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The Zetterling Grant Controversy

An Emblematic Case Study of the History of Homeopathy in Sweden

MOTZI EKLÖF

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Der Zetterling-Schenkungs-Streit. Eine symbolische Fallstudie in der Geschichte der Homöopathie in Schweden

Kurzfassung: Im Jahr 1872 schenkte Per Olof Christoffer Zetterling (1815–1888) der medizinischen Fakultät der Universität Uppsala 5.000 Riksdaler (Vorläufer der schwedischen Krone). Dabei war eine der Bedingungen, die er stellte, dass die Zinsen aus dem Fonds der Förderung der medizinischen Wissenschaft dienen sollten, „mit der Verpflichtung, die aufgelaufenen Zinsen zur Deckung der Gebühren von Vorlesungen über die homöopathische Gesundheitslehre zu verwenden, solange diese Wissenschaft an ausländischen Universitäten vertreten ist“. Die Fakultät nahm das Geld dankend an. Allerdings wurde die Absicht des Geldgebers im 20. Jahrhundert mehrmals von der medizinischen Fakultät umgangen, die versuchte, die Bedingungen für die Spende zu ändern – was sie 2008 schließlich auch erreichte. Das Amt für Recht, Finanzen und Verwaltung änderte Bedingungen und Zweck dahingehend, dass ausschließlich die medizinische Wissenschaft gefördert wurde.

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht das Schicksal der Zetterlingschen Schenkung zwischen 1872 und 2020 im medizinischen und gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhang und beleuchtet die unterschiedlichen Faktoren, die zu dieser Entwicklung beigetragen haben. Das Schicksal der Schenkung wirft auch Fragen bezüglich der Beziehung zwischen Staat und Universitäten sowie nach dem Sinn und Zweck der Hochschulbildung auf.



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Homeopathy introduced in Sweden

The earliest mention of homeopathy in Sweden was in an article written by the Royal Doctor Sven Hedin, in 1797¹, published the year after Hahnemann first presented homeopathy and the principle of *similia* in writing. Homeopathy was more properly introduced in the 1820s by Göran Wahlenberg (1780–1851), a professor of medicine and botany at Uppsala University. Wahlenberg, best known for his botanical work and appointed to the Linnaean chair, included the subject in his university courses, despite opposition from his faculty colleagues.²

Among Wahlenberg's students was Pehr Jacob Liedbeck (1802–1876), who was an active member of the circle around Pehr Henrik Ling (1776–1839), the creator of Swedish gymnastics and physical therapy, in German also called 'Heilgymnastik.' Liedbeck was also married to Pehr Henrik Ling's daughter Jetta Ling.³ P.H. Ling and his followers were adamantly against the use of medications and considered gymnastics a form of natural medicine.

Liedbeck was the primary advocate and practitioner of homeopathy in Sweden during the 19th century, translating Hahnemann's seminal book, "Organon of medicine," in 1835, works on homeopathic treatment of cholera and also publishing several papers of his own on the subject.⁴ Liedbeck's son-in-law, Carl August Georgii (1808–1882), travelled to Berlin, Paris, and London, where he taught Swedish gymnastics and practised homeopathy.

Zetterling at Uppsala University

During the mid-19th century decades, homeopathy gained a few followers among the university students of the time in Sweden. Per Olof Christoffer Zetterling (1815–1888) was one of them. Born in Linköping, as the son of a contract dean, he enrolled at the university in 1836. After a philosophical-theological dissertation in 1838⁵ he continued with philosophical studies at the university until his death⁶. According to his will from August 1872, he stipulated that the interest from the donated money should go toward furthering medical science, "with the obligation to use the accrued interest for lecture

1 Hedin (1797).

2 Eklöf (2003), p. 204; Eklöf: The homeopathic hospital (2007), p. 171.

3 Eklöf: The homeopathic hospital (2007), p. 171; Ottosson (2005).

4 E. g. Liedbeck (1854); Liedbeck (1869).

5 Zetterling (1838).

6 Pontén (1954), p. 53.



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fees on homeopathic health doctrine, as long as this science has representatives at foreign universities.”⁷

The Faculty of Medicine decided, at a meeting in September 1872, to “humbly” receive this gift “with the conditions attached to it.”⁸ Present at the meeting was, among others, Dean August Almén, professor of medicine and physiological chemistry and later the head of the National Medical Board. The Faculty of Medicine accepted the donation but has on several occasions tried to have the conditions for the donation revoked.

It is not uncommon for a donation’s original description of purpose to be changed via a legal decision in line with societal changes that make the original purpose obsolete, even if it takes a lot to go against the donor’s wishes. What is special in this case is the long-running battles surrounding the donation. Since 1872 there has been a struggle between different parties at different stages of the process: Uppsala University, medical authorities, representatives of homeopathy, the government, the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency and other judicial bodies. One key issue for the authorities has been whether homeopathy is to be considered a science, another if homeopathy can be considered part of medical science.

From other perspectives, other issues are of greater relevance. The controversy surrounding the Zetterling donation does not only illustrate the position of a Swedish Faculty of Medicine regarding homeopathy. It is also an example of how the wardens of medical, and with time also the pharmacological sciences, asserted interpretative prerogative, not only in terms of what is to be regarded as medical or pharmacological science but also regarding the dominance of medicine and pharmacology within the university as a whole with all its scientific fields, as well as to legal regulations. The Faculty of Medicine’s argumentation for not following the donor’s intentions sheds light on how homeopathy was defined in Sweden during the 20th century and to date, and the consequences that the battle over homeopathy has had, and can have, for the scientific basis of higher education.

First attempt: Unworthy and not honourable

By 1907, the funds from the donation had grown to such a level that the interest was available for the stated purpose.⁹ The Faculty of Medicine had been informed that ho-

7 “[...] över homeopatisk hälsolära så länge denna vetenskap har representanter vid utländska universitet.” UU, copy of the letter from Zetterling, received from the Faculty of Medicine.

8 § 2, Minutes from the Faculty of Medicine at Uppsala University, September 11, 1872, in: Kant (1946), p. 22.

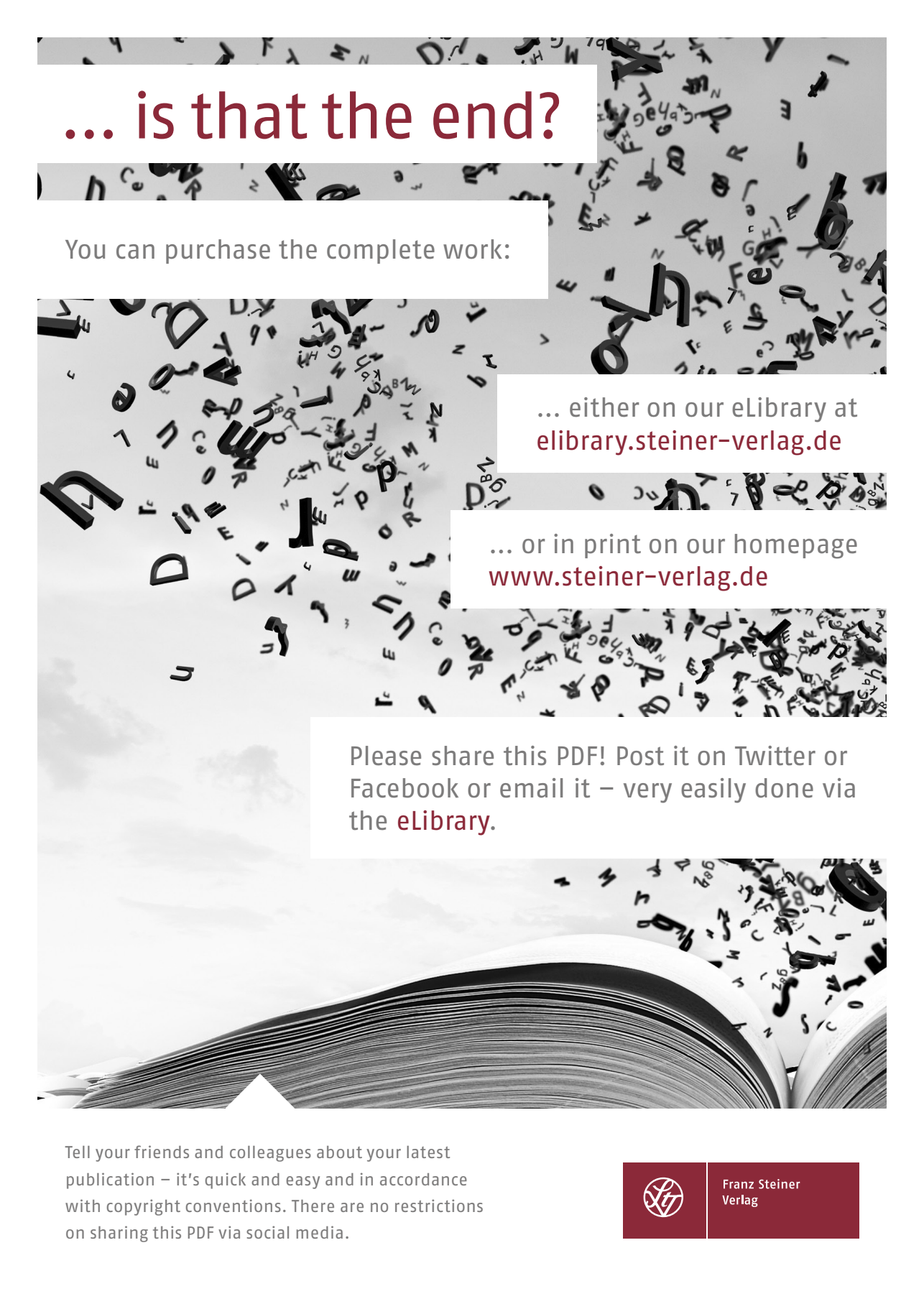
9 § 311, Minutes from the Faculty of Medicine, Uppsala University, April 24, 1907. UUL, Faculty of Medicine Uppsala Minutes 1907–09, AI:16.



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The background of the entire page is a grayscale image. The upper portion is filled with a dense, chaotic arrangement of various letters and symbols (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z, 0-9, and punctuation) scattered across the surface. In the lower portion, the top edge of an open book is visible, showing the thickness of the pages and the binding. The text is overlaid on this background in white rectangular boxes.

... is that the end?

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