“In the blood of your bridegroom”. Women writers, religious language and rhetorical tactics in the Swedish eighteenth-century Moravian movement

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During mid-eighteenth century a religious revival had reached Sweden from Germany: The Moravian movement. One significant characteristic of this movement was that it gave the individual the right to express a personal confession of faith in his or her own words. As a consequence of this women in Moravian circles had unique opportunities to act and speak in public. They did so in writing or even by preaching, something that was denied them in most other religious contexts. This was the case in orthodox Lutheranism, which was the dominating doctrine at the time in Sweden and imposed by the authorities. In this paper, which is based on my ongoing research project in comparative literature (“Gender, power and religious rhetoric in the Swedish eighteenth-century Moravian movement”), I discuss how gender was constructed in texts written by some of these Moravian women writers. I do this by analysing their use of rhetoric, i.e. rhetorical devices, such as metaphorical language and ways of argumentation. Additionally the term “rhetorical tactic” is introduced in the discussion. As Michel de Certeau has pointed out: "The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it an organized by the law of a foreign power.” This means that some factors become especially important, such as flexibility or vigilance, and the use of linguistic contradictions and cracks. These women were both constrained and had possibilities. By using the term rhetorical tactic the dynamics of different rhetorical situations are emphasized. Religion limited women’s participation in public, but at the same time religious language and ideas could be used to exceed gender bound limits.