

Dressed in a Present from the Past: The Transfers and Transformations of a Swedish Bridal Crown in the United States

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Abstract

Ever since the emigration from the Nordic countries the Old world and the New world have maintained an exchange of ideas, customs, and material culture. This cultural heritage consists of more than remnants of the past. Drawing on theories of material culture and performance this article highlights the role of gifts in materializing relationships between individuals, families and organizations in the wake of migration. First, I build on a suggested coinage of the term heritage gifts as a way of materializing relationships. Thereafter, I map out the numerous roles which a Swedish bridal crown play in the United States: as museum object, object of display and loaned to families for wedding ceremonies in America. The transfers and transformations of the bridal crown enhances a drama of a migration heritage. This dynamic drama brings together kin in Sweden and America and maps specific locations into a flexible space via the trajectory of crown-clad female bodies.

Keywords: Gift-giving, heritage gift, performance, the dressed body, Swedish-America

Introduction

In April, 2002, at the age of 82, Marie Ylinen (born 1920) took center stage as bride at the American Swedish Institute (ASI) in Minneapolis for the second time in her life. On her head she wore the same Swedish bridal crown that she wore when she married Arthur Ylinen in this historic house and cultural center in 1952. While the crown was the same, the 2002 event was a symbolic wedding, a staged ceremony dealing with a different sort of marriage; the matrimony between the province of Värmland in Sweden and Swedish America. In 2002, the governor of the Värmland province, Ingemar Eliasson, crowned Marie Ylinen (nee Olsson) as “the Värmland Gift Bride”. The ceremony marked the highlight of the ASI’s fiftieth anniversary celebration of Värmlandsgåvan, a collection of 3000 greetings, 200 volumes of books and 300 artifacts, all selected by the parishes of Värmland to represent both the typical and spectacular of present and past parish life. A replica of the bridal crown in Karlstad Cathedral was selected a gift from the entire province in addition to the individual parish gifts of textiles, paintings, ceramics, glass, photo albums, miniature houses and birch bark items. The Värmland Historical Association (Värmlands Hembygdsförbund) presented this collection of gifts to the American Swedish Institute at a ceremony in Minneapolis in 1952, a gift-giving act in which Marie Olsson’s wearing of the bridal crown played a key role.

The ceremony in 2002 was a restaging of the gift-giving performance in 1952, which can be said to centre around one star actor—the bridal crown. This particular artefact was presented by the gift-givers in 1952 as “an emblem of a desire that the ties between American and Swedish citizens of the same tribe shall be joined generation after generation”¹ Since its arrival in Minneapolis in 1952, the bridal crown has been displayed at ASI as part of several exhibitions. It has also been loaned to families of Värmland descent to use for wedding ceremonies in America: rituals where the crowned body becomes a performance of connectivity. The crown enhances a drama of migration heritage that brings together kin in Sweden and America and maps specific locations and ties them into a flexible space via the trajectory of crown-clad female bodies.

Ever since the emigration from the Nordic countries the Old world and the New world have maintained an exchange of ideas, customs and material culture. Even though the relationships between the individual nation states have been frosty at times, the Nordic countries have remained for numerous descendants of emigrants from there the standard bearer of culture. This cultural heritage consists of more than remnants of the past. It can be described as culture selected in the present and projected into the past, and simultaneously, the past congealed into present culture (Comaroff 2009: 10; cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 149). Moreover, such culture is often materialized and involve our senses by being for example touched, worn, and viewed. These materializations may be understood as stylized expressions of who we are (Küchler & Miller 2005; Miller 2005, 2009; Damsholt 2009) and

effects of previous materializations (cf. Latour 2005). Hence, heritage solidifies contemporary perceptions of our past into material culture and such material heritage is apt to reconfigure perceptions of inclusion and exclusion, our senses of belonging.

Museums and exhibitions are by definition selective and material. They are also theatrical, observed American folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 3), and the theme of this special issue of Culture Unbound is the ways in which museums, events and objects are made to perform Nordic spaces. As part of such discussion, I will explore how a Swedish bridal crown gives rise to multiple performances in the United States and generates a sense of history that differs from that of museums, exhibitions, monuments and archives. By following one single object, I explore how its role changes over time, and illustrate how it fosters a long-term dynamic relationship between “geographical Sweden” and “imaginary Sweden” and their counterparts in North America. The study will show how the bridal crown enables an emotionalized kind of cultural performance where heritage rests on the heads of brides, creating magic bonds with the local and regional, pre-national past.²



Marie Ylinen crowned as the Värmland Gift bride 2002.
Photoalbum in Ylinen's private collection; Photo: Lizette Gradén

Heritage Gifts and Migration

Gifts hold the promise of furthering relationships, and the giving of gifts to museums may be seen as a plea for a presence in the future. Gifts played a major role in the founding of cabinets of curiosities and many collections in art and cultural history museums in Sweden were originally gifts (cf. Svanberg).³ The same gesture of gift-giving that creates cultural connectivity among people and institutions in a particular nation or region also strengthens ties between emigrants and their homeland. Many of the Nordic immigrant historic houses and museums in the United States can be described as gifts. The Turnblad mansion, later named American Swedish Institute, was a gift to the “Swedish people in Minnesota and their descendants” from Småland immigrant and newspaper publicist Swan J. Turnblad. The mansion, originally Turnblad’s home, was intended as a space where Swedish literature, art, crafts and music could be developed and material culture of Swedish immigrants could be collected, preserved, and displayed. Today a thriving cultural institution, the ASI describes itself as a historic house with a collection.⁴ By this donation, he envisioned his former home as a monument of Swedish culture in Minneapolis. Implicitly he called for a space where his deed and dedication could be reciprocated by being performed over and over again.

The idea of gift-giving as means to further relationships is not new. Particularly the idea of reciprocity has its own heritage. In the Nordic realm, the principle for generating relationships through reciprocity appears for example in the Poetic Edda. It says “with weapons and weed should friends be won, as one can see in themselves, those who give to each other will be friends once they meet half way” (The Poetic Edda: 40). In a similar vein, anthropologist Marcel Mauss’s analysis demonstrates that reciprocated gifts further relationships and build community (Mauss 1990).⁵ In other words, he pays attention to what the gift is capable of doing, how the gift-giving as performance is an effect of a previous performance. Building on Marcel Mauss’s concept of the gift as something that can bind people together, along with the assumption that objects increase in cultural value through their appropriation and socialization (Appadurai 1986; Miller 2001), I use the term “heritage gift” to describe a gift which biography builds cultural relationships over time. Like diplomatic gifts, heritage gifts require specific cultural competence which includes detailed uses of the past. The uses of past in this case can be defined as a performance intended to amplify cultural recognition, connectivity and collaboration. Corresponding to the quite similar restitution process, however, the heritage gift is less oriented towards the juridical rights to the object. The heritage gift refers to an object selected to recognize human beings, objects or events with a specific emphasis on the past. The gift-giving act refers to a method of negotiating future recognition and cultural connectivity.

Performing Gifts

Performance is an efficient way of communicating ideas and values related to heritage and history. Drawing on the works of Richard Schechner, I understand performance as an activity that is framed, presented, high-lighted, and displayed before an audience (Schechner 2006: 2, 28). According to Schechner, who borrows his view from Erving Goffman, any behavior, event or action can be studied “as” performance (Schechner 2006: 40; Goffman 1990) so also the crowning ceremony, as it contains and enacts multiple performances presented in various places, at various times and in various situations. As Schechner points out, the boundaries between performance and daily life can be unclear. What takes place in performance effects life outside the actual performance (Schechner 1985: 125, 2006) According to Schechner, objects and spaces also “perform” as part of their interaction with human beings. He writes:

They are regarded as practices, events, and behaviours, not as “objects” or “things”. [...]. Performance studies inquires about the “behaviour” of, for example, a painting: the ways it interacts with those who view it, thus evoking different reactions and meanings, and how it changes meaning over time and in different contexts; under what circumstances it was created and exhibited; and how the gallery or building displaying it shapes its presentations. (Schechner 2002: x, cf. Latour 2005)

Framed as performance, in Schechner’s sense of the concept, the bridal crown when on display, handled, or used in weddings performs on people who come into contact with it. It performs history in action and invokes a drama of loss and re-connection, a hands-on sensory and emotionalized kind of cultural performance. Deliberately or not, the crown put to use performs who we are or want to be, that is here Swedes and Americans with a flexible past, including both pre-national and migration heritage.

Performance is thus understood in this context to mean stylized communication that takes place front stage, following Goffman (1990), i.e. in rooms that are accessible to the public to a greater or lesser extent. Gift-giving performances such as the handing over of the bridal crown at the ASI in 1952 with the Olsson Ylinen wedding, as well as the crowning ceremony in 2002, are part of the front stage. Some of these performances also take place in other areas where the objects are handled and thereby framed – rooms considered backstage for the museum visitor. In the case of the crown, these spaces include storage, offices and places outside of the museum such as family’s homes. Moreover, I suggest that both participants in the study and the researcher when dealing with the crown take on roles as collaborating actors performing on stages, adding yet another dimension to the drama studied.

A Swedish Bridal Crown as Heritage Gift in America

Taking into consideration the strained relationship between Sweden and America during the Second World War, the choice among the gift-givers to “perform” the province of Värmland rather than Sweden as a whole probably contributed to the bridal crown’s success at the ASI at this time.⁶ The strong emphasis on family values in both Sweden and the U.S at the time may have contributed as well. In hindsight, the bridal crown was granted a diplomatic status in both official and private settings.

Even today, the bridal crown plays a key role when the history of the American Swedish Institute is communicated. Early on in my fieldwork at ASI the curator and volunteers presented the Värmland gift collection as the most important part of the ASI collection and the crown as the key object of this particular collection.⁷ These verbal performances most typically took place in back-stage areas such as during coffee breaks at the kaffestuga before museum opening hours, in the curator’s office, or when we were working in storage. These performances transformed these spaces from back-stage to front-stage; profession-specific stages on which staff which handled and cared for the bridal crown could act. These verbal performances brought forth several actors. Highlighted was the province of Värmland where the crown was made by local artists. Similar to the second act in a play, it was not until later on in my fieldwork process that the museum staff presented the crown as a paradoxical object in the museum.



The bridal crown as accessioned into the museum collection. Photo: Lizette Gradén.

The crown, like other objects that arrive at the American Swedish Institute, or any other museum for that matter, is moved through the rite of passage of accessioning. This ritual performance, when the museum registrar inscribes a newly arrived object with a number-combination and notes it as part of the collection is not just a transaction between donor and recipient: it is a performance of ownership that separates a museum object from objects outside the museum sphere. This act explicitly performs how objects are transformed into heritage —how this particular object is worth being part of a collection from the past, cared for and carried into the future. Unlike most museum objects, however, the bridal crown was also circulated outside the museum sphere. The circulation can be seen as an effect of a written performance from 1952. In the official gift letter that accompanied the bridal crown to the United States, the gift-givers in Värmland performed their intended aim with the crown as follows:

Folk of kinship in the province of Värmland send to the people of Värmland heritage in the United States a greeting with a gift from the old ancestral home. The gift is a reproduction of the bridal crown from Karlstad Cathedral. It is an emblem of a desire that the ties between American and Swedish citizens of the same tribe shall be joined generation after generation.⁸

The letter of intent may be interpreted as the gift-givers performance of fear to be left in oblivion by relatives, friends and their descendants who had created a new life for themselves in America. It can also be understood as a wish to reproduce a piece of material culture from Värmland in America. Moreover, and perhaps most important here, it may be seen as a performance of connectivity based on kin (Mauss 1990; Easterson 1992: 3–4). After all, Värmland had lost one-fourth of its population to emigration between 1869 and 1930, an emigration which separated numerous families and households. In this context the bridal crown takes on a role as a potential unifier.

In Sweden (as well as in America) folklore archives, ethnological literature, and museum exhibitions have lavishly described weddings in the past, some which include ornaments of the body and the dressing of the bride. In recent years a growing interest in materializations of culture has spurred a renewed interest in the bread and butter of weddings. As ethnologist Eva Knuts points out, a woman does not need a ring or a dress in order to be legally married; her choices to materialize the event are culturally governed (Knuts 2006). Similarly, there is no need for a bride in Sweden or America to wear a silver crown to be legally married.

Instead of taking the wedding as my vantage point and explore what materials and actors such event requires, I being with the single material object. As a symbol of status and virtue the bridal crown has a heritage of its own dating back at least to the 16th century and the writings of Olaus Magnus (Resare 1988:77). These previous acts have an effect when the crown takes center stage as cultural heritage also in the present. In ethnological literature the bridal crown is put forth as a distinctively Scandinavian or Nordic custom (Resare 1988:77–95; Noss 1990; Knuts 2006) which parallels the idea of a crown in the Swedish-American setting.

The replica of the bridal crown in Minneapolis refers to the bridal crown in the Karlstad Cathedral, where it was received as a gift from a local family and inaugurated in 1931. Like any other congregation at the time, this practice of offering a specific crown can be understood as the Karlstad Cathedral's congregation's performance of themselves as an honorable community. As an object, writes Anna-Maja Nylén, the silver bridal crown is regarded as the strongest symbol of virginity, and of all the ornaments for the body, the silver bridal crown was worn only during weddings, as a badge of honor. Nylén (1962, 1971) points out how churches in Sweden in the early twentieth century increasingly loaned or rented out their bridal crowns made of precious materials. Karlstad Cathedral was one of these churches to receive a crown as a gift to transform women in the congregation to honorable brides and wives.

But the crown as a symbol of purity and virginity has also been challenged in performances where the American Midwest has served as center stage. A silver bridal crown plays a key role when author Vilhelm Moberg in his novel *Nybyggarna: Sista brevet till Sverige*, first published in 1959, resurrects the honor of Ulrika of Västergöhl, who was regarded a whore in her home parish in Sweden. First, Moberg transforms Ulrika into a crown bride in America and thereafter to a donor of a "gift from North America to Ljuder church", a bridal crown of silver and precious stones to be loaned to "those brides who are known for their virtue, honor and good manners" (1984/1959: 242–249), a return-gift by a woman of transformation to women back home.⁹ The transformations may be interpreted as Moberg's performance of America as the land of possibilities and the potential for women to re-stage themselves outside their parish, region, or nation, here in a Swedish-American setting.

In the same way as previous ethnological studies demonstrate the silver crown's transformative force, the crown becomes a vehicle for the transforming women's view of themselves. If its transformative capacity makes body ornamentation perhaps the richest category of material culture (Eicher 1995; Baumgarten 2002; Küchler & Miller 2005; Shukla 2008), this richness is reinforced when the object of adornment is a heritage gift. Keeping in mind that many emigrants from Värmland after 1890 were single women (Måwe 1971; cf. Lintelman 2005), it is likely that the women in the province were familiar with the impact of the tradition and possibly considered the social consequences for women whose families did not have access to their own silver crown. When worn in the American context, the bridal crown performs the bride's past as honorable all the way from Scandinavia.

A Contested Object

The bridal crown was not without controversy at the outset. People involved in having it made and donating it, of course, appreciated the gift. Among these were John Bryntesson of Svaneholm's manor and Axel Westling, the Värmland governor. Museum representatives in Sweden, however, reacted strongly to the initiative of the Värmlanders to provide their relatives and friends in the United States with a bridal crown linked to the province. The bridal crown brought forth high levels of emotions.

Albin Widén, Swedish author, curator, and scholar of Swedish-America wrote:

It has been mentioned that a bridal crown is the main item in the Värmland Gift. In recent years, several bridal crowns have been donated to Swedish-America and one of the donors is a female member of the Institute's Board. Should girls of Swedish ancestry in Minneapolis wish to borrow a Swedish bridal crown, they already have access to one. [...] Export art and handicrafts, but leave Swedish peasant culture at home! (DN 6 April 1952)

Carl A. Boberg, a Värmlander and returnee from Chicago, replied:

According to Dr. Widén there is already a bridal crown in Minneapolis, to be used by Swedish descendants who want to marry. Who cares? It is not from Värmland! The crown to be sent is meant for the girls from Värmland. That is the great difference. Värmland is the crown among Svearikes länder! Bryntesson from Svaneholm, who has donated the crown, is a Swedish-American and he knows what he is doing. (NWT 8 April 1952)

The Governor of Värmland, Axel Westling, responded:

Our goal with the Värmland Gift to the US has been to provide expression of a personal connection through traditions and community history. [...] Doctor Widén is seething over the fact that they are sending an expensive bridal crown, when Swedish-America is already in disposition of several such crowns. He seems not to have understood that what is intended here is to convey an idealistic connection with Värmland, to provide a breath of their native home. It is none other than the bridal crown from Karlstad Cathedral that they wish to send over. (NWT 10 April 1952)

These men play both official and private roles, and their altercation over the bridal crown expresses high levels of emotion and different perceptions of heritage. Albin Widén, scholar at the Nordic Museum in Stockholm and at the time head of the Swedish Information Bureau in Minneapolis (hosted by the ASI), takes on a role of Swede with cultural competence about the Swedish museum sphere as well as the Swedish American ditto. Does he really find the crown to be unfit for export to America because of its provincial origin? So it may be. More likely, Widén's objection stems from his official role to promote Sweden as a modern society in America, marked by high culture, technical innovation and social progression rather than family traditions and peasant heritage. The governor, on the other hand, is the official spokesperson for a region, and takes on the role of the gift-giver and promoter of community, beyond the nation state. Carl Boberg, an immigrant and returnee, embodies the emigrant/immigrant role and performs the role of the culture broker. The debate over the suitability of the bridal crown as a

gift appears to perform a region's challenging and increasingly centralized view of the modern nation state.

Performed and Embodied Heritage

Since the 1970s, the ASI has struck a balance between the museum's task of caring for and displaying the crown and the intention of the donors to provide women from Värmland in the US with their own bridal headpiece. Keeping the crown in storage has become a way to balance between preserving and providing access to the crown, without marketing the object. Storing it in a locker outside of public view but accessible for those who know about its existence, the bridal crown appears more precious than when put on display for the public in the exhibition area at the museum. In this sense the museum has transferred the bridal crown from an object of display to a semi-public object.

When studied as performance, the activities that frame the bridal crown reflect the cultural order of the museum, the gaze of people who can perform in this space. Judging from the object's present careful placement in a locker, in its original transportation box and in relation to other objects on adjacent shelves, the bridal crown still plays a key role to the ASI. The careful placing of the object, of giving it space, communicates care in a historic house with a collection, a building that lacks the facilities of a museum crafted to care for collections. Although away from public view, the crown becomes a display for selected view such as curators and visiting researchers like me. Following Goffman, the showcasing of the bridal crown in the storage area transforms this part of the museum from backstage to front stage (Goffman 1990), from storage to a semi-public space, where museum staff and researchers can act. In this area, during one of my visits, the curator carefully pulled down the paper box from the 1950s, opened it and lifted out the crown in a manner that demonstrated familiarity – and great respect. The curator Curt Pederson declared:

As you know [referring to my learning about the object through archival material, photos and its placement in storage at the ASI] this beautiful headpiece is very different from other bridal crowns in our collections. It is unique! It is a gift from the people of Värmland, ordinary people to the people from Värmland living over here. The crown stands 3½ inches high and measures 3 inches in diameter. It is made of gold filigree over silver and is inset with rubies and rhinestones. It was designed by artist Oscar Jonsson and made by goldsmith Thure Ahlgren, both from Värmland.¹⁰

While setting and performance are crafted to attract an audience, the back stage belongs to those working to prepare the public performance (Goffman 1990: 107–112), hence the objects' display, exhibitions and programs. Places such as the storage area that are back stage in daily life at the museum become transformed into front stage when curator and researcher venture into the Värmland Gift collection. This shift appears most clearly in explicit performance. The curator's verbal presentation of the bridal crown reinforces the crown's preeminent status. As a

researcher I take the role of the listener, the audience and apprentice. Through this collaborative act, Curt Pederson and I, the curator and the researcher, further strengthen the notion of the object's importance as heritage gift, an act which makes us both actors in the drama of heritage preservation.

The curator hands the crown over to me. The silver feels cold as the crown rests heavy in the palm of my hand. The crown and the stories about it perform on me, the mere touch makes the past feel eerily present, perhaps in a similar way as an archeologist holding his still soil-covered find from a dig. When holding the crown, its mere materiality in hand makes me think about how the crown now connects me with women who have previously handled it, imagining myself into yet another phase in its long, complex biography: a biography spanning its making in Värmland, rite-de-passage and inclusion in the museum collections, display in the museum, circulation among brides across the United States and return to museum storage and to performances and exhibits there. As a learner of things through touch I am convinced that objects have close to magical power to generate emotions and imaginary spaces. In the next moment and because of the crown's weight I spontaneously exclaim: "It's so heavy – how on earth could a bride keep it on her head?" a statement that brought yet another actor on stage in the storage room. One of the volunteers let us know that in the 1950s and 1960s, when the crown was frequently used in weddings, the American Swedish Institute referred brides-to-be to the beauty salon at Dayton's department store, whose hairdressers had learned how to use "doughnuts", rings padded with flax or horse hair to fasten the crown. In this case, the bridal crown itself becomes an actor (Schechner 2002: x) with a biography which also influences the hairdresser's performance, i.e. how the bride's body is dressed. It also connects the American Swedish Institute with Dayton's department store in a relationship of business exchange where heritage takes front stage.

Like a costume in a play, the bridal crown and the presented details of it dramatize the story. Along with its careful placing in metal storage, away from public view, the curator's presentation of the crown's biography (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) to the listening researcher and her response to the materiality of the crown, all contribute to its aura of being different from other bridal crowns in ASI's collections and therefore unique. By stating the exact measurements of the crown and describing its surface and luster, proportions and specific workmanship, the curator demonstrates his curatorial expertise, including the in-depth knowledge about the object. His presentation conjures up the crown's past as values that performs regional space down to the soil where it was made and where its makers lived, connecting people from Värmland within the United States with Värmlanders in Sweden. In addition to verbal presentations, the crown takes front stage also in written and visual performances.

Doubling and Parting as Strategies for Unified Heritage

The ways in which the bridal crown becomes a key actor is also apparent in written wedding announcements. The following example is found in the Minneapolis paper *The Tribune*. In this particular announcement, the crown is carefully combined with another transatlantic object, namely one half of a table cloth made in Norway and brought to the United States. While the crown materializes culture, it is also an important instance of its embodiment. The crown as heritage gift allows heritage to be embodied, the word to become flesh.

A Swedish crown from the province of Värmland and one half of a table cloth woven almost 200 years ago, by a former Bishop of Norway, lent a Scandinavian touch to the wedding Friday evening of Mary Kirsten Towley of Hopkins and David Robert Swanson of Cokato, Minnesota. The bride, daughter of Mrs Carl Kahrs Towley, 246 N. 6th Av., Hopkins, and the late Mr Towley, wore a crown presented to the American Swedish Institute by the Swedish province. (The bride's maternal grandfather, Dr. P. A. Mattson, came from this province, entitling her to wear the crown)." (*Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, 30 July 1961)

Like a press release or written review for a theatre production, the wedding announcement communicates and legitimizes that the production actually took place. The wedding announcement articulates exclusivity tied to the crown, as the museum applies particular rules for its usage. As stated in the quotation, the bride is "entitled" to wear the crown because of her maternal grandfather's coming from Värmland, a concept of heritage that brings to mind inheritance of reigns among royalty in Sweden as well as festival royalty in Scandinavian America.

But mostly the description offers insights into how doubling (not duplicating) of objects, through parting or replication, increases symbolic value. The meaning invested here in the bridal crown challenges a common perception of museum objects as unique and intact, while it also challenges the logic of collections, where each piece ought to be unique (Stewart 1993: 161). I would like to suggest, using the bridal crown, that the doubling of the object through replication is crucial to how people in the new land value it. The doubled object, of which one remains in the homeland, performs a particular pre-eminent connection between the individuals that come into contact with it. The replica or clone increases rather than decreases the value of the earlier versions, because it shows that the first object is worth replicating and in this case that both are performances of culture in the same vein, created by the same artists, formed by the same hands. Whereas the first version is kept at the Karlstad Cathedral and used only in weddings held there, the replica moves across space more freely than the previous version, while literally allowing it to perform on a larger number of people as well as being touched by them. While the bridal crown as gift to the Karlstad Cathedral becomes an instrument for embodying gender and kin, the replica becomes a return gift embodying lineage overseas, an act of ritual performance that puts descendants' heritage into place.



Ragnar E. Olsson, president of Värmlandsförbundet at the ASI receives the bridal crown from Axel Westling, county governor of Värmland. Their photo may be viewed as showing a political agreement as well as the joining of Värmland and the USA in a political agreement and in symbolic matrimony. Photo by courtesy of the Swedish American Center.

The ways in which the bridal crown performs heritage also echo in photographs. In the visual documentation of the 1952 Värmland Gift exhibition at the ASI, the bridal crown appears time and again. In one of the photographs from the gift-giving performance in 1952, the bridal crown is literally elevated when handed over from the county governor Axel Westling to the president of the Värmland association Ragnar Olsson. Thus the bridal crown was granted a special position, even photographically. The photo resembles how successful political agreements or business deals are performed – two individuals, both holding onto a symbolic document, book or object (Becker 2000), here two men holding onto the bridal crown. But this photo also has a sense of intimacy more characteristic to wedding photos. Just as a wedding photograph plays a crucial part in the wedding ceremony in the western world (Eicher & Ling 2006; cf. Kjerström 1993: 145–167; Knuts 2006: 100–103), the photograph with the governor handing over the bridal crown to the president of the Värmlandsförbundet plays an important role in confirming to future generations that the official marriage ceremony took place, that the Värmland descendants and receivers of the crown said, “I do!”

Heritage Renewed – Performing Patriarchal Heritage

In the early 2000s, several young women in the Midwest showed an interest in wearing the Värmland bridal crown for their weddings. According to ASI staff, these requests (phone calls) came from women whose mothers or grandmothers had worn the crown at their weddings. Besides pointing out family relations, the bridal crown seemed attractive for future brides who wished to have what they described as “all-Swedish weddings”, or to make their weddings “totally Swedish”. These young women seemed to follow the trend for large, costly weddings as well as an interest in theme weddings, much popular among brides in the Midwest where clothing, table settings and choice of party facility all articulate relationships to fairytales, music and specific eras (Winge & Eicher 2003: 207–218), or in the case of the bridal crown, that something Swedish is taking place.¹¹

As I have shown in my analysis of the Värmland Gift the provincial connotation of the entire collection means it being both uniquely Swedish, and of an area of authentic heritage, at the same time an apolitical, non-nationalistic or partisan. This connotation frees the collection for broad and inclusive cultural uses (Gradén 2010). The bridal crown, being the object selected as the gift from the entire province, epitomizes this process. In Sweden the province of Värmland along with Dalarna and Småland are used more often than other provinces (see Aronsson 1995; Häggström 2000). When Värmland is highlighted in America such performances may be interpreted as mirroring the activities in Sweden. The situation is, however, not certainly so. The transfer of the bridal crown from Sweden to the United States, from Värmland to Minnesota, from exhibit to storage and further to private homes and individual bodies, demonstrates how the bridal crown is a force in the performance of heritage. In the Värmland example it is the migration heritage which is emphasized, the connectivity between emigrants and family back home. The bridal crown draws in and touch people on both sides of the Atlantic, also today. Perhaps therefore the bridal crown performs a different job than many other heritage gifts. It is a very hands-on and emotionalized kind of performance where history rests on the head of brides, creating a magic bond with Värmland, but also with a family past rooted in Värmland with branches both in Sweden and America. It shows that history can be embodied as heritage gifts, the heritage gift as heritage – how the word can become flesh.

On one level, the bridal crown from Värmland becomes attractive to young women in Minnesota because a theme wedding offers a playful, creative and carnivalesque alternative to a traditional wedding that is often perceived as serious, conformist, and ritualized. However, just as a traditional wedding communicates who the bride and groom wish to be, the Swedish theme wedding in the United States stages the wedding couple’s values and ideals.

Although the term “theme wedding” may be new, weddings have long been a venue for womens’ performances of heritage. Among women living in the United States, the desire to wear the Värmland bridal crown is not new. It has been popu-

lar in the past, also during times when bridal crowns were considered out of fashion. In the summers of 2006 and 2009, I interviewed women who had worn the crown, whereupon new performances involving the crown emerged. When Marie Ylinen (nee Olsson), at aged 82 was crowned "Värmland Gift Bride" by the county governor Ingemar Eliasson in 2002, that performance contained a series of performances from the past.

Marie Ylinen presented the crowning in 2002 as follows:

I was honored and it was very festive with a nice dinner, toasts and the whole bit. Being re-crowned was like being confirmed – like I have lived the Swedish-American life I was expected to live...that my father expected me to live (laughs). For this rich life, my heart is overflowing with thankfulness for God's protection, His provision and the promise of His love.¹²

While the story Marie shared with me is rich in narratives and dramatic turns and deserves an analysis in itself, what is important for this study is how crucial it was to her and her father that she be the first. Marie reflected:

In 1952, when the Värmland Gift was on its way to Minnesota, my father was the director of Värmlandsförbundet and I was about to get married. As it was John Bryntesson of Svaneholm, who had enabled my father to emigrate from Värmland, who also had paid for having the crown replicated, the crown meant a lot to my father. To him, it was a direct connection to the man whom my father throughout his life credited his courage to leave Sweden and succeed in America. I met him, a very nice man, when I spent the summer in Värmland, at 19. My wedding took place right here (she makes a large, sweeping gesture towards the floor before the fireplace where Marie had chosen we'd sit during the interview, that is in the ASI Grand Hall), and opera singer Helga Görilin, who was the first woman to wear the bridal crown of Karlstad Cathedral in Sweden, sang Swedish hymns at my wedding.¹³

A crowning, a confirmation, a renewal of heritage – the bridal crown continues to be a performative force for revitalized connection between Värmland and the United States. In her recollection of the crowning ceremony in 2002, Marie Ylinen presents the event as a confirmation. On another level, the re-crowning demonstrates features similar to the performance of heritage as staged in the election of the festival queen in Lindsborg, Kansas. There, a senior citizen reconfirms heritage by blood/lineage in combination with long-term commitment to and involvement in activities perceived as Swedish (Gradén 2003; cf. Larsen 2009). The re-staging in 2002 of the gift-giving performance in 1952 can be seen as a contractual return gift (Mauss 1990: 6–8), which recognizes both the givers, the Historical Association in Värmland (Värmlands hembygdsförbund) and the people of Värmland who presented the gift in 1952 and the recipients. Moreover the re-crowning further strengthens the crown's role as inalienable object (Miller 2002), making possible the exchange needed to create the mutual relationship referred to as a shared heritage.

The re-staging of the gift-giving performance enable social mobility and elevated status in the Swedish American community. As such, the re-crowning can be seen as the institution's return gift to Marie Olsson Ylinen, a compensation for

the Swedish-American life she has performed for herself, her father and others, a performance enhanced by her wearing the crown for her wedding, held at the American Swedish Institute in 1952 and the re-crowning carried out by Governor Ingemar Eliasson at the American Swedish Institute in 2002. Finally, the renewal of ties in the re-staging the gift-giving performance unites Varmlanders in Sweden and the U.S. in symbolic matrimony, just as the original performance did in 1952. The re-crowning of Marie may therefore be understood as a renewal of vows – a performance of revitalized connection between Värmland and Minnesota, and Sweden and the United States, performing the transformation of two separate places marked by migration into one transatlantic space, through the body of a woman.

Unlike the curator's performance, where the bridal crown is presented as unique and one of a kind, Marie emphasizes the doubling effect; that the crown she wore was indeed the replica of the crown from Karlstad Cathedral. She makes the point that Helga Görlin, the opera singer at her wedding, was the first woman to wear the crown of Karlstad Cathedral in 1931, and that she was the first to wear its replica. Marie Ylinen's wearing of the replica makes the connection between the two crowns. The value she grants the replica is inextricably linked to the fact that its twin is located in the Karlstad Cathedral and used by Helga Görlin, both of them being "the first" and subsequently followed by women in Värmland and the Midwest.

Because Ragnar E. Olsson, Marie's father, was a founding member of Värmlandsförbundet and a man of status in the Swedish-American community, his daughter was able to be the first bride in America to wear the crown for her wedding in the ASI's Grand Hall. In her story about the wedding she emphasized that she had musicians play "Finlandia" by Sibelius to honor Arthur Ylinen, her husband-to-be, who identified himself as a "Finn from the Iron Range". Apart from that, she explained, the entire wedding was "Swedish-to-the-max", including a color scheme of blue and yellow. In the words of Marie, she said "yes to her future husband and to her Swedish background".¹⁴ The framing of Marie's wedding was a performance of Swedishness, the crown expressed the second-generation immigrant bride's regional connection and gave her heritage a definite place of origin. Other women have followed in the footsteps of Marie Ylinen's heritage performance. Marcia Linnér Swanson, who wore the crown in the late 1950s, emphasized that the choice to wear the crown at her wedding was more important to her father than anything. Her father, who held a prominent position in the Swedish-American business community in the Midwest, insisted she should wear the Värmland bridal crown. She felt, however, wearing a crown was out of fashion, and that the crown in particular did not fit with her wedding dress. She said:

The privilege [of wearing the crown] was extended to me because my father's grandparents were born in Sweden. When requesting the crown we presented my father's family tree. We brought in all the papers we had, and I don't know for sure

that all my relatives came from Värmland. We were kindly granted the loan of the crown and I wore the crown to honor my father and his family background – it was much more important to him than it was to me.¹⁵

According to Goffman (1990), we always prepare ourselves for the stages we are to act on, and Marcia's dress and body ornaments can be seen as strategies for performance to ensure success. This is not unique. Like people of all times, places, and social milieus, Marcia Linnér Swanson and her fellow women of Swedish descent dress for the stage in the United States on which they are to act, modifying or supplementing the body in specific ways. The selecting of clothing and accessories are ways of creating a cultured body. As an ornament supplementing young women's bodies, the Swedish bridal crown articulates a wedding celebration and a new stage of life. Marcia makes a particular decision on what to wear – a white long-sleeved dress with a narrow waist and wide skirt – a dress seemingly inspired by the New Look, launched in 1947 by Dior.

Marcia Linnér Swanson had to dress for two stages. While she describes the crown as being out of fashion, she also speaks of the wearing of the crown as a privilege, extended to her by her father's family, whose family tree they had brought to the museum to get access to the crown. Although the Värmland heritage here is embodied by Marcia Linnér Swanson wearing the crown, the wearing takes place by the agency of her father and his grandfather's parents.



Marcia Linnér Swanson was dressed for two stages, and has saved images from these events.
Photo: Lizette Gradén Lizette

A father's actions and values are prevalent also in a man's story about the bridal crown. Nils Hasselmo, who was born in Sweden and emigrated to the United States in the 1950s, presents how he and his wife selected the crown for their 1950s wedding in the Midwest in the following manner:

As I remember this selection it was the memory of my father's work to assemble the Värmland Gift which made us think about using it. A friend of ours who traveled from Minneapolis brought it along for the wedding. To borrow the crown was an easy procedure at the time! I also believe the crown had received a lot of publicity. For me, the crown provided an interesting link to Värmland, now when I was to marry in Diaspora. As you know, my wife was interested in her Swedish background too.¹⁶

The stories show that, although the bridal crown is worn by women, there is also a strong patriarchal connection, where the words of the fathers are materialized and embodied in the bride's wearing of the crown. Like Marie Ylinen's, Marcia Linnér Swanson's recollections of the crown present how they as brides in their respective weddings acceded to their fathers' wishes and to his sense of heritage in Värmland. In Nils Hasselmo's recollection, however, the father of the groom is at the center of the request for the crown, and it is because of Nils Hasselmo's background, and not hers, that he and his wife are granted the crown. The regional connection is emphasized when Nils Hasselmo describes his marriage to a spouse of Swedish background as one in the Diaspora, implicitly suggesting that the bridal crown has the power to transform her into a woman of Värmland heritage.

The bridal crown can be seen as materializing or invoking the Swedish woman as embodied transatlantic life. The women's similar relationship to the crown is closely connected to their relationship to their father, as an authority, and in turn to their fathers' relationship to the native country. Wearing the bridal crown, the woman becomes the bearer of an imagined heritage that includes location and heritage by blood.¹⁷ When the ASI required documented blood relations to Värmland as a premise for lending the crown, heritage performed as blood relations is made a powerful force in defining heritage as parish, town, province and country and maps a dynamic transatlantic relationship.

Approved loans from the 1950s and 1960s illuminate this relationship. The bridal crown was lent to daughters of men who have sat on the Board of ASI, been ASI sponsors, and held prominent positions in Swedish-American cultural and business life. In cases where families have failed to demonstrate their relationship to Värmland, loans have not been approved.¹⁸ The bridal crown and people's handling of it thus connect generations of women of Värmland descent—families with Swedish backgrounds—with the museum and its interested parties and donors. Evident in the wearing of the bridal crown is a sense of care and pride and a sense of understanding family as a unit that bridges the living and the dead and spans several locations.

Embodied Migration Heritage in Real and Imagined Spaces

In this article I have shown how women and men choose a bridal crown to perform their Swedish or Värmland heritage in public and private settings in the United States. By following the crown in and out of these performances makes it possible for us to observe some of the forces that create community in a Swedish-American society. It also helps us understand the ways in which the Old World and the New World have created and recreated cultural connectivity through their exchange of performances where close attention to the givers performance and to material culture play key roles. The article shows that as an actor, the bridal crown has the capacity to influence people to act in particular way. Understood as a heritage gift from a province in Sweden to kin in the United States, the bridal crown reinforces the wedding act as ritual performance – the father giving away his daughter to become the bride of a future husband, and the governor giving away the bride to become the embodiment of the diplomatic Värmland Gift. The Värmland bridal crown not only connects women of Värmland with women of future generations through a patriarchal relationship; the crown also has an impact on how these women (and men) view themselves. The crown as heritage gift and lead actor in the drama of migration transforms unmarried girls into brides and married women embodying a heritage of both countries.

The bridal crown shows how a particular heritage gift, now in the hands of the gift-givers' successors, create transatlantic spaces based on kin in both Sweden and America. It presents the provincial heritage as apolitical, non-nationalistic or partisan, hence flexible and fluid in America when performed in institutional and private settings. At ASI the crown plays a lead role in the museum collections. Like a remount of a classic show; the old is renewed and once again made relevant. By drawing in actors such as the spouse of Marie Ylinen and the table cloth from Norway the crown also includes Finland and Norway in performing the past. Taken together the many uses of the bridal crown brings to the fore migration heritage as a shared Nordic experience and illuminate historical process from the individual actors' point of view.

The connections that the bridal crown maps out create a transatlantic space in which crucial meanings related to migration are embodied, acted out, integrated with the present, and made accessible for interpretation by members of the community and others (Schechner 2006). By being used at weddings across the United States, the bridal crown ties together generations of people and places, of emigrants and immigrants, of old and new lands in a drama about connectivity – all in the body of a woman but through the agency of a father. The crown, thereby, makes what at first seems to be a dramatized performance about migration heritage carried forth by women. On closer look, however, the crown proves to be validated by a patriarchal relationship, and performs a relationship between embodiment and place making. It is an emotionalized kind of performance, a history in action where heritage rests, literally and symbolically, on the head of brides,

creating a magic bond with Värmland, and also with a family past with deep roots and branches both in Sweden and America. The uses of the bridal crown in institutional and private settings over more than fifty years show how history is embodied as heritage, heritage as heritage gifts – how the word become flesh.

Dress and ornaments are objects that make the body visible, perhaps more so when selected deliberately in the wake of migration. Based on this study I would suggest on one hand that embodiment, here of migration heritage in the United States, can be seen as a form of creating space. Embodiment creates a trajectory through space, thus connecting locations and making a coherent transatlantic space, which negotiates territorial boundaries such as those of nation states. On the other hand, one may say that the bridal crown creates space for embodiment.

Whereas transnational labels such as Nordic, Scandinavian, and Swedish-American by immigrants from Sweden and their descendants illustrates the flexibility of these framings in different political settings, and demonstrates that ideas of Norden, Scandinavia and Sweden expand beyond the territorial borders of the Nordic nation states to include numerous cultural spaces (cf. Gradén & Larsen 2009: 1–7),¹⁹ this article shows that heritage gifts worn on the body play a significant role in negotiating and materializing such cultural spaces. Real Värmland and imaginary Värmland are not easily separated. The stuff of a place is not only material, it is imaginary as well. Imaginary spaces, like the ones which have the crown as gate keeper, are not a turning one's back on real spaces, but a way of coming into contact with them. Through an increased research focus on heritage gift exchange, we may gain more in-depth understanding of who wants to be connected to whom, and the implications of such proposals.

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Notes

- 1 ”Den är en sinnebild av en önskan att banden mellan amerikanska och svenska medborgare av samma stam måtte förbliva fasta släktled efter släktled” (official gift letter, ASI archives)
- 2 The example of the bridal crown as heritage gift and performance dealt with in this article are taken from my ongoing research on heritage gift exchange at sites for heritage preservation in Sweden and America. To read more about the project *Nordic Spaces in the North and North*

- America: Heritage Preservation in Real and Imagined Nordic Places, please visit www.nordicspaces.com.
- 3 Fataburen, for example, lists gifts received by the museum until the 1970s.
 - 4 Artur Hazelius, founder of the Nordic Museum and Skansen in Stockholm in Sweden, presented the collections as a gift to the “people of Sweden” (Medelius, Nyström, Stavenow-Hidemark 1998).
 - 5 As I have discussed elsewhere (Gradén 2010) in this view at the time, the gift stands in opposition to the commodity, which aim is to create monetary profit. This oppositional view has been questioned in recent scholarship. French Philosopher Jacques Derrida claims there is no such thing as a free gift (1992: 14) and criticises Mauss by saying “Mauss does not worry enough about the incompatibility between gift and exchange or about the fact that an exchanged gift is only a tit for tat, that is, an annulment of the gift” (Derrida 1992: 37). Derrida, however, writes about giving from his own culture’s context where gifts and exchange is not conflated whereas Mauss is trying to understand giving and receiving from a perspective in which gifts and exchange are not separated.
 - 6 As highlighted by Byron Nordström in the American Swedish Institute’s 80th anniversary exhibition in 2009: Between 1941 and 1945, the Institute’s ability to interact with Sweden was made difficult by the war. Its image was complicated by the reactions of some to Sweden’s (so-called) neutrality. Many Americans and Swedish-Americans alike could not understand how the country could stand outside the struggle against the Nazis.
 - 7 During my fieldwork period which started in 2006 I have worked primarily with curator Curt Pederson and volunteers Phyllis Waggoner and Elsa Petersson. Elsa Petersson, who passed away in May 2009 at the age of 89, had been responsible for the care of the Värmland Gift Collection for 25 years. In addition to fieldwork, I am indebted to archivist Marita Karlisch for excellent guidance in printed material on the Värmland Gift as well as to the collection of some 200 books which was part of the gift.
 - 8 The Värmland gift letter of intent. Gåvoboken. ASI archives.
 - 9 It is possible that Moberg had heard about the Bridal crown, as the arrival of the Värmland gift received a lot of publicity both in Sweden and Minnesota at the time.
 - 10 Fieldnotes taken during work on the Värmland gift with volunteers and curator Curt Pederson, ASI.
 - 11 In a similar manner, old-fashioned Finnish-Swedish weddings were popular among couples of Finnish-Swedish background living in Sweden in the late 1990s (Larsen 1998).
 - 12 Author’s interview with Marie Ylinen, June 2009
 - 13 Author’s interview with Marie Ylinen, July 2006, June 2009
 - 14 Author’s interview with Marie Ylinen July 2006, June 2009.
 - 15 Author’s interview with Marcia Linnér Swanson, July 2006
 - 16 Author’s interview with Nils Hasselmo, August 2006
 - 17 Following Regina Bendix, I understand authenticity as representing an experience, not as something objective or factual. (Bendix 1997: 13)
 - 18 Interviews with Sandra Schwamb, former secretary to the ASI directors and staff member who administered the lending of the crown at the ASI in the 1950-1970s, July 2006, June 2009.
 - 19 The Norden Association was established in 1919 to stimulate cultural cooperation between the Nordic countries and has since established a gift-exchange in the form of cultural houses in Iceland, the Faroes, Greenland, Åland, and Finland.

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