

If my theory about the 'sheila-na-gigs' is accepted, then it follows that there must have been a stone building at Rodel from the 9th or 12th centuries to contain these figures, so that they could survive at Rodel intact and *in situ* until the early 16th century, when there is historical proof that there was a stone building at Rodel.

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#### Some Trends in the Contemporary Swedish Novel

Anders Tyrberg

One of the most striking things about the critical discussion on the modern novel, in Britain and elsewhere, has been the

notion that 'The Novel is Dead'. Others have been more reluctant to issue the death certificate but have nevertheless sensed that the novel as a literary genre has undergone a radical change during the last ten or fifteen years. A certain unease is implied in the titles of some recent books on fiction: Alan Friedman's *The Turn of the Novel*, David Lodge's *The Novelist at the Crossroads* and Malcolm Bradbury's *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel*. These three titles would have suited a discussion on the contemporary Swedish novel as well: Just as in the English-speaking world, critics in Sweden have talked about a crisis with regard to pure fiction. In terms of mere production the novel seems to be quite healthy though: A great number of novels are published every year, most of them bad, some readable and a few quite good. Here I can't deal with all these novels, not even with the good ones. Instead I will limit this short survey to a few trends in the Swedish novel in the 60's and early 70's and focus on how a handful of prose writers have reacted in the crisis-like situation of fiction-writing during the last decade.

If one were asked to draw a background to what has happened to the Swedish novel in the 60's one should really begin with Aristotle, I suppose. Another very reasonable starting point would be the scientific ambitions of the French naturalistic novel. A third possibility would be Strindberg's political writing and from there on a line to the working-class writing in the 1910's and 30's. For practical reasons I'll choose a much more narrow approach and start with the late 50's.

If one picks one year, 1957, one can see that at that time a whole series of events started, events and changes that are still going on. That year Ghana gained independence, the first of the colonies in black Africa to do so. That year, through a revolution, Cuba became the first state in Middle and South America to attain economical independence from the USA. That year the first satellite was also sent up in an orbit around the earth.

In literature 1957 was a turning-point. Prose took over from poetry and became the leading medium even in literary circles. *Le nouveau roman* appeared in France and the first

part of Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* was published in Britain that year. In Sweden Sven Fagerberg, Per Olof Sundman and Lars Gustafsson published their first novels. The most important event that year, as far as cultural life in Sweden is concerned, was probably the opening of a regular TV channel.

During this period, 1957-74, the publication of paperbacks of a factual or polemical nature increased whereas the novel's share of the market decreased. The concept of culture was widened. In the literary pages of the newspapers the focus shifted from the aesthetic qualities of literature towards the needs of the consumers, the readers, and at the same time a great number of authors and critics began to regard literature as an instrument of political change. The discussion on literature was integrated into the general public dialogue. The key word was *communication*. The ideas of Raymond Williams's book *The Long Revolution* (1961) were quoted in discussions and articles which demanded that all people should have equal rights and opportunities in cultural and aesthetic communication. Cultural sociologists provided the discussion with concrete figures and one talked and wrote about the political and social obstacles to cultural equality. As a result of this debate, demands were made that the authors should commit themselves to the overcoming of these obstacles.

The few facts I have mentioned here were all of great importance for the Swedish novel. The intensified discussion on society in general provided the writers with new subjects. From having been concerned with the provincial areas of Sweden in the 50's, the novel moved out in the 60's and chose settings from different parts of the world. The war in Vietnam became very important for producing an upsurge of political interest within Swedish literature; neo-colonialism, overpopulation and starvation contributed to the fact that the class struggle was treated from a global rather than a national point of view and Africa, Vietnam, China, India and South America became more often than before the settings in the new literature. Sara Lidman, who in the 50's wrote highly praised novels about a small community in Norrland, chose Africa and later on Vietnam as settings for her books. Per Wästberg, a Stockholm writer, became our foremost introducer of African literature

and so on. Through the TV medium we got news and documentary programmes from all over the world right into our living rooms. The new medium was certainly important for the choice of subject matter, but probably influenced the development towards a more documentary form as well.

The demands upon the writers to commit themselves to cultural democracy led to a discussion on value criteria. The experiences of the reader were, by some critics, regarded as more relevant than supposed good or bad aesthetic qualities of the book itself. Genres that had been despised earlier, like science fiction or detective stories, were worked into new experiments — comics and material from the mass media as well.

The tradition of 19th century realism depended on a degree of relative stability as far as the concept of reality was concerned, and there was a general consensus about moral values. At the same time there was an uncertainty about the nature of the form of the novel. We all know how many of the early novels keep very close to more familiar ways of establishing verisimilitude: they pretend to be travel-books, accurate transcripts of ancient manuscripts, collections of letters or faithful autobiographies. In the 1960's such consensus about moral values didn't exist any longer of course, but one can still detect an uncertainty about the nature of the form of the novel. After about 50 years, during which the authorial voice was practically banished and the novel purported to be a self-contained work of art, we again got essayistic novels and novels of a type that could be called non-fiction novels. And this is probably the most striking change that can be noticed in the novel genre in the 60's. The documentary became the dominating genre and was considered a more direct and effective weapon in the political struggle than pure fiction. In order to give you a general idea of what has happened to the novel in the 60's I will therefore disregard the more conventional types of books that were published during this decade and limit myself to a few types of documentarism and finally try to give an indication of what might be expected in the 70's.

One of the most marked features of Swedish literature in the 60's was the publication of a great number of *report books*.

The first to appear was Jan Myrdal's *Rapport från en kinesisk by*, (*Report from a Chinese Village*) in 1963. Myrdal's book came out in English at the same time and apparently became the signal for many books of the same kind all over the world. I'll just mention three:

Studs Terkel's *Division Street, America*

José Yglesia's *In the Fist of Revolution: Life in a Cuban Country Town*

Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village*

In Sweden several appeared, for instance Sture Kallberg's *Rapport från medelsvensk stad; Västerås*, inaccurately translated as *Portrait of a Swedish Village* in the Penguin series.

Many writers like Sara Lidman, who wrote provincial novels in the 50's, changed their views about the purpose of writing literature: the aim was no longer to create art but to inform and influence politically. She went to North Vietnam which resulted in the report book *Samtal i Hanoi*, (*Conversations in Hanoi*). She also published a number of interviews with the LKAB mine-workers in Kiruna in Norrland.

The report book represents a new genre to be distinguished from other types of documentarism. A report consists of personal and authentic eye-witness accounts, often with a certain political bias. There is no interference by the author, and in a narrow sense the genre can be defined by its use of the tape recorder. One reason for this particular type of book could be that certain themes are too serious for the author to take over the material himself and offer his own interpretation. There have been attempts to describe this type of literature as a reaction against the long individualistic tradition, as an alternative for the egocentric literature in the Western hemisphere. The author has taken a stand for a group or a social class or a people. I said that as far as narrative technique is concerned there is no interference by the author. This is, of course, not altogether true: one mustn't forget the highly subjective element in these books. Sara Lidman's book about the mine-workers has the unmistakable Sara Lidman stamp. She selects and manipulates her interview material according to her own political and aesthetic attitude.

Documentarism in literature is, of course, nothing new. You need only think of a few writers from different periods and countries like Daniel Defoe in Britain or Zola in France or John Dos Passos in the USA to realize that. But the documentarism of the 60's is often rather more ambitious than the examples mentioned here. The aims of the author often go beyond verisimilitude and there are claims for verifiability — at least in details. One should bear in mind, though, that documentarism isn't necessarily more true than ordinary fiction. Nor necessarily more objective. There is always a selective and manipulating author behind the book.

One documentary novel which has attracted a great deal of attention, even abroad, is Per Olof Sundman's *Ingenjör Andréés luftfärd* (1967), translated into English as *The Flight of the Eagle*, a documentary novel (1970). Even when Sundman published his first collection of short stories *Jägarna*, (The Hunters), as early as in 1957, he used a kind of documentary realism. Everything was centred around pure observations, conclusions and evaluations were avoided. Sundman tries to maintain neutrality as an artistic principle, but through his neutrality and through his narrative technique he communicates a certain attitude towards people and the world around him. By means of exact description of minutiae he emphasizes, at the same time, the limits of human knowledge. There is — though one hesitates to use the word in connection with Sundman — a metaphysical respect for the unknown in his books. Almost all his books deal with that which is unknown, with searching for people who have disappeared, with expeditions into unknown parts of the world. The great number of unsolved problems, and what is, in fact, unknowable, act as a general characteristic of the world in his novels. In his description of Andréé's gigantic balloon expedition in 1897 in *The Flight of the Eagle* Sundman has used a considerable amount of documentary material, newspaper articles and above all the remarkable diaries which were found after the balloon had stranded on New Iceland in October 1897. The expedition consisted of three members: Andréé, Strindberg and Fraenkel. The authentic diaries were written by Andréé and Strindberg but Sundman has chosen Fraenkel as the narrator of his story. This is a remarkable choice since there are no authentic documents left

by Fraenkel. The novel deals in minute detail with the preparations before the balloon took off, with the short unsuccessful flight after which the balloon stranded, and with the hopeless walk on the iceflows which, because of the wind, often floated in the opposite direction to that which the men walked. The book ends with the death of all three of them. Even the narrator Fraenkel dies at the end of the book, which from the point of view of narrative technique might seem a bit unusual. What is particularly interesting — and it is probably here the novel differs most from the authentic documents — is the psychological interplay between the three men. Andrée's aristocratic pride, Fraenkel's and Strindberg's growing irritation, the gradual insight that Andrée had realized even from the beginning that the expedition was doomed to end in a catastrophe, but that he for prestigious and patriotic reasons felt forced to continue. It is implied in the novel but much more clearly stated in the purely documentary book compiled by Sundman the following year (1968) *Ingen fruktan, intet hopp*, (No fear, no hope), that the whole expedition was a nationalistic enterprise, a manifestation of a nationalistic wave that swept over Sweden in the 1890's. Even though *Ingen fruktan, intet hopp* is a collage of authentic documents it is not more objective than the novel *The Flight of the Eagle*. Interspersed between the authentic texts are commentaries and interpretations written by Sundman himself and through these commentaries Sundman has been able to aim a more direct blow at the chauvinism that led to the expedition. Even though *Ingen fruktan, intet hopp* is certainly more documentary than the novel, it has no doubt a sharper political bite than the novel.

*The Flight of the Eagle* is built on documentary material but at the same time it has the form of a fictitious diary, and the documents and the events are interpreted from the point of view of one single person. Because of this it is doubtful how this novel should be distinguished from historical novels by, for example, Eyvind Johnsson, the Nobel Prize winner this year.

A different technique, more similar to that of Alexander Kluge's famous documentary novel *Slachtbeschreibung* (1964), is used by P-O Enquist in his *Legionärerna* (1968), translated

recently into English as *The Legionaries*. Instead of using only one point of view as Sundman does, Enquist tells his story from the point of view of a large number of disparate individuals. The difference in technique could, of course, be explained by the fact that the Andrée expedition is rather clear and simple compared to the complicated political events in connection with the extradition of the Baltic refugees in 1964. This problem was very difficult to solve as many people feared that the Russians would regard the Baltic refugees as traitors. Formally they had been Russian citizens since 1940 and since they had served in the German army they had in fact been fighting against their own compatriots. The Foreign Minister, Östen Undén, maintained the view that the Russians would show a sense of justice and Enquist proves in his book that Undén was right: The Russians were quite moderate and only a few of the Balts were punished and they had evidently committed some crimes of war as members of German police units. The book deals with the situation of the Balts in Sweden, the political discussion before the extradition and the epilogue, that is, what actually happened to the refugees when they were returned to the Baltic countries.

*The Legionaries* has been called a documentary novel but has also been read as a thesis in modern history. The author himself says in a foreword that if the label *novel* seems offensive to the reader he could just as well call it *a report* or *a book*. It is based on parliamentary reports and minutes, newspaper articles, and interviews with politicians and refugees made by the author himself. He even went to Latvia and interviewed the Balts 20 years after the incident. The documentary technique lies in the precise and verifiable statements of facts and details. Fragmentary portraits contribute to the credibility of others that are more complete, even though the author admits that there are a few characters in the book made up from two or three different authentic persons. It seems to be a very honest book, one believes in the authenticity of the story. But the documentary technique raises questions as to what distinguishes a novel from an ordinary report or thesis: Which is more truthful, a fictitious synthesis depicting something that is representative and typical or a mere copy of what is transient



or accidental? As one can see, this is the old argument about the concept of realism.

But what distinguishes this book from an ordinary academic thesis is the role that the investigator himself plays in the book: It is not mainly as a critic of sources but as a moral judge that he tells the story of the Balts. He asks himself whether he should form an opinion of the extradition of the Balts from a left wing point of view or from that of the right. How should the actions of the government be judged? Should they have trusted the Soviet authorities? He tries to avoid oversimplified evaluations and ideological pitfalls, and throughout the book he is utterly conscious of his own observations and reactions. The constant self-analysis makes in fact the author the main character, the protagonist of the novel, and through the great number of facts and authentic documents there is a line of subjectivity which structurally keeps the novel together.

It has been said that documentarism often reflects an ideological and political commitment to the working classes. Such a statement would certainly be true as far as the report books are concerned. But at the end of the 60's there were interesting signs in Swedish literature that the demands for commitment created problems for some of the authors. At this time a new genre appeared, a kind of confessional novel which could be seen as the opposite of a documentary but which really has its starting point in documentarism and political commitment. In the documentary novel reality is supposed to speak for itself: in the confessional novel the individual takes up a defensive position against all these demands for commitment. Compared with the traditional bourgeois autobiographies one won't find any tendency to look back upon a rewarding life in the service of the country in this new type of confessional novel. Nor does it deal with the social liberation from the working class conditions towards intellectual establishment which one finds in the autobiographies of the 30's. Rather the opposite: The position of the author in society was felt as problematic and had to be re-evaluated in the current political situation.

I think it is fair to say that something happened to the

relationship between the established writer and the reading public when modernistic techniques, both in poetry and prose, took over from more traditional ones in the 40's, though I have no statistical material to back up that argument with. The gap between the so-called good and free literature on the one hand, and the mass-produced and by commercial interests manipulated sub-literature on the other was widened.

The problem for the author was to find his reading public again and to decide what forms would best serve his political and social aims. But it proved to be difficult to change the reading pattern of the public. A different form didn't seem to matter much, so many authors chose to leave literature altogether and spend their time on more direct political work instead. Others chose to ignore the problem, either in a defiant belief in the author's role as a supreme creator or a sort of resigned escapism. Quite often, though, they found it necessary to discuss the function of literature and to analyse their own position as writers. Why were they writing and for whom?

One interesting example of this kind of confessional novel is Sven Lindquist's *Myten om Wu Tao-tzu* (The Myth of Wu Tao-tzu). Wu Tao-tzu is an artist who takes his art so seriously that he literally walks into his painting. The same motif occurs in a book by Hermann Hesse: A prisoner is sitting in his prison cell painting a landscape. In the middle of the picture there is a train on its way into a tunnel. When the picture is finished the prisoner gets into the little train and disappears.

Sven Lindquist has been interested in this myth and he says that he has made the same mistake himself several times, to use art as a form of escapism. His book deals with the old theme of art versus life or life versus art. As a sort of framework he uses Hermann Hesse's novel *Das Glasperlenspiel*. But most of it is taken up by an account of the miserable state of the world, by essays on the relationship between life and art and by a fragmentary autobiography. He gives details from his very ordinary, middle-class background and from his post-graduate studies on one of the most aristocratic and antisocial writers you are likely to find in Swedish literature, the poet Vilhelm Ekelund. From this individualistic and typically European

starting point he is confronted with the masses in China and the absolutely devastating misery in India. Is economic and political liberation possible *without* violence, he asks. The answer is no. Is it possible *with* violence? The answer is again no. And Lindquist finishes his deeply pessimistic confessional book by renouncing the value of his artistic work as well.

You could read Sven Delblanc's confessional novel *Åsnebrygga* (Ass-bridge, or A Bridge for Asses) as a reply to Lindquist's book. In a way it is rather similar to *Myten om Wu Tao-tzu*. While Lindquist is studying the social inequality in India, Delblanc witnesses police brutality and oppression in USA. But their conclusions are different. With direct address to Lindquist Delblanc gives his creed: "Is social and economic liberation possible? *Your* answer is no. But by even putting the question you have given a positive answer. Knowledge is freedom. Once you have seen your prison warder's face and called him by name, you are on your way out of prison. Is liberation possible? *My* answer is yes." Well, creeds are seldom very interesting and I don't think this one is an exception to the rule. I think it is more interesting to ask why he has written this book. The title *Åsnebrygga* means a short cut. The word is not very common in Swedish but has been used in connection with annotated editions of classics intended for not particularly bright students. Delblanc wrote this book as a pretext for another book, a real, socialist novel which he wanted to write but somehow wasn't able to. By writing this confessional he wanted to find a short-cut and build a bridge back to the novel. But he is in the same dilemma as so many other writers. He sympathizes with the socialist cause, but for an established intellectual and university teacher there is a long way to travel before you are really identifying with the struggling classes and groups. The bridge he tries to build is the one that goes from the individualistic *I* to the collective *We*. The setting of the book is in Berkeley, California where Delblanc was a visiting professor in Scandinavian Literature in 1968-69. This was a year of rather violent student demonstrations and plenty of police brutality and reactionary attitudes. Delblanc tells himself he is just a foreigner, a passive observer, but at the same time he feels that he should participate and act. Evidently *Åsnebrygga* helped Delblanc to find his way

back to the novel.

After Lindquist's and Delblanc's books several other confessional novels have reached the market. For example Mauritz Edström's *Medan världen dör* (While the World is dying), and Lars Gustafsson's *Herr Gustafsson själv*, (Mr Gustafsson himself). But one has a feeling that the serious discussion on art and society that you'll find in Delblanc's and Lindquist's books has now been standardized and become a new genre. The reaction against fiction has become a new sort of fiction itself.

The documentary and the confessional novel are two rather common ways of dealing with what I've here called the crisis of the novel. But the uncertainty about the fictional form has been expressed in other ways as well. One possibility, by no means a new one, is to build the hesitation into the novel itself; the frame is getting into the picture as it were, and the author's act of writing is included in the field of the novel. This kind of *problematic* novel, as it has been called here in Britain, makes the difficulty of writing a novel the subject of the novel itself.

Per Gunnar Evander has written several novels of a semi-documentary kind, in which he very often uses a sort of neutralized bureaucratic language. In *Berättelsen om Josef* (The story of Joseph), (1972) Per Gunnar Evander himself appears as an investigator of an old murder story intended to be used in a TV programme. At the same time, and we are still inside the book covers, he, Per Gunnar Evander, is working with a documentary novel about the industrial shift worker Joseph Blomberg, a man who is a victim of the social system as well as of his own conscience. The third track in *Berättelsen om Josef* is Per Gunnar Evander's own efforts to tell the two stories. This third track involves guilt since the author's own story is woven into the two others. While the murderer solves his problem by resorting to religion and Joseph his by suicide the author tries to solve his by artistic methods, by investigating the events, by putting it down in words as clearly as possible and by creating coherence in what seems to be incoherent.

It appears from many statements made during these years

that fiction writing no longer has indisputable value. It has to be defended and justified. But in the 70's there are signs that instead of sacrificing all fiction on the altar of commitment it could be used. Sven Delblanc once said in an interview: "I want to influence the public dialogue through the characters in my novels. These characters must be representative and stand for something that is essential and important in society. Direct criticism and discussions are given more efficiently in newspaper articles. Social criticism is just one of the many possible functions the novel could have."

And one of the most promising signs for the novel during the 70's is Delblanc's own series of novels about Axel Weber from the village of Hedeby in the province of Sörmland. We are back again to the provincial novel of the 50's, it would seem, but that is only partly true. Hedeby in the 30's is certainly described with all the details necessary for the reader to believe in its authenticity but at the same time it represents the whole of Sweden on a reduced scale. He is dealing with a transitional period before the second world war, during which class divisions were still very strong but at the same time on the wane. Hedeby in 1937 is Sweden in 1937, but is of course also meant to be Sweden in the 70's. These books, three of them have come out now, are too complicated to analyze here. I just want to recommend them to you. I think they are irresistible: burlesque and serious, pathetic and learned, delicate and full of smells from sweat and excrement at the same time. Delblanc is fantastic at balancing between different emotional and stylistic levels and he is probably the one who masters the Swedish language best of all writers since Strindberg. At the same time he is using an ingenious narrative technique which gives distance to the memories from his childhood in the 30's. The author's role is one of the themes and it is woven into the equality theme of the novels. Just like another Swedish novelist, Lars Ahlin, Delblanc wants to create a communicative atmosphere, a kind of solidarity, between author and reader, and it is exactly this question of solidarity that is the motive force in his story about the class-divided village of Sörmland.

Delblanc is the last name I'll mention here, partly because

I like his books so much, partly because I think he will show the way to the epic novel again in Sweden. After a rather austere decade, during which fiction had a hard time, I think we are finally back to the novel.

## Modern Scottish Writers

### Ian Campbell

To look at Scottish literature as an isolated phenomenon is not easy: questions arise at once, questions of language and place. Do we mean literature in Lallans (the writer's own, or created as "synthetic" Scots), in English (the language of many Scots, and other writers living in Scotland) or Gaelic? Do we mean the literature of the Lowlands, where the majority of the people of Scotland live, or do we mean the literature produced in the more remote parts of the country where productive and challenging writers of this century have often lived? Do we mean all of these?

A survey of recent Scottish writing by authors of merit does suggest that the writing of merit is done outside the centres of major population. This is not to deny the success of urban novelists such as Moira Burgess, George Friel, Clifford Hanley, Archie Hind, Robin Jenkins, William McIlvanney or Alan Sharp. A random selection, in carefully-chosen alphabetical order to avoid premature judgement by listing, indicates that Glasgow has much to offer today, and to this list could be added figures writing in other media, Stewart Conn, Stephen Mulrine, Edwin Morgan. There are powerful minds at work outside Scotland itself, Duncan Glen supporting the Akros Press in Preston and David Black writing in London.

Yet the attraction of the periphery seems strong. Stevenson wrote from Vailima of a Scotland intensely remembered, nostalgically recreated yet never engaged in the sense that he could enter fully into its life. George Douglas-Brown grew up intensely experiencing what he could of life in Ochiltree, Ayr and Glasgow yet found it necessary to escape to an artistic base in Oxford and London to give his vision shape in *The House*