ability to analyse, with ruthless relevance to the distant metropolitan scene, certain features of character and action we call universal. Crichton Smith's disturbing satires of closed minds and religious intolerance, Sorley Maclean's equally disturbing evocations of freedom and patterns of thought stemming from a Gaelic culture alien to most of his readers have the same effect. Scotland may be fragmented to the point where even the definition of "Scottish literature" can (and does) occupy hours of lecture and discussion time in the Universities. Perhaps this short exercise in looking through Northern eyes may suggest that fragmentation is not altogether an evil phenomenon, if by fragmentation we mean the existence of outposts, of cultural areas in which a vision may exist sufficiently strong to be used to turn inwards on Scotland and analyse it with new clarity.

Per Olof Sundman's Novel *Två Dagar, Två Nätter.*

Irene Scobbie

Per Olof Sundman was born in Vaxholm, near Stockholm, in 1922. His father died in 1924 and his mother then took him to live with his uncle, Olof Rosmark, at Åtvidaberg. Rosmark was very active within the Swedish Co-operative Movement, being connected with Konsum's school "Vår gård" and then going on to build up the Co-operative Movement's retail and distribution of cars and oil on a national scale. This entailed long car journeys into the vast, sparsely populated province of Norrland and Rosmark occasionally took the young Sundman with him. The landscape and the people fascinated Sundman and in the post-war years, when the time came for him to make decisions concerning his future and his career, he chose to move with his wife to north Jämtland where he ran Jormliens Fjällgård, a small guest-house in an isolated part of the country.

Sundman believed in the Co-operative Movement, but he could also see, specially in an isolated part of the country with a small population, how easy it is for over-zealous organisers to deprive the individual of the rights he ought to enjoy in a free

society.

He lived in the north of Sweden from 1949 until 1963 and during that time conscientiously played his part in running the community. As a local councillor, and perhaps most of all as Chairman of Nykterhetsnämnden (Committee for Abstinence) he learned at first hand how delicate the balance is when one wants to help improve the amenities in a community without invading the privacy of the individual. An official entrusted with authority must understand all the people involved in a situation before attempting any improvements, and yet understanding other people is an almost impossible task. In all Sundman's literary work one finds the equation the community versus the individual, with the added complication that one individual can never fully understand another individual.

The most significant remarks on Per Olof Sundman's literary aims and style have been made by Sundman himself. He writes, for example, in an article entitled "Den svåråtkomliga medmänniskan" (One's elusive fellowman) *Vinduet* 1964, of various experiences in his life and uses them to illustrate that one can never *know* someone else's character or circumstances. He tells us that when he was appointed Chairman of the Abstinence Committee one of his first cases concerned a man who was drunk at a dance, started a fight and then resisted arrest. "The view of the police was clear: he was an unpleasant argumentative chap in his cups, and needed a reminder of his mortality." Sundman had to interview the man, who admitted that he had drunk too much on this occasion but maintained that he rarely over-indulged. By chance Sundman later met his aunt who mentioned that the man's wife had once attempted suicide, that she wasn't sure why, but could guess. Sundman felt obliged to ask another relative. An uncle said that he knew nothing definite, but the man certainly drank more than he ought, not just outside but at home too. The man himself was irritated and denied all this. Sundman let the matter drop – how much did the relations *know* and how far could he accept their testimony?

An even more difficult case (and Sundman says here that

it led directly to his writing his first novel *Undersökningen* 1958), concerned a man who certainly did over-indulge, but since he was unmarried Sundman at first took the view that if he inconvenienced only himself then it was his business. But then Sundman was visited early one morning by a close relative of the man, and a different picture emerged – violent scenes at home, a perpetual feeling of uneasiness and insecurity, especially over holiday periods, when furniture would be smashed up. It was the constant anxiety that the man was causing his relatives that convinved Sundman that he ought to do something about the case. He tried to persuade the man to have voluntary treatment, but he refused. Then as Chairman of the Committee Sundman proposed that the man should be committed to an institution. He wasn't convinced that the man would be cured – perhaps even the reverse, for up to this point the man had at least maintained some kind of respectability in society, whereas now he would lose self-respect by being branded incapable. But he would receive medical treatment and it would relieve the pressure on his relations. When the proposal was put forward Sundman was disturbed to find complete unanimity among the committee members, even though the matter concerned the grave step of robbing the man of his freedom for at least three months.

What worries Sundman in cases like these is that no one can be sure of another man's actions, let alone the motives behind the actions. It is this that is brought out in his novel *Undersökningen.*

Writing about his technique Sundman writes (in BLM, 1963) "The basis of my technique is merely this: I let the narrative concern itself with the external course of events; I do not concern myself with psychological constructions of the inner course. I like to tell stories about people I have met, of events and episodes I have experienced. I always restrict myself to the behaviour and actions of these people – I see what they do, I hear what they say, I notice their facial expressions and the movements of their fingers, I can recount these things. Over and above that I know nothing – speculations about "inner action", emotions, will and causes must remain specula-

tions. I have found these "inner actions" to be quite unnecessary; they don't carry forward the narrative; they cannot, however beautifully formulated they may be, add one ounce to the weight of the story." (Sundman was very fond of a remark by Frans G. Bengtsson that psychological analysis of fictional characters was simply a case of the author extracting the sawdust stuffing that he had put there in the first place).

"From a purely technical point of view my method has almost always led to the narrative being associated with one character, whom I allow to give an account of the action to the reader. As the author, I stand to one side ostensibly. I try to restrict my narrator's account to what I imagine he would have described if he had been a living person, if my created reality had been *real* reality....I am perfectly well aware that he gives a picture of himself when he dwells on certain details and relations, and fails to observe or ignores other details.

I am extremely interested in the individual's relations to the people around him; his situation in a small group or a larger group; his situation as a member of society."

Sundman then goes on to mention *Undersökningen* and says his original intention had been to illustrate how impossible it is to know what lies beneath the surface of one's fellow men, and how vital it is to be aware of this limitation and to equip ourselves with tolerance, openmindedness and understanding.

Connected very much with this idea of understanding is the realisation that we all have our prejudices. Sundman himself wrote ("Att berätta" *Studiekontakt,* 1957): "As soon as you clothe your thoughts in words you have witnessed a very dubious metamorphosis; by the time we are talking about your listener's "understanding" of your words, then you aren't even a witness and you know nothing .... Man is not something static, he changes continually. Andersson standing beside Pettersson is one person; Andersson standing beside Lundström is quite a different person."

One of the characters in *Undersökningen* describes an event

he had witnessed when he was 15. Unable to sleep he had got up at 3 a.m. on a June morning and witnessed the woman opposite undress herself completely, throw open the window, yawn, stretch, put her arms above her head and push her thighs forward as though aware of her 15 year old witness. Suddenly she trembled, doubled up; the next time she came into his view she was kneeling by the bed with a full glass in her hand and her back arched. She threw the glass over her shoulder and it shattered and then she went to bed shortly afterwards. The man feared she had committed suicide. Years later he met her and heard that she had got home late from a dance that night; it was a lovely June night, she'd thrown open the windows and started to do physical exercises. She had used a glass but it "wasn't enough" and she had dropped it. We don't know *exactly* what she was doing with the glass, or for that matter why she should suddenly decide to perform physical exercises at 3 a.m. naked in front of an open window. In a sense, therefore, her explanation years later is no more conclusive than the man's version when he was 15. The point is that an action can have so many explanations that we can hardly gauge which one is "right".

It is these shifting points of view (or prejudices) which Sundman demonstrates with such virtuosity in his novels. *Expeditionen* (1962) is based in many respects on Stanley's account of his African expeditions, but Sundman realised when reading Stanley that there were many things and above all many people with whom he must have been very closely associated and yet never appear in the journals at all. Sundman therefore wrote *Expeditionen* in the form of journals kept by two very different members of the Expedition, a European, Laronne and a Parsee, Jaffar Topan. The European is loyal to Sir John, the leader of the expedition, but is increasingly aware of his shortcomings. Jaffar Topan in a gentler way can see how incapable the European mind is of appreciating the African life they have come to try and dominate.

Ingenjör Andrées luftfärd (1967) employs a similar device. On his ill-starred attempt to reach the North Pole by balloon in 1897 S.A. Andrée has two companions, Nils Strindberg and

Knut Fraenkel. In 1930 when their camp was discovered diaries by Andrée and Strindberg were found, but Fraenkel did not keep one. Sundman wrote his story in the form of a journal kept by Fraenkel whom he allows to be a pragmatic, down-to-earth man who had set out on the expedition with great admiration for Andrée's qualities of leadership. As the ordeal continued he became increasingly critical, and so we are given a new picture, in a sense a modern picture, of Andrée to supplement the view of him left by his reputation and by his journals.

The novel *Två dagar, två nätter* is not based on an actual event recorded in someone's journal, but even so Sundman gives us two views of the same incident, for the work started as a short story included in his first collection of short stories, *Jägarna* (1957) and was expended into a novel in 1965.

The story is simple: two men are trying to capture a youth who has shot three people dead, wounded another, and is now on the run in the desolate province of Norrland. One of the two men, Karl Olofsson, is a policeman; the other is the narrator. Karl Olofsson knows the terrain, has worked out which route the fugitive is likely to take; he and his companion move very quickly over the snow, skirt around the fugitive's route and take up a strategic position ahead of him and await his arrival.

When the young man appears Karl Olofsson fires a warning shot, the fugitive tries to escape and so Karl Olofsson wounds him superficially in the leg. All three spend the night in a hut, intending to return to base the next day. However, the young man says categorically that he isn't going. Karl Olofsson and his companion are physically tired, they are many miles from the nearest telephone and it is February when there are very few hours of daylight. They decide that they would probably be stranded in the snow when darkness fell if they had to struggle the whole time with their unwilling captive, so they take away his sleigh, skis, provisions etc., and leave him, intending to return in a day or so with reinforcements.

In both versions the climate and the terrain isolate the

three men, so that their actions and inter-actions are of prime importance.

In the short story we learn a little about the policeman. He says "We'll find him all right" on the way to the spot where they are to take up their position. When he catches sight of the youth coming, he says simply "It's him. We worked it out right". When he has wounded the boy "He's finished now. Now we've got him". They take their turn on guard and we are told that Karl Olofsson "dropped off to sleep the moment he laid his head on the pillow".

When the captive opens the door to go out Karl Olofsson jumps up immediately. When the lad says "I had to go outside" Karl Olofsson simply replies "We couldn't deny you that".

We learn much less about his companion, the narrator. Near the beginning of the story when they are in a farmer's cottage the radio isn't working and the narrator tells them pedantically about the effect the Northern Lights have on radio reception. At another point he asks Karl Olofsson what they will do when they capture the fugitive and the words used are " 'And after that,' I asked, since I lacked the cunning forester's wisdom." He also asks three times "Are you sure it's him" although by then it is highly unlikely that it could be anybody else.

He also mentions that he has trouble with insomnia. We also find that when it is his turn to watch their captive the youth gets up and ignores the narrator's repeated command to remain in the bunk and sit still. It also says "Without waiting for my permission he went right past me to the door". It is when Karl Olofsson orders the boy back to the bunk that he obeys.

In the novel the characters are filled in (but that is a relative term where Sundman's characterisation is concerned!). Perhaps they are under more stress too, since in this version Karl Olofsson and his companion have had a very late night before they ever set off and were feeling the effects of too little sleep from the outset.

There may even be friction between the two men from the start, since the "I" of this version (now named as Olle Stensson, a school teacher,) spent the evening and a good part of the night with the Olofssons and when Karl went to sleep in his chair Olle and Karl's wife started kissing each other.

There may be a sense of rivalry between the men, for as they set off on their ski trip Karl Olofsson leads the way, is the fitter of the two, and calls repeatedly over his shoulder to Olle "Are you tired?" without waiting for an answer. Olle tells us at least four times, using the same words each time, that Karl Olofsson skied with long, smooth strides and with the upper part of his body swaying rhythmically. Perhaps there is even a physical attraction between them. Olle Stensson helps Karl Olofsson out of his uniform tunic and gun harness at one point and remarks on his muscles. However, it is a strange kind of attraction in that case. When they are still excited at having caught their quarry and are outside getting in water they indulge in a certain amount of horseplay, which starts with Olle splashing ice cold water into Karl Olofsson's face and then having his own face rubbed in the snow. Commenting on the incident Olle writes "One could perhaps try to explain this sudden outburst of playfulness. I don't intend to try. It began with my throwing ice-cold water into his face. One could also explain why Karl Olofsson so often bursts out laughing or draws up the corners of his mouth in a broad grin. It was into that laughing and grinning face I threw the water ... It sounds profound. It was only a whim."

We are told by Olle that he and his wife are both teachers, but she does more qualified teaching with the highest forms while he does general subjects with the middle school. "One is placed on a higher salary scale than the other, but it is difficult to say which demands more work, more commitment." She is also "at least as tall as I." Perhaps Sundman is suggesting here a case of inferiority complex?

The very few pedantic remarks made by the narrator of the short story are increased considerably in the novel. Karl Olofsson tells a story about an eccentric Norwegian who came over the Swedish border occasionally, said he was Nicolas III

and asked for political asylum. Everybody, including his family, knew who he was, but he insisted he was a prince and Karl Olofsson humoured him, bowed when opening the door for him and escorted him home. Olle's reaction to the story is to inform Karl Olofsson that "there never was a Nicolas III ... The son of a tsar isn't called a prince, he is a tsarevitch."

When Karl Olofsson carries the wounded youth to the hut Olle likens him to St. Bartholomew carrying the child Jesus on his shoulder. He wonders if Karl Olofsson has ever been to Greece or Italy, for there one often sees pictures of St. Bartholomew in buses and taxis. (Karl Olofsson displays perhaps a dry sense of humour here, for he replies that he has never been to Southern Europe but only to Finland once and Norway three times and Norwegian buses are like Swedish ones – there are no pictures of saints and disciples, just signs saying "No smoking".)

Karl Olofsson emerges as the stronger and more balanced of the two. His grievance at the beginning of the story would seem to be a dislike of the Procurator Fiscal's habit of organising. The Fiscal comes from the south, is used to organised hunting with a large party and beaters, etc., while Karl Olofsson is a northerner. He says at least nine times in the same words "He always has to go in for this damned organising". That seems to be his only grouse. Otherwise he laughs a lot and grins frequently but is taciturn. He knows his territory very well; on more intellectual matters he is apparently uninterested. Olle produces gobbets of facts, a bit of culture here or there, but perhaps as a deliberate reaction Karl Olofsson seems neither to know nor care what he is talking about. To the schoolteacher's "A votre santé" and "Grüss Gott" and "Salut" he merely replies "Yes, well, skål, or whatever you're supposed to say."

When they capture the youth they become more clearly differentiated. The youth is tall and broad-shouldered, is given to violence if provoked and shows no inclination to co-operate. Karl Olofsson's method of speaking to him is calm and kept in a low key. "What about lying down on the bunk" "Does it

hurt?" etc. When the youth the next morning starts to eat again Karl Olofsson says "It's a good thing you're eating. Have another sandwich." Stensson's attitude is the opposite. He is sarcastic and provocative. When the boy refuses to ask questions Stensson says "Have you bloody-well decided to hold your tongue?" and then says to Karl Olofsson "It wouldn't be so difficult to get him to talk."

The boy's reaction to the different approaches is shown in his actions. It is when Olle is on guard that the boy gets up. When he goes outside Olle picked up a heavy poker and Karl Olofsson has to get up and come between them.

We learn that Olle Stensson had had difficulty with discipline the very first day he was in charge of a class which consisted of a group of 14-year olds. A boy had deliberately sat throwing pellets at him and was quietly insolent to him and Olle lacked the strength of character to deal with him.

When violence finally does break out it is described in detail, and again it seems to have been provoked by Olle Stensson. The youth has stated "I'm staying here" to which Olle replies "Like hell you are," and goes on "I went up to his bunk. He was chewing a cheese sandwich and looked at me with an expression which can be described as nonchalant and arrogant.

" 'Do you hear! Get dressed ... You can start with your shoes.' He got up, defiantly slowly, bent down and picked up his boots ... looking at me the whole time. Suddenly he dropped the boots – or rather he threw them on to the floor ....

" 'Put your boots on, do you hear!'

"I pushed him towards his shoes and his bunk.

" 'Don't touch me!'

"He jabbed violently with one hand. I swerved but his knuckles caught me low in the ribs. It was a violent blow ... The room went black, it hurt like hell, I couldn't breathe. I almost vomited ... The worst effects of his blow soon passed – two or three seconds perhaps. Then I sprang at him."

On that occasion Karl Olofsson grabs Olle Stensson and holds him back. The youth has got hold of the poker by that time, but Karl Olofsson makes no attempt to take it from him. Instead he gives him some water, at which point Olle Stensson says to Karl Olofsson "If I were a rich man I'd hire you as a valet and chauffeur."

Karl Olofsson has by now decided to leave their captive behind but to take his boots. Olle picks them up and says, " 'Will these be enough? .... I approached the youth's bunk as innocently as possible .... I made a swift lunge and pulled off one of his socks .... He gave me a vicious kick which caught me just under the windpipe ... The next moment he was on the floor and he struck out with the poker." Karl Olofsson at that point throws himself at the lad. "The youth wriggled and kicked like a madman, but couldn't free himself. He had taken a horrible hold of Karl Olofsson's head ... His nails bored into the hollows behind Karl Olofsson's ears and into the soft flesh of his cheeks ... One thumb lay inside the corner of his mouth. The nails of the other hand had got hold of his lower eye lid ... His hold on Karl Olofsson's head was disgusting and repulsive." Karl Olofsson is the stronger of the two and holds him and meanwhile Olle slaps him ineffectually on the face, and then kicks him in the chest. "My action may be considered brutal, but it was necessary and effective..... I had consciously acted provocatively, but was surprised nevertheless at Karl Olofsson's reaction ...'Was that necessary?' he asked me. 'Presumably,' I answered. 'Go to hell,' he said."

They leave with the youth's boots and top clothing, leaving him food, firewood, matches, blankets – and there the story ends, but of course the reader doesn't stop there. The questions go on. What was the relationship between Karl Olofsson and Olle Stensson? Between Olle Stensson and Karl Olofsson's wife? Between Karl Olofsson and the Procurator Fiscal? Between Stensson and the community in which he lived? Was the captive a psychopath? Would he have gone quietly if Karl Olofsson had taken some one else with him? etc. These are my questions, of course, and that is part of Sundman's method. The events are described without analysis; every reader will have his own interpretation. And even that isn't all.

Sundman wrote in an article in 1970 ("Om att övertolka" *B.L.M.*) that Olle Stensson, the "I" of *Två dagar, två nätter,* is not a wholly reliable narrator. He gives obviously wrong information time and again. So even if we read the text very closely we still have this extra factor to contend with.

But this is the strength of Sundman's writing. We are given exact descriptions of physical events, but there are almost no metaphors and no vague formulations about moral or aesthetic values. We aren't even sure when an action begins and ends. We don't know what is of particular significance. The result is that we read everything carefully, not wanting to miss any clues.

We also come to realise that our interpretations will differ from those of other readers; that because of what we are we'll notice or respond to some details and not others. In the end this leads at best to a realisation of the fact that no event is an open and shut case, which must surely be a healthy sign in a community which values human rights.

The following English translations of Sundman's novels have appeared:

The Expedition (Expeditionen) 1967, Secker and Warburg.
Two Days, Two Nights (Två dagar, två nätter) 1969 Panthean books.
The Flight of the Eagle (Ingenjör Andrées luftfärd) 1970 Secker and Warburg.

Some Contemporary Swedish and Danish Literature in the National Library of Scotland

Stephen Holland

Traditionally the purchasing policy of the National Library has treated emerging authors with caution. We have not been in a position to buy the works of writers who fade away after five or six years of critical acclaim, but have preferred to concentrate our resources on authors of proven worth. Consequently our task in choosing contemporary literature is not an