

Introduction to Special Issue of Swedish Literature Studies

Jane Mattisson

School of Learning and Environment, Kristianstad University, Sweden

Email: jane.mattisson@hkr.se

The present Issue celebrates the richness and variety of Swedish literature from the late eighteenth century to the present day. It incorporates articles on both prose and poetry; all are written in English. A contribution, concerning the epic work *Ani-ara* and written in Chinese, is also included by translator Chen Maiping.

Despite its very small population of approximately 9.5 million people, Sweden has produced many internationally acclaimed authors, no fewer than eight of whom have won the Nobel Prize in Literature: Selma Lagerlöf (1909), Verner von Heidenstam (1916), Erik Axel Karlfeldt (1931), Pär Lagerkvist (1951), Nelly Sachs (1966; shared), Eyvind Johnson (1974; shared), Harry Martinson (1974; shared) and most recently, Tomas Tranströmer (2011).

The earliest writers discussed in the present Issue were active in the middle of the eighteenth century, which saw the emergence of the Swedish Enlightenment movement and of such literary figures as Olof von Dalin (1708 – 1763) and Johan Henrik Kellgren (1751 – 1795). Other important writers, who are included in the present volume, are Carl Michael Bellman (1740 – 1795), Bengt Lidner (1757 – 1793) and Johan Gabriel Oxenstierna (1750 – 1818). In the first article, “Carl Michael Bellman: Poet and Singer – Songwriter of the 18th Century”, Johan Stenström discusses some of Bellman’s most important works, demonstrating why he has become one of Sweden’s most prominent poets. In the following article, “The poem as concert: Lidner, Oxenstierna and the unity of the long poem”, Alfred Sjödin discusses selected poems by Bengt Lidner and Johan Gabriel Oxenstierna. With the aid of detailed literary analyses, he explores the close relationship between form and ideology in both poets’ works.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century witnessed two golden ages of Swedish poetry. Some of Sweden’s most famous poets, including Esaias Tegnér (1782 – 1846), Erik Johan Stagnelius (1793 – 1823), Verner von Heidenstam (1859 – 1940), Gustaf Fröding (1860 – 1911) and Erik Axel Karlfeldt (1864 – 1931) emerged during this period. In “Great 19th Century Swedish Poets”, Eva Haettner Aurelius discusses all five poets, their complexity, formal excellence and symbolism, demonstrating their special ability to depict the joy and misery of man. Haettner Aurelius demonstrates how the five poets have contributed to giving both poetry and the poet a prestigious position in Swedish culture.

August Strindberg (1849 – 1912), one of Sweden's greatest playwrights, novelists, poets, essayists and painters is given special attention in Astrid Regnell's article "The Caterpillar transforming into a Butterfly? The images of women in Strindberg's "Zones of the Spirit". Focusing on Strindberg's portrayal of women, Regnell concludes that Strindberg saw women as mediums of man's reconciliation with God.

The centennial of Strindberg's death has been marked by a number of celebrations both in Sweden and abroad. Swedish television has televised several of Strindberg's works, and public lectures on a wide variety of Strindberg's productions have been held throughout Sweden.

Writing at the same time as Harry Martinson, Astrid Lindgren (1907 – 2002) focused on children's literature. The publication of her *Pippi Longstocking* in 1945 is regarded as a milestone in Swedish literature because it revolutionised not only children's literature but the attitude of the Swedish people towards children and their upbringing. In her article "Astrid Lindgren's Twin Roles", Helene Ehriander demonstrates that Lindgren was part of the golden age of children's literature that flourished after the Second World War (1939 – 1945). In her capacity as editor and writer, Lindgren was responsible for promoting children's books by insisting that they maintain the same quality as that pertaining to books for adults.

During the twentieth century, historical novels for children became popular in Sweden. Mary Ingemanson discusses aspects of this development in her comparative article "Migration and Identity in Swedish and Canadian Historical Novels for Children". Ingemanson compares Maj Bylock's *Drakskeppstrilogi* (*Dragon Ship Trilogy*, 1997 – 1998) with three Canadian novels — Kathleen Pearson's *The sky is Falling* (1989), and Barbara Smucker's *Underground to Canada* (1978) and *Days of Terror* (1989), concluding that migration to a new country and the resulting process of adaptation are less dependent on context than on inner strength. She argues that novels of migration can act as important sources of inspiration and comfort to teenage readers.

Lena Ahlin's "The Doctor and the Pastor: On Love and Evil in Hjalmar Söderberg's *Doctor Glas* and Bengt Ohlsson's *Gregorius*" discusses the relations between the two works (*Gregorius* is a response to Söderberg's classic *Doctor Glas*). The first, from the beginning of the twentieth century and the second from 2004, focus on evil. Ahlin explores the Swedish fascination with the dark side of life and why we continue to be drawn to depictions of evil.

In discussing Kerstin Ekman (1933 –), Cecilia Lindhé focuses on Ekman's novel *City of Light* (1983). Renowned for a series of highly successful detective novels and fascinated by psychological and social themes, Ekman explores the complexity of "now" and supplies alternatives to a stereotypical tradition of images of women. Lindhé demonstrates that Ekman's writing investigates the relationship between verbal and visual art while simultaneously testing their ideological powers of signification.

Above all, it is Henning Mankell and Stieg Larsson who are responsible for the popularity of detective fiction in Sweden—a popularity which has spread far beyond the boundaries of the home country. In her article "Beyond Stieg Larsson: Contemporary Trends and Traditions in Swedish Crime Fiction", Kerstin Bergman surveys the

landscape of Swedish crime fiction before and after Larsson's popular *Millenium* trilogy (2005), shedding light on current trends and development in detective fiction, the changing role of the police procedural, the new wave of women writers, recent diversification, and the current Europeanisation of Swedish crime fiction.

Focusing on Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2008), Teri Schamp-Bjerede considers the role of Lisbeth Salander, one of the two protagonists, and her relationship with the computer sub-culture that is such an important feature of the novel. Bjerede illustrates how the use of labels transforms Salander from a negative, reclusive computer hacker to a reluctant but acceptable heroine. Bjerede points to how Larsson exposes not only the benefits but also the liabilities of personal computers.

The final article on literature discusses the poetry of last year's Nobel Prize Winner, Tomas Tranströmer. In her article on "Life and Death in the Poetry of Tomas Tranströmer", Jane Mattisson discusses a range of poems, early and recent, arguing that Tranströmer's concrete images provide access to the imminence and reality of death at the same time as they preserve its mysterious nature. Tranströmer's poems, argues Mattisson, can act as agents of change, enabling readers to breach the wall of conventional thinking and regard death from a variety of perspectives.

Following the final article on literature is Chen Maiping's article (in Chinese) on translating Swedish texts into Chinese. As a translator, Chen Maiping gives an introduction to *Aniara* by Harry Martinson sharing some of his reflections on translating the well-known epic work into Chinese.

This special Issue on Swedish literature concludes with personal observations about the functions of the Nobel Prize Committee. These are provided by one of its members, Kjell Espmark. Espmark draws attention to the fact that since 1946, it is the pioneers of literature who have been favoured. At the same time, the Swedish Academy also wishes to draw attention to less well-known authors and new oeuvres; the 1980s saw a growing ambition to recognise innovators around the world. Espmark's comments conclude with an intriguing personal reflection.

Finally, two book reviews are included, of Harry Martinson's *Chickweed Wintergreen* (2010) and Kjell Espmark's *Outside the Calendar. Selected Poems* (2012). Both have recently been translated into English.

It is our sincere hope that the present collection of articles will give a taste of the variety, depth and complexity of Swedish literature from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day. Swedish literature, adult as well as children's, is blossoming and continues to be translated into a wide variety of languages. We look forward to more titles translated into Chinese.

责任编辑:杨革新