formation and upholding of the family as an emotional community, held together by bonds of love and affection and nurtured by collective remembrance of emotionally charged moments in the shared past.<sup>6</sup> In this respect Gjørwell's endeavour is quantitatively, but not qualitatively, different from any such collection of affectionately preserved memorabilia. Or so it would seem, but at a closer look, this collection that merely documents the private life of the family turns out to be really something else. The archivist, the tender *pater familias* Gjørwell, exerts more or less unchecked control over his archive. And through this the archive itself becomes an instrument of patriarchal power. Be it a power that poses in the guise of tenderness, a power it is nonetheless.

When the daughters, Britta and Gustafva, are grown up and set up families of their own, Gjørwell persistently asks them for complementary material for the family archive. For instance, he asks them for copies of their correspondences with their fiancés, to be deposited in the mother archive in Stockholm. I don't think it is altogether anachronistic to ask whether this request might not have been perceived by the grown-up daughters as something of a violation of the private sphere. For Gjørwell it was perfectly clear that the task of family archivist, also entailed a position as custodian of the family members. When Gustafva marries, he admonishes her to leave her previous correspondences with previous suitors (or male friends in general) in the custody of her husband, "giving him the commission of trust of secret archivist, much beneficial between spouses".<sup>7</sup>

In fact, Gjørwell was just as interested in the preservation of certain materials, as in the weeding of the archive. In these ambitions, however, he was at times undermined correspondents. For instance his daughter Gustafva would keep on to even the smallest pieces of paper bearing her father's writing.<sup>8</sup> But even more interesting is this exertion of soft power, when Gjørwell regulates what can be included in and what must be excluded from the archive.<sup>9</sup> An example would be when Britta in a letter expresses emotions that are not to the liking of her father. The young woman expresses sombre feelings of melancholy, and her father admonishes her not to make him upset by displaying such emotions. Letters such as the one she has written has no place in the family archive, he declares. The idyllic picture of happy family life must be kept intact, and must not be contaminated by emotions of an undesired nature.

In this example one also senses a conflict of generations: Gjørwell's sentimentality represents an emotional culture, modelled predominantly upon the pastoral idylls of the Swiss poet Salomon Gessner, whereas the children apparently have taken a liking to a more radical form of sensitivity, as represented for instance by Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*.<sup>10</sup> This is a kind of sensitivity that Gjørwell not only dislikes, he apparently finds it threatening and potentially destructive. He severely censors any accounts of melancholy moonshine walks, or of sublime experiences such as thunderstorms, untamed nature et cetera. His emotional world requires a pastoral setting – like the parks Djurgården or Haga in Stockholm – where the sun shines on flowers and butterflies – and the like of that.<sup>11</sup>

The spectrum of emotions that are allowed entry into his archive ranges from the somewhat bittersweet melancholy called forth from meditating on an autumnal landscape or on the waning of a beauti-

ful flower, to the light, happy and tender emotions produced within the family. The extremes at both ends are meticulously censored.

Thus, one could claim that Gjørwell, with the help of his archive maintains what the American historian William Reddy has termed an “emotional regime”.<sup>12</sup> The term refers to the regulation of “emotives”, that is the formulations, rituals and symbolic practices expressing and thereby also modifying emotions, within a particular culture and a particular historical situation. As the very term suggest there are indeed strong affinities between emotional and political regimes. And Gjørwell's affective political interventions indeed served to maintain a soft patriarchal power, although disguised in tender smiles and tears.

What is striking with this example is not least that the (intimate, nuclear) family in the general emotional regime of the eighteenth Century, in the emerging separation of the public and private sphere was launched, alongside intimate friendship, precisely as what Reddy would refer to as an “emotional refuge” – that is a safe haven, where people would be at liberty to express emotives otherwise censored by the prevailing emotional regime; “a relationship, ritual, or organization [...] that provides safe release from prevailing emotional norms and allows relaxation of emotional effort [...] which may shore up or threaten the existing emotional regime.”<sup>13</sup>

In fact, armed with his archival infrastructure, Gjørwell establishes an emotional regime that for the members of his family must in many respects have been equally oppressive as the behavioural and emotional demands exerted by the strict etiquette required of the “grand world” of life outside the family.<sup>14</sup>



As these cases illustrate, archives at times turn out to be something quite different from what we might have expected. In an archive with the explicit purpose of controlling and documenting a political organization, emotional experiences and expressions unexpectedly surface. And on the other hand: in an archive devoted to intimate control and power. The archive, once again, appears to contain much more than information, and they tell us about other things than those the archival creator's thought they were recording.

## Endnotes

1 As this article is being finalized, in the spring of 2021, the archive is closed due to the Covid 19-pandemic. Accordingly, I have not been able to check on my quotations. In the archive the material from Birka sociademokratiska ungdomsklubb is found under the reference code 899/1 and the material from Eriksdals socialdemokratiska ungdomsklubb is found under the reference code 724/1

2 Cf. Otto Sylwan, "Förord", in Carl Christoffer Gjörwell, *En Stockholmskrönika ur C. C. Gjörwells brev 1757–1778* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1920), xxxvi.

3 Gjörwell's familiar letters are the subject of Ina Lindblom, *Känslans patriark: Sensibilitet och känslopraktiker i Carl Christoffer Gjörwells familj och vänskapskrets ca 1790–1810* (Umeå: Institutionen för idé- och samhällsstudier, 2017), the most extensive study on Gjörwell. In this article, I draw heavily on her findings.

4 See Lindblom, *Känslans patriark*, 42 f.

5 Lindblom, *Känslans patriark*, 44.

6 The term "emotional community" was famously coined by the medievalist Barbara H. Rosenwein, who defined it in the following way: "[Emotional communities] are precisely the same as social communities – families, neighborhoods, parliaments, guilds, monasteries, parish church memberships – but the researcher looking at them seeks above

all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore." (Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History", *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 821–845: 842.) In Lindblom's account, the notion of the Gjörwell family as an emotional community is of decisive importance. (Lindblom, *Känslans patriark*, 66–92.)

7 C. C. Gjörwell to Gustafva Eleonora Lindahl, 31.5.1791 (EpG 12:1, nr 9, Royal Library, Stockholm).

8 Lindblom 2017, p. 45. Cf. Lindblom, *Känslans patriark*, 229.

9 Cf. Lindblom, *Känslans patriark*, 51.

10 On this shift in sensibility that can be described as a radicalization, see Lindblom, *Känslans patriark*, 105 f. On Gjörwell's predilection for Gessner, see Lindblom, *Känslans patriark*, 173–178.

11 On "joy" as the predominant emotion in the Gjörwell family circle, see Lindblom, *Känslans patriark*, 66 ff.

12 William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2004), 129.

13 Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, 129. On the view on family life as a safe haven, separated from public and professional spheres, see Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Penguin Books, 2002 [1977]), 20; Lindblom, *Känslans patriark*, 93 ff.

14 Lindblom, *Känslans patriark*, 120.