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Carl Linnæus:

The Lapland Journey.

Edited and translated by
Peter Graves.

Lockharton Press,
Edinburgh, 1995, 207pp.,
£10, ISBN 1 874665 01 X.

Linnaeus set out on his Lapland journey on 12th May, 1732, "which was a Friday, at 11 o'clock a.m., when I was 25 years old all but half a day." His clothes, continues this high priest of precision, were "a small coat of linsey-woolsey cloth, unhemmed, with small cuffs and a collar of woollen plush. Neat trousers of leather, a wig with a pigtail. A green fustian cap with ear-flaps. Short boots on my feet." And so on, and so on.

Peter Graves's new translation of Linnaeus's *Iter Lapponicum*, or *Lappländska resa* (The

Lapland Journey), captures the very essence of the great list-maker, and achieves the difficult objective of rendering eighteenth-century Swedish into readable modern English. Graves copes admirably with that bugbear of translators from the Swedish – the distressing tendency of Swedish writers to pile up principal and subordinate clauses in monotonous profusion, scatter a few commas around, and call the result a sentence. Here, for example, is the sixth paragraph of the first chapter in the original Swedish:

"Jag reste allena från Uppsala, den gamla residensstaden, vilken äger ett slott, som 1702 blev ruinerat av brand, efter vars make till att äga prospekt man får leta. Runt omkring ligger slätten, till en fjärdingsväg ungefär, grön av Ceres, däromkring går berg och äntligen skog."

The clumsiness of the Swedish is transmuted by Graves into:

"I travelled alone from Uppsala, that old provincial seat with its

castle, destroyed by fire in 1702, from which the view is such that you will seek far to find its equal. The plain lies all around for about a mile and a half, green with Ceres, and beyond that there are hills and finally forests."

This is user-friendly modern English which at the same time preserves a tinge of eighteenth-century gravity ("[...] you will seek far to find its equal") – a difficult feat to bring off.

In his native country Linnaeus has often been regarded as a rhapsodic nature poet, a *blomsterkonung* (king of the flowers), whose literary style was the product of high art; but as Graves points out in his interesting and useful 19-page introduction, this misrepresents both the author's actual prose style and his stated intention as a writer ("A simple style, short words with a clear meaning and the avoidance of tautology, is what makes one's writings easily understood. [...] My primary intention, therefore, has been to write scientifically and with a

clear method.")

The clarity of Linnaeus's text is not helped by the liberal use of Latin phrases, which readers of earlier editions and translations have been forced to look up in a scholarly apparatus of end-notes. Graves sensibly translates the Latin, but italicises it to remind the reader of its origins. The plethora of scientific names is treated in one of two ways: where the Swedish plant has a recognised English name (e.g. Mouse-ear Hawkweed) this is printed inside square brackets after Linnaeus's Latin name, and capitalised. Where no such English name exists, a general name (e.g. catchfly) is given, uncapitalised, and further information is relegated to a note. (The 11 pages of notes and bibliography, incidentally, are a model of informative conciseness.)

Unhampered by a text which resembles an obstacle-course, the reader can happily follow our intrepid taxonomist up the Swedish side of the Baltic, down the Finnish side (where the natives had the

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temerity to speak only Finnish), and back by sea from Åbo (Finn. Turku) via the Åland Islands to Roslagen.

Linnaeus's trip was sponsored by *Kungliga Vetenskapssocieteten* (The Royal Society of Science) in the best Enlightenment tradition of scientific-cum-commercial enquiry, and if he exaggerated the perils somewhat in order to impress his backers, it must nonetheless have been a daunting task for a 25-year-old man to contemplate a 3,500 mile journey in five months "into relatively unknown country on a shoestring budget."

This reader is reminded of near-contemporary accounts from travellers in the unchancy wilds of the Scottish Highlands, and indeed there is something of Linnaeus's open-mindedness in the 1754 *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland* by Captain Edward Burt, who, according to Christopher Smout, "wrote at first mainly to amuse his London friend with accounts of the primitive life and wild customs of the

natives, later with increasing seriousness and affection for the land he was describing" (*A History of the Scottish People 1560-1830*, Ch. XIV).

Contents apart, this new edition of *The Lapland Journey* is an attractive artifact in its own right, with its turquoise, grey and white laminated cover and its eminently legible typeface. Congratulations are due to Lockharton Press, whose address – I note – coincides with that of the translator. There is a lesson here for those of us who are always griping about the reluctance of British publishers to bring out our favourite Scandinavian writers in translation. With this, his latest translation from the Swedish, Peter Graves has elegantly demonstrated just what can be achieved with a bit of gumption and know-how.

Harry D. Watson