

# Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

Av Helge Ridderstrøm (førsteamanuensis ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet)

Sist oppdatert 08.12.20

## Gåte

(\_sjanger) En prøve på skarpsindighet. Vi skal finne svaret på et spørsmål som med vilje er dunkelt formulert.

Tradert folkediktning, dvs. lever på folkemunne, eller nyskapt (lagd av en bestemt person).

“It is Aristotle’s opinion that not only are metaphors the germs of riddles, but that enigmatic elements appear in all metaphors, since these are derived from ‘objects which are closely related to the thing itself but which are not immediately obvious.’ Gaston Paris defines the riddle as ‘a metaphor or a group of metaphors, the employment of which has not passed into common use, and the explanation of which is not self-evident.’ [...] In its origins the riddle is closely connected not only with the metaphor but with mythological personification. From one to the other is but a step. ‘So thoroughly does riddle-making belong to the mythologic stage of thought,’ says Tylor, [...] ‘that any poet’s simile, if not too far-fetched, needs only inversion to be made at once into an enigma.’ As the metaphor plays an immense role in the formation of mythologies, so the riddle is early associated with imaginative conceptions of nature and the divine spirit.” (professor Frederick Tupper Jr. i [http://www.archive.org/stream/riddlesofexeterbook00tuppuoft/riddlesofexeterbook00tuppuoft\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/riddlesofexeterbook00tuppuoft/riddlesofexeterbook00tuppuoft_djvu.txt); lesedato 02.10.12)

Deles inn i bl.a.

- egentlige gåter (Hva har øyne, men kan ikke se? Svar: En nyfødt kattunge)
- læregåter (Hvem slo ihjel fjerdedelen av alle mennesker? Kain)
- skjemtegåter (Hvem slo den første spikeren i kirka? Hammeren)
- gåtevitser (Hva får vi hvis et nøste og en giraff parrer seg? En høyhalset genser)
- kryptomorfe gåter (Hva er midt på Karin og i enden av Sjur? Bokstaven r; svaret på gåten ligger i måten den er formulert på)

“A riddle is a statement or question that proposes a puzzle to be solved. Riddles generally have a veiled meaning and might use figurative language, a euphemism,

or even a sort of pun in order to hide the true answer. Those who want to solve a riddle usually must use some logic to arrive at the correct answer, or see through some misleading clues. The contemporary word riddle developed from the Middle English word *ridlen*, in which it meant “to sift,” which came from the Old English word *rǣdelle*, meaning “counsel” or “conjecture.” [...] The definition of riddle can be further classified into two main types: enigmas and conundra.

- Enigma: This type of riddle is a statement or question that employs metaphorical or allegorical language. The person trying to solve the riddle must use careful thinking and some ingenuity to reach the answer. For example: I’m tall when I’m young and I’m short when I’m old. What am I? A candle.

- Conundra: This type of riddle relies on some sort of pun either in the original statement or in the answer. For example: What is the longest word in the dictionary? Smiles, because there is a mile between each ‘s.’ ” (<http://www.literarydevices.com/riddle/>; lesedato 31.03.16)

Noen vitselignende gåter leker med bokstaver/ord, med deres uttale og betydning. Eksempler:

“Why is the letter “D” like a sailor?” Svaret er “They follow the sea” fordi bokstaven C i alfabetet følges av D, og C uttales likt med “sea”.

“What is a difference between a hill and a pill?” “A hill is hard to get up, a pill is hard to get down.” “What is the difference between a jeweler and a jailer?” “A jeweler sells watches, a jailer watches cells.”

“What driver doesn’t have a license?” “A screwdriver.” “What kind of clothes do lawyers wear?” “A lawsuit.”

“A koan is a riddle or puzzle that Zen Buddhists use during meditation to help them unravel greater truths about the world and about themselves. Zen masters have been testing their students with these stories, questions, or phrases for centuries. Many koans can be traced back to the collections of sayings amassed by Chinese priests in the 12th and 13th centuries. Koans may seem like paradoxes at first glance. It is up to the Zen student to tease out their meaning. Often, after a prolonged and exhausting intellectual struggle, the student realizes that the koan is actually meant to be understood by the spirit and by intuition. [...] The koan serves as a surgical tool used to cut into and then break through the mind of the practitioner... Koans aren’t just puzzles that your mind figures out suddenly and proclaims, “Aha! the answer is three!” They wait for you to open enough to allow the space necessary for them to enter into your depths – the inner regions beyond knowing.” ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/zen-buddhism-koan\\_us\\_563251dce4b0631799115f3c](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/zen-buddhism-koan_us_563251dce4b0631799115f3c); lesedato 20.09.16)

Fra 1000-tallets England er det bevart en bok med gåter, *The Exeter Book*, der gåtene er satt opp som vers og noen av dem er komiske og obskøne (Lacey og Danziger 1999 s. 159-160). Boka var i 1999 oppbevart i katedralbiblioteket i Exeter. Den inneholder både svært korte gåter og gåter som består av mange verselinjer. “Nothing human is deemed too high or low for treatment, and all phases of Old English existence are revealed in these poems [...] so that they stand forth as the most important contemporary contributions to our knowledge of the everyday life of their time. The poet does not hesitate to treat the cosmic aspects of nature, the changing forms of sea and sky, of wind and wave, in the greatest of the riddles, the Storm-cycle (2-4); nor to embody into an exquisite myth the battle of Sun and Moon or the fierce onset of the Iceberg (Rid. 34); but, with a few such exceptions, the Riddles are very close to solid earth. The larger number is devoted to man and his works: his weapons, his implements of home and field” (professor Frederick Tupper Jr. i [http://www.archive.org/stream/riddlesofexeterbook00tuppuoft/riddlesofexeterbook00tuppuoft\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/riddlesofexeterbook00tuppuoft/riddlesofexeterbook00tuppuoft_djvu.txt); lesedato 02.10.12).

En av de største gåtesamlingene som er bevart, er tyskeren Nicolas Reusners *Aenigmatographia* (1602). I en av gåtene er svaret “røyk”: “Mange er tårene jeg gir, men det er ingen grunn til sorg, / jeg streber mot liv i skyen, men luften oppsluker meg.”

Den tyske læreren Johann Christoph Ludwig ga i 1749 ut boka *100 utvalgte gåter*. Gåtene skulle lette innlæringen av skolestoff fordi læringen ble morsommere. Et lignende pedagogisk verk er den anonyme tyske gåteboka *Åtte hundre nye og ikke hittil trykte gåter* (1791), der svarene på gåtene gjelder historiske personer, naturvitenskapelig kunnskap og lignende, inklusiv bibelkunnskap (Göbels 1980 s. 180).

“En fjøs full av kvite kyr, med en stor rød okse i midten (munnen). Ei gåte som ikke så mange i dag kan klare, er denne:

Svin drog lin  
gjenna fe  
oppå tre.

Løysninga er her svinebusten som blei brukt til skomakring. Busten satt på enden av en lintråd, som blei trukket gjennom læret (fe) oppå en stokk av tre. I ei særstilling står ei gruppe gåter av tilsynelatende erotisk tilsnitt, som denne:

Det ramla og det skramla  
i bestemor si gamla,  
oppafor knean  
og midt i mella låran.

Løysninga her er selvfølgelig kaffikverna.”

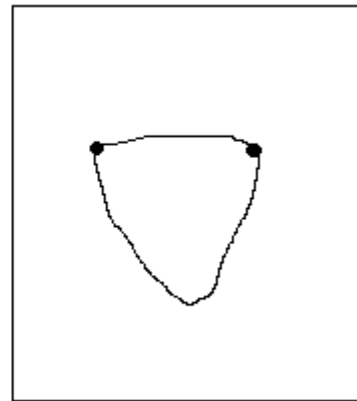
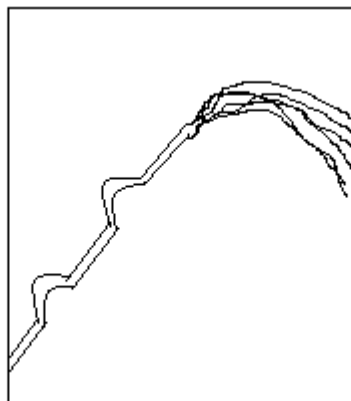
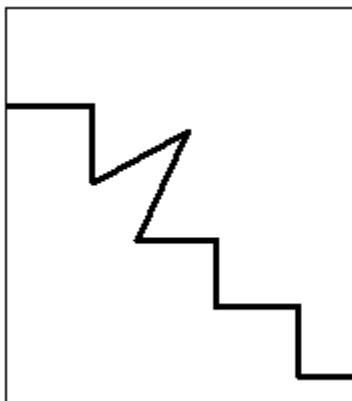
([http://karlsoy.com/bygdebok/periode10\\_del20.html](http://karlsoy.com/bygdebok/periode10_del20.html); lesedato 20.09.13)

Den britiske fantasyforfatteren J. R. R. Tolkiens barnebok *The Hobbit* (1937) inneholder i kapittel 5 en rekke versifiserte gåter. Disse gåtene var inspirert av eldre litteratur: “Riddles occurred in old English Poetry and had a significant literary tradition. They were derived partly from Anglo-Saxon literary works (Aldhelm 639-709). Aldhelm was inspired by the works of a latin poet, Symphosius. Examples of riddles can be found in Old Norse and ancient Greek works. The technique of the riddle is to refer obliquely to the subject by using figurative language. The Riddle Game is a contest of wit and skill. The person who cannot answer loses. Riddle games occur frequently in mythology. In chapter 5 therefore, Bilbo and Gollum have a riddle contest which reflects Tolkien's interest in old literary forms.” (<http://mulubinba.typepad.com/>; lesedato 30.05.13)

Såkalte logiske gåter er tankenøtter som kan kreve stringent logisk resonnement, eller bare å tenke litt utenom det mest konvensjonelle, som i denne gåten: En gutt i Boston i USA kom sammen med sin far ut for en alvorlig trafikkulykke. Faren avled. Gutten kom på sykehus. Da gutten våknet opp, sa legen til han: “Du var heldig, min sønn.” Hvordan var dette mulig? Løsning: Guttens mor var lege.

En rebus er en type bildegåte (vanligvis med kombinasjoner av tegninger, bokstaver og matematiske tegn). Såkalte drodler er visuelle gåter med overraskende og morsomme svar:

Hva er dette?



Løsninger: Et feiltrinn. Vannstrålen fra en brannmann med hikke. Våt sirkel hengt opp til tørk.

Det som på engelsk kalles en “charade”, er en slags versifisert gåte som skjuler f.eks. et ord/begrep. I Jane Austens roman *Emma* (1815) er det et eksempel på at en ung prest (Mr. Elton) skriver en charade rettet til Emma. Emma og venninnen Harriet Smith prøver å løse gåten:

“To Miss—

CHARADE.

My first displays the wealth and pomp of kings,  
Lords of the earth! their luxury and ease.  
Another view of man, my second brings,  
Behold him there, the monarch of the seas!

But ah! united, what reverse we have!  
Man's boasted power and freedom, all are flown;  
Lord of the earth and sea, he bends a slave,  
And woman, lovely woman, reigns alone.

Thy ready wit the word will soon supply,  
May its approval beam in that soft eye!

She cast her eye over it, pondered, caught the meaning, read it through again to be quite certain, and quite mistress of the lines, and then passing it to Harriet, sat happily smiling, and saying to herself, while Harriet was puzzling over the paper in all the confusion of hope and dulness, “Very well, Mr. Elton, very well indeed. I have read worse charades. *Courtship* – a very good hint. I give you credit for it. This is feeling your way. This is saying very plainly – ‘Pray, Miss Smith, give me leave to pay my addresses to you. Approve my charade and my intentions in the same glance.’

May its approval beam in that soft eye!

Harriet exactly. Soft is the very word for her eye – of all epithets, the justest that could be given.

Thy ready wit the word will soon supply.

Humph – Harriet’s ready wit! All the better. A man must be very much in love, indeed, to describe her so. Ah! Mr. Knightley, I wish you had the benefit of this; I think this would convince you. For once in your life you would be obliged to own yourself mistaken. An excellent charade indeed! and very much to the purpose. Things must come to a crisis soon now.

She was obliged to break off from these very pleasant observations, which were otherwise of a sort to run into great length, by the eagerness of Harriet’s wondering questions.

“What can it be, Miss Woodhouse? – what can it be? I have not an idea – I cannot guess it in the least. What can it possibly be? Do try to find it out, Miss Woodhouse. Do help me. I never saw any thing so hard. Is it kingdom? I wonder who the friend was – and who could be the young lady. Do you think it is a good one? Can it be woman?

And woman, lovely woman, reigns alone.

Can it be Neptune?

Behold him there, the monarch of the seas!

Or a trident? or a mermaid? or a shark? Oh, no! shark is only one syllable. It must be very clever, or he would not have brought it. Oh! Miss Woodhouse, do you think we shall ever find it out?”

“Mermaids and sharks! Nonsense! My dear Harriet, what are you thinking of? Where would be the use of his bringing us a charade made by a friend upon a mermaid or a shark? Give me the paper and listen.

For Miss ——, read Miss Smith.

My first displays the wealth and pomp of kings,  
Lords of the earth! their luxury and ease.

That is *court*.

Another view of man, my second brings;  
Behold him there, the monarch of the seas!

That is *ship*; – plain as it can be. – Now for the cream.

But ah! united, (*courtship*, you know,) what reverse we have!  
Man’s boasted power and freedom, all are flown.  
Lord of the earth and sea, he bends a slave,  
And woman, lovely woman, reigns alone.

A very proper compliment! – and then follows the application, which I think, my dear Harriet, you cannot find much difficulty in comprehending. Read it in comfort to yourself. There can be no doubt of its being written for you and to you.”

Harriet could not long resist so delightful a persuasion. She read the concluding lines, and was all flutter and happiness. She could not speak. But she was not wanted to speak. It was enough for her to feel. Emma spoke for her.

“There is so pointed, and so particular a meaning in this compliment,” said she, “that I cannot have a doubt as to Mr. Elton’s intentions. You are his object – and you will soon receive the completest proof of it.” ” (fra kapittel 9)

Den amerikanske litteraturforskeren Archer Taylor publiserte blant annet bøkene *The Literary Riddle Before 1600* (1948), *English Riddles from Oral Tradition* (1951; over 900 sider) og *An Annotated Collection of Mongolian Riddles* (1954).

I Simen Hagerups essay- og kortprosasamling *Absolutt alt: (fra abaksograf til årringer)* (2004) er det inkludert et par gåter der svarene står med speilvendt skrift (leses lettest med bruk av et speil). Teksten “Skapgåte” er både et dikt med enderim og en gåte.

Alle artiklene og litteraturlista til hele leksikonet er tilgjengelig på <https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no>