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Introduction: Literary Public Spheres

By Torbjörn Forslid & Anders Ohlsson

Why a thematic section on “Literary Public Spheres”?

Literature has always constituted an important part of the public sphere. For instance, drama in ancient Greece was performed within the popular festivals of Dionysus. However, drama was also an important part of life in the city state. Writing drama was part of a competition, and those selected for performance were sponsored by wealthy citizens. Using well known myths of the time, these dramas typically dealt with central issues in the daily life of the city states and its citizens. Each performance was attended by close to 15 000 spectators, which makes ancient Greek theatre a dominating medium before the invention of print technology.

Examples abound that literature influences public debate and public life: Taslima Nasreen challenging Islamic fundamentalism in her documentary novel *Lajja Shame* (1994), and Elisabeth Alexander performing her own poem “Praise Song for the Day” at Barack Obama’s presidential inauguration in January 2009. Literature has always affected its readers and listeners, it has exerted influence on politicians and legislators, and it has called upon action or defense.

The complex relation between literature and the surrounding society has of course been a much debated issue. At the turn of the 20th century, Swedish literary historian Henrik Schück considered the study of literature as part of the history of culture in a broad sense. In literary biographies, which for long held the position as dominant genre within literary studies, and which in recent years has experienced a noticeable revival, the life of the author was put in relation not only to his or her literary works, but also to the surrounding society. Within the sociology of literature, the social production of literature and its social implications are considered.

Since the mid-20th century, however, literary studies have been dominated by theories focusing on formal aspects of the literary text. Suffice it to mention theories such as Russian formalism, new criticism, structuralism, and post-structuralism. Literary studies have given precedence to the interpretation of single works, groups of texts, or whole authorships. Also in cultural studies, interpretation has been a key analytical tool, although the focus here has not been on canonical texts.

The developments in society in the latter half of the 20th century have made this traditional text analytical approach difficult to defend. In today’s literary public sphere, different artistic and commercial interests converge. Dissolution of genres and transgression of borders has become the rule, rather than the exception. In-

depth readings of, for instance, Nasreen's *Lajja Shame* will give us a more thorough understanding of this documentary novel. These types of literary studies, however, will not explain the function and effect of this novel in today's media-tised public sphere.

The objective of this thematic section on Literary Public Spheres is to broaden the scope of literary studies by exploring how writers and different categories of readers employ literature for a variety of purposes – some explicit, some only vaguely defined – in a wide range of public settings. Thus, we seek to explore how literary texts become the subject of debate, negotiation or dialogue centered on contemporary values and opinions of popular concern. Furthermore, we consider the public conversation – the debate – about literature, as a crucial part of literature itself.

The literary public sphere may be approached from a number of theoretical perspectives. One natural, yet partly problematic starting point is Jürgen Habermas' classical *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962; eng. transl. 1989). Habermas develops a slightly idealized concept of "public sphere", which emerged in 18th century Europe. It is a space outside of state control, where individuals can get together for debates, conversations, and discussions, thus forming a "public opinion". The best argument, not the prestige or status of the debater, should be conclusive/decisive. According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere had its heydays in Britain during the 18th and 19th centuries. Already in the 1870s, the economic decline and the growth of commercial mass media caused what Habermas refers to as the "decay" of the public sphere.

Several objections can be raised to Habermas' idealized and normative view of the public sphere; some of these are displayed in the very first article below. Still, the concept of the public sphere offers a point of departure for the study of today's modern (literary) public spheres. Habermas' concept should not be considered a static and normative theory, but a productive hypothesis. Furthermore, it highlights the function of (the debates of) literature in a wider context. The concept of the public sphere might also be used for bridging the gap between internal interpretation of texts and a wider cultural analysis, focusing on the effects of *different* texts in society. Consequently, Habermas forms a background to the predominant "deliberative" view of democracy (compare lat. "deliberare" meaning "discuss", "deliberate") where literature and culture hold a prominent position.

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In "Participation, Representation and Media System: Habermasian Paths to the Past", Patrik Lundell argues that Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere may serve as heuristic tool for the study of today's media situation and media development. In order to achieve this, Lundell argues for further historical investigation into three aspects of Habermas' theory: Actual media participation, the representative features of media institutions, and media systems. These can and should

be combined, and historical specificity is of utmost importance. Focusing on concrete situations and places makes the neat grand-scale chronologies (Habermas' and others') fall short.

In her article "An Amateur's Raid in a World of Specialists? The Swedish Essay in Contemporary Public Debate", Emma Eldelin focuses on the role of essayists in late modernity. Referencing on Edward Said's plea for an attitude of *amateurism* in the public sphere in response to the contemporary specialization, Eldelin argues that the essay, as a genre, should be considered a vital part of public culture today, because of its devotion and interest for the larger picture. Some examples of essayists and essayistic writing of later decades, mainly from Sweden – among others Kerstin Ekman and Peter Nilson – serve as illustrations. These writers, however, have also gained at least part of their authority from being acknowledged in other fields or genres: Ekman as a distinguished novelist and member of the Swedish Academy and Nilson as a trained astronomer.

In her article "Personal Readings and Public Texts – Book Blogs and Online Writing about Literature", Ann Steiner states that the blogging culture has become an important and integrated part of the book trade and has influenced the publishing, marketing and distribution of literature in North America and in many European countries. The question is how this potential agency among bloggers operates. Focusing on Swedish book blogs during the autumn of 2009, Steiner addresses two issues in her article: the position of the amateur book blogger with regard to concepts like professionalism, strategies and hierarchies, and secondly, the connections between the book bloggers and the book trade, especially the publishers and their marketing departments.

After the "cultural turn", the question of how to legitimate the study of literature has become an urgent matter within Western educational systems. In her article "The Literature Curriculum in Russia: Cultural Nationalism vs. the Cultural Turn", Karin Sarsenov examines the development of educational discourse in Russia. Despite radical educational reforms since 1991, literature still holds a prominent place in Russian schools. Sarsenov identifies the specific objectives of the authorities in devoting so much time to literature in school, as well as to elucidate in what way literature is to achieve these aims.

According to German media theorist Friedrich Kittler, the turn of the 19th century meant an intimization of language and literature. Coinciding with this development, Jon Helgason states in his article "Why ABC Matters. Lexicography and Literary History" that radical institutional attempts were made to regulate and discipline language and to codify spelling, inflection and, not the least, meaning – all on scientific grounds. Influenced by "The Encyclopaedic Idea" – the will and ambition to collect and order all human knowledge – institutions and researchers began working on and publish impressive lexicographical projects such as *The Swedish Academy Dictionary* (1893 –). Helgason describes its origin, and considers its importance for the literary culture.

Media development has profoundly affected the literary public sphere. Authors as well as politicians may feel obliged to follow “the law of compulsory visibility” (John B. Thompson). All contemporary writers, be it bestselling authors or exclusive, high brow poets, must in one way or another reflect on their marketing and media strategies. Meeting and communicating with the audience, the potential readers, is of critical importance. In our article “The Author on Stage”, we consider how different literary performances by Swedish novelist Björn Ranelid (b. 1949) help establish his “brand name” on the literary market place.

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Participation, Representation and Media System: Habermasian Paths to the Past

By Patrik Lundell

Abstract

Drawing from Swedish press history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the present article argues for further historical investigation into three aspects of Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere. The first concerns actual media participation, the second the representative features of media institutions, and the third media systems. These routes of analysis can and should be combined, and historical specificity is key. When we focus on concrete situations and places, the neat grand-scale chronologies (Habermas' and others') fall short. There is no simple development from a "representative publicness" to a participatory public sphere, and back again. And the media have always been interconnected in a system-like way. However, historical specificity does not exclude contemporary developments. The present conclusion is that if we are to gain any true understanding of contemporary phenomena, a historical perspective is crucial, and aspects of Habermas' theory can serve as heuristic tools.

Keywords: Participatory media, representation, media system, public sphere, Jürgen Habermas, press history, eighteenth century, nineteenth century.

Introduction

Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, published in German in 1962 and translated into Swedish in 1984 (*Borgerlig offentlighet*) and into English in 1989 (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*), has been strongly criticized. Three problems associated with Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere are 1) that, by focusing on the (male) *bourgeois* public sphere, it downplayed other forms of public activity, and hence depicted the public sphere as a far too homogenous object; 2) that, by focusing on a small range of high-culture periodicals, it neglected other forms of printed material, and hence described public life in an idealized manner, as being free from commercialism and sensationalism; 3) that its depiction of the decline of the bourgeois public sphere is simplistic, because recipients of media products have never been passive consumers who are as easily manipulated by new media techniques as Habermas, clearly influenced by Horkheimer and Adorno, imagined (e.g., Calhoun 1992; Robbins 1993; Thompson 1995; Bergström, Ekström & Lundgren 2000; Roberts & Crossley 2004).

These are valid objections. Habermas' work has nevertheless remained central, and the present article suggests three empirical paths, originating from his theory, worth exploring in an attempt to deepen and extend our understanding of the past. The first concerns participatory features of historical media forms. The second considers the representative character of media institutions. And the third deals with media systems. While Swedish press history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the period from which most of my examples derive, has its own unique features and chronology, the paths suggested can most likely be followed far beyond the borders of Sweden, in other media forms, and in others times.

Participatory Media

According to Habermas, the public sphere was constituted by private persons who came together to discuss among themselves how civil society and the state should best be regulated. The periodical press did not constitute the public sphere. Individuals did. The public sphere was neither a medium nor an arena, neither newspapers and magazines nor salons and coffee houses. It consisted of communicating people.

This notion has been blurred in much of the historical research, and it has been common to view the newspaper press as perhaps not equivalent to the public sphere, but at least as its most important expression. In Swedish historiography, authoritative individuals, in the form of, e.g., self-confident liberal newspaper editors in the first half of the nineteenth century, have even been described as (more or less successful) interpreters or registers of the public sphere and their papers as (more or less accurate) mirrors or megaphones of public opinion (e.g., Nordmark 1989; Rosengren 1999). But how, more specifically, did the editors

manage to register public opinion? And where, more precisely, was this public opinion created (Habermas' whole point being that public opinion was crystallized *within* a critical discussion among individuals)? That is, if the editors did actually manage to register some *predominant* opinions (by opening their windows, by eavesdropping at coffee houses, or in some other way), how do we know that these opinions had been formed in a critical debate that was *in principle* open and unconstrained? Or, to put it differently: What is the actual relation between the texts in these newspapers and the individuals supposedly constituting the public sphere? Naturally, as long as that question remains unanswered, interesting things can be said about these newspapers and their editors; we should be careful, however, with any statements about their relation to a rational and critical Habermasian public sphere.

The periodical press was certainly, as Habermas argued, important to the public sphere: to start with, as an important source of information on which arguments and critiques could be based, and later on, as a medium through which individuals could express their views and opinions. But empirical anchorage is not the strength of *Structural Transformation*. Habermas was not particularly empirically generous with regard to how individuals actually expressed themselves via the periodicals.

I will only be slightly more generous in that respect and merely point out some remarkable features of Swedish press history (see Lundell 2002 for a comprehensive study). In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the ideal of a participatory press was established. Newspaper publishers started to consider it their duty to print letters to the paper, and readers began to identify a corresponding right to be published. Incorrectly, some individuals even believed that this was a legal right (Sylwan 1896: 108). It was commonly agreed that, in order to promote a better society, newspapers should *contain* a public discourse, not merely reflect one.

Three examples: In the 1760s, when one paper was beginning to show signs of decline, a subscriber appealed to his fellow citizens. "Whom shall I blame? Not the printer, for his task is to print, not to write. It must therefore be the learned and literary citizens of this city" (Quoted in Lundell 2002: 23). In a prospectus from 1793 for another paper, the ideal of the participatory press was articulated as follows:

One would see such a daily or weekly open the door, so to speak, to a constant conversation among the residents of the town, where everyone has the opportunity to enlighten, benefit from and amuse each other, and where the most prominent as well as the most common resident enjoys an equal right to raise his voice, for both the public and the private good. (Quoted in Mral 1998: 111.)

In the first issue of a third newspaper, launched in 1795, the paper's editor addressed his readers: "The beginning of a newspaper which reflects the values of our city and our community is hereby realized; it must depend, however, on the practitioners of Science, Literature and the Fine Arts to further my purpose!" (Quoted in Lundell 2002: 23). Naturally, this ideal was shaped by several factors

– cultural, economical and social – that cannot be elaborated on here. My point is that it was very frequently expressed. It is furthermore easy to show that it was put into practice; material submitted by subscribers comprised a substantial amount of newspaper content, ranging from hard facts about travel and comers to poetry and polemics. And it is even possible – based on signatures and subscription lists – to get a fairly good picture of the social status of the contributors (Lundell 2002).

In principle, the newspapers were explicitly open to everyone; in practice, however, high cultural and social barriers were erected around them, including of course gender qualifications. In the case of Sweden, this periodical press was borne primarily by the clergy and the nobility, i.e. the traditional elite of the old regime, demanding in the name of Enlightenment and anticipating (and later echoing) Immanuel Kant’s famous appeal (Kant 1784) that the true good citizen be actively involved in society. The view of the Enlightenment as a not too radical but politically moderate and elite phenomenon is fairly established today (e.g. Porter 2000; Knudsen 1986; Christensson 1996). Furthermore, an important parameter was the limitation of the medium itself, conditioned by its historically specific means of production and distribution. As few as three or four hundred copies could be considered successful circulation, often in towns with less than 10,000 inhabitants. The papers usually lacked competition on the local market and hence operated in relative solitude. And although newspapers had existed since the beginning of the seventeenth century, the papers referred to here were often understood as a new way of communicating, as a new medium. Their relatively conservative content and their socially and geographically limited scope, however, do not make the participatory features of this press less true, neither as an ideal nor as a practice.

So, was this the Habermasian public sphere? In the case of Sweden, the social structure of the actual public supporting this kind of press had little to do with a pushing bourgeoisie; its “decline” in the nineteenth century, on the other hand, can certainly be related to the rising middle class. And in any event, an analysis limited to newspapers is certainly not sufficient for making statements about a single, uniform public sphere. Habermas’ ideas still work as a heuristic framework for generating questions, and this kind of periodical press corresponds as well as anything to what I find to be most central in his theory, namely the participatory aspects. In a sense, it actually seems even more Habermasian than anything in *Structural Transformation*.

In the British context, the “humble” editor of the eighteenth century has been compared with the “authoritative public oracle” emerging in the next century, based on, e.g., the very first issue of the *London Daily Universal Register* (soon to be renamed the *Times*) in 1785, where one could read that a newspaper “ought to resemble an *Inn*, where the proprietor is *obliged* to give the use of his house to all travellers, who are ready to pay for it” (Liddle 1999: 5–6). In other words, this kind of media participation could be seen in London as well as in small provincial

towns in Sweden. Though hardly studied to date, the theme can most likely be found elsewhere as well.

And the observations *per se* are not new, at least not as far as Sweden is concerned. However, the participatory elements of the Enlightenment press have previously often been understood as something else. While everyone has agreed that its history stretches much farther back in time, *proper* newspapers, the story has usually gone, only came into existence in the nineteenth century. The preceding period has often literally been seen as *pre*-history and quite anachronistically defined in terms of its lack of features to come. Historians around 1900 sneered at the amateurish elements and poor quality of the eighteenth-century press. In 1927, a highly regarded history of Swedish literature informed the reader that the pages of *Dagligt Allehanda*, one of the most widely-circulated and long-lived Stockholm papers (founded in 1769), were filled by its own readers. “Thus,” the authors concluded, “*Dagligt Allehanda* was a very inferior newspaper” (Schück & Warburg 1927: 76). In a four-volume history of the Swedish press published at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the participatory qualities of the early nineteenth-century press are referred to in terms of editorial “cunning and tricks” (Torbacke 2000: 282).

Instead of being blinded by the rhetoric of novelty, changes in the media of our own digital age – blogs, podcasting, video sharing websites – should make us capable of seeing something quite different in history as well. We just have to start looking. Instead of speaking vaguely of a Habermasian public sphere that connotes openness, dialogue and civic engagement, we should try to study actual participation historically (cf. Ekström *et al.* 2010). And who knows where this could be found – in what times and places, in what media forms? This would truly deepen our understanding of past media relations, and it would challenge the widespread notion of the revolutionary nature of our time (e.g. Surowiecki 2004; Tapscott & Williams 2006; Keen 2007).

Representative Institutions and Individuals

One answer to the question of why we became so blind, of how we managed to forget media participation in days gone by, is that modern media institutions have had no interest in letting us see or remember. The history of the newspaper press and its audiences has largely been constructed as part of the professional efforts of an emerging corps of journalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This resulted in a narrative that ignores their older participatory precursors and emphasizes the non-participatory qualities of their own enterprise (Lundell 2010).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, a new type of editor began arguing for both a representative and leading role. This was motivated by the fact – as one very influential paper, *Argus*, put it in 1825 – that everyone, including the individuals who wrote letters to the papers, was driven by self-interest, even if it was

often “concealed even to the writers themselves.” The same paper wanted to abolish “the *extensive* and *uncontrolled* practice of printing letters to the paper” (Quoted in Lundell 2002: 125). The only individual actually capable of rising above self-interest was the independent editor, by virtue of his being a professional. The editor, and the editor only, could lead and educate public thinking *and* give the same public a voice. Thus, what happened was that an existing, participatory public was degraded to a passive audience that received the teachings of professional editors. The dramatic increases in the number of newspapers that found their way into the hands of the lower classes would not occur until half a century later, when the new roles were firmly established.

When it became apparent that this type of editor was fighting a winning battle, conservative representatives of the old Enlightenment ideal began insisting on the legal obligation of newspapers to make room for rebuttal. In 1849, the parliamentary ombudsman recommended that such a law be enacted, because it would not only curb abuse and defamation, he argued, but also strike at the core of the problem, *viz.* the lack of impartiality in the press and hence in the public debate (Theorell 1849). Liberals sometimes agreed that these ideas were seemly and just—while at the same time dismissing them as unrealizable. The modern infrastructure of communication was simply far too complex (Rydin 1859).

For the new editors, there were a number of discursive means (from silence to exaggeration) of attaining status and establishing the new ideals and practices in the public mind. For example, the word *correspondent* was recharged. In Swedish, it had primarily denoted a letter-writer (a layman), but in the 1830s, it quite rapidly came to mean news reporter (a professional), and soon it behoved every editor with self-respect to employ at least one or two of them. Quite a few new newspapers even added the word to their names. The more or less professional correspondent certainly existed. But in many cases, this was merely a case of giving an established practice a new name. In the public mind, however, the label stressed the difference between professional and layman, and hence strengthened the professional image of the paper (Lundell 2002: 235–236). As for the participatory element *per se*, there is no question that non-professionals were responsible for a considerable amount of newspaper content long into the nineteenth century, and much later (Johannesson 2001; cf. Griffen-Foley 2004).

On a general level, there was a rhetorical exaggeration of professionalism. For instance, in descriptive reports of newspaper offices, the huge buildings (baptized newspaper palaces) are bustling with people, the pace is frantic, and the rotary press adds to the industrial atmosphere. In reality, most of these late-nineteenth century papers had only a handful of employees, the offices were furnished with one or two desks, and the most important tools were a bottle of glue and a pair of scissors (Jarlbrink 2009).

It is not possible to draw a line between the conscious strategies and inherent logics of a profession gaining momentum. But around the year 1900 – when the

press, as far as Sweden is concerned, could be described as an institution and an industry, whose power and influence no one could seriously deny – organized and very conscious attempts were also made to promote the self-image (Lundell 2006). And this self-image was that of the professional, not of layman participation. The newspaper press now became occupied with far more than the mere production of papers. Several other media forms – from pins to statues, from stamps to movies, from posters to lavish history books – were enrolled (Hampton 2004; Jones 1996; Lundell 2008). These expressions should not be regarded as exceptions, or phenomena outside proper journalism. They should be considered obvious features of practising the profession, of attaining and maintaining the status of the institution. Besides these kinds of external, self-celebrating activities, more internal strategies developed, for example narrative techniques aimed at creating the *impression* of objectivity (Tuchman 1980), i.e. the impression of professionalism.

The success of a medium is always conditioned by blindness or inattention to its supporting protocols, i.e. the social and cultural norms and practices associated with the specific media technology (Gitelman 2006: 5–7). Today, the narrative of the professional press is part of a confirming tradition, “invented” in the nineteenth century. And this tradition is also maintained outside the press itself. Politicians, novelist, scholars and other intellectuals and artists have – for various economical, ideological and social reasons – joined in the chorus (Lundell 2008). On the other hand, the mass-media critical approach developed during the twentieth century, from (say) Karl Bücher and Walter Lippmann onwards, has generally been highly consistent with and confirmed the internal stories of professional media institutions. Bücher (1917: 257–258) described the press as developing from a news-based medium via an opinion-based one to being advertisement-based (a scheme that Habermas later adopted). In his own time, Bücher (1926: 31) saw newspapers as an industry that produced advertising space, which required at least some editorial material to sell. Lippmann (1922) viewed the press as a means for transmitting information from professionals to the mass public, and his main concern was with the standard and skills of those professionals, arguing for the importance of scholarly influence on the journalistic corps. These two narratives – the internal journalistic and the external (sometimes) critical – have been so predominant that the professional and basically non-participatory aspect of the press is seen as media specific, creating a blindness for any actual participatory elements.

According to Habermas, the public sphere was eventually “refeudalized”. In modern society, critical debate left room for theatrical practices. It has been argued, however, that direct comparisons between the kind of “representative publicness” that was typical in the Middle Ages and the mediated politics of today risk being superficial; the development of media has supplied new forms of political interaction (Thompson 1995: 75). On the other hand, this does not alter the

fact that there actually are representative elements in modern media institutions as well. Every institution, every power, is anxious about how it is viewed. This is true of the *New York Times* and BBC as well as of Routledge and Google. Any exercise of power actually *requires* a production of meaning that confirms and conveys the legitimacy of that power (e.g. Walzer 1967; Hunt 1986; Douglas 1987). This also applies to individuals. Every individual needs to present him-/herself, in the public particularly through a professional identity (e.g. Goffman 1956). Every individual – be he or she a small-town journalist, a famous novelist, an upcoming poet, an ageing actor, a wealthy publisher, a young blogger or a career-planning academic – needs to produce meaning in relation to his/her public function. We need not moralize on these conditions. Identifying self-images as such, and seeking to offer critical correctives, is therefore no less important.

Media System

Structural Transformation can be described as a periodization of different media systems: the representative, the bourgeois and the refeudalized media system (Harvard & Lundell 2010). In Habermas' narrative, the bourgeois phase was dominated by one specific medium, *viz.* the periodical press; the preceding representative era was characterized by ceremonial practices; and the following refeudalized media system saw a wide range of new manipulative media techniques. In some important respects, this is consistent with later works on media systems. They have very often been occupied with establishing large-scale chronologies, and they have described the historical development as being characterized by ever-growing medial complexity and diversity. Furthermore, like Habermas' historiography, they are also often normative, pointing out the "best" media system, and they are as a rule limited to a rather narrow spectrum of media forms (e.g. Bastiansen 2008; Bastiansen & Dahl 2003; Turow 1992; Hallin & Mancini 2004; McChesney 1999).

Habermas' theory and description of the history of the public sphere could be enriched by other new perspectives used in recent historical media research. An approach that is more sensitive to history can draw from an expanding multidisciplinary field of research into the cultural history of media. Once again, changes in the media of our own time can open our eyes to neglected aspects of the past. To begin with, in recent decades, the very concept of media has been challenged in a new way, calling for a much more open definition than one that only includes the traditional mass media of the twentieth century (which has dominated if not theory construction in, at least the practice of media research) (Jülich, Lundell & Snickars 2008: 12–17). If a medium is defined as a technology for producing and transmitting messages, there is no reason why a wide range of historical artefacts, apparatuses and activities should not be included, from mechanical automats and zoograscope to exhibitions, museums and public festivals.

In line with the ideas of Raymond Williams, it could furthermore be argued that any given epoch has residual, dominant and emergent media (Williams 1977: 121–127). The relation between the past and present is always dynamic. And the relation between media forms at any given time, also in the past, can be analysed using concepts like convergence, intermediality and remediation (e.g. Bolter & Grusin 1999). All these relations can be said to constitute the media system of a given time and place. The hitherto predominant form of media historiography, which focuses on one medium at a time – book history, press history, film history etc., is becoming obsolete. And once again, these historiographies are partly the result of media institutions writing their own history. The dependence on and interplay with other media forms have hardly been in focus, because one aim has been to market a product, commercially and ideologically. One measure of the success of these internal historiographies is the institutionalization of some academic disciplines, for example media studies (centred on the press, radio and television – one at a time), film studies and comparative literature.

In *A Social History of the Media*, Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, in their critique of Elizabeth Eisenstein's work on *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979), stress the necessity of considering "the media as a whole, to view all the different media as interdependent, treating them as a package, a repertoire, a system, or what the French call a 'regime', whether authoritarian, democratic, bureaucratic or capitalist" (Briggs & Burke 2002: 22). And they continue:

To think in terms of a media system means emphasizing the division of labour between the different means of communication available in a given place and at a given time, without forgetting that old and new media can and do coexist and that different media may compete with or echo one another as well as complement one another. (Briggs & Burke 2002: 22–23.)

It is obvious that, in the past as well, content migrated from one medium to another, that changes in the form within one medium had effects on the content of other media, that new media changed the conditions for old media, that the economic base within one sector of the media system influenced the production within other sectors, that the terms of distribution of one medium acted on the consumption of other media.

This approach can partly be illustrated by two twin articles on the parliamentary reform in Sweden in 1865, written by Jonas Harvard and Madeleine Hurd, respectively (Harvard 2010; Hurd 2010). Harvard shows how a group of influential individuals carefully orchestrated a media campaign in order to create an opinion in favour of parliamentary reform. By activating newspaper editors and other influential citizens in more than one hundred places in the provinces, and by having these agents organize so-called reform meetings, a grass roots movement was established. Through the whole chain of media – from the letters of instruction, and the local meetings and the petitions, to the delegations calling on the King, the pamphlets, the parliamentary protocols and the increasingly frequent telegrams on these issues published in the papers – the impression of a uniform and nationwide

opinion was created. In Hurd's article, the very organizing function of the newspaper press is in focus. The relations between various medial expressions outside the press – like political meetings – and their equivalent genres within the press are analysed. There was a firmly established structure for how the ritual of a typical and successful political meeting should be carried out. The corresponding reports on the meeting in the papers incorporated the ritualized activities in a suitable text form, which at the same time arranged the activities into a uniform narrative on the meeting in question. Through this uniformity, the single report became only one part of a larger narrative, in which the press – by referring to all the activities outside itself – could claim to speak on behalf of the nation and its people.

To be sure, by focusing on a small range of high-culture periodicals, Habermas neglected other forms of printed material, but he did include – and this, I find, is another very important result of his study – the coffee houses, the literary salons, the political clubs and the parliament in a view of the media as a system (cf. Briggs & Burke 2002: 73). With a more generous media concept and with new analytical tools, we can deepen that understanding. Instead of adopting his scheme (which is based on not too solid empirical ground in England and France) and instead of looking at it from above, from the perspective of grand-scale chronologies, we should start from below, in specific places and situations. We should try to uncover concrete medial interchanges, connections and overlapping practices on the local level. Only then – and after a great deal of hard work – can overall patterns and casual relations be seriously discussed (cf. Harvard & Lundell 2010).

Conclusion

The present article has argued for further historical investigation into three aspects of Habermas' theory of the public sphere. The first concerns actual media participation, the second the representative features of media institutions, and the third media systems. Naturally, these paths of investigation can, and should, be combined. The last example above – on the media system of the reform movement in Sweden in the 1860s – is also a clear case of both participation and representative strategies. Historical specificity is key. When we focus on concrete situations and places, the neat grand-scale chronologies fall short. There is no simple development from a "representative publicness" to a participatory public sphere and back again. The media have always been interconnected in a system-like way. Historical specificity does not exclude an interest in contemporary developments. On the contrary. Today, one discursive strategy for newspapers, printed or net-based, is obviously to create the impression of public participation, which on the other hand does not exclude the possibility that there actually is some real participation going on. If we are to gain any true and deep understanding of these contemporary phenomena, a historical perspective is necessary.

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An Amateur's Raid in a World of Specialists? The Swedish Essay in Contemporary Public Debate

By Emma Eldelin

Abstract

The point of departure of this paper is a lecture by Edward Said, in which he claimed it necessary for today's intellectuals to respond to modern specialization by assuming an attitude of *amateurism* in public life. It can be argued that there is a historical connection between the public role of the learned amateur and the *essay* as a form of expression and communication. Among recent advocates of the essay, the decline of this genre in modernity has sometimes been explained by the increasing public confidence in experts and specialists. According to this view, the development of modern society has made it less legitimate for essayists to serve as generalist commentators on society and culture. However, the growing tension between amateurism and professionalism goes back at least to the nineteenth century, and it has marked the ambiguous relation of the essay and the essayist to academia and institutional discourse ever since.

This paper discusses what has become of this public role of essayists in late modernity. Some examples of essayists and essayistic writing of later decades, chiefly from Sweden, serve as illustrations of a general line of argument, even though there are also comparisons between the essay in Sweden and in other countries. Among the examples of Swedish essayists put forward here are Kerstin Ekman and Peter Nilson. The reception of these writers suggests that the essayist, adopting the role as amateur, driven by devotion and interest for the larger picture, might still be a vital part of public culture today. However, it is also clear that writers like Ekman and Nilson have gained at least part of their authority from being acknowledged in other fields or genres – Ekman as a distinguished novelist and Nilson as a trained astronomer.

Keywords: Swedish essay, late modernity, amateur, authority in literature, persona, Kerstin Ekman, Peter Nilson

Introduction

In 1993, the literary theorist Edward Said gave the Reith Lectures on the subject *The Representations of the Intellectual* (Said 1994). In these lectures, broadcast on BBC Radio 4, he discarded several of the explanatory factors given by recent debaters, among them John Carey (1992) and Russell Jacoby (1987), for the decline of intellectuals in contemporary public debate. Instead of blaming the postwar explosion of higher education, the universities monopolizing intellectual work, or the increasing commercialization of journalism and publishing, Said asserted that the largest threat to intellectual life in contemporary society was an attitude of professionalism. By professionalism, he meant

[...] thinking of your work as an intellectual as something you do for a living, between the hours of nine and five with one eye on the clock, and another cocked at what is considered to be proper, professional behavior – not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and ‘objective’ (Said 1994: 55).

In contemporary society, Said argued, the true intellectual was often expected to be a specialist or professional in a certain discipline or field. There was not only an increasing expectancy of specialization in higher levels of the educational system, but also a widespread cult of expertise and expert authority in society at large. In a system that rewarded conformity, the most pressing task for the intellectual should therefore be to respond to modern professionalization by representing a different set of values and ideals. He or she should assume an attitude of amateurism, which Said described as

[...] the desire to be moved not by profit or reward but by love for and unquenchable interest in the larger picture, in making connections across lines and barriers, in refusing to be tied down to a specialty, in caring for ideas and values despite the restrictions of a profession (ibid.: 57).

Even though Said does not elaborate on his definition of amateurism in the lectures, he seems to refer to the etymological roots of Latin *amatorem*, which means “lover of” (Stebbins 1992: 43). Amateurism might then aim at something you do primarily out of devotion and commitment. Even though there might be other, more sociological definitions of the amateur (cf. ibid.), for Said, it rather seems to be a question of attitude, of spirit, of a way of acting and behaving in public life.

The role of the amateur or generalist in contemporary public debate, stressed by Said and in focus of attention in this paper, is evidently not a new one. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was quite common for writers and thinkers to adopt this role, not least while using the *essay* as a means of expression and communication. Essayists of the past often spoke and wrote as nonspecialists, but still, “they knew how to speak with a generalist’s easy authority”, claims Phillip

Lopate (2007: 390), an American author and essayist, in discussing why this typical persona or public role of essayist writers is no longer very frequent. The essayist, considered as a man of letters (the major part of essayists until the early twentieth century were male, cf. Boetcher Joeres & Mittman 1993), used to speak comfortably of just about everything, serving as a commentator on society and culture, on manners and customs in the periodicals of the day. In public life, these men of letters were often looked upon as providers of moral and intellectual guidance (Gross 1969).

The role as generalist or amateur was often made legitimate through the essayist's habit of quotation. Just as Montaigne abundantly quoted his ancestors from classical antiquity (expecting his reader to recognize the sources), essayists, at least until the twentieth century, often addressed themselves to an educated reader, assuming that they shared with their public an idea of a universal literary culture. "Though the early essayists' habit of quotation may seem excessive to a modern taste, it was this display of learning that linked them to their educated reading public and ultimately gave them the authority to speak so personally about themselves", writes Lopate (2007: 387). Even though such a literary culture possibly existed only as an ideal for a very limited group of readers and authors – perhaps consistent with what Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) has spoken of as the "public sphere" – it had an imaginative power, and as such it was often used by essayists as a pretext for speaking about anything and everything.

Both Said and Lopate seem to point to the generalist or amateur as a legitimate and even indispensable public role in contemporary society as well. While Said does not explicitly discuss the verbal forms suitable for expressing such a generalistic attitude, for Lopate, it seems that the essay has for a long time been the congenial genre for the discourse of the amateur. However, compared to the confident guides of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, the essayists of later decades have had problems with their authority. In a multicultural world, where the idea of a universal literary culture might seem dated, conservative as well as attached to a particular social group, essayists have often replaced references to literary learning with more personal experience. According to Lopate (2007: 388), this tendency might often be hazardous, as it is risky to suppose that "individual experience alone can constitute the universal text that all may dip into with enlightenment".

Evidently, Lopate's main concern is the state of the essay in American culture during the last few decades. Just like Said, he is troubled by the increasing public confidence in experts and specialists, as it might have made the essayists' fondness for making general comments on societal and cultural matters even less legitimate. He claims that scientists like Stephen Jay Gould and Oliver Sacks have attracted attention as essayists at least partly because they have been perceived as experts; their readers "are reassured they are 'learning' something, not just wasting their time on *belles lettres*" (ibid.: 390). If Lopate's observation is correct,

what reason should people then have to listen to the essayist who might not be addressing the public as a surgeon, a biologist, a physicist or a literary theorist? On what grounds is the essayist – as an amateur – authorized to speak, and what are the certain attractions of the essay, as method and form of expression, in a world of specialization? How is the essayist, enacting the role as learned amateur, perceived in public debate today? Below, I will touch on these issues by means of some examples, chiefly from another national and cultural context – Sweden – thereby also making some brief comments on the state of the essay and essayistic writing in contemporary Swedish culture, as viewed in a wider context. However, I will start by again referring to Lopate, as one of his essayistic books bears many similarities to the Swedish examples presented here.

A Form to Encompass All?

Despite being doubtful about the impact of today's essayists speaking as learned amateurs, Lopate himself deliberately adopted this very persona in *Waterfront* (2004), a book that might be described as an essayistic walk around the Manhattan shoreline, scattered with references to technical facts, autobiographical fragments, and fiction. In an interview about writing the book, Lopate admitted he was sometimes bothered that readers perceived him as a specialist who knew all about waterfront history, asking him obscure questions he could not answer, since he had studied the subject just enough to “tell the story”. In comparing himself as an essayist and writer with the historian, he claims that the latter would have said “I still need another few years to read all the documents”, while this was never Lopate's intention (Taylor 2006: 133f). He wanted to enact the role of generalist or man of letters, because it allowed him to be personal, and to combine a wide range of material and methods without being exhaustive or systematic. This role is further emphasized by the fact that *Waterfront* was originally supposed to be published in a series of “belletristic guidebooks”; it was a book that an editor asked Lopate to write, but which he hesitated about, partly because he did not at first find the accurate form for it (ibid.: 126). Eventually, *Waterfront* did not turn out the type of guidebook it was originally meant to be, but something much more wide ranging: an “‘everything but the kitchen sink’ book”, as Lopate calls it (ibid.: 134). He searched for a form where he could purposely work with discordant materials. Making use of his experience of essay writing obviously made this possible, as he describes the book as “an anthology of essay types” and overall stresses the affinities with the essay tradition (ibid.: 131).

True enough, the book-length, all-encompassing *Waterfront* might perhaps not be apprehended as an essay in the traditional sense (a commonplace definition of the essay being “a short, non-fictional prose form”, Obaldia 1995: 11). Among the typically external and formal aspects of essay definitions is the question of length. As Peter France (2005: 25) has pointed out, there are major differences between

English and French usage in this regard. It is in the English-speaking world, predominantly, that the essay has been viewed as a relatively short prose form, while the French *essai* has for a long time referred to all kinds of non-fictional prose, often to books. In part, this difference might be explained by the heavy influence of the periodical press on the Anglo-American essay from the eighteenth century onwards, with its favouring of texts that could be read at one sitting (ibid.: 33). As an example of the Anglo-American view, for some perhaps verging on the comic due to its exactitude, Graham Good (1997: xix) has argued that essays are “texts of between one and about 50 pages”. Even though Good has admitted that the term could sometimes be used for book-length works, he is sceptical about whole books being consistent with the ideal of spontaneity so common in the essay tradition (1988: xi). Nevertheless, changes in publishing during later decades might have made it more attractive for essayists to write essayistic books rather than compiling collections of previously published essays, as there are fewer periodicals and magazines today that seem willing to provide the necessary space for essayistic writing (cf. Lopate 2007: 388f).

Apart from length, it is also possible to describe the essay by pointing to some of its inner features – many of them clearly present in *Waterfront* – among them the typically essayistic approach to a topic which has been described as “provisional and exploratory, rather than systematic and definitive” (Good 1997: xix). Further, the essay has often been viewed as random, fragmentary or sauntering. “Rather than progressing in a linear and planned fashion, the essay develops around a number of topics which offer themselves along the way”, writes Claire de Obaldia (1995: 2). The essayist acts as if all subjects are naturally linked to one another, by using association and digression as textual and compositional tools (Lopate 1995: xxvii). There are multiple points of contact among thoughts rather than hierarchy, coordination rather than subordination. Montaigne’s essays, for example, were often additive and in lack of clear linear direction (Good 1988: 19f). The effect of this is, in the words of the British writer Aldous Huxley (1960: ix), that the essayist tries “to say everything at once”, which is “as near an approach to contrapuntal simultaneity as the nature of literary art will allow of”. The essay seems, at least ideally, to be the form to encompass all. One might perhaps even, as Lopate does with *Waterfront*, describe this kind of writing as striving for an “aesthetic of impurity” (Taylor 2006: 135).

Winding Paths, Dead Ends and Exhaustion – Kerstin Ekman’s “Masters of the Forest”

Turning now to my first Swedish example, there are some apparent similarities between the form and approach of *Waterfront* and Kerstin Ekman’s *Herrarna i skogen* (“Masters of the Forest”, 2007). The latter might be described as a wide-ranging, essayistic account of the relationship of nature and civilization through

the lens of the forest, particularly the Nordic and Swedish variety. The book is overflowing with references to reading and thought about the forest, from Virgil to Simon Schama. Already, it has been represented as the first cultural history of the Nordic forest (e.g. Jonsson 2007; Olsson et al. 2009: 527). To describe the scope of *Herrarna i skogen* as extravagant or excessive seems not to be entirely inadequate – as several critics have noticed, Ekman seems to have scoured Western literature, art, and science for every possible depiction of the forest, fusing them together in an immense volume of about 550 pages (cf. Jonsson 2007; Lingebrandt 2007).

For non-Swedish readers, Kerstin Ekman might be most well known for her crime story *Händelser vid vatten* (“Blackwater”, 1993), for which she was awarded the August (Strindberg) prize. In Sweden, she has for a long time been a widely recognized and highly respected writer, praised for novels like the “Katrineholm” series (1974–83), *Rövarna i skuleskogen* (“The Forest of Hours”, 1988) or the trilogy with the overall title *Vargskinnet* (“The Wolfskin”, 1999–2003). In many of these novels, the forest and the shifting northern landscapes are ubiquitous. As Anna Paterson (2008a: 41) has noted, Ekman is a writer who has stayed true to her native culture and the national heritage. As an acknowledgement of her literary oeuvre, she was elected member of The Swedish Academy in 1978. Since 1989, however, Ekman has chosen not to take an active part in the Academy, after having accused it of being too indulgent in the debate on the death threats posed to writer Salman Rushdie.

Ekman got the idea for *Herrarna i skogen* as early as the 1970s, when she started reading and thinking about the forest, collecting notes in a binder (Lenas 2007). However, she always seemed to get distracted by ideas for other books, even if she did not altogether abandon the thought of a nonfiction book about the forest. Thirty years after its conception, she finally wrote it. Most critics have viewed *Herrarna i skogen* as a voluminous book of essays, which seems to confirm the author’s own opinion of it. In an interview, Ekman has explained that she has been intrigued by the essay format for a long time. She especially stresses the freedom of the essayist to use language so variously, sometimes causing tension between the personal and the literary, the technical and the imaginative. “You can break up the structure, change the mood and the pace at will”, she says (Paterson 2008b: 44). Again, as in the case of Lopate’s book, Ekman seems to have sought for a form that could contain almost everything – regarding tone as well as material. As one critic has put it, *Herrarna i skogen* “combines passages of lucid prose-poetry with erudite, witty essays on history, literature, folklore, ecological biology, aspects of sociology and geo-economy, as well as punchy personal anecdotes, observations, and political polemics” (Paterson 2007: 76). The author herself has described the structure of the book as symbiotic with the forest itself: “The paths are winding. They sometimes end blindly. You come across the unexpected, and the foul and dangerous, things you’re tempted to

avoid, but have to find your way through in the end.” (Translated by Paterson 2008a: 41) As this quotation is part of the preface of *Herrarna i skogen*, it might probably be viewed as the author’s instruction for how to read her book.

When the reader is confronted with such demanding and shifting texts as *Waterfront* or *Herrarna i skogen*, the sense of trust in the author might be crucial. In cases like these, the self-representation of the writer is among the major textual tools for gaining the reader’s trust. Regarding the self-representation in the essay, it has been quite common to describe it by using the term *persona*, which refers to a mask or social role that is used by the author “to set him- or herself in the right posture towards particular subjects for a particular audience” (Cherry 1994: 91f). One of the chief functions of the persona in texts like *Waterfront* or *Herrarna i skogen* seems to be to serve as a trustful reader’s guide on an unpredictable journey – be it mental or geographical. This is an authorial role often put forward in studies of the essay, and it has been argued that honesty and reliability in the essayist are among the core values of the genre (Lopate 1995: xxv; Atkins 2008: 12, 59). Furthermore, the personae in Lopate’s and Ekman’s books may well be viewed as representatives of the belletristic amateurs typical of the essay tradition. While Lopate seems to be the witty, quite intimate flaneur of the big city (New York is his home town), Ekman, an outdoor woman equally learned but more detached, with her wellies on and her dog at her side, is at home walking, reading and thinking in the woods rather than in the city.

While Lopate advisedly has referred to himself as a generalist as opposed to the specialist, Ekman has rather emphasized the *literary* status of the essay and *Herrarna i skogen* belonging to *literature* (e.g. Lenas 2007). It seems that in Ekman’s view, as long as your writing is acknowledged as literature, you can take liberties with materials and methods. She considers the essay an unbeatable form of literature, as it offers new knowledge to the reader, and combines it with a personal point of view and an eloquent style (Unge 2007: 98). Ekman’s description might remind us of Horace’s “*utile dulci*”, as her aim seems to be to delight as well as inform the reader.

In Ekman’s view, the essay form obviously offers knowledge of something, which makes it adequate to ask what *sort* of knowledge this might be. Is it somehow related to the amateur stance in the essay tradition? Graham Good (1988; 1997) has addressed these issues, as he has stressed the essay’s position outside of and in opposition to a system of specialization. He claims that the essay opposes the organising structures of academic knowledge and does not aim at a system. Rather, the essayist’s observations are free – they do not “seek authority from tradition and doctrine” and they are often rooted in individual experience (Good 1988:4). Like many other essay theorists (e.g. Adorno 1958/1997), Good has tried to capture the character of the essay mainly by contrasting it with disciplinary expertise and its major genre – the academic article. While the discipline carefully distinguishes its area of investigation and defines its proper

method, the essay “cultivates diversity”; it is provisional and personal, “thus *non-disciplinary*” (Good 1988: 6). While each individual contribution to the discipline has to take account of previous contributions on the topic (which is often carried out by quotes and footnotes), the essayist is free to look for subject matter anywhere, which might include making use of personal experience. As the essay’s knowledge is “situated”, its claim to truth is limited, it “is for here, for now, and for me” (ibid.: 23). The insights of the essay are thus non-transferable, they do not offer a theory or a method which can be applied to other objects, which makes the essay less useful from a disciplinary point of view (ibid.: 24).

As for the question of the learning of the essayist, the essay “is not in itself a ‘learned’ work in the sense of contributing to a common system of knowledge”, even though essayists frequently express their personal learning, often through quoting (ibid.: 6). However, the essayist’s learning, his or her formal credentials or academic degrees (if any), might not be among the major sources of authority. As the essay “possesses neither the institutional legitimacy of a scientific treatise nor the cover of traditional generic conventions (lyric, epic, dramatic), authority is intimately tied to the author”, writes Elizabeth Mittman (1993: 95). Likewise, Good (1988: 7; 1997: xx) has stressed that the essayist’s authority is expressed chiefly through his or her personal experience and the personality as it is reflected in the style of writing.

How are we then to understand the authority of *Herrarna i skogen* in the light of the above statements? Might there be answers in the critical response to Ekman’s work, and have critics made a point of the author’s massive learning? First of all, it is likely that as Ekman is already acknowledged as a distinguished writer, this has given her authority in this case as well. Further, she is predominantly a writer of fiction, which is one of the most prestigious of literary forms today, while the essay is often described as ancillary or secondary (e.g. Obaldia 1995: 4; Good 1997: xxi; Atkins 2005: 11–25). It is probable that the public acknowledgement of Ekman as a writer has made it irrelevant that she is in this case expressing herself in a less prestigious genre. Besides, who could avoid being impressed when an author has been working on a book for thirty years? *Herrarna i skogen* is a life’s work. Consequently, Swedish reviewers often seem to have felt overwhelmed but clearly and positively impressed while reading the book, but there are also some descriptions of exhaustion and feelings of intellectual inferiority (e.g. Lingebrandt 2007; Luther 2007). One reviewer (Kronqvist 2007) even asked herself who the supposed reader of *Herrarna i skogen* might be – who was expected to be able to navigate through all these facts, references, historical figures and quotations piled up one after another? She pointed out that in small parts of the text, Ekman makes use of her own experiences and expresses her love for and concern about the forest, but that she does not seem to trust this personal commitment enough to be the centre and motivation for the book. Instead, Ekman covers herself with references to her

learned gentlemen – she seems to feel obliged to account for everything, as if she was afraid that the personal perspective could not make room for her wide-ranging learning. This reviewer however discerned a slimmer, more pressing volume within Ekman’s 550 pages – a pamphlet, an expression of love for the forest and an apology for the endangered species.

The observations made by this last reader could serve as background for a conclusion about where to place *Herrarna i skogen* in relation to the essay and more academic genres. Ekman’s book shares the typical scope of the essay as she has not decided on any limits or restrictions for her subject matter. However, though *Herrarna i skogen* is not a contribution to a specialized discipline, Ekman seems to have taken into account almost *every* possible previous depiction of the forest that she has come across. What distinguishes *Herrarna i skogen* is that she has added on to her material for years and years. In this case, it has resulted in an aesthetics of exhaustion (rather than an aesthetics of impurity, as in Lopate’s case). While Ekman is clearly not addressing a specialist audience in the disciplinary sense, *Herrarna i skogen* serves among other things as a display of the author’s immense learning, and thus, it certainly demands an educated, attentive and above all persistent reader. It is likely that the public function of *Herrarna i skogen* has much in common with the communicative relation of the essay to the educated, though non-specialized, audience of the past (cf. Rohner 1966: 351, 372, 557; Haas 1969: 24, 80f.; France 2005: 35f.). Nevertheless, there are also major differences between Ekman’s book and the personal essay, most favoured in the Anglo-American tradition, that strives for the ideal of “light learning” (Lopate 1995: xlii). The most salient one is that Ekman does not primarily seek authority by referring to her own experience – the voice in *Herrarna i skogen* is not so intimate and confidential as in the personal essay.

The Essay Murder in the Library – a Debate on the State of the Essay in Sweden

As can be seen above, Kerstin Ekman has maintained that the essay is a *literary* genre. Likewise, her shield against intrusion from the media and expectations of her to pronounce on matters of politics and morality has been to claim the autonomy of literature: “I don’t enter policy debates. I’m a writer”, is a recurrent comment (e.g. Paterson 2008a: 42). When interviewers ask her if *Herrarna i skogen* might not be perceived as a contribution to the debate on deforestation or environmental policy, Ekman persists in that her book is *literature*, not a pamphlet or an apology (Lenas 2007).

The status of the essay as a literary genre was also a starting point for a debate in one of the major Swedish newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter*, in 2003. The initiator was Nina Burton, essayist and poet, who started by expressing her concern for the essay being dispersed in Swedish libraries (Burton 2003a). As essays were not

being located on a certain shelf, but were catalogued by subject matter and placed among works of nonfiction in general, one could get the impression that the essay was not viewed as belonging to literature. Just like the novel, Burton argued, the essay was a literary genre in its own right and it should therefore be placed by form and not by content. With a striking comparison, she stated that no one would ever think of sorting *War and Peace* under Military Science or *Madame Bovary* under Biography, while this constantly happened to essay books (2003c). In three witty, rhetorically effective articles, Burton further underlined her message by satirical metaphors and allusions to literature and mythology. She claimed that the dissemination of essays in the library was a matter of “murder” (which likely inspired the editorial headline “The cruel essay murder in the library”, perhaps alluding to whodunits like Agatha Christie’s *The Body in the Library*) (2003a). She also stressed the conformity of the classification system by comparing it to the iron bed of Procrustes where the mythological bandit amputated every limb that did not fit his bed (2003b). She even created an inverted Ten Commandments by stating that if the essay was not to be seen as belonging to literature, there would be an alarming change of the definition of the latter. Literature would then be, according to the standard Swedish classification system (SAB), *not* to be too serious, not to know too much on the matter in question, not to make use of facts, not to strive for the bigger picture, and not to express thoughts on a certain matter (2003a).

What was at stake in this debate, at least for its initiator, was not so much the principles of classification in general as the changing definition of literature. The physical location of essays in the library was given a symbolic function, but what Burton really wanted to discuss was something more abstract. Perhaps as a result of this, debaters representing different interests evidently talked at cross-purposes in the debate following Burton’s first article. Librarians and representatives of the Swedish classification system (Berntson 2003, Fredén 2003, Myrstener 2003) explained the principles of classification and the advantages of sorting by subject matter, they gave advice on how to find your way through the library data-bases, or they seized the opportunity to lament on the recent decline of Swedish folk-libraries (i.e. public libraries). On the opposite side, besides Burton, there were other writers and critics (Eriksson 2003, Thente 2003) who elaborated on her analysis of the relation of the essay to literature. According to writer and critic Ulf Eriksson, the apparently low status of the essay in Sweden was culture-specific. He claimed that in other European countries like France, Spain, Italy, or Germany, the essay was without question a vital part of public life. In these countries, there were prestigious awards for essayistic writing and the essay could serve as an intermediary zone in society. Literary critic Jonas Thente did not hesitate to suggest that the weakening of the Swedish essay might be due to Swedish essayists themselves, as they were content to write belletristic articles. These articles in the guise of essays could easily be summarized or reduced to a single

subject, and could therefore not be viewed as real essays, while an essay should be impossible to truly describe.

The above debaters are not the only ones who have pointed to the low status of the Swedish essay in the last few years. In a recent essay collection, the former permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, essayist and critic Horace Engdahl (2009: 7f), has regretted the shrinking public space for essayistic writing in the last two decades. Engdahl himself was during the 1980s one of the major contributors to *Kris*, a Swedish learned journal introducing many of the central continental philosophers and thinkers of the time (e.g. Derrida, Barthes, Blanchot, Adorno, Benjamin, Lacan). In retrospect, *Kris* was often accused of adding fuel to the post-modern cultural climate of the 1980s, but it clearly also contributed to a renewed interest in theory in the university departments of literature in Sweden (Arping 2009: 545). *Kris* also favoured the critical essay as its chief form of expression and, as is apparent from Engdahl (2009: 7), the members sometimes expressed a wish that this type of criticism be viewed as a pursuit distinct from literature, but equally valuable. Engdahl however concludes that it is more difficult than ever to maintain such an ideal today, since the blogosphere has triumphed and the media no longer have room for reflective writing.

The tendency among Engdahl, Burton and other Swedish writers and critics to talk about a decline of the essay in public life in recent years, or to observe that the relation of the essay to literature is ambivalent, is neither unique for Sweden, nor is it new. Rather, these observations seem to have been omnipresent for a long time. For example, Ludwig Rohner (1966: 120) has noted that the low status of the essay in German culture was already apparent in the 1930s. A somewhat different but recurring example of later decades might be the debate, probably most clearly expressed in the United States, about the weak position of “creative nonfiction” in English studies (e.g. Hesse 2003). Even though creative nonfiction and similar concepts are much more wide ranging than the essay (e.g. Root 2003), many of the American advocates of the essay genre of later years have expressed themselves by referring to such labels, or speaking about creative nonfiction as the “fourth genre” (e.g. Klaus 1991; Root & Steinberg 2007). There are however those who have remained sceptical of attempts to make the essay purely literary. In his introduction to genre theory, Alastair Fowler (1982: 5) concludes that the essay, along with genres like biography, dialogue and history, is “literature *in potentia*”. This quite effective description of the essay’s borderline position has been further commented on by Claire de Obaldia (1995: 16), who has stated that “the essay is, and [...] is not literature; or rather, the essay *is not yet* literature”. The relation of the essay as a *genre* to literature is contingent, but this has not prevented particular essays and essayists making their way into a literary canon.

Despite the fact that essays are often viewed and treated ambivalently – as “literature in potentia” – whether in the United States, in Germany or in Sweden, one might still distinguish between essay traditions of different countries. While it

is not possible to make a detailed comment on this matter here, some short points should however be made. As Kuisma Korhonen (1998:14) has noted, the Scandinavian essay has for a long time been associated with literary criticism, “sometimes in a pejorative sense: in academic circles the word ‘essayistic’ often refers to a loosely written tractate lacking proper documentation”. In addition, Göran Hägg (1978) has stressed that the tendency in Sweden to use the essay as a tool for literary criticism, or at least that literature has been the chief subject matter of essays, has been predominant since the turn of the last century. This is further emphasized in the article on the “Scandinavian Essay” in the *Encyclopedia of the Essay*, where the authors argue that the essay in individual Scandinavian countries has certain affinities: “The Danish essay might be called the subjective, personal essay; the Norwegian essay, the essay of national character; the Swedish essay, the literary essay.” (Mitchell & Greene-Gantzberg 1997: 746.) The tendency to equate essayistic writing with criticism that seems to be predominant according to these examples should not be overstressed, however. Among the Swedish essayists discussed in this paper, Horace Engdahl is alone in expressing this view, while for example Nina Burton (2007) has argued against the essay being equal to criticism. Conversely, Burton as well as Ekman have maintained that the essay is a *literary* genre, whereas Engdahl (2009: 116f, 148) has rather made a distinction between the essay and literature.

In the above mentioned article from the *Encyclopedia*, the ancillary status of the essay in the Scandinavian countries is stressed as well:

In some literary histories the term “essay” is not even indexed. In others, the essay is generally treated as an author’s secondary preoccupation; little effort is made to clarify the relationship between the essay and other genres. Although the essay is much discussed, it is relegated to the less important corners of secondary and university instruction. (Mitchell & Greene-Gantzberg 1997: 746)

It seems that from these descriptions, the Swedish essay is far away from the continental tradition (France, Spain, Germany), where the essay has served as one of the major genres of intellectual writing during the post war-period (cf. Korhonen 1998: 13f). However, it is evident that Swedish writers like Horace Engdahl have expressed a conception of the essay that has much in common with the continental tradition, likewise that this tradition has probably had an influence on the Swedish discussion on the essay over the last few decades, not least in literary journals. It should be noted, however, that the essayistic writing of continental philosophers like Benjamin, Adorno, Weil, Cioran, Camus, Barthes – often following the aphoristic style of Nietzsche – is a type of writing that is quite different from the informal, conversational style of the personal or familiar essay often favoured in the English speaking culture. The continental “essayism” has been described as a “subversive tool of skeptical probing” and as a “critique of ideology in a time when large, synthesizing theories and systems of philosophy are no longer trusted” (Lopate 2007: 390). According to Phillip Lopate, the view of essayistic writing as something serious and philosophical is only beginning to

influence American essayists today, while the more intimate, chattering and friendly voice has long been preferred. In Sweden, however, essayists at least of later decades have often been reluctant to be too intimate with the reader. The eloquent, slightly detached, and very learned voice that we can distinguish among essayists like Horace Engdahl or Kerstin Ekman seems to be a recurring persona in the Swedish essay tradition. Whether this tells us something about the cultural climate of Sweden or not can of course not be established from these few examples, though it might be a suggestive hypothesis for a more wide ranging study of essayist personae in Sweden as compared to other countries.

A Form for Expressing Ambivalence – Peter Nilson’s “Solar Winds”

Despite the above description of the Swedish essayist as being somewhat reserved, my last example, Peter Nilson, would seem at least a bit different, as his voice is more personal and venturesome than most Swedish essayists I have come across. However, he is, just like Kerstin Ekman in *Herrarna i skogen*, acting as a generalist with regard to his refusal to stay within disciplinary boundaries and in his desire for the larger picture. This makes him an adequate example of the amateurism that Said claimed to be a necessity in a professionalized world, in my view not least because Nilson favoured the essay as a form of communication.

Even though Nilson dreamed of being a writer at an early age, he was also inspired by Einstein and Darwin and eventually became an astronomer at Uppsala University. There, he compiled a widely acclaimed catalogue of galaxies and was made a senior lecturer in the mid 1970s. At this time though, he felt that his wide ranging interests could not be satisfied by doing scientific research (Nilson 1996). Accordingly, he abandoned his academic career for the more insecure path of the writer. Until his death in 1998, he wrote a number of novels and essay books which were often greatly inspired by scientific theories and ideas, but equally by philosophical, religious and mythical thought of the Western culture in general. Despite the evident eclecticism of Nilson’s inspirational forces, his essays were often perceived as contributions to popular science. Perhaps the tendency to view Nilson as a popularizer was reinforced by his appearance in a famous Swedish radio show (*Svar idag*), where listeners would phone in to pose questions on different subjects to a panel of experts. Nilson was also elected member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in 1993.

In the early 1990s, Peter Nilson published three essay books of a similar character where he aimed at describing the scientific world view of our time and ourselves as inhabitants of the universe (Nilson 1993a: 225). The last of these books, *Solvindar* (“Solar Winds”, 1993), is the one that will be in focus here. Just as in the case of Kerstin Ekman’s *Herrarna i skogen*, *Solvindar* was nominated in the category of nonfiction for the August Prize in 1993, but neither of them

received the prize.

To give an adequate and brief description of *Solvindar* is not easy. The essayistic writing of Peter Nilson seems to be a neverending search for the missing pieces in the big puzzle that is the world. In nine winding essays, Nilson hovers around recurring questions, often concerning fundamental conditions of human existence: How is human life possible? Are we alone in space? What are the boundaries for our knowledge of the universe? What exactly is the human soul? What would it be like to travel back in time and will we ever be able to do so? Of what concern is science to everyday life?

As there are hardly any simple answers to these questions, they rather serve as expressions of the disposition of the essayist. Nilson's persona is clearly ambivalent – he embodies the rational ethos of the scientist as well as the whimsies of the dreamer (Eldelin 2008: 249–252). Nilson's essays seem to be expressions of the self, thinking. In fact, they might even profess a Montaignian view of the essay. As has been pointed out by many, Montaigne did not use the word *essai* as a generic concept but as a methodological principle (referring to the verb *essayer*). As one of his many interpreters, R. Lane Kauffmann (1989: 224), has put it: “To essay is to experiment, to try out, to test – even one's own cognitive powers and limits.” Essaying, for Montaigne, was an ongoing process of trying out ideas and weighing his own experiences through writing (Rohner 1966: 66f.; Obaldia 1995: 29). Even if Nilson does not claim, like Montaigne, that his essays are foremost explorations of the self, he frequently confronts his own experiences with the peculiarities of human existence. What distinguishes Peter Nilson as an essayist is the intimate voice and the sometimes direct addresses to the reader, the recurring autobiographical references and a penchant for playfulness and fictive elements. Foremost, however, Nilson poses questions, to himself as well as to the reader. And rather than providing the reader with answers, as the questions that fascinate him often challenge the boundaries of thinking, it is the trying out and the probing that marks the core of Nilson's essays.

In Nilson's case, just as in Kerstin Ekman's or Phillip Lopate's, the value of freedom connected to the essay as form (cf. Klaus 1989: 160) allowed him to cross boundaries and confront ideas and topics from different areas in society. It was Peter Nilson's pronounced ambition to do so – he has expressed that the intention of his writing was to let the arts and the sciences reflect each other (Nilson 1993b: 248). In public life, he was often perceived as a reconciler of the two cultures that C.P. Snow (1959/1961) once pointed to and which were widely discussed in Sweden (Eldelin 2006). That Nilson often touched on matters that he had no first-hand knowledge of, as a generalist, was rarely considered a problem in public life. Rather, some critics viewed his learning as boundless, not only in his own field but in philosophy, religion and cultural history as well (e.g. Jacobson 1993; Anshelm 1994; Wallroth 1994). That Nilson appeared to be the

very opposite of the specialist was met by reviewers with admiration and praise. However, these reviewers rarely claimed to be able to determine whether there might be errors among the massive heaps of facts that Nilson provided the reader with. As one reviewer noted, as *Solvindar* was a work of art and not solely of science, some minor errors would not affect the quality of the book (Kälvemark 1993). Nevertheless, Nilson himself does not seem to have been as anxious as Ekman or Burton to describe the essay as a purely literary form. Rather, he asserted that the ambition of his essay trilogy was to cross the boundaries of the science essay and literature (Nilson 1993b: 248). By literature in this case, it is likely that Nilson mainly referred to fiction, as there are recurring fictive elements in his essays, among them apparently fictional anecdotes but also a play with fictive or mythological identities (Eldelin 2008: 249–252).

Despite the playfulness and irony that mark the essayistic writing of Peter Nilson, it might be tempting to compare him with Phillip Lopate's expert essayists, writers like Stephen Jay Gould or Oliver Sacks, since Nilson shares their scientific background and was considered a popularizer of science in public life. Is it, in this case, the scientific training of the author that has given him the authority to speak, rather than the personal experience that is often put forward as ground for authority in the essay? From the reception of Peter Nilson's work, not least *Solvindar*, it is clear that critics have often perceived Nilson as keeping himself informed of what was going on at the research frontier in his own as well as in neighbouring fields. This is a recurring picture of the writer even twenty years after he quit his career as a scientist (Eldelin 2009: 83). It seems that the high social status of science as expert knowledge is passed on to the reception of Nilson's essays, even though he has also received praise for his literary style and for making readers feel as fellow travellers on a challenging intellectual journey (e.g. Gellerfelt 1993; Törnlund 1993; Wallroth 1994). As stated above, however, the persona in Nilson's writing is not acting as the convincing expert that one might perhaps expect, following Lopate's description. For Nilson, the essay rather becomes a form to hold his ambivalence; it allows him to constantly shift between different modes and to express his uncertainty (cf. Eldelin 2006: 287). Therefore, it might be more adequate to compare the essays of Nilson with the natural science writing of the American anthropologist and philosopher Loren Eiseley, as they both shared a sense of wonder at the marvels of the natural world which is expressed through their texts (cf. Nilson 1993b: 248, who has stated that Eiseley was an inspirational source for his essayistic writing). In Eiseley's perhaps most well-known book, *The Immense Journey* (1957), the evolutionary perspective of science shares the space with philosophical and religious contemplation, poetic nature descriptions and autobiographical anecdotes. Apart from the apparent compositional similarities between the writings of Nilson and Eiseley, they both used the essay form to express a personal and imaginative response to scientific facts and to a scientific view of the world. As Andrew J. Angyal (1993: 61) has

noted, Eiseley “found it increasingly difficult to reconcile his ‘personal universe’ with the rational universe of science”, where everything was reduced to measurable facts. A similar disillusion with regards to the rationalism of science, though perhaps not as pointed as Eiseley’s, could be found in Peter Nilson and in his choice to be a writer rather than moving on as a scientist. Nilson seems to have shared with Eiseley a certain intellectual temperament that sought connections between facts and imagination. In Eiseley’s case, it has been compared to that of the Victorian scientist, who was not “intimidated by the ‘two cultures’ division or the fear of bridging disciplines” (ibid. 1993: 64).

The Essayist and the Growing Tension Between Amateurism and Professionalism

In intellectual history, the growing tension between amateurism and professionalism in Western countries has often been traced back to the nineteenth century, the very time of Victorian scientists like Darwin. Before that, scientists and humanists did not form exclusive university circles separate from those of other educated people, and the learned amateur or dilettante was welcome to participate in scholarly and scientific work. Gradually during the nineteenth century, however, rules were formulated and methods and fundamental principles were established that made it increasingly difficult for non-academics to be recognized by scientists and scholars. Along with a new social and institutional organisation of science, new social identities for research practitioners emerged as well: the ideal of the specialist scholar eventually replaced the broad-ranging generalist (Torstendahl 1993; Wittrock 1993). As a result of this development, the amateur culture seemed more and more outdated at the turn of the century. This was even more the case after World War I, when new socialist intellectual groups referred to themselves and their work as objective, scientific and specialized (cf. Mauriello 2001). Nevertheless, it seems to have been possible, even after that time, to combine scholarship with being a generalist with a public position. Not surprisingly however, the scholar who wanted to communicate with a wider audience through the medium of the essay or through public lectures was met with increasing challenges in a society of growing specialization. One example from the Swedish-speaking culture could serve as an illustration. As Thomas Ek (2003: 18) has pointed out, the chief expression of the Finno-Swedish aesthetician, philosopher and writer Hans Ruin was the essay in its many forms; he wrote autobiographical, philosophical, political as well as literary essays. Ruin rejected a professorship in Åbo and emigrated to Sweden in the late 1940s. Besides being appointed senior lecturer in aesthetics at Lund University, he was known as a popular speaker and lecturer, not least on the radio, where he could express his wide sphere of interests, ranging from philosophy and psychology to aesthetics and literary history. Ek notices that Ruin, at least periodically, considered himself

an outsider in the academic world. In his diary notes from the 1960s, he expresses a growing disillusion over not getting the academic acknowledgement he expected, and blames it on himself being too versatile. In his own eyes, his penchant for bridging genres and disciplines became a weakness. He was met with the "tyranny of genres", which neither promoted his academic career, nor gave him a place in literary history (*ibid.*: 123–126). The borderline position so typical for essayists and for the essay genre could certainly be traced in the authorship of Hans Ruin.

Despite the proceeding specialization and professionalization that seems to have bothered Ruin in the 1960s, and which might seem even more pressing half a century later, Edward Said was persistent in his talk of the necessity of intellectuals adopting an amateur stance in public life to be able to look for the larger picture, to challenge conformity and to raise moral issues. As amateurism, for Said (1994: 54f, 61), was not an occupation but an attitude, he considered it to be possible to combine with being an academic. Said did not primarily, like other debaters of the time, blame universities for the decline in intellectual life. Here, he argued chiefly against Russell Jacoby (1987: 141), who had claimed that professionalization at universities had led to a "privatization" among intellectuals and to a "withdrawal of intellectual energy from a larger domain to a narrower discipline". However, it might be adequate to remain, along with Jacoby, a bit sceptical about the possibility of an attitude of amateurism residing within academia, not least today, when university managements as well as single scholars and scientists increasingly seem forced to rely on bibliometrics, citation analysis, rankings and high impact factors as the chief measurements of academic quality. One might ask if devotion is even compatible with the bibliometric system?

The examples that have been discussed in this paper confirm that the relation of the essay and the essayist to academia and institutional discourse remains ambivalent, just as it has been for a long time, despite the common ground of the essay and the emerging modern science in late sixteenth century Europe (Hall 1989; cf. Good 1997: xx). This ambivalence will probably be even more accentuated the more we rely on bibliometrics in academia. Among the Swedish essayists that have been put forward here, apart from Ruin, none has remained a scholar or scientist at the university even though several of them have received high academic degrees and might therefore be considered professionals of some kind (Nina Burton and Horace Engdahl both hold PhD's in literature, Peter Nilson a PhD in astronomy). Irrespective of these writers having deliberately chosen to reside outside of academia or not, it is doubtful that they would have been able to fully express and develop their penchant for essayistic inquiry and experimental writing within modern academia. Nevertheless, all of them have or have had affiliations with institutions or academies that at least historically could serve as competitors with the universities with regards to learning (cf. Wittrock 1993).

Engdahl and Ekman are members of The Swedish Academy, Nilson was a member of The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and Burton is an elected member of Samfundet de nio, another Swedish prize-awarding and learned literary society. These affiliations, along with the reception of their essayistic work, confirm that these writers have adopted or been ascribed to public roles that clearly resemble the learned amateur essayist or man of letters of the past, even though they have not explicitly or deliberately referred to themselves as amateurs (perhaps this is due to the contemporary connotations of *amateur* being somewhat more disparaging than positive).

However, in the essayistic writing of these authors and in their view of the public function of the essay, one might also find prevailing traces of originally romantic ideas of the autonomy of literature and the independence of the artist. The tendency to describe the essay as belonging to literature or to defend oneself from public debate that can be seen in some of these examples suggests that there is a certain reluctance among modern essayists to act as the “amateurish conscience” that Said (1994: 62) was asking for. The scepticism of today’s essayists to claim moral authority also distinguishes them from many of the learned amateurs of the past, not least in the British tradition, where morality and manners were among the chief subjects of periodical essayists like Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, or Samuel Johnson (cf. France 2005: 35f). However, it could also be that as essayists have excused themselves “from the job of pontificating to the public” (Lopate 2007:391), they have remained true to the ethos of the essay tradition, which since Montaigne has been marked by scepticism and by the rejection of all kinds of totalizing modes of thinking (cf. Adorno 1958/1997). Still, it cannot be denied that essay books like Kerstin Ekman’s *Herrarna i skogen*, Peter Nilson’s *Solvindar*, or other similar essayistic works, have often been acclaimed in public for being syntheses of some kind, however fragmentary, maps of meaning or graspings at the larger picture driven by a devotion for the subject. In a time when we are overwhelmed by disruptive information and increasingly tend to rely on experts of all kinds, the discourse of the essayist, which might still be adequately described as “an amateur’s raid in a world of specialists” (Sanders 2007: 417), seems more essential than ever.

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Personal Readings and Public Texts: Book Blogs and Online Writing about Literature

By Ann Steiner

Abstract

The blogging culture has become an important and integrated part of the book trade and has influenced the publishing, marketing and distribution of literature in North America and in many European countries. However, it is unclear how this potential agency among bloggers operates, and thus far most research has concerned politics, media systems and larger social structures. The present article is a study of the Swedish book blogs during the autumn of 2009 and an attempt to address a small, but significant, part of the Internet influence. The relationship between books and digital technology is complicated and manifold, but it is clear that the Internet has changed how people access books, how they read and how they communicate with others about their reading. Here, the position of the amateur is one that will be discussed in detail in terms of professionalism, strategies and hierarchies. Another issue that will be addressed is the connections between the book bloggers and the book trade, especially the publishers and their marketing departments. The book bloggers operate in a social realm, despite the fact that their writing is personal, and have to be understood in their social, economic and literary context. The Swedish book blogs will be analysed with the help of reader-response theory, sociology of literature and a book historical perspective on the dissemination of literature.

Keywords: Blogs, Internet, book history, book trade, reader-response theory, reading

Introduction

In October 2007, Andrew Stevens, an editor of *3:AM Magazine* in the UK, wrote about the existential and emotional troubles of being a book blogger. How can I be a book blogger, he said, when such people are so often described as being “over-opinionated and under-qualified dilettante[s]” (Stevens 2007)? Stevens had been “outed” in a book on the subject, a guide to English language book blogs (Gillieron & Kilgarriff 2007), which gave him reason to question his own position. The article was, of course, largely ironic, and it started a friendly and humorous discussion on being in denial, acceptance and coming to terms with being a book blogger.

This discussion on who and what a book blogger is and the publication of the *Bookaholics Guide to Book Blogs* (2007) were signs that the phenomenon had become an established part of the literary scene. Two years later, when I conducted the research for the present article, the book bloggers were no longer called into question, but mainstreamed. Monthly magazines suggest book blogs, and in the daily papers bloggers are interviewed about their reading habits and literary interests. The blogging culture has become an important and integrated part of the book trade, and has influenced the publishing, marketing and distribution of literature in North America and in many European countries. The present article is a study of Swedish book blogs during the autumn of 2009. Blogging, like much of the Internet, is constantly changing, and any study of online activities has to deal with the fact that the material is elusive. It is only possible to map out and analyse the character of the blogging phenomena at a certain point in time and with geographical and linguistic limitations. Sweden is a valid example. It is a country with a small population, a single language, an extensive general knowledge of English, and widespread use of the Internet. The observations made, however, can be compared to similar findings in other countries.

Describing and analysing how books are produced, distributed, and consumed in contemporary society has many similarities with writing an historical account of the book trade in antiquity or in the early modern period. There are, of course, differences in addressing historical or contemporary material, but there are also parallels between different periods. The methods and theories underlying a perspective within sociology of the text (McKenzie 1999) or book history (Eliot & Rose 2007) supply useful methods of approaching the material. The difficulty in historical research is that a great deal of material is lost, and in a study of the present, the material is overwhelming in size and cannot be processed as a whole. Each attempt to investigate reading habits, the book trade or the production of literature in digital media has to be accompanied by a number of limitations. Thus, it is still important to make sense of contemporary development in order to address the conditions for literature.

In studying the book blogs, a number of questions immediately arose concerning reading, attributing value, the public character of the Internet, as well as marketing, the book trade, and the position of the book bloggers. For example, is it possible to study book bloggers in order to understand how general readers discuss and approach literature? Are different kinds of values employed in reviewing books than in professional critique? Is it possible to find common strategies that many readers use in their writing about literature? Two aspects immediately stood out as important; one was how amateur reviewers and professional critics relate to one another. The other significant facet was the fact that there are connections between the book bloggers and the book trade, especially the publishers and their marketing departments. The present article will cover these aspects as well as others essential to an analysis of how the book meets the digital world.

Books vs. Internet – Theories and Positions

There is a surprising edginess between representatives of different media in the literary world. Many booklovers do not trust the new media to spread the word, and many IT devotees find the book old-fashioned and obsolete. Considering that they in effect owe a lot to each other, the conflict is a little startling, but still it is a recurrent feature of most discussions, articles, and even research in the field. This general observation applies to a great deal of writing about books and the Internet in recent years, but is not relevant to book bloggers. The book blog is rather the opposite; it is a place where different media intermingle and meet. Most book bloggers love not only literature, but also the book itself, and many often express that the printed book is the best format for reading literature. These readers happily use digital technology to cherish the experience of reading an old-fashioned book.

That modern media and digital technology pose a threat to the printed codex is an often-repeated mantra that has yet to be proven. In fact there are no signs that e-books, audio books, or online writing are taking over the printed codex' position. As Angus Phillips, British researcher in publishing studies, noted: "Paradoxically, the world going digital is helping to keep the book alive, with the possibility that books may remain in print indefinitely while being available to buy anywhere in the world" (2007: 547). Not only has digital technology improved the possibilities to store and print books, but book bloggers, online reviewers and BookCrossers have showed that the Internet is in fact promoting and aiding literature published in the book format.

Others would not agree with Phillips, and one of the most influential critics is Sven Birkerts who, in *The Gutenberg Elegies* (1994), argued that digital technology is a threat to literacy as well as to higher level reading skills. Our willingness to embrace new technologies endangers reading and literature, according to Birkerts, and all new media – CD-ROMs, DVDs, the Internet, etc. – have detrimental

effects on our ability to read printed text. In the 2nd edition of his renowned book, Birkerts did admit that parts of modern technology have proven to be more useful and less harmful than he had predicted, however, he still maintains that his initial analysis was correct (Birkerts 2006: XI–XV).

On the other side of the so-called “reading wars” are those who argue that the book is a dead medium and that it is only a matter of time before this non-environmentally friendly, old-fashioned product will be gone for good. For example, in his thought-provoking text (published as a printed book!) *Print is Dead* (2008), American publisher Jeff Gomez pronounced that not only the book in codex format, but also all other kinds of printed matter are passé. According to Gomez, the reluctance displayed by publishers and distributors in the trade is the main obstacle to the development of e-books, mp3 files and other forms of digital distribution. Not only does Gomez believe in a digital future, but also he claimed that the change has already taken place in the younger generation and predicted that the process might be slow, but that we will eventually forget print and the book (Gomez 2008: 39).

Perhaps it is no coincidence that those who are for and those who are against new media have a different focus. Among those who embrace the development, there is a strong interest in the technology itself or in the social interactions between those who use it. While the critics, on the other hand, instead talk about content and how this is created and spread. Those who disapprove of the literary uses of digital technology will most often discuss quality, informed knowledge, and culture. Some are also interested in the interplay between people, but not with an enthusiastic belief in the development.

Gomez still maintained that the medium – whether it is an e-reader, printed book or broadsheet – has no bearing on the content, at least not for the readers (2008: 45–47). His argument, however, is neither elaborated nor convincing, and other theorists, such as Friedrich Kittler or Don McKenzie, would object that the medium influences and shapes content (Kittler 1999; McKenzie 1999). Most booklovers would also argue that there are profound differences between a printed book and an e-reader, and that the latter will change reading and writing in the long run.

This polarized debate has left traces in most parts of the Internet research, and neutrality is not a possible position. So yes, I still think the printed book in codex format has a future. However, supported by reading researchers such as David Reinking (2009), I also believe that digital technology will have profound effects on literature and printed matter in general. The competition between different media may take a different turn than expected, as has been suggested by American media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999). They argued that new media technologies integrate older, already established media forms and content, it is in this sense “remediated”. A similar line of reasoning can be found as early as in Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding Media* (1964), where he claimed

that all media exist in constant interaction with each other. These ideas can be applied to the book, as well as the other media used for texts and literature that have become increasingly important. Henry Jenkins has also suggested that the meeting of different media in the present “convergence culture” is not a technological shift, but should be seen as a process: “Convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences” (Jenkins 2006: 15). His argument is useful for addressing the book blogs and their relationship to literature, as the encounter is not merely a physical and technological meeting; instead it is process in which the audience, the texts and the market re-negotiate their positions and responses.

Media studies have tended to dominate the research on the Internet, but many other fields have contributed to our knowledge, for example law, economics, and linguistics. The present approach is from a literary studies perspective. This means, among other things, that some of the theories and concepts, e.g. the ideas mentioned by McLuhan, Jenkins, Bolter and Grusin, are standard to a media theorist, but new when applied to literary material. There is a rift between literary studies and media theory, but in combination with a book historical perspective, which in reality is the study of a single medium’s history, it is possible to address contemporary literary material in new ways. The book historical view is that the conditions for media production constitute an important historical link to understanding literature and the construction of knowledge. Within book history, an often-used theoretical basis is that of Robert Darnton and his view of the book as a process: “the communications circuit” (Darnton 2002). Others have questioned the usefulness of Darnton’s model for the contemporary book trade (Svedjedal 2000: 125–126). One particular critique is that the literary circuit, as described by Darnton, reduces the reader to a passive recipient of texts (Pawley 2009). However, in this context, Darnton can be employed to analyse and clarify the structure of the book trade and the position of the book blogs within the literary system.

As argued before, book bloggers are part of the market at the same time as they are readers and consumers, and in this respect, it is possible to make use of theories inspired by Michel de Certeau and his concept of “poaching”, i.e., the reading strategies employed. According to de Certeau, an active reader will fight back against an oppressing system based on the assumption that production and distribution exist above consumers and beyond their control (de Certeau 1984: 165–176). Christine Pawley thus argued that the criticism of Darnton could similarly be directed at de Certeau (2009). They both regard the producer and the consumer, the author and the reader, as separated from each other, but this is an opposition that is no longer valid. Furthermore, according to Pawley, de Certeau places the reader in a hierarchy below the author and the publisher, which is a simplifying model.

Pawley’s arguments provide tools for understanding the position of the reading process in contemporary society. The drawback is that in criticizing both Darnton

and de Certeau, she leaves a theoretical vacuum. If the objective is to make sense of reading strategies, it is hardly possible to dismiss both the socio-economic layer as well as the individual psychological one. In order to understand book bloggers, I suggest that a very open use of Darnton's set of functions could provide a solution. Instead of applying the functions to individuals, they can be used as a method for mapping out different activities in the trade, such as marketing, writing, or evaluating. This will help us make sense of the actions of companies, individuals and different agents in the book world. As suggested by others (Svedjedal 2000: 130–132), the contemporary book trade does not differentiate between various tasks in the manner of early trade booksellers, printers, and binders. For example, the Internet bookstore Amazon sells books, distributes, markets, evaluates, publishes, etc., all at the same time (Svedjedal 1999, Steiner 2006). Therefore, it appears to be necessary to question the separation of audience and trade.

A general difficulty in applying theories from book history or sociology of literature to a single phenomenon is that it has proven to be complicated to show how societal change affects individual actions. The connection between a wider sphere and an individual person or phenomenon tends to be vaguely described, and however important and interesting the questions are, the answers often leave methodological issues unresolved. Christine Pawley suggested that, in order to understand how literature links individuals with society, organizations and social institutions such as libraries, government agencies, and literary societies should be studied. Another possibility, only hinted at by Pawley, would be to study readers as groups. Others have proposed similar concepts, i.e. Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" (1983), Stanley Fish' "interpretative communities" (1980) and Elizabeth Long's "social infrastructure of reading" (2003). Long is particularly useful in this article as she has examined readers' uses of literature.

One of the most significant arguments in debates over the consequences of the Internet has been about the changes – positive as well as negative – in social structures. Media theorist Manuel Castells mapped out a new world, *The Internet Galaxy* (2001), where information technology dissolves existing social patterns and creates new ones, unknown and difficult to grasp. This is a drastic and thought-provoking idea if applied to literature. People are already becoming more publicly social in relation to literature – book clubs, blogging and Internet bookstores are examples of how people interact in the public realm with both friends and people unknown to them. On websites like these, readers are no longer passive consumers, but instead actively promoting and discussing reading and literature.

When different forms of digital media became widespread in the 1990s, many expected a rapid development that would revolutionize the book trade. However, a number of previous setbacks have caused the book industry to be cautious with regard to other media. One not-yet-forgotten failure was the miscalculated ventures into CD-ROM publishing in the mid-1990s, when many small and large pub-

lishers alike made investments that did not pay off at all. The so-called “dot.com-crisis” around the year 2000 added to the unwillingness among traditional publishers to venture into new technologies. Besides, the printed book sells very well. A survey among American publishers showed that they are keen on creating websites, online marketing and new distribution channels, but have no interest in new media for publishing (Healy 2008). Established websites such as Amazon and Facebook or sites specifically dedicated to certain kinds of genre fiction, such as *Fantasy Fan*, are useful for marketing purposes, and these are being used more frequently. The relation between the freedom of the Internet, the commercial interests and the uses of the public sphere is intricate, and will be discussed further in the article.

The Book Blog in Sweden 2009

In Sweden, use of the Internet is widespread, among the highest rates in the world along with the other Nordic countries, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. A survey from 2009 revealed that 77% of the Swedish adult population uses the Internet on a regular basis (Findahl 2009: 15). Blogs may be a much-talked-about phenomenon, but only 37% of Internet users read blogs and only around 5% of the adult population spends time creating or developing a blog. The statistics also show that it is women who blog, while men spend more time file sharing and playing online games (Findahl 2009: 22, 31–33).

Bloggging arose as a phenomenon already in the mid-1990s, generally attributed to the web diary of Justin Hall in 1994 (Rosen 2004), with the first Swedish counterpart in 1997. In Sweden, the web diary, later referred to as weblog or blog, became widespread in 2004. With well over 100 million blogs worldwide, the numbers and the variety of the blogs are still, in 2009, rapidly growing with new blogs being created every day. The blogs dedicated mainly to literature were common already in 2005, and in autumn 2009, the number of active blogs about literature in Sweden, depending on the definition, ranged from 150 to 250.

The survey conducted for the present purposes was based on the book blogs that could be found through three major portals, one general (*Bloggportalen.se*) and two specialized in book blogs (*Bokbloggar.nu* and *litt.se*). The collecting site *Bloggportalen.se* claims to have 3 000 registered blogs about writing and literature, but this figure also includes bloggers writing occasionally about literature who link themselves to this category. The lists from the two more specialized portals gave 300 blogs, but after going through each link, the number was significantly lowered. Several blogs were inactive and others wrote more about other things than about literature. Attempts to find unattached book blogs gave some newly started ones. In the end, the list comprised 220 blogs about books, literature, and reading. The requirement for being included on the list was regular postings (minimum two per month) and more than half of the postings had to be about litera-

ture, the book trade, authors, or writing. There are a large number of general cultural blogs that also write about literature, but those are not included in this study. Many other bloggers writing web diaries about their daily life also comment on books they have read, but these bloggers are also not included in the material. So it should be noted that blogging about literature is much more extensive than this survey indicate.

Defining the book blog was difficult in several ways; one hard line to draw was determining the differences between an online literary magazine and a book blog. There are several group blogs that resemble online magazines. A common, but not always valid, definition is that the online magazine publishes a number of articles at the same time, making it an issue with a number (often with some kind of theme). The articles in the magazines also tend to be longer and edited. In contrast, the book blog article is rarely edited, the articles are generally shorter and they give a sense of “immediacy”, both in publishing and content. However, for the present purposes, the blogs and the magazines have been allowed to define themselves, i.e. the sites that call themselves magazines have not been included.

A general observation is that it is hard to maintain a blog dedicated solely to literature. Most people do not read at a steady pace. A holiday may result in more postings, and work in dry periods. Some bloggers solve this by writing reviews that are published at a later date. Also, many bloggers express that they find it difficult to have something to write about apart from reviews. The result is that most single bloggers have a short life span, rarely more than one or two years, while group blogs (made up of more than one blogger) usually last longer. As the person behind the blog *Rubus Libri* expressed it: “I can now look back on more than a year of blogging, and observe, as expected, that it was harder than expected [!]” (*Rubus Libri* 2009).¹ This blogger complains about the difficulties of being a creative writer, the lack of visitors, and worse, the even lower number of comments. It is clear that book blogging, like most things, requires time, hard work and dedication. As a result, less than 20% of the single bloggers started before 2007 and had maintained their blog for more than two years. At least 20% of the single bloggers (probably more as these tend to be more difficult to trace) started in 2009, the same year the survey was conducted. I made a similar study of book blogs during the autumn of 2007, and at that time the majority of the blogs had been started in 2005. Two years later, most of them were deactivated. However, it can be argued that the intention of the blogs is not to be permanent or fixed. The nature of the format promotes a short life span.

Other general observations that can be made concern age and gender. The book bloggers are usually, in cases where age is presented, between 30 and 40 years. This is a higher average age than bloggers in general, as most blog creators are between 16 and 24 years (Findahl 2009: 31). Accordingly, book bloggers more often have families, and they also generally have university degrees and jobs. Furthermore, most of them live in smaller towns around the country, although quite a

few live in one of the three larger urban areas: Stockholm, Göteborg, or Malmö. The book bloggers are also almost all female. Among the single bloggers, 75% of those who state their sex are women and only 8% men. These figures concur with blogging in general, as women spend more time on creating and updating blogs than men do, but women are even more common among book bloggers than they are in the rest of the blogosphere.

In Sweden, the most popular (visited) blogs are written by young women (between the age of 15 and 20) writing about gossip, fashion, and their daily lives. Bloggers like Blondinbella, Kenza and Kissie have between 600 000 and 700 000 visitors a week, and have duly become minor celebrities. These bloggers get invited to parties, are written about in evening papers, and mentioned on TV – blogging has become a route to fame. Yet these bloggers are in most respects far different from the average book blogger, who is older, writes more or less on one subject, is less personal, and does not have as many readers. The only book blog with plenty of readers is *Bokhora*, a group blog that will be analysed in more detail, with approximately 15 000 visitors a week (Björkäng 2009). Most book bloggers, on the other hand, only have a few visitors, ranging from less than ten to 2 000 a week.

Book blogs could be mapped out in different ways depending on the criteria, e.g. content, themes, and style. To give a general overview, I have divided them into four groups based on the blogger, or bloggers, i.e. their actual number (one or more), purpose (commercial or non-commercial), and profession (professional or not). The groups intersect and overlap, but give a sense of the nature of different kinds of blogs. The following groups are described: “professional commercial book blogs”, “professional non-profit book blogs”, “non-professional individual book blogs”, and “non-professional group book blogs”. The “non-professional individual book blogs” form by far the largest category and are also important, as they represent a group that did not previously have the same kind of access to the public sphere.

Professional Commercial Book Blogs

These are blogs written by authors, bookstores, newspapers, magazines, journalists, etc. Most of them are created in order to market a brand, a name, or a company. Some are simply commercial marketing, while others have a versatile and sophisticated content. The professional blogs tend to be nicely designed and do not have so many banners. The blogs produced by publishing houses and bookstores generally post comments on an irregular basis. Newspapers and journals, on the other hand, often make a daily posting written as a way to comment on current debates or events. None of the four large daily papers in Sweden have cultural blogs any longer (they used to have them), but the large evening papers have several (e.g. *Aftonbladet*'s Kulturbloggen). These professional bloggers generally have a surprisingly slight influence on the debates in other blogs, with a few ex-

ceptions, such as prominent authors (e.g., Bodil Malmsten). In the survey, there were twenty publisher blogs (e.g., *Svante Weylers blog*) and six belonging to bookstores (e.g., *SF-bokhandeln i Malmö*). The authors' blogs are more difficult to define, as these tend to be about more than literature. Many of these are literature in their own right, while others are simple marketing for the author's persona.

Professional Non-profit Book Blogs

These are blogs written by a single librarian, or more commonly a group of librarians, connected to a local city library. The aim of these blogs is to inform the public about books and literature in general. A few of them are directed at other professionals, and will also give general information about the book trade, authors, events, etc. These are popular, while the blogs written by single committed librarians have fewer postings. The most influential in this group is a book recommendation blog, *Boktips.net*. Library blogs have become increasingly popular as a way to reach readers outside the house, especially the blogs written for children and teenagers (e.g., *Skolbibblan*). There were forty library blogs on the list.

Non-professional Individual Bloggers

The single-writer, non-professional blogs are the most common (e.g., *BookyDarling*, *En annan sida*, and *Lyrans nobless*). The search for active blogs of this kind gave 140, but there are likely more. New blogs are started daily, while old blogs become inactive. The variety among these is large. Some write short postings about a book they have read, followed by a very similar review of another book, and then another. Others write ambitious long texts about literature in general, compare books they have read, or discuss literary trends they have discovered. Most of the bloggers are personal in their views of literature, and some also relate their reading to personal experiences. Most postings are on popular literature published in paperback by the large publishing houses. There are only a few book bloggers who discuss less known literature or poetry. However, most of them read a great deal, and overall many different kinds of literature are brought up.

Non-professional Group Blogs

Blogs run by more than one person are less common, but on the other hand more active, long lasting and well established. At the time of the survey, there were thirteen active non-professional group blogs. Some of them are devoted to a specific field: crime fiction, children's books, or paperbacks. The most talked about book blog, *Bokhora* [Book Whore], is a group blog, and the oldest book blog *Dagens bok* [Book of the Day] started in 2000. The level of writing in the group blogs tends to be higher than among the single bloggers, probably due to discussions within the group, and in some cases an editor goes through texts pre-publication.

Bloggers as Critics and their Role in the Book Trade

The grouping of the book bloggers served the purpose of making structures apparent, and it illuminates differences between the blogs. The professional bloggers, whether commercial or not, used the blogging technique mainly for marketing. Much of this work is a development of pre-existing strategies among publishers, authors, and librarians alike. An important part of the professional's work is to get attention and to reach an audience, and the blog is simply another means to achieve this end. The non-professional bloggers, on the other hand, developed new strategies and structures, and the main interest here is in examining how this is done and the effects it has had. The following section deals with the non-professional bloggers in general, in what sense they are literary critics, and their role in the trade. The subsequent two parts will discuss examples among the non-professionals: the group blog and the single blogger. The purpose is to analyse more closely how a few of the book bloggers operate.

The non-professional book bloggers might be idealists, and unconnected (as a whole) to the trade, but they are still part of the book market. Marketing, distribution, publishing formats, media attention, and literary trends are factors influencing which books the bloggers write about. Only a small proportion of the books published will be discussed in the blogs. In Sweden, approximately 2 000 new works of fiction are published each year.² A single, fast reading blogger might manage to write about less than 100 works. The group blogs generally cover 200–300 titles of mainly new fiction, but still the majority of new titles will not be reviewed or discussed to any great extent. The number of new titles published each day, in Sweden as well as globally, makes the proportion of reviewed titles tiny in relation to all the texts never mentioned.

The book bloggers are part of the book trade in the sense that they contribute to the attention a particular work receives. The need to orientate in the book world, or the book flood, has become central in all dealings with literature, as so-called over-publishing has been called the greatest threat to the book. In 2008 there were over 100 000 titles published in the UK, over 80 000 in Germany, more than 275 000 in the US (some of the UK and US titles are the same) and 75 000 in Spanish (from different countries). Swedish book production in 2008 amounted to a modest 4 500 titles printed for the public (all printed books is a much higher number, but this includes governmental reports, etc.), but since most Swedes also read in other languages – especially English, but also maternal languages, Scandinavian neighbouring languages as well as French, German and Spanish – in reality the number of books on offer is much greater than a few thousand. The import of foreign language books make up at least 10% of the trade and the two large Swedish Internet bookstores offer between two and three million titles, where books in Swedish only comprise less than ten percent (Steiner 2005). The number of published titles the book blogger can choose from is enormous.

The increasing book publishing is a problem for the trade as a whole as well as for the individual reader. As the Mexican author Gabriel Zaid remarked, “Books are published at such a rapid rate that they make us exponentially more ignorant” (2003: 22). Even an imagined extensive fast reader going through a work of fiction a day would miss thousands published any particular day. In a year, the unread books make up a massive amount. Books given as a gift, books I got as an intellectual challenge, and books bought for fun – all the unread books on my bedside table giving me a bad conscience. “Humankind writes more than it can read”, says Zaid, which is a fact that readers have to find strategies to deal with (2003: 30). Perhaps the previous economic and practical restraints on publishing had advantages over the present system. Today, however, these are gone, and print-on-demand publishers such as *Lightning Source* and the Swedish *Vulkan.se* have eliminated the last impediments. Everyone can publish anything at a very small cost. But who shall receive these texts? The professional critics will not, and cannot, write about everything as the produced texts are too many and the large daily papers decided long ago to limit their reviews.

When too many titles are published, visibility becomes the key to success in the trade. In reality, this applies to most media, as the expansion of the information flow has required new ways to become known. In “the attention economy”, being seen is the most difficult and important task for authors, publishers, and other agents in the book trade (Davenport & Beck 2001: 2–3). It has become easy to be published, but difficult to receive attention. Visibility has become the most desired, and the least accessible commodity in the new economy, and in book marketing it has become essential to “whip up a hype” or “create a buzz”, PR phrases in publishing. It is not only the avant-garde trendy or hip products that are buzz-worthy. Generating hype can be done regardless of content and setting, with the right target group anything can be achieved. Market strategist Renee Dye argued that not all costumers are equal, some are vanguard, highly influential, first adopters and others are followers (Dye 2000). If you aim at the middle-class reader, the critics at large daily papers are influential, but the young, globally oriented, and ideologically aware groups of readers that blog and comment on different online communities may be equally important. These readers can create a buzz, as they are the real things – the authentic readers. While Dye suggested that PR groups and branding people create most buzzes, there is evidence that on the whole publishers of general fiction do not have the means, technical know-how, or funds to fully employ such strategies. When it comes to the previously mentioned Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* series (2005–2008), Dan Brown’s *The Lost Symbol* (2009), or other titles with a substantial market, these schemes are used, but in Sweden very few works of fiction have enough pull to allow for advanced marketing.

There are exceptions, and a few of the large publishers have experimented with new marketing schemes (Thoresson 2010). One example was in the summer and early autumn of 2007, when the largest publishing house in Sweden, Bonniers,

aimed at the bloggers in a marketing campaign. They promoted a debutant, the pseudonym Tim Davy, and the novel *Amberville* (2007). The strategy included sending out 100 copies of the unedited manuscript, although nicely bounded as a book, to bloggers well before publication, in order to create a buzz. The manuscript was followed in the mail by a lighter, then a kitchen sponge, and finally a large leek – all with quotes from the book tied onto them (Cato 2007). The campaign was not particularly successful in creating a sense of authenticity, and most of the bloggers wrote about the marketing scheme and the leek. However, the book was much talked about, and by mid-October it was the most discussed novel on all Swedish blogs. The fact is that a large proportion of the 100 bloggers did read and write about the text, prior to its official publication.

Despite the economic limitations of the Swedish publishing houses, and perhaps also the lack of know-how, it is clear that the Internet is a part of modern marketing strategies. There are courses given for publishers' employees to ensure up-to-date knowledge, and in 2008 the trade magazine published an issue dedicated to online marketing (Westlund 2008). It has also become more or less the norm for publishers to send out review copies to the more influential bloggers, and occasionally more sophisticated schemes are employed. In the early days of the Internet, publishers merely presented books on their websites, but during 2008–2009 marketing moved into areas where the readers were already active – Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, Bebo, and blogs – preferably through discrete infiltration, in what is termed “social media marketing” (Westlund 2008: 15–16).

An often-repeated critique of how literature is discussed and spread through the Internet is that there are no gatekeepers offering judgements. Considering that book bloggers might be one group of gatekeepers, there is a risk that they will be used for marketing purposes. What position does the book bloggers take in balancing personal interests, publishers' influence, and other kinds of inspiration/authority? Are bloggers general readers, or are they part of the contemporary book trade? In analysing the Swedish book blogs, I would argue that it depends on the blog, as these are so diverse. The bloggers as a phenomenon operate with a variety of functions: marketing, displaying, recommending, reviewing, gossiping, and consuming. Some act as gatekeepers, but this is not a prominent feature. Instead, the book bloggers tend to promote reading in general, rather than single titles. Most book bloggers also affirm the opinions and views spread in other media as well on other sites on the Internet.

The Non-professional Group Blog – the Example *Bokhora*

The book bloggers are readers and studies of readers, historical as well as present, are marked by methodological difficulties. The previously mentioned reception studies researcher Christine Pawley argues for two different methods. One can study readers as individuals, with one or more examples, but the problem is the

difficulty in determining the general accuracy. Using the second method, it is feasible to group the readers based on characteristics, but as a consequence, some individuals might not fit into the groups constructed by the researcher (Pawley 2002). Despite these valid objections, I have divided the book bloggers into groups to reveal general patterns. This is supplemented by a more in-depth analysis of some examples, the first being the non-professional group book blog *Bokhora*. It is the most established and talked about book blog in Sweden.

Bokhora is a group blog created in 2006 by five women around the age of 30. In many ways, these women represent the typical book blogger – not only in age and gender – but also in that they all have university degrees, and three of them have studied literature in college. Despite their education, they present themselves as “general readers”, i.e. non-professionals. Their double nature as amateurs with an education raises questions about professionalism. What are the differences between writing by professionals and by amateurs? This is a significant question that has to be examined and discussed from different angles. A traditional way of differing the professional from the amateur is if someone is paid for the job or not. The five women in the *Bokhora* group are not paid to blog, on the other hand have they are often invited to do other, but connected, work that is waged.

One notion is that book bloggers and others alike (such as the critics on the Internet bookstore Amazon), unlike most professionals, write about all kinds of literature. They include genres generally not reviewed in daily papers or literary journals – crime fiction, chick lit, fantasy, etc. – and they also write about a mixture of newly published titles and back list (even out-of-print books). The mix of texts seems to be a goal in itself. In some ways, it reflects how people generally read – an inexpensive paperback, an old book, a borrowed recommendation, or a brand new expensive hardcover. “We go to bed with any kind of literature” is the *Bokhora* mantra (Rydin 2009).³ But a further exploration of the titles reviewed at *Bokhora* shows that this is not quite the case. Most of the reviews published August-October 2009 on their blog were of new novels published by one of the larger established publishing houses in Sweden. The reviews of older books were only of English-language titles and were written by the same person, Helena Dahlgren, who is the only one presenting herself on their site as semi-professional. There are also other kinds of books mentioned on *Bokhora*, but these are rarely reviewed in their own right, instead these are titles referred to in general discussions on a theme or a presentation of an author. The reviews make up only part of the blog, and it is in the other postings that a wider range of books can be found.

The reviewed titles on *Bokhora* indicate that they operate in much the same manner as professional critics. One can question whether the five contributors to *Bokhora* are amateurs, and on their blog there is a constant balance between their semi-professional character and their image as general readers. While they often promote themselves as amateurs, it has become increasingly difficult to ascertain this position. They have in many ways moved from the amateur to the profession-

al sphere. For example, they are presented in styled press photos as smart, good-looking, intelligent middle-class women, they appear at the annual Book Fair in Gothenburg, they have published an issue of the literary magazine *Album* at a large publishing house, and they travel around the country talking about reading and books. They sell advertising space on their website, and occasionally they link to an external book sales site. In daily papers and monthly magazines, they are presented as the new generation of readers (Rydin 2009; Eklöf 2009), they are quoted on book covers, and *Bokhora* is also included in the “new reviews” list in the trade magazine. Most of the members in the Bokhora team also participate in paid activities connected to the website, for example they talk about reading and literature in libraries and bookstores. In the summer of 2010 one Bokhora, Johanna Karlsson, started working for a small independent publisher, X Publishing, and thereby definitely crossing the traditional line between the amateur, unwaged, and the professional, paid for a similar line of work. There are plenty of examples of how they are no longer amateurs, and it is possible to argue that their professionalism lies, among other things, in being able to read and write like “anybody”, something that perhaps traditional criticism has failed to do.

There is no evident or clear division between professional and amateur criticism in the present (Steiner 2008 & 2009). It has been argued that a new kind of amateur has emerged, a group called “the Pro-Ams” (Leadbeater & Miller 2004). According to Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller, a new kind of amateur has appeared that operates in a more professional manner than previous individuals or groups have done. They are knowledgeable, educated, committed, and have large networks. Leadbeater and Miller argued that pro-ams question traditional hierarchies, though obviously many amateurs reinforce the very same as they climb towards professionalism. However, what is more important, the pro-ams do not regard themselves as professionals, rather they use their amateurism as a tool for networking, writing, and creating new structures. The term amateur has traditionally been used in a derisive manner, to explain that someone is lacking in knowledge, education, and standards. But that is not a useful way to apply the word to contemporary non-professionals. They may lack a certain degree, or the right job title, but they can often work in new and experimental ways. There are also examples of how the pro-ams have influenced and inspired professionals, and this is also the case within the book trade.

Are the book bloggers pro-ams? In some ways, but the range of book bloggers is wide, from the near professional to the dabbling amateurs. At one end of the continuum, there are 14-year-old book bloggers writing personal accounts of their reading experiences. At the other end, there is *Bokhora*, the most professional of all the Swedish book bloggers in the sense that their educational background, present occupation, and position on the literary scene are not characterized by amateurism. However, they did start out as non-professionals, and they can be seen as part of the large group of semi-professionals – such as journalists, authors,

critics, translators, and librarians – who have their own blog. Most of the bloggers are somewhere between amateur and professional, and among the group bloggers, many have studied literature at the university level and/or work with books. Moreover, 30% of the single non-professional bloggers present themselves as having a background or job related to literature. One example is the blogger Anna Winberg [*Anna Winberg Knows Good Books*], who has a degree in publishing studies and has worked both in bookstores and in publishing. Another example is Sara Britta Jadelius [*Brittas böcker och bibliotek*], who has a degree in literature and librarianship, and is working as a librarian and web designer, marketing herself through the blog. The line separating the professional from the non-professional is dissolving, and is it probably no longer a valid distinction. Many of the non-professionals, including *Bokhora*, use professional strategies, values, and language to reach their readership.

Some say that online reviewing poses a serious threat to professional criticism. In the US, a number of critics started *The Campaign to Save Book Reviewing* in an attempt to create awareness of the differences between professional and amateur writing. They argued that the reviews in daily papers are threatened not only by the Internet, but also by under-qualified journalists and large media companies selling short reviews. One of the defenders of the professionals, Rónán McDonald, wrote in *The Death of the Critic* (2007) that only printed criticism can create renewed understanding of literature and deepen our perspectives, “quantity is no substitute for authority” (2007: 3). To McDonald, a public sphere has to have limitations, there needs to be an authoritative voice, and the fact that anyone can be a critic will diminish choice and agency for the reader (2007: 16–17). Objections can be raised to the elitism in his arguments and the structure of canon formation, but these are rejected by McDonald, who claimed that only the professional, printed critic with a strong link to academic literary studies offers the source of authority that can challenge people in their reading.

The purpose of professional literary criticism has been debated many times, and the selection processes, power, canonization, and literary value have been called into question. The professional critic is a gatekeeper who consecrates and canonizes authors and their works, and with this power follows a complicated relation to the book trade, the authors, and the literary world. The professional critic may have authority, but is at the same time often a person linked in different ways to the literary world. A critic also needs to market and position him- or herself in relation to others. It is easy to criticize book bloggers for being susceptible to clever marketing, publishing trends, or other bloggers’ views, but not even the professionals are able to isolate themselves from such things.

The example of *Bokhora* shows that book bloggers may be amateurs in some respects, but have a great deal in common with professional literary criticism. In this sense, they are similar to the American book blog *Book slut*, or the British *Ready Steady Book*-blog. These also began as amateurs, but have developed into a

semi-professional sphere with an impact on the book trade. The authors of the popularly written *The Bookaholic's Guide to Book Blogs*, Gillieron and Kilgarriff, decidedly played down the polarization and animosity between print criticism and the Internet (2007: 170–171). They also argued that the most influential book bloggers are the professionals: publishers, booksellers, journalist, and critics. Their UK examples are indicative of this, but the study of Swedish book blogs also showed that the amateurs have become increasingly important, and that some of the amateurs have become part of the literary establishment. However, the hierarchy in the blog world is a defining trait, and there are huge differences in the status and position of *Bokhora* and the book blog of a 14-year-old schoolgirl.

The Diary of a Book Blogger – the Non-professional Single Bloggers

Bokhora is an interesting example of a non-professional group blog, despite the above discussions on professionalism, as it is the most established book blog existing in Sweden. But selecting equally good examples from the large group of single non-professional bloggers is not easy, as they are all different and very few have a large readership. Instead the following analysis of the single bloggers will use a number of different examples to show the variety and complexity of this writing.

One general observation of these blogs is that they are often written in an intimate style, similar to a diary. Others have already observed that the blogs are blurring the line between public and private – being written in a personal manner in a space open to anyone. It has been argued that the Internet offers a place for a collective society where individuals connect in large networks. Manuel Castells, on the other hand, claimed that regarding the Internet as a community is misleading, instead it has provided forums for a stronger focus on an I. The process is what he calls the “privatization of sociability” and a “networked individualism” (Castells 2001: 129–130). Individuals may create large networks, but these have specific interests, values, and tastes that have little to do with the Internet in general. A network, whether interested in science fiction literature or Tecktonik music, is developed in social interaction, but is always based in individual selves. Being social has become privatized, but according to Castells, the Internet is not made up of a mere collection of individuals, and it is not in conflict with the individual; instead the Net has become the self. The process is one of an individualist consumerism that often stresses both consumption (possessing, buying, touching) and the individual reading experience (the act). The differences and links between these two concepts have been debated in the research, but if applied to individual book bloggers, it is clear that they are deeply intertwined (Squires 2007).

Almost all of the book blogs written by one person have a personalized style of writing, regardless of whether the person behind the blog has a professional back-

ground or not. In the posted reviews, there are often comments on the blogger's private life, the postings about literature are also often intermingled with writing about a cat, walking in the autumn sun, feelings on a rainy Monday morning, etc. These texts promote the blogger as a person, but they are also necessary to give a blog a personalized style. It is not possible for a blog reader to identify the character of someone solely writing about literature, and the main function of the personal postings is to create a relationship with the readers. The more private writing in many ways defines who the blogger is: "Like the writing of paper diaries, blogging is a process that helps shape subjective feelings and identity through affective connections, thus defining a sense of self in relation to others" (Dijck 2007: 73). Even though a book blog is about literature, the personalized tone is necessary to attract readers. A de-personalized blogger without passions leaves no impression, and tends to have few visitors. Consequently, as van Dijck argued (2007: 73), bloggers use technology to express individuality and a self. In this way the blog and the diary resemble one another, and even though the handwritten diary may appear private and secret while the weblog is public and open, the similarities in the act of writing are evident. The blog can also be understood as a ritual process defining an I in relation to others (Dijck 2004). Seen from this perspective, book blogs are only a matter of literature to a certain extent – the main issue is positioning the self in relation to culture, society, and other readers. However, this would not be the first time that media negotiate a self in society. Print, radio, TV, etc. have already transformed the position of the individual in the public sphere, and in this sense transformed people from objects to subjects (Thompson 1995).

Despite all the personal elements, the most common way a single book blog is organized is simply by adding one review to the next, an example being *Ylvas läsdagbok* [Ylva's reading diary]. Depending on how many books have been read, the number of postings varies greatly. Some bloggers write long reviews, but most write a short paragraph on what they thought about a particular book. This writing is reminiscent of a primary, or early teenage, school activity, and an exercise book with a list of read novels followed by short reviews. These book blog reviews do not appear to have been written for an audience; instead they have a self-preserving, documenting form. The blogs resemble a diary, photo album, or other kinds of saved documents from a life. Not all book bloggers write like this; many seem to have a readership in mind and will direct questions, tasks, or ideas towards an intended reader. However, "I blog for my own sake" is an often repeated stance. The blogger "Mårten" writes that he blogs to develop his writing, as a process of seeking something, but never for attention because he has never received any (*pocketpocketpocket* 2009). But even if many bloggers make similar comments, it is difficult to understand why anyone would bother creating a blog if they did not want to be seen. Part of the success of many sites and activities on the Internet is the possibility to participate, share, and network. Charles Leadbeater

argued that those who are part of the Internet movement identify themselves not by their possessions or professions, but by what they put online: “You are what you share” (Leadbeater 2008: 1), the underlying logic being that if your games, videos, texts, etc. are visible on the Internet, you exist. It is fairly easy to disrepute his claim on several accounts, one being that people online are also their profession, their fame, their skills in real life (IRL), and showing these online is an important part of the sharing. However, the reason for allowing Leadbeater into the argument is that he is right about there being a strong desire among many bloggers to display themselves. Sharing yourself with others is an important part of being someone in today’s society.

A number of the book bloggers express their intention to have a professional career in the literary world, and part of the purpose of their blog is to attract attention or give credibility to a CV. Being seen online may be a path to a desired job, or as stated on the video site YouTube: “Broadcast Yourself”. This is mainstream media becoming personalized. However, as British author Andrew Keen argued, there is a risk that everyone is talking on the Internet and no one is listening. Broadcasting yourself, according to Keen, is one big narcissistic move in which people are not meant to digest or distribute culture, but only to produce it themselves (Keen 2007: 15–16). In the case of the book bloggers he has a point, as most of them have very few readers. Apart from *Bokhora* and a few others who have received attention, most of the book bloggers will have only five to 200 readers a week. Everyone can share, but as these numbers show, there is a strong hierarchy in recognition. Although “[s]haring, recognition, participation” are seen as keywords in understanding the blogging movement (Leadbeater 2008: 222), not everyone is recognized. The position of a particular book blogger is evaluated through the number of visits, being on other bloggers blogrolls, nominations to the book blog of the month, review copies from publishers, or comments from other readers. The single non-professional book bloggers confirm that sharing is easy, but that recognition is difficult to attain.

The third keyword, participation, is essential for an understanding of the purpose of the individual book blogger. For most kinds of social networks participation is important, and for the book bloggers it is a way to be a part of the literary scene, to be an authentic consumer guide. The relation between a blogger and the potential readers is very important, and many postings express a desire for a link to other people. A blog reader can post comments and argue with the writer, and in this there is a contradictory combination of distance and intimacy. The physical distance and the limited knowledge of the person writing the blog creates a space between the blogger and the blog-reader that allows for a different kind of intimacy. The anonymity of the media allows us to be more open about who we are. One consequence is that there are often heightened emotions of all kinds, as writing bland texts gives little to a blog reader. There is a tendency towards what some

researchers have seen as a widened social freedom, where people can express themselves more openly and freely (Katz & Rice 2002).

The existence of non-professional individual bloggers is evidence that readers cannot be reduced to passive consumers. They have become, what Jeff Gomez called, “prosumers”, i.e. a portmanteau for producers and consumers (2008). The term is more often applied to phenomena such as fanfiction, YouTube, or MySpace, but is relevant in describing the complexity of book bloggers. The bloggers are in constant negotiation with literature and literary quality. In this sense, book bloggers have redefined how people make use of and deal with literature; they have also questioned the traditional division between production and consumption of texts.

Book Blogs and Literature in a MySpace Global World

There is an often-repeated view that the Internet is global, but anything that is to reach outside national borders has to be in English. The Swedish book blogs are not. They are almost always written in Swedish, and although some will review or comment on books read in a different language, the most of the reviews are of books written in or translated into Swedish. The book blogs have little to do with the blog mantra of globalism, democracy, or being part of a mass collaborative community. This is not co-created knowledge shared for free, what has been called “wicinomics”, i.e. “Wikipedia-economics” (Tapscott & Williams 2008). The aspirations underlying the book blogs differ in many ways from what is generally written about the digital revolution. Often-repeated code words such as collaboration, democracy, global, or participation culture only apply to a limited extent to this material. Most of the often-repeated and spoken of Internet analyses have been written about the same phenomena: Linux, Wikipedia, YouTube, Skype. But these are nothing like the book blogs, which appear to follow a logic of their own, more related to a literary sphere than to other media. Initially I argued that Elizabeth Long’s concept of the “social infrastructure of reading” (2003) was a useful tool for understanding book blogs, and as has been maintained throughout the article, the bloggers operate in a network with other readers and people interested in literature, and only to a lesser extent with other media consumers.

There is a claim that the blog has become the 18th century coffee house transformed into the 20th century public sphere (Tapscott & Williams 2008: 40). A general critique of Jürgen Habermas’s initial concept of the public sphere is that, in the 18th century, women and people of the lower classes were excluded from the coffee houses, and in this sense these places were not public at all. And perhaps the blogs are equally excluding of large groups, as less than 30% of people between 16 and 74 read blogs (including people who do not use the Internet). Furthermore, this figure excludes the 30% of the population, younger and older, who

most likely read blogs to a varied extent. If blogs are today's coffee houses, they are still excluding places. It is also a fact that some voices are privileged, although it would take a much more in-depth survey into bloggers to map out exactly how the hierarchies are structured and how power is controlled.

In the introduction, I proposed that the book bloggers have become part of the book trade and as such are actors on the literary stage. Their impact has not been as radical as was previously predicted (Nelson 2006), and most book bloggers, as I have shown, have very few readers. Still the blogs, together with other kinds of social forums, have changed how publishers view the audience and how marketing of literature is carried out. One of the most tangible changes within the book trade has been a shift in production, distribution, and consumption from divided functions to co-productions or co-operative projects. Up until the 1970s in Sweden, and to a certain extent even up until the early 1990s, each part in the process of making a book was carried out by a separate individual or company. One person wrote the book, one was the editor, one the publisher, the printer, the book-binder, the marketing person, the distributor, the bookseller, and one the reader. This is a slightly simplified model, but as a whole a good description of the pre-1990s conditions. The last fifteen years' digital development, however, has changed the structure of the book trade radically (Söderlund 2009: 87–89). In the contemporary trade, many functions converge in one person, organization, or company. As argued initially in the article, applying Darnton's (2002) or Svedjedal's (2000) book trade functions to the book blogs makes their position visible in the overall structure of the book market. First of all the book bloggers are readers, but they are also book buyers, library visitors, and part of the audience at different literary events. These actions, of course, belong to the traditional realm of the reader; what is new is that bloggers also function as reviewers and in this way proliferate texts and market books and authors. As many of the book bloggers work as journalists, librarians, authors, translators, publisher's readers, and bookstore assistants, they often take on a number of other functions as well. Book bloggers may still make up a tiny part of the book trade, but they are not insignificant, and if seen in a wider perspective, they provide evidence of a transformed trade that is changing the structure of the production, distribution, and consumption of literature.

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Notes

- 1 "Jag kan nu se tillbaka på över ett år av bloggande, och konstatera att, som väntat, var det svårare än väntat."
- 2 The number comes out of the statistics in the National Bibliography (collated by the Royal Library) and is based on fiction for adults in Swedish original as well as translated into Swedish, but not including new editions. Another source, the Publishers Association, claims that their members (i.e. the large publishers) only published 618 titles of fiction for adults in 2008. The great discrepancy can be explained by the large numbers of small independent publishers as well as a large variety of self-publishing and Print-on-Demand-systems (Carlsson & Facht 2010).
- 3 "Vi går till sängs med vilken litteratur som helst".

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The Literature Curriculum in Russia: Cultural Nationalism vs. The Cultural Turn

By Karin Sarsenov

Abstract

In Western educational systems, the question “Why study literature in school?” has been raised in connection with the theoretical development often summarized as “the cultural turn.” The author strives to contribute to this discussion by examining the development of educational discourse in Russia. During the Soviet period, literature was – together with history – the subject most heavily influenced by the dogmas of Soviet state ideology. As such, literature enjoyed great prestige and was a compulsory and separate subject from the fifth to the eleventh school years. Since 1991, the educational system has undergone radical reform, but the number of hours devoted to literature has not changed significantly. This would suggest that literature still is perceived as an important means of incorporating children into the national and political community. The target of this study is to identify authorities’ specific aims in devoting so much time to literature in school, as well as to elucidate in what way literature is to achieve these aims. Russian guidelines for the development of literature curricula published in the years 1991–2010 are examined to see just how literature is legitimated as a secondary school subject. Based on this material, the author draws conclusions about the rhetorical practices and ideological development of curricular discourse, its relationship to Soviet educational thought and the extent to which the cultural turn has influenced this sphere.

Keywords: Russian education; secondary school; literature; curricular guidelines; required readings

Introduction

Teaching literature in school is by its very nature a tricky endeavor. On the one hand, the canonical works taught remind us of the ultimate transcendence of the individual. The fact that a particular writer is taught in school means that this person's views, intentions, experiences, feelings, politics and aesthetics have surpassed their contextual situatedness, overcome the forces attempting to marginalize them, and have emerged as the dominant cultural discourse. In this respect, masterpieces represent the ultimate manifestation of individual agency. In the intimate experience of reading, individual agency is also accentuated – reading is a process which cannot be controlled from outside, and in which the inherent hermeneutical openness of art allows for unexpected – and sometimes perhaps even unwelcome – interpretations.

On the other hand, literature is, together with history, a subject particularly well-suited for implementing the covert and overt agenda of state-administered education. These include objectives such as the Foucauldian subjectification of individuals by means of surveillance mechanisms, “the naturalization of a civil identification with the national political community over time” (Bénéï 2005: 9), and maintaining the dominance of the ruling political, economic and military elite (Apple 2004). Teaching literature in school means negotiating a path in this field rife with conflict and paradox.

In Russia, literature is a compulsory, separate subject from the fifth to the eleventh school year. This would suggest that literature is perceived as an important means of bringing children into the national and political community. The target of this study is to identify authorities' specific aims in devoting so much time to literature in school, as well as to elucidate in what way literature is to achieve these aims. Governmental guidelines used in curriculum development are helpful in this regard. They might reveal very little about what is actually happening in school, but they can tell us more about the normative foundation legitimizing state power. In literature guidelines, the question “Why read literature in school?” may or may not be addressed explicitly, but the passages describing literature as a school subject do provide useful insights into the authoritative discourses concerning the relationship between the nation (the people and their culture), citizenship (the rights and responsibilities of the citizen) and state power.

This study analyzes Russian guidelines for the development of literature curricula in order to discover how they legitimate literature's existence as a secondary school subject. Based on this material, I will draw conclusions about the rhetorical practices and ideological development of curricular discourse, its relationship to Soviet educational thought and the influence of the cultural turn.

“Literature” as a School Subject in European Education

The unchallenged position of literature in the curriculum is a rather recent one. Literature was first introduced in elementary and secondary education in Europe as part of Latin and Greek classes, aimed at the elite. Later, poetry began to be read in the vernacular as a way of practicing elocution (Guillory 1993: 101). It was only in the nineteenth century, and in many areas as late as the early twentieth, that a national history of literature was included in school curricula. This was the result of the rise of cultural nationalism and worries about working class unrest, and was intended to promote patriotic values and virtues.

This stage often coincided with the establishment of a general educational system for all social classes, not only the privileged (Heathorn 2000). According to Ball et al. (1990: 49) in Great Britain, English as a subject now had purposes that were seen as stretching from “meeting the demands of industrial competition to reinforcing national solidarity.” It was at that point that schools began to demand an established list of national masterpieces, spurring a debate over what should constitute the literary canon – a secular version of the ecclesiastical practice of discriminating between divinely inspired scriptures and others (Gorak 1991: 64).

Historically, then, the introduction of vernacular literature as a subject of study in the educational system is closely linked to the ideas of the German Romantics, specifically the ones of J. G. von Herder, who saw a unity between a nation (Volk), its language and literature, and regarded literature as an expression of a nation’s specific character (Volksgeist). The proponents of such ideas invested literature with an enormous amount of cultural capital. A new profession was born, literary history, whose practitioners had the task of keeping the records of this rapidly growing field of cultural production (Bourdieu & Johnsson 1993). Although cultural nationalism did not pursue a political agenda in the strict sense, its ambition to revitalize national culture coincided in many ways with one of public education’s own institutional aims: to foster loyalty to rulers and create a common set of values.

Within the academic discipline of literary criticism, the nationalistic view of literature as developed by Georg Gervinus in his *Geschichte der deutschen Nationalliteratur* (1835–1842) was soon challenged, for example by the fathers of comparative literature. They replaced the narrow, nationally-focused approach with a search for universal patterns and currents, studying the movements of ideas, motifs and symbols. By the early 1980s, literary scholars had thoroughly torpedoed the nationalistic, romantic and implicitly elitist heritage of their own profession: the concept of the canon has been questioned, and non-canonical writers who represent socially disadvantaged groups such as women, racial, ethnic and sexual minorities have since entered academic syllabi. The elevated position

of the Romantic genius has been undermined by reader-oriented criticism and structuralism. As a result, the study of elite culture has given way to a booming field of cultural studies, with its anthropological, rather than quality-based and normative definition of “culture.”

These ideas, often referred to as the “cultural turn,” parallel an ongoing devaluation of the liberal arts in general, and literature in particular. Some critics see a causal relationship between the former and the latter, blaming universities’ curricular changes for the drop in the number of students majoring in humanities. If universities disseminate the view that literature functions as the privileged elite’s tool for political manipulation, students might feel discouraged from studying it. Others, like John Guillory (1993: 45), looks for the reason for this crisis in the humanities outside the campus, in the economic reality facing the professional and managerial class, where the cultural capital of the old bourgeoisie is no longer required.

The Cultural Turn in Governmental Guidelines – Western Points of Reference

The theoretical development of the cultural turn has influenced school culture as well – to varying degrees in different countries (for a European overview, see Pieper 2006). However, the image of the literary genius as the quintessential expression of national identity and his work’s benevolent influence on young minds has not been eradicated. In school documents and practice, the time-honored position of the “literary genius” continues a theoretically uneasy coexistence with the cultural turn’s more radical ideas. In the UK’s secondary school program for English (*National Curriculum 2007*), for instance, this coexistence reveals itself in the following description of “cultural understanding”:

Through English, pupils learn about *the great traditions of English literature* and about how modern writers see the world today. Through the study of language and literature, pupils compare texts from *different cultures and traditions*. They develop understanding of continuity and contrast, and gain an appreciation of the linguistic heritages that contribute to the richness of spoken and written language. Comparing texts helps pupils to explore *ideas of cultural excellence* and allows them to engage with new ways in which culture develops. (p. 62, italics added, K.S.)

In this passage, just mentioning the “great tradition of English literature” in the first sentence refers explicitly to a nation-centered set of ideas. Elsewhere, a pluralistic view of culture is promoted, where the one culture is as good as the other, and different ideas of cultural excellence are allowed. However, only the English tradition is referred to as “great.” Moreover, in a later section that lists compulsory reading, only texts from the English literary heritage are specified by their authors’ names. The curriculum leaves the choice of works from other cultures up to the teachers’ discretion, or leaves open the possibility of omitting

them all together because of time constraints. This gives a strong indication of which texts are considered most important (p. 71).

The documents that regulate the teaching of literature in Sweden suffer from similar incongruities, which Magnus Persson has documented in detail (2007). The 2000 nine-year compulsory school curriculum states that “[c]ulture and language are inseparable from each other. Language is the site of a country’s history and cultural identity. Moreover, language reflects the multiplicity of cultures that enriches and shapes society” (*Swedish curriculum 2000*, Translations here and elsewhere by the author, K. S.). Mentioning “multiplicity,” the curriculum’s authors display an awareness of the cultural turn’s critique of hegemonic power structures and the privileging of the majority culture. At the same time, providing social cohesion and integration remains one of the school system’s main functions, and here, majority culture plays a decisive role. The first two sentences demonstrate that this situation has been taken into consideration. The result is a curriculum that helps to shape schools as a means of developing and transmitting cultural heritage – a thought grounded in the ideas of cultural nationalism. When it comes to defining exactly which cultural heritage this is, however, the text is rather vague, since then the nationalistic overtones would become too obvious. The curriculum does not include any required reading at all, leaving the choice to teachers and anthology editors. In Western societies, this is not uncommon: often the establishment of a school canon on a national level is avoided – this is the case in the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Spain, for example (*Eurydice*).

Compared to the British and Swedish curricula, the French expresses its preference for French literature more explicitly: “Each year, pupils are invited to read numerous classic works, mainly French and written in French, but also European, Mediterranean or more broadly global” (*Collection Textes de reference 2009*: 9). In practice, however, the curriculum’s detailed list of required reading, which includes many English, German and even Russian canonical works, makes it more pluralistic than the British one. One can detect the influence of the cultural turn in the curriculum’s inclusion of documentary texts, as well as images and film.

The Subject “Literature” in Russian Education

In Russia, ideas borrowed from European Romanticism, idealism and nationalism have exerted a tremendous influence on the understanding of national identity, and of the role of literature in its formation. In Russia, the Romantic period coincided with the appearance of a mature secular literary language, a process delayed by the historical dominance of Old Church Slavonic as the standard written language. Beginning in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the idea of a separate Russian identity independent of Western European models developed, and

literature became both the vehicle for and one of the arguments used by those who sought to further this process (Rabow-Edling 2006). This cultural nationalism was articulated primarily by those who opposed the prevailing autocracy – it glorified the nation, not the state – and as a result it was not incorporated into the curricula of state-sponsored educational institutions.

As was the case in most Western European countries, vernacular literature in Russia did not become an important secondary school subject until the twentieth century. Since the Russian Revolution, however, the importance of the legacy of the nineteenth-century oppositional intelligentsia, the view that literature is inseparable from the very idea of Russianness has only increased. The early Soviet period saw an unparalleled expansion of comprehensive education over the course of just a few decades, which managed to raise the literacy rate from thirty to almost one hundred percent (Lovell 2000: 13). This expansion coincided with an urgent need to accelerate social integration in the multiethnic and socially diversified areas under Soviet rule, a need that translated into the project of creating a “new Soviet man.” Literature played a crucial role in this process. Although the ideology behind the project was declared to be internationalist, it was in practice nation-centered/imperialist – as were educational policies in most European countries at that time (Schleicher 1993: 24).

Moreover, it was explicitly Marxist-Leninist, which explains the sometimes awkward interpretations of literature as taught in Soviet schools. Russian popular culture abounds with anecdotes, jokes and satirical references to the hackneyed phrases that were a common feature of literature classes. In a radio program devoted to a discussion of the required readings in Russian secondary schools, teacher Arkadii Busev describes the Soviet teaching practices in the following way: “The [literature] program was ideologized when we lived under communism. It was organized in such a way that from Old Russian literature to Gorky, the communists were predetermined to seize power; it even came to such absurdities as interpreting Pushkin’s poem ‘October has already come’ [1833] in such a vein.” (“Parents’ Meeting,” 2009).¹ A new Soviet curriculum emerged, emphasizing the social engagement of authors of works already inscribed in the prerevolutionary canon, diminishing the role of ideologically wavering ones, and adding new socialist realist works to the list.²

After a period of radical methodological experiments during the 1920s, a decree issued by the Central Committee in 1931 put an end to pluralistic and democratic approaches. Literature became a separate subject, independent from Russian, and a detailed list of required reading replaced the more flexible curricula of previous decades. The list was revised at several points in Soviet history, but the general outline remained relatively unchanged. Even after the disbandment of the Soviet Union and the concomitant denunciation of Marxism-Leninism, it is still possible to detect the influence of Stalinist-era curricular choices in contemporary literature programs.

In Soviet schools, literature mainly functioned as a means of moral, social and patriotic up-bringing [vospitanie], rather than an introduction into a sphere of knowledge. Soviet pedagogues had no problems answering the question “Why exactly do we study literature in school?” In his book *The History of Literature Teaching in the Soviet School* (1976, English translation 1980), Professor Ia. A. Rotkovich writes:

A group of colleagues at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences provided the correct answer to this question. As Titov correctly emphasized, the purpose of literature teaching is to turn pupils into cultured readers. But these readers should be truly cultured, i.e., should be highly educated people who were developed in every way. They must be oriented toward the complexity of life and the social struggle, must consciously determine their position in it, must be able to evaluate a work, must understand the patterns of the historical development of literature, and must master the language of literature; they must be communist-minded and sensitive people, people with a Marxist-Leninist world view. (99)

After 1991, the Marxist-Leninist world view lost its legitimacy and the desire to instill communist-mindedness and awareness of class struggle disappeared. The question of literature’s place and role in the school curriculum now resurfaced. Instead of just one correct answer as there had been during the Soviet period, a host of different, competing answers emerged. Many feared that it would be difficult for the subject to recover from its Marxist-Leninist past. Among teachers, the general consensus is that literature has lost its former significance in the educational system. V. A. Viktorovich writes in his introduction to the volume *Why Literature in School* (2006a: 5): “We speak a great deal today, and legitimately so, about the declining prestige of the school teacher on the one hand, and our ‘philological’ subject on the other. The society and the state obviously underestimate the importance of education in general and literary education in particular.” One tangible manifestation of this declining prestige was the decision in 2008 to abolish literature as a compulsory subject in entrance examinations to all forms of higher education – only Russian and mathematics are now required. Another controversial innovation is the standardized achievement test [EGE, Edinyi gosudarstvennyi ekzamen], replacing the former elaborated literary essay with a multiple-choice test on factual knowledge.

In spite of these gloomy signs, in general literature’s status seems unthreatened. The curriculum of 2010 stipulates an increase in the number of hours devoted to the subject per week – from two hours per week to three hours per week in grades five and six. It continues to be a compulsory, separate subject from grades 5 to 11. The subject of literature seems to have survived the profound social and ideological transformations of the post-Soviet era, readjusting to new demands from state and society.

Required Readings in Russian Secondary Schools

In 1990, Minister of Education Eduard Dneprov was charged with the restructuring of the Soviet educational system. His ideas were liberal, and his influence is apparent in the Law on Education passed in 1992. The law granted individual schools considerable financial and ideological autonomy and diminished state control over textbooks and programs. Although Dneprov was forced to step down in 1992, his ideas continued to wield great influence on the course of reforms over the next two decades (Eklof et al. 2005: 8). The Russian Academy of Education participates actively in the process of redeveloping the curriculum: it provides pedagogical expertise, as well as that related to specific subject matter covered in the various fields of study. The first syllabi were adopted in 1997 (Compulsory Minimum of Secondary Education), but were described as preliminary until a project to develop a National Curriculum was finished. This project was completed in 2004, titled “The Federal Component of the State Standard of Secondary Education.” It began to be revised almost immediately, however, and a “second generation” of curricular guidelines has already begun to be published, the first appearing in 2010.

The most striking aspect of the literature syllabi published so far is their detailed lists of required readings. Not only is every single work specified, the number of hours that should be devoted to its study in class is also given. This is a legacy of the Soviet school system, notorious for its bureaucratic zeal. The most common criticism of the Soviet literature program, that it covers too much, is currently being addressed. The Curriculum of 2004 included thirty literary works of normal book-length (novels, plays, epic tales), as well as numerous poems and short stories. When spread across the five years of secondary education (grades 5 to 9), this meant that all Russian school children were to read six canonical works a year, such as Gogol’s *Dead Souls*, Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* and Lermontov’s *Hero of Our Time*. In the most recently published *Model Programs of Literature* (2010), this number has been diminished almost by half. The reading list could best be described as a revised Soviet canon, focusing on nineteenth and twentieth century masterpieces. The founding texts by nineteenth-century Marxists (e.g., Geogrii Plekhanov) and the socialist realist pieces of the twentieth century (e.g., Ostrovsky’s *How The Steel Was Tempered*) have been replaced by émigré and dissident literature of the twentieth century (e.g., by Ivan Shmelev and Alexander Solzhenitsyn).

In the 2004 syllabus, the selection process is mentioned explicitly: “The main criteria determining which fictional works are to be studied are their high artistic value, humanistic orientation, positive influence on the pupil’s personality, correspondence to the aims of his development and age specifics, and also the cultural and historical traditions and rich experience of our country’s education.”

(Dneprov & Arkad'ev 2007: 15). The idea that a work's "positive influence on the pupil's personality" can be established once and for all pertaining to all prospective readers reveals a view on literature as "self-interpreting," i.e., that literature is understood to transfer its ennobling moral values more or less automatically to all readers, regardless of their shifting frames of reference (Persson 2007: 116, with reference to Gerald Graff). Reader-oriented theories had obviously failed to impress this curriculum's authors.

However, in 2010, these ideas do make an appearance. In the section listing the learning objectives of the subject "literature," grades five to nine, we read: "Literature as an art of the verbal image is a special mode of knowing the world, which differs from the scientific model of objective reality in a number of important ways, such as a high degree of emotional influence, metaphoricity, ambiguity, associativeness and incompleteness, *which presuppose the active co-authorship of the reader*" (*Model Programs of Literature 2010*: 4, italics added, K. S.). While acknowledging the ambiguity and incompleteness of literary works, the curriculum is nevertheless rather explicit about precisely which interpretations of the works are relevant to the learning process. The first learning objective listed concerns the ideological function of literature, for which humanism, nationalism and civic consciousness are the key values. From 2004 to 2010, the overall view of what literature's tasks and functions should be has not changed much. In the latest version, however, a greater awareness is apparent regarding the unpredictability of the reading process and the importance of teaching in terms of accomplishing didactic goals.

If reader-oriented criticism has had some impact on the Curriculum of 2010, other aspects of the cultural turn are conspicuously absent, such as its call for a revision of the literary canon, aiming at social diversity. The 2004 Curriculum listed one (!) female (the poet Anna Akhmatova) out of 112 authors specified by name, and the 2010 version also listed one (the same) out of 74. Even taking into account the prevalence of male authors in the Russian canon, this number is remarkable: canonical authors such as Marina Tsvetaeva, Evgenia Ginzburg and Nina Berberova have been deliberately omitted.³ The French Curriculum of 2009, which is comparable in size and overall orientation, includes nine female writers.

Although the authors of the 2004 Curriculum purportedly strove to adjust required readings to make them more age-appropriate, few of the works listed were originally aimed at a junior audience. Although some fairy-tales and fables are present, the bulk of the reading consists of canonical works that target an adult audience, and one which was often socially privileged. In the 2010 Curriculum, however, efforts have been made to select works with some relevance to children and teenagers. Special sections focus on literature about animals (e.g., Jack London's *White Fang*), literature describing the world from a child's perspective (e.g., *Childhood* by Leo Tolstoy) and the theme of childhood in Russian and

foreign literature (including *The Ransom of Red Chief* by O. Henry, among others).

As in most European countries, the list of required reading concentrates on literature originally written in the nation's majority language, or in languages considered to be its historical predecessors. For instance, the Russian curriculum includes *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, an epic poem from medieval Kievan Rus' written in the vernacular Slavonic of that time. In the Curriculum, *The Tale* is listed under the heading "Old Russian Literature" – a proposition which is at best problematic. "Old Ukrainian Literature" or "Old Belarusian Literature" would be equally correct, since not only Russia, but also Ukraine and Belarus claim to have their origins in Kievan Rus'.

All three versions of the post-Soviet curriculum include a section on "Foreign Literature," which invariably list masterpieces from the West European canon such as works by Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, Molière, Byron and Saint-Exupéry. None of the texts are to be read in their entirety, and the section constitutes only a small portion of the overall curriculum. By equating "foreign" with "West European," this of course excludes masterpieces from the neighboring Chinese, Persian and Arabic cultures, as well as the former Soviet republics. In so doing, the Curriculum's authors make a clear statement about the Russian nation-state's preferred cultural affiliation.

In accordance with the declared aim of a fostering a multi-ethnic civic consciousness, a separate section is devoted to "The Literature of the Peoples of Russia," consisting primarily of Soviet-era poets from ethnic groups still present within the Russian Federation today. Most of the non-Slavic ethnic groups, the Tatars constituting a notable exception, did not write in their native languages before 1917 and written national literatures developed only after that time. This is one explanation for the focus on the Soviet period.

It is significant, however, that the Buriat, Kalmyk and Ossetian groups have oral epic traditions. Excerpts from these were included in the 2004 curriculum, but were eliminated in 2010. When faced with the task of reducing the curriculum, the authors gave precedence to works written in a Soviet-Russian cultural context, rather than those constitutive of separate national/ethnic identities, and from periods when the Russian influence was weaker or non-existent in these cultures.

The section "The Literature of the Peoples of Russia" clearly originates in the Soviet curriculum, in which works from the non-Russian Soviet republics contributed to the concept of a common, supra-ethnic Soviet identity. This included pieces by the Ukrainian and Georgian national poets Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) and Shota Rustaveli (ca 1172–1216). These and other authors from neighboring post-Soviet countries are now absent in the Russian curriculum. This would suggest an understanding of literature as a subject being spatially and temporally restricted to the contours of the present nation-state. The expression "Peoples of Russia" is not synonymous with "ethnic minorities". The exclusion of

Shevchenko and Rustaveli implies that Ukrainians and Georgians are not “peoples of Russia,” despite the fact that large minorities do live inside the Russian Federation. The curriculum allots space only to those ethnic groups who constitute the titular populations of administrative units.

The changes made to the curriculum in 2010 show an effort has been made to emphasize literature’s nationalistic aspect. The texts from the second half of the twentieth century are an example of this. Russian literature during this period is characterized by two major reactions to Stalin’s coercive cultural policies: representatives of “village” prose expressed resistance to forced modernization, the romanticization of factories and Soviet internationalism by praising simple village life in covert nationalistic terms. Representatives of liberal urban prose, on the other hand, focused on human rights, targeting the absence of a rule of law and freedom of speech – to the extent the censors allowed them.

In the 2004 curriculum, village prose and urban prose were rather evenly represented in the section listing literature from the second half of the twentieth century. It also mentioned works by authors of non-Russian ethnic background who wrote in Russian (Chingiz Aitmatov, Fazil’ Iskander). In 2010, however, liberal critics of Stalinism such as Evgenii Evtushenko, Andrei Voznesenskii and Varlam Shalamov are absent, while “village” authors such as Valentin Rasputin and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn have a stronger presence – both pursued a Russian nationalist political agenda parallel to their writing careers.

The list of literature from the first half of the nineteenth century also shows similar changes. In the 2004 curriculum, most entries only mention the authors’ names, leaving the precise choice of work open. In 2010, all works are specified; much more often than not, these express patriotic sentiments. Anna Akhmatova, for instance, is represented by the poem “Native Soil.”⁴ In her poetry, Anna Akhmatova most forcefully protested against state-administered patriotism. She voiced the anguish of Stalin’s victims in “Requiem”, making a clear distinction between “our motherland” and “theirs”. Susan Amert has convincingly demonstrated the intertextual references in “Requiem” to the “unofficial national anthem” of the Stalinist period, “Song to the Motherland” (Amert 1992: 43). In line after line, “Requiem” negates the ostentatious claims of the song, for instance by contrasting the song’s “freely breathing” people to the people of the poem, who are “more breathless than the dead.” The inclusion of “Native Soil”, but not “Requiem” in the curriculum makes sure that Akhmatova’s mockery of state-sponsored patriotism goes unnoticed.

Why Study Literature in School?

What arguments support the presence of literature in the school curriculum in general, and this specific nationalism-tinged selection of literature in particular? Following Persson’s study of the Swedish curriculum (2007), I have extracted

passages from the three post-Soviet curricula, grades 5–9, that provide the answers to these questions. In comparing the lists, a pattern emerges, correlating loosely to the paradigms discussed by Ball et al (1990: 76) with reference to the English.⁵ In all these versions of the curriculum, three types of arguments underlie the reasoning:

1. Arguments based on society's desire to mold the individual according to norms facilitating human interaction and political stability,
2. arguments focusing on the individual and his or her development,
3. arguments presenting the reading of literature as an end in itself: the question "why read literature?" is answered with variations on the theme "in order to become a better reader."

I have adhered to these categories in presenting the results below.

The 1997 Curriculum

The 1997 Curriculum is the most concise: it consists merely of a list of what is to be learned (required readings, facts from literary history, literary terminology) and a statement by the Ministry of Education outlining its view of literature as a school subject – its objectives and place in the curriculum as a whole. This text contains five separate arguments for studying (Russian) literature in school (Kalganova 1998: 3–10):

Pupils should read literature in school because it:

1. facilitates the formation of a humanistic worldview,
2. grants the pupils freedom when choosing their career,
3. supports the pupils in their search for the meaning of human existence,
4. has constructed and helped us to gain knowledge about the different worlds that humanity has experienced during its spiritual history,
5. and also because classical Russian literature is characterized by a high level of spirituality, civic consciousness and "universal responsiveness" [and the reading of such literature transmits these qualities to the pupils].

Thus, the subject is seen as a means of ideological upbringing (1) and (5), a resource in personal development (2), a guide to existential questions (3), and a means of cognition (4).

In the first statement, the term "humanistic" refers to a set of values that promotes the rights and the integrity of the individual, in contrast to the Soviet privileging of collective units such as "the people" and "the state" (Muckle 2005: 329). The first three statements, then, indicate and establish a dissociation from the Soviet collectivist heritage: during the Soviet period, both the pupils' choice of career and the meaning of human existence were areas in which the party administration strove to wield influence.

In the fourth statement, the expression “spiritual history” reveals an affiliation with nineteenth-century historicism, connoting the idea of a continuous dialectical spiritual development. In this case, this denotes both religious and cultural values. The expression recurs in discourse that is grounded in cultural nationalism, which since 1991 has become the most influential type of nationalism in Russia (Sakwa 2009). Like the first three statements, the fourth also contains an implicit repudiation of Marxism-Leninism, which rejected any autonomous spiritual realm of history, separate from the material one, based on the distribution of the means of production.

The fifth statement defines three characteristics of Russian literature, using terms strongly connected to cultural nationalism – spirituality, “universal responsiveness” and civic consciousness. The idea of Russian culture’s spiritual nature is a cornerstone in Slavophile philosophy. In 1880, Fyodor Dostoevsky expressed this idea in a speech he gave in connection with the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow. It was Dostoevsky who in this speech coined the expression “universal responsiveness” [vsemirnaia otzyvchivost’], referring to Pushkin’s capacity to assimilate foreign literary models and transform them into something quintessentially Russian.⁶ Finally, the term “civic consciousness” [grazhdanstvennost’] is a multivalent one. The Russian word may also be translated as “citizenship,” i.e., the relationship between a free citizen and the state in terms of rights and obligations. Since the nineteenth century, however, grazhdanstvennost’ has acquired a somewhat different meaning in Russia. It denotes a feeling of responsibility for the development of Russian civilization, a defining feature of the Russian intelligentsia. This sense of responsibility often led to conflict with the autocratic imperial state (Sakwa 2009 with reference to A. Walicki). While the first meaning of the word may be removed from cultural nationalism, the second one nevertheless constitutes one of its core values.

In the text, the notion of “classic Russian literature” is not questioned – “classic” is implicitly seen as an objective judgment of time. The text does not take into account the intricate process of canonization, in which the symbolic, social and economic capital of different groups and individuals come into play. The reverence shown to literary culture, which distinguished pre-revolutionary Russian and Soviet society, is undiminished in these documents. Even though the Marxist-Leninist heritage is less visible, literature is still assigned an array of ideological tasks: the first argument mentioned presupposes a need to form the pupils’ worldview. According to the politics of this document, this worldview should first of all be humanistic, and then culturally nationalistic.

The 2004 Curriculum

The 2004 curriculum contains more structured and elaborate information about the objectives and priorities of the teaching of literature. Justifications of

literature's place in the curriculum are found under the headings "General description of the subject," "Objects of the study of literature," and "Learning objectives." Since these statements often overlap, passages with similar meaning have been condensed to a total of seven arguments (Dneprov & Arkad'ev 2007: 14, 26, 94–96).

Pupils should read literature in school because it:

1. fosters a humanistic worldview, a civic and national consciousness, a patriotic feeling, love and respect for literature and the values of our country's culture, and because it molds pupils' spiritual character and moral standards,
2. helps pupils understand the categories of goodness, justice, honor, patriotism, and love to mankind and one's family; and that the nation's uniqueness reveals itself in a broad cultural context,
3. cultivates a spiritually developed personality, supports pupils' emotional, intellectual and aesthetic development, develops their figurative and analytical thinking and creative imagination,
4. instills basic notions about literature's particular nature as compared to other art forms. It also develops pupils' emotional perception of artistic texts, a culture of reading and their understanding of the authorial position, and also creates a need for independent reading of fiction,
5. trains pupils to perform a literary analysis of fictional works, using theoretical terminology and knowledge about literary history, and develops pupils' capacity to express their relationship to the readings,
6. develops pupils' oral and written language skills, and reveals the wealth of the national language,
7. complements other subjects, such as Russian language, the arts, history and civics.

Through these arguments, we see a vision of literature as involved primarily with cultural heritage, formation of personal and national identity, and the improvement of communication skills, one which is widely accepted internationally (cf. Persson 2007: 121; Ball, Kenny & Gardiner 1990: 67). Arguments based on the society's needs (collected in statements 1 and 2 above) are generally mentioned first under the respective headings, occupying considerable space. Arguments related to personal development are mentioned next, but are not elaborated to the same extent (cf. no. 3, 6 above). Arguments in which the reading of literature is taken for granted, and which argue that literature enhances reading skills (cf. no. 4, 5 above) go into great detail. They also emphasize the great respect shown to literature – which characterizes the curriculum as a whole.

The 2004 curriculum expounds on literature's moral function, and also promotes humanism and cultural nationalism, as the previous curriculum did. It places great trust in literature's capacity to inculcate values facilitating human

interaction (goodness, justice, love to mankind) and social integration (patriotism). Somewhat surprisingly, “tolerance of other nationalities” is not listed, an attitude which would forcefully promote social integration, and which in most Western societies is a common element in school policy documents. Instead, the call for patriotism is balanced only with a call to include an international perspective, in order to fully appreciate the unique aspects of national culture. The curriculum’s authors justify this emphasis on national values by pointing out that such values ostensibly were lacking during the Soviet period (Dneprov 2004: 44). Ethnic nationalism was strictly limited during the Soviet era, which also in some respects applied to Russian nationalism.

The 2010 Curriculum

In the 2010 curriculum, statements yielding answers to the question “Why study literature in school?” are found under the headings “The contribution of the subject ‘Literature’ to the achievement of the objectives of secondary education” and “Results of the study of literature.” A total of seven statements emerge after consolidating similar statements (*Model Secondary School Programs: 2010: 4–9*):

Pupils should read literature in school because it:

1. fosters a humanistic worldview, national consciousness and an all-Russian civic consciousness, patriotic feeling, love for one’s multiethnic motherland, respect for Russian literature and the cultures of other nations,⁷
2. provides access to the spiritual, ethical and humanistic values of Russian literature and culture, and the possibility of comparing them to the values of other nations; it also provides access to mankind’s universal values and to the Russian nation’s spiritual experience, and to the spiritual and ethical potential of multiethnic Russia,
3. molds a well-balanced, developed, harmonious, and emotionally rich personality, and improves a person’s spiritual and ethical qualities, develops the pupils’ intellectual and creative faculties and shapes their aesthetic taste,
4. helps pupils to understand, comment on, analyze and interpret the masterpieces of Russian and world literature, to articulate their own relationship to them and their assessment of literary works, to understand the authorial position and their own relationship to that position,
5. provides access to authentic artistic values, the opportunity to enter into a dialogue with authors of all backgrounds and generations, expands the pupils’ horizons regarding the wealth and the diversity of the arts,
6. develops linguistic culture and pupils’ communication skills,

7. supports the development of general learning skills, and the ability to develop coherent arguments.

These points remain relatively unchanged, as does their organization into groups focusing on society (no. 1, 2), the individual (3, 6, 7) and literature as such (4, 5). Greater attention is however paid to other nations in statements promoting patriotic feelings. Passages that might be interpreted as advocating tolerance are now included, cf. “respect for the cultures of other nations.” The comment about a “well-balanced personality” implies a continuation of Soviet pedagogical discourse (Muckle 1988: 9). In this discourse, it is associated with the project of creating a non-alienated new Soviet man, following Marx’s vision of workers’ liberation from the specialized training and monotonous work of industrial capitalism.

In post-Soviet curricular guidelines, the understanding of literature as a school subject remains fundamentally the same as during the Soviet period: literature is seen primarily as a means of moral, social and patriotic up-bringing. The most significant change is the replacement of the Marxist-Leninist terminology with one colored by cultural nationalism. The faith in literature’s capacity to imbue its readers with moral qualities remains, despite the lack of empirical evidence to support such a case.

The curriculum’s latest version shows minor signs of the recent theoretical developments within the field of literary criticism – reader-oriented theories are mentioned, as are the “cultures of other nations”, which might indicate a move towards the pluralism characterizing the British curriculum, for instance. Generally, however, the curriculum’s authors do not shy away from the quasi-religious pathos and nationalist pomp that post-war literary criticism has done its best to eradicate.

Within literary education, there are plenty of voices critical of state policy. Professor V. Viktorovich describes the situation thus: “Today, attempts are being made to execute an ideological volte-face, to replace the one single true doctrine with another. This reminds me of Platonov’s short story ‘The Innermost Man,’ in which an artist, a former icon-painter, portrayed St. George with the face of Comrade Trotsky. This current process, although moving in the reverse direction (from Comrade Trotsky to St. George the Victorious), does not change anything in the methodology: only the ideological contents should be replaced.” (2006b: 11p) Instead of a simple change of ideas, he advocates a shift from extensive reading to one that is instead intensive, emphasizing the intimate dialogue between reader and author, referring to Mikhail Bakhtin (Ibid.,15). In a recent discussion on the radio program “Parents’ Meeting” on the liberal channel Echo of Moscow, Evgeniia Abeliuk, a teacher, repudiates any attempts to force pupils to read anything at all. She regards literature exclusively as a source of pleasure (“Parents’ Meeting” 2009).

These passages articulate a view of literature based on the individual's perspective. This view is present in the curricula as well, in the statements focusing on personality development. However, this role is downplayed in favor of those focusing on society's needs. In the curricula, the state declares which values constitute the foundation of the social contract, and the values chosen inevitably limit the space of the individual's development. A Russian pupil's reading of the classics should not, for instance, lead to his or her questioning of Russian literature's spiritual character. Similarly, British pupils' reading of English classics should not end with them questioning their greatness. As long as the nation-state remains the primary site of political power, national literature is necessary in order to help legitimate this form of social organization. The Russian curriculum, with its stoic imperviousness to the cultural turn, exhibits a pragmatic stance. It does not allow critical perspectives to undermine the force of its argumentation or to give rise to theoretical incongruities. Instead, it retains an essentialist view of the canon, proclaims its authors' heroic status and uses terms like "patriotism" and "motherland," leaving no doubts as to why the state continues to invest in literary education.

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Notes

- 1 V. Viktorovich, a professor of literature, describes the situation in a similar fashion: "Since then, the whole history of literature was officially regarded as preparation for the formation of the 'only true doctrine.' Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol and Tolstoi were estimated as (there was such an expression) the progenitors of our idea. It was more difficult with Dostoevsky, but finally, after a long period of embarrassment, they included him as the glorifier of the insulted and the humiliated" (2006b: 11).
- 2 On the details of this process, see Rotkovich (1980) and Dobrenko (1997: 146-180).
- 3 As for now, the curriculum of grade 10-12 (senior secondary education) is not yet published. Authors and works discarded from the 5-9 curriculum might very well appear in the required readings for older pupils. However, grade 10-12 is not compulsory, and therefore the works listed here will reach a smaller number of pupils.
- 4 The title might evoke associations to nineteenth-century native soil conservatism, as promoted by Dostoevsky, for example. However, the poem lacks any reference to Russia or praise of any particularly Russian virtues. It is a low-key lyrical poem that laconically states

our mundane relationship with the mud under our feet. In the last line, finally, the soil's "nativeness" is anchored in the ephemeral quality of our bodies – in the fact that, after death we turn into this very soil. For English translation of the poem, see Akhmatova & Thomas (2006: 171)

- 5 The categories used by Ball et al. are: "English as skills", "English as the great literary tradition"; "progressive English" (English of individual creativity and self expression) and "English as critical literacy" (class conscious and political in content), (1990: 77-80).
- 6 Cf. this quotation from the speech: "In fact, the European literatures had creative geniuses of immense magnitude – the Shakespeares, Cervanteses, and Schillers. But show me even one of these great geniuses who possessed the capacity to respond to the whole world that our Pushkin had. And it is this capacity, the principal capacity of our nationality, that he shares with our People; and it is this, above all, that makes him a national poet." (Dostoevsky 1994: 1291p).
- 7 In Russian, "national" as in "national consciousness" refers to ethnicity, while "all-Russian" (obshche-rossiiskii) means "including all ethnicities residing within Russian Federation." "Russian" could not be used in this context, as it is an ethnic denominator, not a civic one.

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Why ABC Matters: Lexicography and Literary History

By Jon Helgason

Abstract

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, I wish to discuss the origins of *The Swedish Academy Dictionary* against the backdrop of the social and cultural history of lexicography in 18th and 19th century Europe. Second, to consider material aspects of lexicography – the dictionary as interface – in light of German media scientist Friedrich Kittler’s “media materialism”. Ultimately, both purposes intend to describe how letters and writing have been constructed and arranged throughout the course of history. In Kittler’s view, “the intimization of literature”, that took place during second half of the 18th century, brought about a fundamental change in the way language and text were perceived. However, parallel to this development an institutionalization and disciplining of language and literature took place. The rise of modern society, the nation state, print capitalism and modern science in 18th century Europe necessitated (and were furthered by) a disciplining of language and literature. This era was for these reasons a golden age for lexicographers and scholars whose work focused on the vernacular. In this article the rise of the alphabetically ordered dictionary and the corresponding downfall of the topical dictionary that occurred around 1700 is regarded as a technological threshold. This development is interesting not only within the field of history of lexicography, but arguably also, since information and thought are connected to the basic principles of mediality, this development has bearings on the epistemological revolution of the 18th century witnessed in, among other things, Enlightenment thought and literature.

Keywords: Lexicography, media archaeology, Friedrich Kittler, technological threshold, Walter Ong, Benedict Anderson, Swedish Academy Dictionary, saob

Introduction

According to the German media scientist Friedrich Kittler, the very moment I sit down to read aloud to my children I also reproduce one of the key scenes of modern literary culture. Kittler argues that around 1800 literature constituted a cultural inscription programme tied to the rise of the bourgeois family and the bourgeois individual. Kittler's analysis of the "discourse networks" of the end of the 18th century in his work *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* is based on, among other things, social and psychological models of interpretation where, for instance, children's acquisition of reading and writing skills within the intimate sphere is regarded as pivotal to the rise of modern culture of literacy. Around 1800, the activity of reading became linked with an intimate process of literacy. New learning techniques connected to reading and writing acquisition, such as sounding, marked, according to Kittler, a radical break with previous traditions of teaching, where reading was based on orthographic recognition and instead each letter was connected to a specific sound. This change in learning techniques corresponded to a change in both handwritten and printed texts. Gothic script (Fraktur style, black letter) was gradually replaced by the softer letters of the cursive style (antiqua). In Kittler's view, the intimization of literature brought about a fundamental, radical change in the way language and text were perceived. The learning techniques that were developed involved reading and writing techniques that rendered them automatic – as something incorporeal and general. In the reading process language became transcendental. Individual letters and single words ceased to exist. The text became a transparent carrier of meaning.

It is highly significant that this process coincided with (and contributed to) the increased significance of emotion in literary interpretation. This development took place about the same time all over Europe, during the second half of the 18th century. For instance, around 1770 the German education system began to emphasize the significance of emotion in the interpretation of literary texts. Authors were not primarily judged, as previously, on whether they could be recited or imitated, but on how they could be interpreted and understood by the reader on the basis of moral and emotional values. For Kittler these processes are intimately connected. They show that information and thought are connected to the basic principles of mediality. It is this inner production of meaning, an internal realization that Kittler refers to when he writes: "Literature established itself as a medium that could transform words into flowers and flowers into women. Not technically, but psychologically; not by the aid of machines but through human interfaces" (Kittler 1985: 414).¹

Kittler views the establishment of philosophical aesthetics and aesthetical sciences, such as the history of art and literature, as symptoms of this process. Literature was attributed a function as a source of morals and values within a rational, humanistic educational system which focused on the production of civil

servants who were meant to implement the values of the increasingly influential bourgeois public sphere. The function of literature within the educational system was that of a medium of cultural memory and social knowledge.

It is however possible to turn Kittler's reasoning upside down. It is equally true that this era not only brought about an intimization of language and literature but also an institutionalization and disciplining of these two functions. This line of thought constitutes a bridge of sorts between Habermas' theory of public spheres in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962) and Kittler's media archaeology. One of the most fundamental historical changes concerns what I wish to call the disciplining of public language.

Coinciding with "the intimization of literature" there were radical institutional attempts to, on scientific grounds, regulate and discipline language, to codify spelling, inflection and, not least, meaning. The craze for systematization of the 18th century can also be attributed to "The Encyclopaedic Idea" – the will and ambition to collect and order all human knowledge. Works such as Johann Heinrich Zedler's *Großes vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste welche bishero durch menschlichen Verstand und Witz erfunden und verbessert wurden* (1731–1750) and Johann Georg Sulzer's monumental theory of art, *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste in einzeln, nach alphabetischer Ordnung der Kunstwörter auf einander folgenden Artikeln abgehandelt* (1771–1774), can be regarded as a symptomatic expression of these ideas. The concept of national literatures thus coincided with the need for a public language. Ideas concerning national literature and the significance of the language of the nation were furthered by and reproduced through the development of the educational system during the 19th century. The importance of Latin was significantly reduced during the 18th century and, through the growth of literacy, the written vernacular had a growing influence on refined language. This influence constitutes a significant linguistic foundation to the public spheres described by Habermas.²

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first I will describe the origins of *The Swedish Academy Dictionary* against the backdrop of the social and cultural history of lexicography in 18th century Europe; and second, to consider material aspects of lexicography – in this case the rise of the alphabetical dictionary – in light of Kittler's "media materialism". "Materiality" in this sense can, in a broad sense, be seen as the result of the interplay between physical reality and the technology we humans use to shape and create meaning.

I

Disciplining Language

Benedict Anderson writes that more than any other factor capitalism has contributed to the merging of closely-related vernaculars. A mechanically reproducible print language for the dissemination of texts to the market lay in the interests of capitalism. The interplay between capitalism and printing created single language mass audiences by establishing unified areas of exchange and communication. Print capitalism created a language of the public sphere that contributed to the weakening of some dialects. Even ethnic groups that did not comprehend each others' dialects, something that was the case in many European countries, could understand each other through printed matter. This gave a new stability to language. The difference between public and private language was reduced as dialects were forced to retreat in the face of an expanding culture of literacy. The specific language traits of the nobility and upper classes faded gradually during the 19th century and refined spoken language approached that of the written language.

Printed matter after the Gutenberg Revolution contributed to the formation of an understanding of the past that later became central to the subjective idea of the nation. The prerequisites for the imagined communities of the modern nation originated in the interplay between capitalism, technology and language diversity.³

For these reasons, the 19th century was a golden age for lexicographers, grammarians philologists and scholars whose work focused on the vernacular. Vernacular languages were an important tool in the administrative centralization that took place in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries. The great European dictionary projects were powerful instruments in the process of standardization that most European languages underwent during this period. The history of lexicography is for this reason a part of the history of the written language and thus a part of the history of public language.

The creation of rules for commodity production within the bourgeois public sphere was vital to the authority of the sphere of public power. One of the essential prerequisites for this regulation, which is evident in Anderson's description of the importance of print capitalism, was that the potential of writing as a mass medium was realised during the 18th century.

Even today, writing is perhaps our most efficient medium. As a medium, writing has an unsurpassed stability when it comes to preservation, transport and duplication. It is this quality which provides the public sphere with part of its authority. The claims of science in the 18th and 19th centuries were furthered by the fact that writing as medium could ensure that the scientific observation of complex processes could be correctly verbalised (Cfr Ong 2002: 125). At the same time, language was conceived of as more "textual". The printed text became its most

complete, paradigmatic form. The standard of the language for compilation in the dictionaries was the language used by authors writing texts intended for printing. The printed text became a putative definitive form. Changes could not be added as was previously the case with the hand-written text. The literary text was viewed as denser, more verbally (textually) closed. A printed work was complete and separate from other works. It was from this perception that the humanities derived their claims to scholarship. Scholarship in the humanities has been defined as researching texts in their capacity as sources. This is the reason why the elucidation of the authenticity of the sources, their tendency and intention has characterised almost all humanistic research.

In Sweden (as with many other European countries), this progress was manifested in the expansion, adaptation and modernization of the vocabulary to Swedish conditions. Orthography became more uniform and the alphabetical order thus became more consistent. Lexicographical information expanded and became more precise. Concurrently with this intense phase of development in lexicography, a Swedish written language was stabilised – an important prerequisite for an extensive literary public sphere.

Lexicography was a node in a network of institutions formed to support the public sphere around 1800. A dictionary is, from an historical perspective, often a cementation of a local dialect that for political, geographical or religious reasons later becomes accepted as a national language. The printed dialect – the grapholect – has a much greater degree of normative force than the dialect. The veritable explosion of dictionaries during the 18th century is, therefore, a significant marker of the transition from an oral to a written culture.

The dictionaries brought about the understanding of language as an historical product as well as the idea of “correct language” and accordingly the possibility to normatively affect language use. However, at the beginning of the 19th century, none of the Nordic countries had achieved lexicographic descriptions in monolingual, defining dictionaries.

The Dictionary as a National Monument

The Swedish Academy Dictionary (henceforth the *SAOB*) is a monument to writing and as such a manifestation of the public spheres of literature. The first installment of the *SAOB* was published in 1893 and the first volume in 1898. The last volume is planned for publication in 2017. However, the ideological incentive for the *SAOB* project originates to a great degree from the national romantic period and the world of ideas that have been mentioned previously in this essay. The *SAOB* is a national, scientific dictionary of Modern Swedish as it appears in written sources. Within the context of the history of language the period of Modern Swedish begins in 1526 with the first Swedish translation of the New Testament. The *SAOB* is primarily a historical dictionary that stresses written language. It

describes not only words actively in use, but also words that have gone out of use as well as meanings that never or almost never appear in contemporary usage. The *SAOB* describes the vocabulary of written Swedish, but not without restrictions. As a rule names of persons and places, technical terms and dialect words are omitted.

The dictionaries in the Germanic languages that are roughly comparable in scope, historical extension and ambition to *The Swedish Academy Dictionary* are the Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1852–1961), *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (1864–1998) and the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (1888–1928), officially re-named *The Oxford English Dictionary* from 1933 onwards.⁴ The establishment of the two first-mentioned was associated in particular with one of the basic tenets of nationalism: One nation, one people, one language. In several Central European countries, among them Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the birth of the nation coincided with the lexicographical enterprise. The 19th century definition of a nation, that it comprised a community of language, strongly contributed to the formation of the German Reich and to the national processes in the Netherlands and Belgium. Although the *SAOB* is characterised by the same ideas, the connection between language and nation is not as explicit. Modern linguistics had gained too strong a foothold in Sweden at the time the *SAOB* project actually started for this to happen. Instead, the *raison d'être* for the *SAOB* was essentially to make the literary heritage of the nation available to its citizens. This connected literary heritage to the history of the nation and of its language. This was an idea that could easily be reconciled with the rise of modern linguistics during the latter half of the 19th century.

The commission to compile a dictionary was incorporated into the Statutes of the Swedish Academy from 1786. In §22 of the Statutes it states “That the finest and most pressing duty of the Academy” is the work “on the purity, strength and nobleness of the Swedish language”. The aesthetic refinement of language was seen as an important task for any nation with self-esteem. The *SAOB* was to contribute to the embellishment of the Swedish language by providing guidance on the correct spelling of words, their inflection and meaning – all in accordance with the wishes of the founder of the Swedish Academy, Gustav III of Sweden, who wanted “to make Laws for the language” because “no language can be written well without firm rules”. On the 10th of February 1787 the decision was taken to start work on a dictionary of the Swedish language and the work was to be modelled on that used in compiling the dictionary of the French Academy, *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*. Following in the footsteps of the French Academy, the members of the Swedish Academy simply divided the letters of the alphabet among themselves: the poet Johan Henric Kellgren (1751-1795) was allocated the letters A and U, and the historian Anders af Botin (1724-1790) was allocated the letters H and S. However, this working method proved far from efficient. In 1808 the poet and linguist Carl Gustaf af Leopold (1756-1829) was appointed editor of

the *SAOB*, but his interest diminished over the years, and the project came to a standstill in 1814. Several years later, in 1883, the project was recommenced, when Knut Fredrik Söderwall (1842-1924) was appointed editor of the *SAOB*.

The vocabulary that is treated in the *SAOB* is Swedish written language from 1521 to present day. The examples of usage are “authentic”, meaning that they have been selected from a comprehensive data bank containing excerpts from actual texts. Some sources have been subjected to a more comprehensive excerption than others. This applies of course to the Bible (first translation in 1541) and the Swedish Hymn Book, *The Official Registrature of Gustav Vasa (Konung Gustaf den förstes registratur)*, *Excerpts from public records since 1718 (Utdrag utur alle ifrån ... 1718 utkomne publique handlingar)*, encyclopaedias, records of the city courts of law, the parliamentary records of the Swedish Parliament, *The Work and Letters of Axel Oxenstierna* as well as the records of the Swedish Academy and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. The sources listed above clearly show the strong attachment of the *SAOB* to the public sphere. As a consequence women’s language has been less well documented than men’s and the documentation of female experience has been underrepresented (Cfr Mattisson 2006).

One of the most interesting phrasings in the commissioning of the *SAOB* is that “important works of literature and well-known literary passages are to be prioritised”. And it is particularly pertinent that Gustav III of Sweden did not, in the first instance, appoint linguists or grammarians to the Swedish Academy but poets, politicians and men of state, i.e. men who could provide practical guidance in poetry and eloquence. The principal idea being that their own feeling for language should be codified.

Both of these factors are to this day still reflected in *SAOB*. “Vitterhet” (belles-lettres) is by far the largest category among the sources of the *SAOB*.⁵ Swedish 18th and 19th century literature is particularly well excerpted. In the (isolated) studies that have been made, “belles-lettres” accounts for 42% of the total sources for the year 1975; for the year 1898 the same figure is 29% and in 1939 it was nearly 22%. These two last-mentioned figures are in reality higher since several “collected works” were treated as a single source at this time (Svensson 1992: 372-373). In 1990, this figure was 18%. In the *SAOB*, at least, the Swedish national romantic poet Esaias Tegnér lives up to his fame as the national poet. He is by far the most quoted author and before the *SAOB* is completed he will have been quoted more than 10 000 times. *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, the children’s story by the Noble Laureate Selma Lagerlöf, is the single most quoted work (slightly more than 1 400 times), followed by *Jonas och draken* (“Jonas and the Dragon”, 1928) the work of the early 20th century author Sigfrid Siwert and *Vapensmeden* (“The Weapon Smith”, 1891) by the 19th century author Viktor Rydberg (Mattisson 2006: 63-64).

II

The Alphabetical vs. the Topical Dictionary

One of Kittler's basic assumptions is that technology possesses the power to shape and control human lives as well as our ability to critically think about these phenomena. This is a perspective that focuses on the material structures of technology rather than the meaning of these structures or the messages they convey:

What remains of people is what media can store and communicate. What counts are not the messages or the content with which they equip so-called souls for the duration of a technological era, but rather (and in strict accordance with McLuhan) their circuits, the very schematism of perceptibility. (Kittler 1999: xl-xli)

Kittler focuses on the historical conditions of the emergence of new media and the structures of communication and understanding they bring forward. Kittler has paid special attention to "technological thresholds", i.e. points in history where different media networks compete with one another. Arguably, one such threshold is the rise of the alphabetically ordered dictionary and the corresponding downfall of the topical dictionary that occurred around 1700.⁶

Nowadays the most common macrostructure of dictionaries is the alphabetically order. "Macrostructure" is a term used to describe the organization of lexical entries in a dictionary in either lists (semasiological; from Greek *semasia*, meaning of a word, or alphabetical dictionaries), tree structures (onomasiological; from Greek *onoma*, name, or sometimes called topical, thematic, conceptual or ideographical dictionaries) or, in our present day, networks (electronic or online dictionaries). Semasiology is a term belonging lexicography. It is a term which denotes the co-ordination of language and meaning, of linguistic form and matter, by listing lexemes in the arrangement of the alphabet. Onomasiology, on the other hand, is a term which denotes the co-ordination of meaning and language, the technique of listing lexemes according to some order which is not that of the alphabet.

It is known that historically the onomasiological dictionary precedes the alphabetical one. The construction is basically as old as written culture in Europe (Hüllen 1999: 15).

The onomasiological dictionary orders its entries according to the presumed encyclopaedical knowledge of its users. The arrangement of entries in non-alphabetical type of dictionaries indicate that the order of entries is not determined by external criteria but by a certain attitude towards the relation between meaning and form in language (Hüllen 1999: 16). Generally, onomasiological dictionaries were ordered by keywords into semantic domains. The first domains would typically include God, the universe, heaven and nature. These would be followed by categories relating to man as a physical, spiritual and social being. Parts of the human body were given from head to foot. Typically, visible parts of the human

body outnumbered those of the inner organs whereas the lower domains would include insects, stones etc. Although such a list is an important document of the biological and medical knowledge of the time, Hüllen warns that such lists represent a tradition of words rather than of things. They cannot be regarded as fully realistic mirrors of the world of their time (Hüllen 1999: 132).

The structure of onomasiological dictionaries remained remarkably consistent throughout the centuries. There was, as McArthur describes, a “core” of thematic ideas that showed “a considerable consensus down the centuries, in the Classical-to-Christian-to-Rationalist culture of the Western world, as to what the primary categories need to be in any ordering of cosmos from a human point of view.” (McArthur 1986: 151) The structure of the onomasiological dictionary into thematic, philosophically meaningful semantic categories can be regarded as remnants of a mnemotechnical organization of data originating from the oral tradition of the classical and medieval world. The art of memory (*ars memorativa*) recommended a “spatial” arrangement of knowledge by associating memories to visualized locations. This arrangement was based on presumed harmony between the structure of memory and reality (Hüllen 1999: 50).

The hierarchy of the system included above and below, high and low, outward and inward, life and death, animate to inanimate. Contrary to an alphabetically ordered dictionary, an onomasiological dictionary does not per se explain what is unknown in language. Rather it is a classification of concepts in taxonomy or ontological structure, that was constructed to facilitate the transformation of general encyclopaedic knowledge into concrete linguistic knowledge. This means that topical dictionaries typically are organized according to the semantic structure of a whole language. This structure, Hüllen states, “depends on the structure of reality as language users believe they understand it at a given time” (Hüllen 1999: 15). They contain an ontology – a theory of the world.

Dictionary as Interface

The intention of the onomasiological dictionaries up to 1700 was to present a comprehensive image of the world in its entirety. The underlying lexicographical matrix was that of the *liber naturae*. The world was regarded as book written by God. The dictionaries were conceived as mirrors of this book. The dictionaries were written by authors who had read and fully understood the world as God’s scripture. For this reason the dictionaries often had titles containing words such as *imago* (likeness) or *speculum* (mirror) or *thesaurus* (treasure). Thereby either stressing the character of these books as reflections of the world and its divine order or that their wealth of information was an analogy to the grandeur of God’s creation (Hüllen 1999: 438).

The onomasiological dictionary differed also in terms of use from its semasiological counterpart. The former were intended for encyclopaedic and didactic pur-

poses, constructed to store knowledge and to be used as textbooks. They were intended to provide new words as the carriers of new knowledge. The order in which the new words and their meaning were arranged also acted as a principle for teaching and learning. These functions were fused (Hüllen 1999: 24-25). Also, it was common to learn long passages of word-lists and even entire dictionaries by heart. Onomasiological dictionaries were used as texts and conceived as a textual unity. This makes the usability of onomasiological dictionaries much wider. This can be illustrated by the fact that the onomasiologically ordered children's dictionary *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (World in Pictures, 1658), by Czech scholar John Amos Comenius (1592–1670) became one of the most widely circulated school textbooks in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The onomasiological dictionaries up to 1700 were important precursors to the terminological systems that became increasingly important within several fields of science, perhaps most notably in botany (Hüllen 1999: 442). However, from the 17th century onwards there was a strong decline in the onomastic tradition. McArthur stresses the basic materiality that paved the way for alphabetic arrangement:

Although some properly alphabetic works appeared before Gutenberg printed his first book, the printing press seems to have been the factor that changed everything in favour of non-thematic ordering. Compositors were constantly re-shuffling the letters of the alphabet around as small hard metal objects in trays and in composites. They and their associates – which included many writers who were wont to frequent print shops – became as a consequence increasingly at home with the convenience that the alphabet offers an invariant series. [...] Sheer familiarity with hard physical objects in a very practical craft appears therefore, to have promoted interest in ABC order in other, related but more abstract fields. (McArthur 1986: 77)

Onomasiological dictionaries continued to be re-edited and new ones appeared but by mid 18th century they became more and more scarce (Cfr Hüllen 1999: 26-27, 443-444). This is illustrated by the fact that Samuel Johnson, in his great *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) with perfect authority could define a dictionary as a book “containing the words of any language in alphabetical order, with explanations of their meaning”.

The matter I wish to address are not the facets of an historiography of consciousness imbedded in the semantic categorization of the onomasiological dictionary, but the question of technological ordering, directionality of reading paths and the dissemination of data that lies embedded in the “interface” (i.e. a point of interaction that communicates information from one system to another) of a dictionary (Cfr Kress 2003: chapter 4 & 9). Because, unlike the onomasiological dictionary, the semasiological dictionary is concerned with words and word use, rather than with the classification of concepts. Typically it may provide information on orthography, syntactic class, pronunciation, inflections and etymology, as well as meaning. More importantly in this context, the alphabetical structure, an “invariant series”, does not encompass an ontology:

This is an epistemological framework which, being entirely free from metaphysical concepts, places the acquisition of knowledge solely on words. It is their function to

bind together the various simple ideas which are integrated into one hole, to act as a *node*. Words are not oriented towards a preordered reality, they *mean* a creatively collected bundle of simple ideas which they stabilize for recording and communication. (Hüllen 1999: 446)

As such, the alphabetical order placed no necessary limits upon human knowledge. The notion of Divine Order could be replaced with a radical humanism based on belief in social progress, social equality and the perfectability of society and the individual (McArthur 1986: 105).

III

This essay is, to some extent, inspired by the ideas of the Swedish critic Thomas Götselius who conceived a “literary historiographical research without literary history”. His materialist literary history, influenced by Kittler, involves “a *literal* history of literature”: a *historia litterae* – a history of how letters and writing have been constructed and arranged throughout the course of history (Götselius 2008: 12). In this essay, following in the footsteps of Kittler, it has been possible to sketch a primitive line of development from the papyrus scroll to the parchment codex, from hand-written copies to the serial printing of the print revolution and in its wake follows pagination, table of contents, the index et cetera, by highlighting the materiality of lexicographical indexing (Cfr Kittler 1988).

The index, i.e. an arrangement that ranks and refers to entries, not only horizontally or vertically but also crosswise – such as in the typical instance of an alphabetical dictionary – represents a way of thinking that differs from that of the processes of oral language. The use of the neutral spatiality of writing far exceeds what had previously been possible. Oral cultures have “no experience of a lengthy, epic-size or novel-size climactic linear plot.” (Ong 2002: 140) Oral works are seldom constructed with a climax or peripeteia – something that is included in the horizon of expectation of the modern reader.⁷ During the 18th century the “flat” character was replaced by a more complex, psychologically “round” character, made possible by the rise of the novel (Cfr Ong 2002:148-149). It is this textual organization, the increasing interiorization of the world, that Benedict Anderson refers to, when he writes about “the structural alignment of post-1820s nationalist “memory” with the inner premises and conventions of modern biography and autobiography” (Anderson “Preface to the Second Edition” 2006: xiv).

The encyclopaedic and lexicographic boom of the 18th century was one of the factors that finally affirmed the cultural authority of the printed word. This process was, as I have tried to demonstrate, furthered by the ontological void of the alphabet. The breakthrough for a culture of literacy meant that information exchange became standardised to a larger extent than had previously been possible with the human voice or the hand-written document. Skills in reading and writing thus became an important indicator of social class. Reading and writing became activities that demanded seclusion. As Ong writes “what is inside the text

and the mind is a complete unit, self-contained in its silent inner logic” (Ong 2002: 147). Literacy in this sense thus contributed to strictly internalised and individualised modes of reflection – one could say a textual organization of consciousness.

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Notes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. In the original German: “Dichtung etablierte sich als ein Medium, das Worte in Blumen und Blumen in Frauen verwandeln konnte – nicht technisch, aber psychologisch, nicht durch Maschinen, aber durch menschliche Interfaces.”
- 2 It should be noted that Habermas’ concept of “bürgerliche Gesellschaft” should be interpreted in terms of a “civil society”.
- 3 Anderson’s use of the word “imagined” as in “imagined communities” should not be interpreted as “invented” or “fake”. The community is imagined in the sense that an individual of the nation does not know each and every one of the citizens of the nation, none the less these citizens share an imagined understanding of a national community. To Anderson this is the prerequisite for those mental and psychological, basically irrational forces that constitute the individual’s feeling of participation in a national collective (regarded as a psychological mass-movement) and the construction of the nation as a mental landscape.
- 4 For DWB and OED the year stated is when the first volume was published, for WNT when the first instalment was completed.
- 5 The Swedish category “vitterhet” is a somewhat imprecise term covering a wide field. It is often translated as “belles-lettres, i.e. a term which the OED describes as sometimes used for elegant or polite literature or literary studies and sometimes used in the wide sense of ‘the humanities’.
- 6 The historical description of the onomastic tradition is largely based on Hüllen (1999, in particular chapters 1, 2, 9 and 11) and, to a lesser extent, McArthur (1986). I wish to stress that I have not attempted to give a complete overview of the history of the onomasiological dictionary. Certain aspects have been highlighted in order to draw tentative parallels to the developments outlined by Kittler (and Ong).
- 7 This is of course particularly the case for oral epic poetry. The term “peripeteia” was coined by Aristotle in his description of the ancient Greek drama.

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The Author on Stage: Björn Ranelid as Performance Artist

By Torbjörn Forslid & Anders Ohlsson

Abstract

Media development has profoundly affected the literary public sphere. Authors as well as politicians may feel obliged to follow “the law of compulsory visibility” (John B. Thompson). All contemporary writers, be it bestselling authors or exclusive, high brow poets, must in one way or another reflect on their marketing and media strategies. Meeting and communicating with the audience, the potential readers, is of critical importance. In the article “The Author on Stage”, the authors consider how different literary performances by Swedish novelist Björn Ranelid (b. 1949) help establish his “brand name” on the literary market place.

Keywords: Björn Ranelid, performance studies, literary performance, author readings, Richard Schechner, Erika Fischer-Lichte.

Introduction

“Writing at its best, is a lonely life” – Ernest Hemingway’s well-known words about the author’s existential predicament are still valid to this day. The pen and typewriter may perhaps have been exchanged for the word processor – yet the state of loneliness at the writing desk is still a prerequisite of the creative process. Nonetheless, it is evident that today there is a diametrically opposite tendency in the field of literature. Nowadays, authors must, in a whole new way compared to before, step out of their writing chambers in order to market or make manifest their message to the public. Meeting and communicating with one’s audience, the potential readers, in different ways is of critical importance. These reading meetings may actually take place physically in conjunction with writers’ talks in bookshops, at libraries and at book fairs. But, they may also be in the form of interviews and talks that are mediated via radio and television. Apart from serving to market one’s authorship, these performances have a very tangible economical dimension. Just as rock stars of today often earn more from their concerts than from their record sales these performances function as a not so insignificant source of income for the writers. The Swedish Writers’ Union therefore recommends that their members ask for a remuneration of at least SEK 5 500 per “small prose performance” and at least 15 000 for a “larger event” (Författarförbundet 2010).

Such appearances made by writers are naturally no new phenomenon. In earlier times too, writers have made use of this opportunity to create an image of themselves and their authorship among their audience and, in so doing, strengthening their own trademark. For Charles Dickens, who toured the United States between 1867 and 1870 reading aloud from his books, it was precisely the economy that was an important factor: appearing in front of an audience and reading from his own novels gave him an income that compensated for the revenue loss that arose due to there not being any copyright law in “the new world” (Andrews 2006). In a similar way Selma Lagerlöf made herself a name as a skilful and captivating reader of her own texts (Vinge 2005).

Björn Ranelid, born in 1949, is today, without a doubt, one of Sweden’s authors who has attracted the most attention and is most acknowledged. This is largely due to his comprehensive activity as a performance artist. On his website, Ranelid presents himself, not only as a “writer and columnist” but also as an “entertainer”. In other words, not only does he devote himself to writing novels and articles, but he also appears – usually on his own – on various stages and platforms. The appearances of the last few years can be found listed on the author’s website. It is a touring plan worthy of a rock star. According to Ranelid himself, he has given more than 3 000 such stage appearances since his debut in 1983. Considering that

Ranelid appears on stage approximately 100 times a year (and often more than that) this means an annual salary that is above the average in Sweden.

Ranelid holds a position in contemporary Swedish literary public life that in many ways is unique. He moves between different, normally incompatible positions. On the one hand, the lofty and highbrow poet, who preaches goodness, love and the holiness of the word, and whose poetic and metaphor-charged language has even been given its own name: “Ranelidish”. On the other hand, the commercially conscious writer, who builds his author’s trademark by driving around in a shining Jaguar with “RANELID” on his number plates and by participating in advertising campaigns of various kinds (Forslid & Ohlsson 2009). “Referring to him as being ‘known from the radio and television’ would be to make an understatement”, a paper wrote towards the end of the 1990s (Carlsson 1997). This utterance is no less true today. Not only does Ranelid participate in traditional literature and culture programmes on television, he is also a frequently appearing guest in entertainment programmes showing on prime time. Thus Ranelid is the prototype of a modern medialised author.

A pivotal aspect of this medialised author’s role is that of Ranelid’s fighting- and provocative spirit. He knows how to use his strong public position, from where he constantly, with his fighting spirit and desire to debate, time and time again calls attention to himself and his authorship. This emphasis on struggle and debate can certainly be regarded as fundamental to Ranelid’s entire production and his role as a writer. Jonas Frykman, Professor of Ethnology, has aptly called him “the Mohammed Ali of literature” on a TV show (SvT 2002). The struggle and fighting therefore function as a successful strategy for getting attention from the media. But it is also an effective way of charging his authorship with energy and power.

However, Ranelid distinguishes himself from most other authors who are highly exposed to the media, by way of his classical romantic-modernistic artist’s role and his high-brow literary claims. His debut novel, *Den överlevande trädgårdsmästaren* (1983; “The Surviving Gardener”) consequently follows a traditional modernistic aesthetic, with an experimental imagery that might be hard to fathom. With his subsequent novels Ranelid developed into somewhat of a favourite among critics. In the middle of the 90s he was placed within the circle of highly acknowledged contemporary authors such as Per Olov Enquist and Kerstin Ekman (Franzén 1996). Ranelid also came to be associated at an early stage with Lars Ahlin, one of Sweden’s leading modernist writers of prose (Eriksson 1990: 125).

Already a few years after his debut the term Ranelidish began to be used about the author’s distinctive and personal style of prose with its meandering metaphorical formulations. In order to exemplify this Ranelidish virtually any opening line in the author’s novels could be used, such as this one from *Mitt namn ska vara Stig Dagerman* (1993; “My Name shall be Stig Dagerman”): “My soul weighs

less than a dream in a butterfly, but it holds so much that God needs to use his biggest compass to close the circle”.

A consequence of this variety of pursuits with its role changing is that it is hard to place Ranelid the writer into any given category. He moves between different positions. One moment the aristocratic modernist who preaches the holiness of the word. Next moment the ex football player who chooses sides in politically controversial matters. Thus the public opinion of Ranelid is also divided. Depending on which aspect is being discussed he may be both praised and blamed. “No-one has written about the handicapped as well as he has”, someone might say. “An arrogant son-of-a-bitch”, says another.

The fact that the first of these utterances – that are authentic ones, uttered in our proximity – refers to Ranelid’s text and the second to his person is quite typical. Far from all Swedes have read a novel by Björn Ranelid. But almost all adults know who he is and have an opinion of him. In literary studies the discussion on the relationship between life and work was long regarded as problematic. In Ranelid’s case this is virtually inevitable, at least with regard to the connection between public person and works. Ranelid appears continuously in the media, where he states his opinions and views on various matters. How then, could you disregard this when reading his books? You can see his face in front of you. You can hear his voice with its particular phrasing and Scanian accent.

For better or for worse the writer is once again a part of his/her text before the literary public of today – and this applies to a particularly great extent to Ranelid.

Even if Ranelid has been both criticised and praised through the years there is an obvious dimension of time. At this point in time he is certainly one of the most known and read authors in the country. Yet, at the same time as Ranelid has become an acknowledged author and is loved by many, his status within the cultural Establishment has, to a certain extent, declined. The lofty prose and the religiously tinted message of love which at the beginning of his career as a writer secured him a unique position, is seen today by many people as being provocative and challenging. Others see him as somewhat of a medial buffoon (compare “the Mohammed Ali of literature”). But Ranelid’s massive exposure to the media has also implied that he has reached new groups of readers and fans, not least among the younger generation where he at times has been assigned cult status.

In this article we will illustrate an essential aspect of Ranelid’s medial role as an author – his activity as a performance artist. This meeting between author and reader is an important but often overlooked aspect of literary public life of today. Our point of departure is that it is impossible to understand Ranelid’s position in literary public life, and in the Swedish social debate as a whole, by merely reading his books. The perspective must necessarily be broadened to include more than textual analysis. Theoretically we have our point of departure in “performance studies” in Richard Schechner’s (2006) and Erika Fischer-Lichte’s (2008) versions. This is also where we find the methodological devices that we present con-

tinuously. Even though Fischer-Lichte focuses on avant-garde performances and theatre, the concepts and methodology she has developed may in our opinion also be applied to Ranelid's performances. A performance, in the same way as a theatrical event, is of course impossible to preserve for posterity or to recreate. Video documentations – that are of necessity imperfect – of Ranelid's appearances are all that is left of this momentary art form.

We will analyse three of Ranelid's many appearances in recent years. Two of them in small places in Southern Sweden, in Vinslöv (27/11, 2007 and Ystad (6/2, 2009). The third was recorded in a TV studio and broadcasted in the programme "Go' kväll" ("Good Evening") on Sveriges Television (19/10 2007; Sweden's Television, national public service broadcaster).

Every such appearance – or performance – is of course unique. Their character changes as we will see, depending whether, for example, the meeting with the audience takes place face to face or is mediated via TV cameras. Naturally, the context and the audience in front of which Ranelid performs are also significant. We will shed some light on how he goes about staging himself and his authorship under the rather varying conditions prevalent on these three occasions. The differences are obvious. The meeting with the anonymous and rather heterogeneous TV audience is strictly structured (by the producer and the presenter). In Vinslöv the author had the possibility of arranging his appearance according to his own wishes. Finally, in Ystad Ranelid was interacting with a music group. Moreover, the differences between the events in Vinslöv and Ystad were quite substantial as regards the composition of the audience and the institutional framework. The result is three performance appearances with varying character. Ranelid takes on, and is given, different roles. We see him as a literary stand-up artist, as a "prophet" and as an artist.

Ranelid – The Literary Stand-up Comedian and the Entertainer

An essential part of Ranelid's appearance – his performance – in Vinslöv and in other places, is the actual framing. First of all Ranelid enters onto a simply built up stage with colourful advertising signs in the background. Art and commercialism go hand in hand. The author is dressed in a black blazer and a white unbuttoned shirt. The shirt collars are spread over the lapels of the blazer like a classical Schiller collar. After some playful small talk with the audience and some tens of seconds of silence comes the introductory line:

Paradise has thin pages and you have to turn them with a needle in your hand. Show me anything else on Earth that has that density, that weight, that mass which words have. It is all that rises from the dead. Now black letters lay on white pastures that from time to time are called the pages of a book, and so I sharpen my pencil so that it becomes like a shepherd's staff and thus the words will follow me, one by one, over the face of the Earth.

Ranelid's voice is loud and clear, finely tuned and poetic as is befit an author who dresses in a way that leads one's thoughts to a romantic character such as Lord Byron. His Scanian dialect bears a tinge of a Central Swedish accent with its lighter diphthongs and more complex intonation. The opening line is a typically Ranelidish one, a well-formulated phrase which, like a refrain in a popular song or a rock tune, is easy to recognise. It is taken from *Min son fäktas mot världen* (Ranelid 2000; "My Son Crosses Swords with the World") but recurs and is re-used in various performances, books and articles. The idea is that the faithful audience of readers and listeners will recognise the opening line and nod in assent – this gives a feeling of belonging, both with the author and within the audience. On this evening the latter is comprised which is very unusual when it comes to Ranelid, of only men plus one woman journalist.

Although the theme of Ranelid's appearance in Vinslöv is *the word*, it soon becomes obvious that it is not only the spoken word – no matter how equilibristic and well-formulated Ranelid is this evening – that brings the, initially clearly reserved, audience to line up after the performance in order to buy his novels. If one wishes to better understand the audience's experience and the effects of a performance such as that of Ranelid, one must take a number of different factors into consideration. As early as around the turn of the last century research showed that if one were to understand communal phenomena such as theatre performances or rituals in non-western cultures, one could not merely make do with the actual spoken language; one must, for example, also take into consideration the institutional framing or the actors' ways of using their bodies. Thus it is advantageous for anyone trying to describe and understand various types of performances to refer to the comprehensive research that has been conducted about theatre and other ritual events. The German theatre researcher Erika Fischer-Lichte writes about this shift of perspective in *The Transformative Power of Performance*:

...both ritual and theatre studies repudiated the privileged status of texts in favour of performances. It could thus be said that the first performative turn in twentieth-century European culture [...] occurred much earlier with the establishment of ritual and theatre studies at the turn of the last century. (2008: 31)

Essential for a performance, Fischer-Lichte points out, is the *concurrent* physical presence of the actor or actors and the audience. In this way the prerequisites for the audience's more or less active participation in a performance are created and this can thus be described as a happening that occurs *between* actors and spectators (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 32).

Ranelid also comes back to and continuously reminds us, in his various appearances, of the relationship and sense of belonging between himself and the audience: "As you know, I have said that one swims from the shore I, to the shore you, in the ocean we. This ocean we all have within us". With a slight gesture – he quickly bows his head to the right – Ranelid accentuates the rhythmical direction away

from the self to the other. Ranelid also emphasises that it is the support of the audience that has helped him to avoid getting stuck during the performance.

Richard Schechner, one of the main names in the American tradition of Performance Studies, traces features of performance in a large number of human activities, in everything from play, sports and rock galas to theatre performances and rituals (Schechner 2006: 31). The key categories here are ritual and play, which are present in all performances to varying degrees. Rituals provide people with a sense of belonging and a communal experience. Furthermore, rituals help the participants to relate to difficult upheavals and transitions in society or private life, to relate to hierarchies of various kinds as well as taboo-like or risky events that cannot be given expression in daily life. In rituals the experience of border phenomena and the crossing of borders are of critical importance. Both ritual and play create a “second reality”, that distinguishes itself from daily life, writes Schechner. With various, more or less conventional means a stage is created where ritual and play take place (2006: 52).

Ranelid’s performance in Vinslöv gets its dimension of ritual both from the introductory meal that is eaten together and served before his appearance, and from listening to Ranelid’s elaborate and dedicated use of language. Even the actual performance is of a ritual character and leads one’s thoughts to situations like the presentation of an authorship or authors reading aloud. By comparing his pencil to a “shepherd’s staff”, Ranelid places himself in a sort of Christ-like or preacher’s position.

Ranelid’s performance in Vinslöv, which lasts slightly longer than an hour, is built on his own authorship. His point of departure is taken from some of his novels that are lined up on a small table on the stage, blatantly visible just as in the case of “talking about books” in a library. But before coming to his authorship, Ranelid sets the tone of the evening in a prologue-like section by evoking the presence of three persons. Onto the stage he invites, one after the other, Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer, Nelson Mandela and, the Cambridge professor Stephen Hawking.

The presentation of Tranströmer turns out to pay homage to Art with a capital A. The poet is said to come sailing in on a “gondola of grief” – which, by the way, is the title of one of Tranströmer’s poem anthologies – navigated by his wife. Here, Ranelid alludes to Tranströmer’s poem “Storm” from the collection *17 dikter* (1954). According to Ranelid, this is one of “the world’s most skilful, generous, equilibristic poets” and time and time again he proves his mastery in spite of his suffering from aphasia after a stroke. Great artists have power over the word which, according to Ranelid, allows them to compare favourably with all the worldly power magnates.

When presenting both of the other guests of honour – Mandela and Hawking – Ranelid introduces the ethical stance that runs all through his performance. Mandela who chose to turn away from “hatred, revenge and vendetta” despite having

been imprisoned for 27 years on Robben Island. Hawking, the much acknowledged physicist and mathematician, who is gravely handicapped by the disease of ALS, but if “Adolf Hitler had been allowed to decide and had been a contemporary of his he would not have been deemed worthy of living”, despite the fact that his brain functions better than most people’s. Ranelid summarises his ethical stance – his conviction of man’s inviolable value – with one sentence that he self-consciously nominates as “Vinslöv’s and Sweden’s and the world’s most beautiful sentence”. It runs: “Every single person on Earth exists in one unique sample and when she is gone she can never be replaced by anyone else”. In a way that is typical of the performance arts: aesthetical, social and political aspects are interwoven already in the prelude. Art is brought into contact with the world (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 44).

Thus the theme of the prologue-like introduction in Vinslöv is the power of the word and the inviolability of human life. But Ranelid does not only merely rely on his own spoken words to reach out with this message. As all performance artists do (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 40), he also uses the language of his own *body*. During the performance Ranelid is in constant movement in the room. He steps down from the simple stage, where he starts his appearance, and interacts with the listeners. In addition to this he uses the premises in a spontaneous fashion, for example by sometimes hiding behind a column. At this moment in time it is possible to identify two superior and interacting strategies of Ranelid’s which can be found to occur amongst most performance artists. On the one hand a striving to achieve a (temporary) feeling of belonging between himself and his audience. On the other hand the ambition to achieve a mutual, physical contact with the listeners.

When Ranelid leaves the stage and moves around in the room he shows quite clearly how he attempts to bridge the gap between the stage and the auditorium and how he tries to avoid addressing his audience from a top-down perspective. Otherwise the whole situation is designed for precisely that: on the stage we have a literary celebrity with his familiarity with the media and other authorities who is inevitably in a superior position in relation to his listeners. In a way that is typical of performance artists he thus observes his audience and interacts spontaneously with it instead of directing his words *to* an anonymous mass. The spectators, who normally watch, now find themselves being watched by the actor. On one occasion Ranelid jokes, to the delight of the audience, about a man sitting in the first row who obviously has not reacted quickly or strongly enough to an anecdote: “You’re not keeping up. Have you brought your pillow? It’s time to sleep now. Have you got an alarm clock also?” Here we have a situation where the tables are turned: an observer who himself is being observed by someone whose primary task is to act, something which, according to Fischer-Lichte (2008: 40), is another common strategy used within the performance arts.

Ranelid also makes use of the opportunity on one occasion to touch one of the spectators lightly. This touch is no doubt a surprise for the man in question.

Whoever seats himself in a theatre hall naturally expects to take part in the performance by *seeing*, in the capacity of spectator, what takes place; compare with the Greek word “theatron” from “theastai” that means precisely “to see”. When an actor thus breaks with this convention this can contribute indirectly to the achievement of the main goal of a performance, namely that of creating a sense of belonging. The reason for this, as Fischer-Lichte maintains (2008: 60–62), is that various forms of physical contact temporarily upset the opposition between seeing and feeling, between public and private, between distance and closeness, which in turn leads to emotional responses. Something similar also happens on the occasions when Ranelid moves around in the room and approaches individual spectators – without actually physically touching anyone – bends forwards towards them and addresses them with the Swedish informal form of you or their personal name and looks into their eyes. Fischer-Lichte writes: “A glance exchanged between two people can constitute closeness and intimacy similar to physical contact. Seeing stimulates the desire to touch” (2008: 62). The sense of belonging between the entertainer Ranelid and his audience is also strengthened by laughter and satire against power and authority. The parties are united on such occasions in a bottom-up perspective where Ranelid becomes just like anyone else – in a collective we – that is directing criticism towards all of those “up there”.

Another strategy from Ranelid’s side for melting in with the crowd, for showing the spectators that he is one of them, is the ideal of conscientiousness he continually assigns himself. He is no non-committed sort of person who takes liberties. One aspect of this is to always do one’s very best in every situation, to make an effort. Ranelid declares sharply: “Don’t come and say that I didn’t do my best. You can say that I was bad, that I was worthless, but *don’t say* that I didn’t do my best. *Don’t say* that I didn’t do my very best. Don’t say that I didn’t strain every nerve to the utmost”. Ranelid refers to his “ethos”, that is, to his personal traits and his character, as a guarantee of the credibility of his message (Johannesson 2003).

Ranelid’s striving to establish a common ground and feeling of belonging with the listeners in Vinslöv around his ethical message has a good chance of succeeding, since it is the local Lions Club that has invited him to talk. Lions, founded in 1917 in the U.S, are an international network with 1.3 million members – both women and men – in 205 countries. One works to “create and foster a spirit of understanding among all people for humanitarian needs by providing voluntary services in conjunction with social commitment and international collaboration” (Lions 2010). The spirit of community and the ideological affiliation among the audience is, so to speak, already in place. Apart from the fact that they are all in some way associated with Lions, it is likely that many of them already know each other; the village of Vinslöv is no bigger than that. The bond between the listeners is stronger in such a relatively closed company than in a more official Ranelid event. It is “just” for Ranelid to step into the fellowship, which is thus facilitated

by the sympathy for and understanding of the ethical message presumably harboured by the Vinslöv audience. The bonds of fellowship that are established during each performance – in Vinslöv it is both about the bond between Ranelid and the listeners and *between the individuals* in the audience – facilitates for the individual to connect to the values that form the foundation for the work of both Lions and Ranelid. A performance, Fischer-Lichte emphasises, normally creates rather temporary fellowships (2008: 55).

Ranelid's appearance in Vinslöv, just like the performance arts in general, is thus characterised by a tangible *bodily presence*. Ranelid regularly dresses in generously open – preferably short-sleeved – shirts, allows himself to be photographed with a bare torso or discusses the meaning of being well-trained and of leading a healthy life. Therefore it comes as no surprise that he also during the Vinslöv appearance uses his body in different ways. For example, he shows how, being a former elite player himself, his parents used to dream when he was growing up about how their sons would become football players just as famous as the Swedish Italian pros Gunnar Green, Nisse Liedholm and Gunnar Nordahl by, for every name, make-believe heel-kicking a football or slap kicking a side-foot.

If therefore, Ranelid on stage – not without pride – shows up a body that can breed jealousy among certain spectators, the story about his earlier and present bodily exposure and failings are a regularly returning feature during his performances. As Fischer-Lichte claims, this is also applicable to the performance arts in general (2008: 82). The stories about his childhood skull fracture and growing upper lip that continuously surface in Ranelid's appearances further strengthen the character of ritual. These elements are constantly present. The sympathy of the audience may be an advantage for the ethically demanding sermon. As an advocate of truth Ranelid has had a high price to pay: "No one has been so slandered, no one has been so derided, and no one has been so lied about as I have been". In Vinslöv Ranelid refers to his autobiographical book *Till alla människor på jorden och i himlen* (1997; "To all people on Earth and in Heaven"), in which the accident when he, at five years of age, falls down the cellar stairs and fractures his skull, is a pivotal event. But, according to Ranelid, this is also the explanation for how he can perform as he does – without a manuscript – without losing his thread: the high-pitched tone ringing in "... (my) head is a part of the explanation for me being able to be so concentrated when I talk. I am namely always in the present. I'm sentenced to being in the moment. [– – –] I have a radio in my head that I turn on and off". In Ranelid's understanding of himself this means that he has turned a threat of catastrophe into something productive and successful. Paradoxically, his whole success story as a writer and entertainer probably derive from this fracture.

Ranelid's other bodily trauma as a child – his upper lip that, without any explanation, starts to grow when he is in his teens – is also a part of the Vinslöv appearance. He recounts how the event still stalks him. But Ranelid knows how to take revenge on those who called him "nigger lip" when he was growing up and

even later. “You take revenge”, Ranelid goes on cheerfully and to the audience’s great delight, not by force but “by being elected one of Sweden’s ten sexiest men. How about that? Good Lord!”

Ranelid’s performance in Vinslöv is based on the author’s humanistic sermon on the inviolable value of man and the importance of taking an individual responsibility in an existence in which everyone is fundamentally dependent on one another. However, this does not stop Ranelid from sailing close to the wind, from making jokes about and making fun of other actors in public life. In this circle of (ethically) like-minded people, male Lions supporters and people living in Vinslöv, Ranelid lets go in a way that he does not do when performing in front of an anonymous TV audience. Towards the end of his performance he declares: “...you know, I can say what I want to now; it’s so wonderful”.

Ranelid – The Prophet

The TV programme “Go ‘kväll” (Good Evening) is broadcasted every evening Monday to Friday between 6.15 and 7.00 pm on Sweden's National Television and has the character of a lifestyle programme aimed to serve an audience comprised of people who are upper middle aged and older. The features included concern fashion, food, culture and existential questions. A standing point in the programme on Friday evening broadcasts is that of a medially well-known person pretending to be the host of an imaginary dinner party – a feature that normally takes about ten minutes. The host of the dinner and the presenter of the programme take a seat at a neatly set table where four seats are empty. They chat about the menu and the setting of the table as well as about the four absent – yet present in the imagination – guests. This talk about the food that is served, where the dinner takes place and, not least, the choice of dinner guests, functions as a performance, in which the host stages his own person and role in the public eye.

Ranelid chose to invite two men and two women to his dinner party. These were then seated as two couples at the long ends of the table, while Ranelid and the programme presenter sat opposite one another on the short sides. The men who were invited were world-famous: the South African bishop Desmond Tutu as well as the then American President George W. Bush. The two women on the other hand were unknown to the general public. Elisabeth B. Lindgren, Chairman of the Board of the Temperance Society in Örebro as well as Inga Pagnréus.

One might ask oneself whether Ranelid’s dinner party on “Go ‘kväll” really is a performance fully comparable with the one in Vinslöv? Several of the characteristics of performance art are missing, especially the live character and the concurrent presence of actor and audience. Fischer-Lichte also draws a sharp line between live performances and medialised performances: “Live performance seems to carry remnants of an ‘authentic’ culture that fortifies the opposition to media-

lised performance as a product of commercialism created by market interests” (2008: 69).

However, the opposition between a live and a medialised performance is not, at least as far as we can see, quite as absolute as Fischer-Lichte would have it. Firstly, performance artists who appear live today are often completely dependent on mediating electronic or digital techniques, in the form of microphones and speaker systems or various kinds of image or sound reproductions. Secondly, a performance artist can interact with the audience that is present in, say, the TV studio (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 69). Furthermore, Ranelid’s contribution to “Go ‘kväll” can hardly be described as a straightforward TV interview. The programme presenter takes on a very subordinate role. His contribution is confined to just a few random lines, while Ranelid totally dominates the stage.

The description and analysis of Ranelid’s participation in “Go ‘kväll” as a performance, is also supported by the fact that this feature of the programme is framed in and divided from the rest of the programme in a very clear way, which according to Schechner (2006: 2) is one of the defining characteristics of a performance. After having conversed with two other participants the programme presenter stands up and says: “Now I can smell food”. A dimension of play, also a prominent feature in the performance arts, is thus made apparent. We are all meant to imagine delightful aromas of dinner, in spite of the fact that food and drink are so clearly absent during the feature. The line fills the same function as when children who are eager to play open with “do you want to play with me?” Ranelid’s answer to the question about where the dinner party is to take place – “next to the apple grove in Kivik” (Kivik is famous for its apples) – shows that yes, he would like to play.

The subdued dinner table where Ranelid and the programme presenter sit down is set for a traditional middle class party with tall wine glasses and broken serviettes. The dinner table creates its own stage within the TV studio, which differentiates itself from the bar counter where the other interviews took place. This dinner party feature is thus made up as a stage setting of its own within the framework of the staging of the whole TV programme.

The actual physically present audience during Ranelid’s TV performance is, as mentioned, small. However, the stage-setting in itself reveals a striving for involving the anonymous TV audience in the feature, thus creating prerequisites for the kind of togetherness that a performance aims to achieve. Various means are used to create closeness between Ranelid and the TV audience. The viewers are invited to join in the game and in their imaginations take a seat at the ceremoniously set table in the Ranelidian summer home in Kivik, Österlen. This is emphasised by the chairs that, in keeping with the logic of the game, remain empty during the feature. Here there are seats that are literally empty to allow for the viewers’ own identifications.

There is also a clearly ritual dimension in Ranelid's TV appearances just as in a traditional live performance. The whole concept of the programme is built on one of the holiest rituals of secular private life: the middle class dinner party with all of its tacitly implied codes and rules. Moreover, the imaginary dinner party comprises an important and recurring ritual in the actual programme. It is one of the cornerstones in the Friday broadcasts. It is also logical that the dinner party takes place on the last day of the working week. A large number of viewers find themselves in the borderland between work and leisure. The much longed for weekend has just been initiated with opportunities for, and features of, playing and games.

Ranelid's TV performance was directly linked to his book of current interest in the autumn of 2007, *Öppet brev till George W Bush* ("Open letter to George W Bush"). It follows that three of the guests at the fictive dinner party are also in the book which is not a novel but a personal reflection on the state of the world and the suffering of mankind, something which, all in all, has led Ranelid to the edge of despair. In *Öppet brev* he addresses the American President with an informal "you" – compare the letter form – and accuses him of a lack of righteousness in his war on terrorism, but also in relation to the poor and destitute in his own country.

As one can see, the production and institutional framing of this TV performance differs from that of the Vinslöv performance. The format is both shorter – just more than a quarter of an hour instead of an hour – and stricter. Ranelid remains seated at the short end of the table and can thus not use his body in the same way as in Vinslöv, where he could, by using gestures and movements, support his message and create a feeling of closeness with his audience. He is thus forced to a greater extent to trust in the spoken word, even though the TV audience is naturally exposed to his well-trained body and styled image. Moreover, he appears more austere and has a more serious profile during the dinner party on TV. He does not allow himself to take liberties like he did in Vinslöv, for example he avoids, in so far as possible, joking about and criticising well-known people.

This means that Ranelid in his TV performance remains in the authoritative position where he, as a medial celebrity, is naturally at home. His possibility of creating closeness to the audience is limited in an entirely different way than during a performance. Now he is forced to be in a *high position*, from which he talks to his listeners with a top-down perspective. In Vinslöv he strove to be in a *low position*, which meant that he instead talked *with* the audience from a more equal we-perspective or, alternatively, from a bottom-up or victim's position. In the TV studio Ranelid rather chooses a number of different strategies in order to mark his high, superior position. One is the use of long, expansive lines that aim to create authority, to give the impression that he knows what he is talking about.

Another and more important circumstance that places Ranelid in a high position in relation to the viewers – as well as to the American President – is that he takes on a sort of prophet-like role. On the whole there is a dimension of the Old Tes-

tament and Christianity in Ranelid's TV performance. At least three of the guests are believers, both the "good" guests like Desmond Tutu and Inga Pagréus and the "bad" guest, Bush. Ranelid himself bears witness to his own strong faith ever since he "...accompanied Mom and Dad to the Elim Church in Malmö. And, what's more, I've found, that all the mysteries that exist in the world today, all the miracles that exist in the world today, they are immune to all scientific and technological explanations. There isn't one single Nobel Prize winner in Physics or in Chemistry who can explain laughter, sensuality and eroticism and beauty on Earth, there isn't anyone who can explain that".

Ranelid's language thus often borrows expressions and figures of speech from the religious sphere: "I have sentenced myself to never deride or violate another human being".

Another circumstance that shows that Ranelid takes on some sort of a prophet-role is that he does not behave at all like a conciliating, middle class dinner party host who will do everything in his power to ensure that the guests will enjoy themselves. Instead he confronts the American President and makes him accountable for his war on terrorism. In this confrontation the dinner host also accepts assistance from the other guests:

And now I think that Desmond gets up and says a few words to George Bush and the words will burn like laser beams right through the man, and then I'll say to George Bush that you should now pick up your shining knife, and then you shall look at the reflection of your own face there since it fits into that narrow blade of the knife, and when you have observed your face for long enough you'll see that you, yourself, are your worst enemy.

When Ranelid in this way condemns the American President he also resembles an Old Testament prophet. In *Öppet brev till George W Bush* this connection between Ranelid's words to the president and the prophets of the Bible is even more direct: "I write these words to you, since they say more about humanity than all of your advisers' opinions. Many people in history have claimed to be prophets, but only very few have been true prophets. A prophet who says that he/she has received a revelation from God must be a loving person and be more good than evil" (Ranelid 2007: 46).

Thus Ranelid acts as a judging prophet, who surrounded by his good and loyal disciples exhorts and admonishes the sinful disciple – George W bush – who has not understood how best to serve the will of God. From his elevated position the dinner host talks to "the world's most powerful man", the presiding American president. The judgemental dimensions of the prophet role – the dinner party's features of debate and struggle – blend together well with the dramaturgy that governs talk and discussion programmes on TV. This, in turn, can be seen in the light of the tendency towards struggle that characterises the spoken word in general, not least in the so-called "primary oral culture" (Ong 2002: 32)

Ranelid's description of people's exposure and vulnerability is striking. In this case it also becomes clear that his prophetic speech not only addresses itself to the

most powerful men in the world, but to each and every one of us. He makes an impression by talking in terms of “we”, that it is about all of our responsibility. In answer to the question of how important it is to hand out food to the homeless in Stockholm he says:

It’s extremely important. Because this has nothing to do with glamour, nothing to do with honour or with money. This comes straight from the heart. This is where the little and the big person meet. The whole future of the human race begins in your heart as a human. [– –] And there is no such thing as war inscribed in human genes. Not one single person on this Earth exists who has been born with evil, hatred, revenge and vendetta inscribed in their genes.

Thus in his TV performance Ranelid is forced, to a greater degree than during the Vinslöv appearance, to put his trust in the spoken *word*. The position of stiff dinner party host in a TV studio allows for less freedom of bodily exposure and use of gesture. On the other hand, Ranelid has in general – both in his role as performance artist and author – a strong confidence in the intrinsic power of words. This applies both to the word in writing and in speech. This is made obvious in *Öppet brev*:

Words fly faster than the hawk and the falcon and they live longer than the elephant and the oldest tree on Earth. [– –]

The word is alone on Earth in its ability to rise from the dead. Man closes the book. Then the black letters lay as lambs on the white page. The pencil is a shepherd’s staff. When you move it over the paper, then all the letters of the alphabet play, dance or behave according to the gravity of the moment. Seat yourself in your reading corner in the evening. Turn on the light and once more start again.

In the beginning was the Word.

The power of the word is strongly emphasised here; as Christ it can rise from the dead. On the whole the Biblical connection is tangible – the lamb, the staff of the shepherd – just as the closing sentence, that directly cites the so-called Johannes Prologue in the Bible translation of 1917.

And so, the “prophet” Ranelid, equipped with the strong and powerful word, pronounces his sentence over President Bush and anyone else who has not understood that he/she needs to follow the message of God in the right way. However, this is only the one part of the author’s sermon which, in its entirety, does not only consist of condemnation. He also points to the opportunities for ethical actions that are open to every person. He does this by bringing to the fore his three “good” guests as worthy examples. Desmond Tutu, the South African bishop; Elisabeth B Lindgren who after 22 years as a drug addict now runs a cooperative rehabilitation centre – she stands, together with her husband, “for some sort of hope for mankind”. And finally, Inga Pagraeus, the deacon, who together with a group of volunteers – Ranelid is one of them – hands out food to alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes and the homeless in Stockholm City: “And then I make Sergel’s torg [a town square] the hand of God. And where we should be pumping in oxygenated blood, we see to it that we pump in hepatitis, HIV and AIDS. And on

Sergels torg that is the Aorta of Sweden, we let people die with their tongues in a pool of urin”.

In sum we can maintain that Ranelid’s TV performance combines the religious and the secular, ritual and play. In a similar way it finds itself in the field of tension between seriously directed messages and entertainment (Schechner 2006: xx). This is the actual idea of the programme “Go ‘kväll”’: a pleasant and entertaining start to the weekend that can nevertheless contain existentially thought provoking and serious features. And Ranelid’s sermon is to a great extent serious. It is the Christian ideal of love he preaches from his secular pulpit. And it is hard not to be moved, even if one’s first reaction might be to smile a faint, amused smile. Both Ranelid’s appearance, his clothes and his language are exaggerated and blown-up. But after a couple of minutes, when the initial surprise has settled, one becomes captivated by the power in the message and the words. One feels powerless when the author speaks of the exposed and vulnerable people on Sergels torg, a place he metaphorically sees as Sweden’s aorta. The image-packed turns of speech, whose significance might not be immediately clear to the listeners, and that can be difficult to digest when seen in print, seem none the less seductive in the actual moment of delivery. However, the situation and the framing involve a number of limitations compared to Ranelid’s live performance in Vinslöv. The result is a less laid back and more strict performance. It is the prophet Ranelid who sits at the table in the TV studio.

Ranelid – The Jazz & Poetry Artist

The third and last Ranelid performance we analyse in this article thus took place in a well-respected Cinema Theatre in Ystad in February 2009. Here films have been shown since 1910. However, during the period of the last ten years the premises have been totally renovated. Today the company is run by a non-profit association and its programme includes over and above the showing of quality films also music and song, theatre and lectures, meetings and information evenings.

Shortly after nine in the evening Ranelid stepped down from the stage. Already then it became clear to us that what we had just witnessed diverged from both the other appearances in Vinslöv and the TV studio respectively. This was a different experience. We were not surprised and slightly embarrassed – as when we saw “the prophet” Ranelid on TV the first time – but rather moved. Neither were we alone with our reaction: An enthusiastic audience managed to get an extra number after the standard performance. The local newspapers stated the next day that “Ranelid spellbound the Scala” and transformed the old cinema into a “church building” where there soon arose an “intimate and spiritual atmosphere” (Nilsson 2009). What then, was the difference between the performance in Ystad and the ones on TV and in Vinslöv respectively?

Already the institutional framing was different. Here it was an intimate room where also on other occasions an ambitious cultural and artistic activity is pursued. The mixed audience that fills the room till the last seat has left the duties of everyday life behind them; the performance was on a Friday. People have seated themselves in premises where artistic – aesthetic- experiences are usually served. This creates certain expectations, which are fulfilled. The audience is given from the first moment the impression of being a part of an artistic performance. Ranelid performs now as an *artist*, not only as a preacher and prophet – or entertainer. In Vinslöv the show was framed by large, conspicuous advertising boards. In Ystad the commercial side of the appearance is toned down, actually almost absent.

Perhaps the most important explanation for why the Ystad performance has such a clear aura of art is that Ranelid appears here together with the band “Tales”. The group that was founded in 1996 fetches inspiration from Nordic ballads, meditative jazz and folklore. Improvisation also plays an important part in their music. The band released its first CD in 2000 and started working together with Ranelid two years later (Tales 2010). Together, Tales and Ranelid have given a great number of concerts around the country, often in Southern Sweden. In January 2009 they released a CD they had made together.

As we shall see Ranelid functions as some kind of an extra “singer” in the band, when he recites his one-liners – his recitations – to music. His basic position during this performance or concert is also among the musicians on stage, where he either stands up or sits on a chair. In the background a suggestive photograph of the group; no advertising boards.

During his recitals Ranelid moves around in the room, so as to create a closeness to and contact with the audience. The whole performance gives a stronger impression of planning, of being staged: Ranelid often looks at his playlist to remind himself of the order of the songs and his own contributions – and he chats to the leader of the band before performing his own numbers. In total Ranelid stands for twelve such interpositions or numbers during the evening. In sum the institutional framing – from the premises to the stage that has been clearly arranged for the concert – makes this performance seem like an artistic happening or concert performance (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 201).

Already in the prelude to the performance, which including the interval is almost two hours long, it is quite clear that Ranelid not only talks or preaches but also takes on the role of singer. Ranelid does not begin, as he has done in other performances, with anecdotes or short jokes. Instead he recites something that is much more like the lyrics of a song – or a prose poem. His speech is organised in a more lyrically unpredictable way than as a narrative at the Scala in Ystad. For example in the fifth number of the evening he cites from the introduction page in a novel by Stig Dagerman with the support of the saxophone-dominated music. First in Swedish – just like in Vinslöv – later also in English. Ranelid makes here a definite entry into the Jazz & Poetry tradition (Baumgartner 2001).

In Ranelid's first number one can differentiate two themes that are well-known to anyone who knows their Ranelid. First of all it is about the power of the word. Secondly it is about the unique and inviolable dignity of man.

The part about the power of the word in the first number is introduced with the sentence: "Show me anything on Earth that has the density and the weight and the mass that the word has". During the time – approximately one minute – that it takes for Ranelid to perform this first part about the possibilities of words, this sentence is repeated at least twice. In this way it gets the character of a refrain or chorus that frames in the other sentences that vary the theme.

In a similar way Ranelid uses one and the same sentence in the second thematic section – "Every person on this Earth exists in one single sample and when she is gone she can never be replaced by anyone" – three times and lets it frame lines such as "You are tall, you are short, you are feeble-minded, you are mentally retarded, you are even equilibristic in the expression of language".

Thus Ranelid works throughout with repetitions of single words, groups of words and full clauses. When it comes to singing – a genre he approaches in Ystad – this is nothing strange. But anyone who has read or listened to Ranelid will know that these repetitions and reuses apply to all of his oral appearances. Neither is this surprising bearing in mind that Ranelid, as he himself emphasises, does not use a written down script in the role of entertainer. This naturally requires that the speaker has a memory bank that is quite comprehensive with ready-made formulas and expressions to lean on and make use of. This practice is, to a certain extent, in conflict with the originality requirement that is a fundamental prerequisite in the romantic and modernistic tradition that Ranelid, at least in the beginning of his writing career, had as his point of departure. At the same time these formulas and expressions are Ranelid's own expressions. They are not anyone else's words that he imitates or repeats. Ranelid of today finds support in Ranelid of yesterday.

Ranelid's appearances thus show all the typical signs of oral narration. As a performance artist without a script Ranelid can be compared with the rhapsodes who during the pre-classicistic era – before the art of writing – with the help of special *formulae* could recreate long stories off by heart. Traces of this can for example be found in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These works were probably written down on a particular occasion with a specific oral appearance in mind. Thus they display a number of characteristics – writes Walter J. Ong in his classical study *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* that are typical of speech in the early oral societies, in so-called "primary oral cultures" It is a matter of "heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetition and antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic or other and other formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings" (2002: 34). Such formulae are to be found on different levels. It can be anything from the use of standard words and expressions, such as, for example, Ranelid's continually appearing phrase "it's as simple and as great as that". To the reuse of entire episodes, such as when Ranelid in all of these ana-

lysed appearances tells the audience about the skull injury of his childhood and the subsequent tinnitus problems which he sees as a fundamental part of his artistry.

As an entertainer Ranelid works today in what has been called “the secondary spoken language culture”, in other words, in a written-language dominated society like our own, which is nonetheless experiencing a renaissance for the spoken word. This rebirth includes the use of new electronic and digital techniques: from the telephone and radio to the television and mp3-players. And naturally there is a great difference between our day’s spoken language culture and the conditions for words and communication, thought and knowledge that prevailed in primarily oral cultures. Secondary spoken language is “more deliberate and self-conscious” (Ong 2002: 133). Yet still, in Ranelid’s use of language as a performance artist, one can see traces of classical oral story-telling (Ong 2002: 32–76). This kind of speech is often bound to a specific situation; since concepts in oral cultures tend to be used in specific situations, close to the experiences of human life. Thus the situations that form the starting point of Ranelid’s ethical sermons are consistently concrete situations – often self-experienced.

Furthermore, Ranelid’s oral appearances are characterised by a wealth of words and a surplus of information – so-called redundancy. This is because one’s thinking cannot proceed as quickly in speech as in writing. By using different oral expressions for one and the same thought the speaker can carry on thinking without having to be quiet.

Moreover oral speech tends to be aimed at struggle. This is because in societies without a written language it was difficult to store knowledge and know-how. The only way of communicating it was to repeat it to each other, to speak to each other face to face. This could easily lead to strife and physical behaviour. We have already seen how Ranelid during his dinner performance verbally attacked Bush’s war on terrorism. In Ystad Swedish football player Fredrik Ljungberg and Simone de Beauvoir are among those who land up in the line of fire. Alongside struggle and confrontation in spoken language situations, one can also find examples of the opposite: empathy and participation. Just as Ranelid contrasts George W Bush with Desmond Tutu at his dinner party, in his sixth number in Ystad he contrasts Fredrik Ljungberg with Zlatan Ibrahimovic. And there is no doubt as to who is the “good guy” of the two. The empathy and admiration are both completely on Zlatan’s side. This is made clear in the quotation below both with the description of Zlatan’s artistry on the football field and with Zlatan himself being seen as connecting with Ranelid’s humanistic message:

Now Zlatan comes in here. Now he writes a Z with white chalk over Ystad’s and Malmö’s dark skies. Now white flakes from the chalk fall down and settle next to the black sheep. Now he does a roll & scissor. Now he does sixteen of them. Now he flies. Now he makes sure to keep the ball close to his feet. Now he stretches Sweden’s broadest grin between Smygehuk in the far south and Jukkasjärvi in the far north. Now he dribbles, now he jinks, now the back starts running in the wrong di-

rection. Now he's a sibling of Nacka, now he's a sibling of Romario, of Ronaldinho. Now he's a sibling of all the great players. Now he comes from the town of Rosengård. This is how one describes the world's longest and best and most beautiful class travel.

This part of the Ystad performance has a very special character. The son of Malmö and the former player in the town's best football club – Malmö FF – praises here another son of Malmö and MFF-player. The tone is humorous but still warm when he imitates Zlatan's special Malmö dialect – and comments: “Zlatan – he must always maximise” – about the luxuriously renovated house at the finest address in Malmö. Ranelid comments on Zlatan's broad smile – one of the Zlatan brand's most obvious “product attributes”. As time goes on Ranelid becomes more and more involved, the intensity is raised: the words clatter on. The accompaniment of the band gets the pulse rising even more. The repeated word “now” also contributes. During the number Ranelid moves smoothly around in the room as though to bring forward the image of a dribbling football player and thus illustrate the opening line: “Now Zlatan comes in here.” The audience, who is thrilled, gets a feeling of how Zlatan “flies” forwards over the green grass with the ball close next to his feet. Ranelid evokes a warm-hearted image of Zlatan with the big smile, the equilibristic technique on the field and the generous attitude to his old home-town. Some of this energy and empathy most likely stems from the fact that Ranelid himself has travelled on a similar class journey – from the working class quarters of the eastern parts of Malmö to the centre of the Swedish media scene – even if at a lower level as far as money is concerned.

The tendencies we have looked at in Ranelid's Ystad appearance – the use of formula-like repetitions, its constraints of the here and now, the wealth of vocabulary, the element of struggle but also the empathy and striving to accomplish a feeling of togetherness – are naturally also a part of the author's other appearances on stage.

At the end of the day the question remains: what was it that triggered the concentrated, almost sacred atmosphere during the appearance in Ystad – an atmosphere we could all feel and that was also lifted forward in the review done by the local newspaper? So far we have shown with different examples that this performance bears a stronger stamp of artistic staging – of being aestheticised – than both the others we have analysed. Yet it is nonetheless obvious that it is not enough to point to the degree of aestheticisation to explain the stronger experience. This aestheticisation collaborates namely with other pivotal aspects, and then, not least the religious element.

As Fischer-Lichte points out rituals often have a recurrent, trisected structure (2008: 175). In the first phase the participants leave their daily lives behind them. Translated to Ranelid's Ystad performance this implies that we and the other spectators took ourselves to the cinema theatre Scala at the end of the work day, where we seated ourselves in front of the stage. The second phase – the actual “transforming phase” – implies that the people who have been separated from

their daily contexts take part in a strong, “transforming” experience that ideally gives them a new identity. For example in initiation rites of manhood young men are exposed to diverse physical ordeals and hardships. By managing these they prove themselves worthy of being taken up into the circle of real men. This second phase thus takes place between two “thresholds”: the participant has taken the step over the threshold that separates daily life from the place of the actual ritual, which in turn is one threshold away from the daily life context that the participant of the ritual finally re-enters into. This step back into daily life is namely the third phase: the, by ritual transformed, participants re-enter into their original contexts, but now with another identity and status.

As mentioned previously: one should take care when drawing parallels between various types of rituals. When we say that we to a certain extent were “struck” by Ranelid’s Ystad performance, we perhaps do not mean that it was an experience that changed our lives and forever left us with a change of character once we crossed the “threshold” between the Scala and the reality of daily life – this however, does not mean that such an experience would be impossible. On the other hand we do mean that the performance/ritual in its “second phase” gave us strong, maybe even “revolutionising” experiences that had the effect of bowling us over as least as long as we found ourselves within the threshold. The transformation may be described as temporary rather than constant; the latter is the pronounced goal in more traditional rituals. The journey that is the actual performance – not the destination – seemed for us in Ystad to be the strong experience. But this can of course vary between individuals in the audience (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 199–200).

Fundamental for a “threshold experience” is such a feeling of community – with an audience that is spoken to and that participates in different ways – as we have pointed out during Ranelid’s various performance appearances. As Fischer-Lichte points out, such an artistic performance therefore implies a transgressing and crossing of different kinds of borders:

Among these supposedly natural borders are the borders between art and life, high culture and popular culture, and Western art and non-Western-art. [– – –] its aim is to transcend rigid oppositions and to convert them into dynamic gradations. The project of the aesthetics of the performative lies in collapsing binary oppositions and replacing the notion of “either/or” with one of “as well as”. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 203–204)

One obvious such opposition, which Ranelid negotiates during his Ystad appearance, is the one between ethics and aesthetics, between the right way of acting in life and art. Towards the end of the evening this becomes particularly clear. The band Tales have just performed Joni Mitchell’s well-known “Both Sides Now”, which has made a strong impression on the audience and results in the longest applause of the evening. The leader of the band happily hugs the other band members. The Ranelid number that follows after this evening’s aesthetical peak illustrates the striving to build bridges between aesthetics and ethics. Still moved

after “Both Sides Now” the individuals in the audience have their senses wide open for the “preacher” and ethicist Ranelid. This goes back to the feministic discussion or “provocation” in the novel *Kvinnan är första könet* (2003; “The Woman is the First Sex”). It concerns an existential view of woman – and not least an honouring of her as a mother: “There is nothing more beautiful on this Earth than a mother breastfeeding her child”. Thus, Ranelid says, a woman can never be the “second sex”, which is the title of Simone de Beauvoir’s classic from 1949. The provoker Ranelid, who is critical of de Beauvoir, is careful to express his dissociation in an original and aesthetically effective language. He criticises de Beauvoir for passivity in the face of the burning issues of the time and claims that she merely “sat amongst the upper class and hid her face in the wreaths of smoke from Jean-Paul Sartre”. In immediate connection to this he turns to a listener and reminds us of his inventiveness in language: “Where do I get it all from?” – The audience cheers. Ethical preaching and aesthetical ambition go hand in hand.

Ranelid’s attempts at, especially in the Ystad performance, in different ways transgressing the opposition between art and life, between global and local etc, can be seen from a wider perspective. To think about and understand the world in terms of such binary oppositions is an inheritance from the rational philosophy of Enlightenment of the 18th century. The Age of Enlightenment sought to “demystify” the world. By referring to the laws of nature and reason one wished to explain everything that had previously been seen as mystical, magical or difficult to comprehend. This was attained by dividing existence into oppositions: heaven against earth, soul against body and, towards the end of the 1700s, also art against life (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 206).

Therefore one could perhaps claim that this ambition to transgress borders becomes a way of “re-mystifying” the world. Today we also know – not least thanks to the natural sciences – that there are powers and aspects of the world that cannot be explained rationally with the help of enlightenment-inspired reason. “Today, chaos theory, or microbiology in particular, bring home the fact that the world is ‘enchanted’ and that it forever eludes the grasp of science and technology” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 206). The border-crossing and abolition of borders that is staged during a performance can therefore be experienced – if only temporarily – as the re-creation of the magical dimensions of existence. An audience that has left the chores of everyday life on the other side of the threshold can be receptive for such a performance, experience it as revitalising, as challenging and jolting (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 207). This was the case when Björn Ranelid and Tales stood on stage in Ystad’s renowned cinema theatre. Ethics and aesthetics are twined together. Music and song and speech are united. For a while the world seemed once more to be “enchanted” to the spectators of the performance.

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