

## Selma Lagerlöf's Transnational Terrains

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In 2014, a scholarly volume in the English language presenting the Swedish world literature author Selma Lagerlöf appeared. *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf. Performance, Intermediality, and European Transmissions* focused on new interdisciplinary research in three areas: Lagerlöf as a celebrity; films inspired by her texts; and her texts in relation to other cultures. Many of the chapters in the anthology were developed from papers given at the international Lagerlöf conference held in 2011 at University College London. On that occasion, the three first volumes of 'Lagerlöf in English', a series of new English translations, were launched by Norvik Press.

Both the conference and the book were initiatives of UCL's Professor Helena Forsås-Scott, who was also responsible for the Norvik Press 'Lagerlöf in English' series. She involved Bjarne Thorup Thomsen and this author in the organising of the conference and the editing of *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf*. In these projects, Bjarne was always on hand, doing his part without much ado. He was a perfect, reliable team player.

The release of the book took place in the celebration hall at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm on 17 May 2014. It was arranged thus in memory of the two first women to take chairs in the Academy: Selma Lagerlöf in 1914, and Elin Wägner

in 1944. At the release, we editors were there lending a hand. Gunilla Blom Thomsen also made a considerable contribution, and getting to know her made me see that she was as dedicated as her husband in her efforts to promote Selma Lagerlöf's authorship.

The conference and the English-language presentation of current research was of vital importance for the Swedish Lagerlöf scholars who participated. Helena Forsås-Scott and Bjarne Thorup Thomsen, both working in British institutions, were at the centre of the international scene and had key contacts around the world. By creating spaces where we could meet both in person and in texts, they initiated further international contacts. In the years to follow, symposiums were held in Tokyo, Moscow, and Berlin to try to build networks in countries where Lagerlöf had been highly recognised in her time but from which no one had participated in the 2011 conference.

While Bjarne Thorup Thomsen opened up Lagerlöf research internationally, in his own research on Lagerlöf he brought attention to the way she used marginal places and positions. She sought – in his term – ‘peripherality’ when depicting the nation, and in this way she uncovered transnational terrains. In his chapter in *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf*, Bjarne illustrated these transnational terrains with great elegance by beginning with a little known utopian text from 1888 written at Landskrona – on the border with Denmark. By focusing on two central texts, *Nils Holgersson* and *The Outcast*, he deepened his analysis and showed Lagerlöf's efforts to avoid limitations and exclusions in creating a national identity. He finally presented a totally unknown text, ‘Lapland–Schonen’ from 1918. Lagerlöf was commissioned to write it as a piece to be read by German war prisoners being transported by train from Russia through Sweden, from Lapland in the north to Schonen in the south.

The readers are invited to remember their own local homeland ('*hembygd*') and compare it to parts of Sweden. The feeling for a landscape, the '*hembygd*', is a common experience. Bjarne understands 'Lapland–Schonen' as 'an important internationalisation of the idea of the wonderful journey'.

That Lagerlöf's authorship won international acclaim during her lifetime is well known: she was then translated into around forty languages. She was to a large extent promoted by the international women's movement, an important context and precondition for her authorship. Today, the publication of new translations makes it possible for readers across the globe to access her works. The values imbedded in Lagerlöf's authorship, of democratisation and the value of every human being, are still needed in the world today. With his research, Bjarne Thorup Thomsen has helped us understand the way that Lagerlöf in her art brought a true internationalism to life.

## Bibliography

Forsås-Scott, Helena, Stenberg, Lisbeth, and Thorup Thomsen, Bjarne (eds). 2014. *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf: Performance, Intermediality and European Transmissions*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.