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A Contested Actress and Sex Goddess

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Anita Ekberg in Hollywood: A Contested Actress and Sex Goddess

In 1951 Anita Ekberg won the contest Miss Sweden and went immediately to the United States. From 1953 and onwards she appeared in films produced by Universal and Paramount, and she was also a member of John Wayne's company Batjac Productions. Anita Ekberg had one of the leading roles in *War and Peace* (1956), but mostly she appeared in thrillers, light comedies and farces, often together with popular stars such as Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis and Bob Hope. She made films in USA up until 1970, but worked mostly in Italy after her remarkable role in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* in 1960.

Ekberg was one of the most famous blonde bombshells in Hollywood during the 1950s and she won a Golden Globe as a new star of the year in 1956. Besides making films she became known as a model and pin up girl which was an important way to fame during the fifties in USA, and she was a staple in the magazines about her sometimes scandalous stories.

She came to a United States permeated with discussions about sexuality and to a popular culture that favored sex, breasts and voluptuous female bodies more than anything. I would argue that she was most important in how the apprehension of Swedish sexuality and Swedish blonde women was created, propagated and upheld in the American cultural discourse, in a way that has not been observed at all.

In this presentation, my aim is to explore and analyze the writings about Anita Ekberg in the American press and media to find out how she was apprehended and constructed as a new Swedish star in Hollywood, and how notions and ideas about Sweden, sexuality, gender and stereotypes were negotiated and reproduced through Ekberg. This analysis will be compared with the Swedish reception and construction of Ekberg, which presumably was of a different kind, arguably more derogative, on the verge to harassment.