Local Labour, Cosmopolitan Toil

Geo-Cultural Dynamics in Swedish Working-Class Fiction

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Abstract

In the renowned and epoch-making working-class novels from the Swedish 1930s, claims for social and economic justice reflect a local struggle with distinctly national and cosmopolitan significance. Generally, these novels can be described as having local characters and settings, national narrative perspectives, and cosmopolitan plots, but a closer look reveals a much more varied picture. There is, in fact, no general tendency of geo-cultural dynamics in this historically distinct literary current. When the novels are translated into English, however, a more distinct pattern occurs: regional embeddedness is considerably weakened in the translation process, leaving room for much stronger national ties and a more extensive cosmopolitan significance.

Keywords

working-class fiction – Swedish literature – translation – geography – regionalism

Introduction

Regarding its cultural position and impact, Swedish working-class fiction from the 1930s must be seen as a very special, perhaps unique, contribution to world literature. In just a few years in the mid-1930s, a whole range of self-educated novelists from the underprivileged classes made a major collective breakthrough in the national public sphere, making a huge impact on the written history of Swedish 20th century literature. Since these novelists—of whom Harry Martinson, Ivar Lo-Johansson, Eyvind Johnson, Jan Fridegård, Moa Martinson, and Vilhelm Moberg are the best known—were all born around 1900 and achieved notoriety with autobiographical bildungsromans, their fiction

made the experiences of a single generation the prototypical image of an unequal society later corrected by the Social-Democratic welfare state. Published by major national publishers in the 1930s, the novels were made widely accessible in affordable new editions after the war (Nilsson 76), establishing their position in the prosperous post-war decades as testimonies of what the construction of a new society had achieved. For many generations, these narratives were mandatory reading in school, reminding Swedes of their humble past and, by implication, their fortunate present.

In addition to their stories, the self-educated novelists themselves quickly gained important positions at the very centre of Swedish culture. Ivar Lo-Johansson was, for example, considered to be a central contributor to the abandonment of a whole socio-economic system on Swedish estates, and Harry Martinson and Eyvind Johnson were elected as members of the Swedish Academy in 1949 and 1957, respectively. And in 1974 Martinson and Johnson were jointly rewarded the Nobel Prize for literature. During a 40-year period, then, working-class authors were elevated from a subcultural and politically radical undercurrent of Swedish society to the topmost position of contemporary World Literature—at least from a Swedish point of view.

This successful trajectory of the impact of Swedish working-class fiction draws a neat parallel to the reign of the Swedish Social Democratic party, which came to power in 1932 and retained its governmental position until 1976. The most prominent decades of the Swedish welfare state were also the golden era of the particular kind of working-class fiction that emerged in the 1930s—often politically radical, but at the same time in accordance with the existing political institutions (Holmgren 69).

These novels have, then, a strong national significance, both in their long-standing effect on Swedish literary and political history, and in their ideologically charged direct address in the 1930s. At the same time, they are all firmly set in different Swedish regions: Harry Martinson's *Nässlorna blomma* (1935) on the borders between the provinces Skåne and Blekinge in southern Sweden, Vilhelm Moberg's *Sänkt sedebetyg* (1935), *Sömnlös* (1937) and *Giv oss jorden!* (1939) some 75 kilometres further north in Småland, Moa Martinson's *Kvinnor och äppelträd* (1933) and *Mor gifter sig* (1936) in the province of Östergötland, Ivar Lo-Johansson's *Godnatt, jord* (1933) and *Bara en mor* (1939) in a rural area of Södermanland, south of Stockholm, Jan Fridegård's *Jag Lars Hård* (1935), *Tack för himlastegen* (1936) and *Barmhärtighet* (1936) in Uppland, north of the capital, and Eyvind Johnson's *Nu var det 1914* (1934) in the northern province of Norrbotten. In the written history of Swedish literature, the respective regional root of these authors is an important feature. Taken together, they are described as giving the underprivileged classes of Sweden a general char-

acterization, but one by one they are seen as portrayers of their respective regions.

In their ambition to narrate working-class circumstances, however, these novels reach beyond both national and regional conditions. Claims for social and economic justice from underprivileged groups bear a worldwide significance. At a quick glance, a slight adjustment of Franco Moretti's triangle of local and foreign characters, material and plot seems applicable here (57). The novels hold *local characters and settings* acknowledging geographically restricted cultural and social spaces, and *national perspectives* in their politically charged accounts of social and economic mechanisms in Swedish society. In addition, they entail *cosmopolitan plots* of the struggle between the privileged and the underprivileged, first and foremost relevant for hierarchical mechanisms in similar systems, but, in effect, illustrative of unequal conditions in any political system. Reading the novels less distantly, however, a more complex picture of their geo-cultural dynamics emerges. A closer reading reveals a great variety of how these novels relate to the world. Furthermore, the way they relate to the world depends on the way they exist in the world. When these novels are translated into English and published in the UK and the US, their geo-cultural dynamics change.

The World in Swedish Working-Class Fiction

Every literary text with any kind of mimetic ambition offers an impression of the world and says: "This is what the world is like from this social, cultural, geographical and individual point of view." And if the world, as Pheng Cheah puts it, is "something continually made and remade" (31), literature creates the world by making us perpetually re-imagine it from new positions. The crucial task is, then, to explore what kind of world the literary text at hand lets us imagine. When it comes to geo-cultural dynamics, this task can be narrowed down to relations. Exposing how the text positions itself, its characters and milieus in relation to other phenomena of the world, reveals the ways in which it creates and confirms geo-cultural categories and spheres.

The National

Some of the working-class novels from the Swedish 1930s establish a predominantly national setting for the actions and conditions depicted. In the opening lines of Vilhelm Moberg's *Sänkt sedebetyg*, for example, the national scope of the narrative is made very clear. In Edwin Björkman's English translation, the novel's first paragraph reads:

The light of dawn spreads over the country's capital city. Half a million people work and sleep, play and make love, rejoice and suffer here, totally ignorant of each other's lives. One-twelfth of the country's inhabitants are packed together on less than one three-thousandth part of the country's soil.

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By describing Stockholm in relation to the rest of the country, Moberg gives an impression of the whole nation. The setting is Sweden, portrayed through the lens of its centre.

In Ivar Lo-Johansson's *Godnatt, jord* and *Bara en mor*, the characters' national belonging is confirmed by references to Swedish flags, Swedish colours (the yellow and the blue in the flag), national proverbs, and a portrait of the royal couple. At school, Swedish national history takes up most of the curriculum. The novels narrate the lives of rural farmworkers, a group depicted as a national class rather than a stratum in the local social hierarchy, and when the issue of a potential socialist revolt comes up, the uprising is planned on a national level. Locally, the farmworkers are not able to do much—they need to get organized all over Sweden. The two narratives are clearly set in the province of Södermanland, but this region is not given a particularly substantial depiction, and its cultural difference from other parts of the country is not evident. The differences depicted are social rather than geographical and cultural: in *Godnatt, jord*, between urban and rural life; in *Bara en mor*, predominantly between land-owners and farmworkers. Rather than narrate locally specific struggles, these novels depict hard earned lives on the big estates in Södermanland as a *pars pro toto* of a national social structure.

Unlike Lo-Johansson's novels, Moa Martinson's *Mor gifter sig* and Jan Fridegård's *Jag Lars Hård* rarely mention national characteristics, but just like in *Godnatt, jord* and *Bara en mor* the characters' conditions and worldviews are governed by their social restrictions rather than their regional contexts. As a result, Martinson's and Fridegård's narratives have a strong national significance in their preoccupation with the conditions deeply rooted in the fundamental hierarchy of society.

The Regional

In other novels, the idea of a general Swedish cultural space is either distinctly avoided or actively challenged. In Moa Martinson's *Kvinnor och äppelträd*, this is done by pointing out the illusory and constructed quality of the idea of a Swedish identity. Describing a poor Swedish moving party, the narrator asserts that the sight would disrupt a foreigner's preconception of the country and its

inhabitants. Later in the novel, the fact that national identities are constructs is stressed when the protagonist adopts a stereotypical rural Swedishness in dress and speech in order to sell mittens in the urban and cosmopolitan Stockholm streets.

The idea of a homogenous national space is also challenged by the novel's depiction of regional differences. When one of the characters travels back from his home in mid-eastern Sweden to his childhood area in the western part of the country, his existential journey from adult life to childhood memories is underscored by a transfer between two geographical worlds. The natural landscape of his childhood region—its juniper bushes and sandy plains of heather—comes through as a world he no longer has access to. The novel is mostly set, however, in the eastern province of Östergötland. Apart from its difference from the above-mentioned region in the west, Östergötland is not given a separate natural identity. Instead, it is depicted as culturally specific through the use of thick dialect. In dialogues, the characters are portrayed as having strong ties to a particular region rather than belonging to a general national culture.

While starting off on a distinctly national note in *Sänkt sedebetyg*, Moberg's autobiographical trilogy successively replaces the nation with the region. In the second and third novels, *Sömnlös* and *Giv oss jorden!*, the protagonist leaves his life in Stockholm in favour of his childhood village in rural, southern Sweden. His youthful dream to climb the social ladder and become something different from his father, grandfather and great-grandfather has proven empty and superficial, and now he wants to get back to the soil of his ancestors. In this process, the national belonging that governed his life in the capital is replaced by a strong connection to his regional roots. Geographically, his world narrows down, but spiritually it widens and deepens.

The fact that Eyvind Johnson's *Nu var det 1914* is set in the northernmost part of Sweden is highly significant. The province is referred to as "up here" (17), and its distance to the national centre is continually stressed, limiting the possibilities for the young protagonist, Olof. The region is characterized by a specific natural environment, the marsh, as well as a cold climate, symbolically charged with social and existential dimensions of loneliness and lack of love. Culturally, the specificity of the region is stressed by references to the neighbouring country Finland, and by pointing out strong influences from the indigenous Sami culture in northern Sweden: a special kind of footwear (Lapp boots), and a particular mode of singing (joiking). Life in the region is a hybrid merging Swedish, Finnish and Sami influences into a locally specific cultural space.

In Harry Martinson's *Nässlorna blomma*, life is even more locally conditioned. The region where the protagonist, Martin, grows up—the southern

province of Blekinge—is described as fundamentally different from other parts of the country. When a stranger appears, for example, the narrator tells us that he was “not of this world; he was of Västergötland” (176). Coming from another Swedish province, this man has crossed a border between worlds. Martin’s region is a world of its own, but at school he is able to reach beyond it: “Inside the school was Sweden” (176). In Martin’s experience, he does not live in Sweden. Life in the region has stronger ties to Pomerania in northern Germany, where many local labourers have learned their trade. This German region is culturally close, even closer than the town of Växjö in the neighbouring Småland province. “Of Stockholm”, the narrator continues, “they dared hardly think; America itself was almost nearer” (50). Martin’s southern region is depicted as a culturally hybrid space, even more so than Olof’s far north in Johnson’s *Nu var det 1914*. The Swedish influence is only one of many cultural streaks, not even the most significant: “The land had had so many overlords that now it scarcely knew to which it belonged. There were streaks of Danish, Swedish, Herulian and Wendish” (165).

The regionally limited worldviews of Olof and Martin has to do with the fact that they are both young, but this is not the only reason why Johnson’s and Harry Martinson’s novels differ so strongly from many of the others. The protagonists in Moa Martinson’s *Mor gifter sig* and Lo-Johansson’s *Godnatt, jord* are, after all, also children. One distinct difference between the novels is that Johnson’s and Harry Martinson’s narrators are much closer to their protagonists, often making use of free indirect speech. This would partly explain why the worldviews of *Nu var det 1914* and *Nässlorna blomma* are almost as regionally rooted as their young protagonists’. This is not, however, the only explanation. The case of Vilhelm Moberg’s trilogy, in which a grown man returns to his childhood village and develops a locally situated outlook, illustrates a more fundamental distinction in the different ways these novels narrate the geo-cultural categories of nation and region. Although his childhood memories are revived in the village, Moberg’s protagonist is not a child. Underneath the choices of protagonists, motifs and narrative techniques there are more philosophically grounded distinctions in the ways the world is seen and made. And, as Moa Martinson’s novels illustrate, these differences do not predominantly present an author’s worldview, but the worldviews in particular books.

International Scope

The transnationally relevant theme of injustice and social stigma—clearly evident in all these novels—is often addressed through minor themes and motifs just as wide in significance. In Lo-Johansson’s *Godnatt, jord* and *Bara en mor*,

Moa Martinson's *Mor gifter sig* and Jan Fridegård's *Jag Lars Hård*, social spaces clearly overshadow geographical regions as the true context of the characters' belongings, connecting the narratives to European and American literary traditions of scrutinizing the social effects of capitalism. The opportunities and pitfalls of western modernity make up a recurring cosmopolitan theme in these novels, in particular the social consequences of industrialization and urbanization. In several novels—predominantly Lo-Johansson's *Bara en mor* and Vilhelm Moberg's *Giv oss jorden!*—the very logic of ownership is specifically challenged. The working-class novels of the Swedish 1930s, thus make a nationally situated contribution to the transcultural literary depiction of western capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The international elements of these narratives are, however, not only to be found on this general and abstract level. The local characters and milieus themselves, in which the cosmopolitan themes are embedded, are often described as internationally conditioned. Moa Martinson's *Kvinnor och äppelträd*, for example, starts with a short, foundational episode from the mid-19th century, in which middle-aged Sofi breaks the social rules by taking regular baths in the washhouse. In describing this scandal, the narrator lets us know that Sofi had a "half-gypsy" mother and a French father, "who as a young man had to leave his homeland during a revolt" (3). Rebellious behaviour, which later on will reappear in Sofi's great-granddaughter Sally, is thus connected to an influx from abroad.

In Lo-Johansson's *Bara en mor*, life at the socially highly limited estate, Ella Manor, undergoes distinct changes when World War I breaks out in central Europe. Sweden did not participate in the war, but the conflict had a deep impact on the country's economy and demography, consequences that also reach Lo-Johansson's fictitious estate. Vilhelm Moberg's *Giv oss jorden!* shows a similar, but potentially more devastating, effect twenty years later when World War II is about to break out. The protagonist, Knut Toring, sits in the small, distant village of Lidalycke and listens to the radio, waiting for news on Chamberlain's negotiations with Hitler in Prague. His struggles with the Swedish economic system of land-owning and bank loans are replaced by reflections on the village's global position: "a tiny fragment of this earth, the village of Lidalycke" (537). The threat of war makes Knut realize where he predominantly lives: in Lidalycke and in the world.

The local life most internationally conditioned in this material is, however, Martin's in Harry Martinson's *Nässlorna blomma*. Despite the fact that the novel is firmly set in a very limited geographical area, where all the action takes place, the novel is thoroughly international in scope by way of the narrator's associations and the characters' minds and experiences. Martin's father, for

example, has spent many years on a farm in Tasmania before settling down and starting a family in his region of birth, bringing his experiences from the other side of the globe into the rural border area between the Swedish provinces of Blekinge and Skåne. Later on, he leaves his family and tries to start a new life in Portland, USA, before coming home yet again to die. After the death of her husband, Martin's mother has a hard time coping and decides to emigrate—without her children—to California. Martin and his siblings are left behind, parentless, and the phrase “My father's dead and my mother's in Carlifornia” becomes the young boy's mantra (40 and *passim*). His mind is thus internationally set, and he tries to convince himself that one day he will be able to follow his mother across the Atlantic. The misspelling of the American state name signals that Martin's outlook is firmly located in a particular geo-cultural space—he constantly thinks about the big world out there, but his cosmopolitan mind is locally conditioned.

Furthermore, many of the other locals that Martin meets have international experiences. Most of the “basket-makers”—a craft specific to the region—have learned their skill in northern Germany, and the band of old sailors Martin listens to at length and with eager ears tells adventurous tales of many distant places. For Martin, the smallest and most local phenomena take on a cosmopolitan appearance: he sees bamboos in the region's hazel woods and thinks about China when he looks at the alderwood clogs of the Blekinge people. When he falls in love with Tyra, his adoration for the girl is intertwined with his fascination for the big world. Tyra reminds him “of water-lilies, of Columbia in geography, and Ob and Jenisej—gazelles which ran about Africa like the roe-deer in the Crown Forests in Harasjö” (261).

Through the experiences and imagination of the novel's characters, a large part of the world is plunged into this small region in southern Sweden. The social struggles of the underprivileged are thus not only international on an abstract ideological level. On the contrary, a cosmopolitan awareness governs their everyday thinking. Their lives are lived in the limited region and in the world. As mental spaces, these two categories are far more important than the characters' national belonging.

In stark contrast to *Nässlorna blomma*, some of the other novels contain very few international references. In these works, local life is described as more or less undisturbed by the world outside the region or the nation. Although Johnson's *Nu var det 1914* depicts a culturally mixed region in referring to Finnish and Sami influences, the impact from national and international spaces are very sparse. The milieu is not culturally unambiguous, but its specific cultural blend is very regional and very remote. The isolation of the protagonist's world is most strongly communicated in disrupting the expectancies derived from

the title. The year 1914 is directly associated with the outbreak of World War I, by readers in the 1930s as well as later. For the protagonist Olof, however, the war has no real impact. News from the conflict only come to him in tiny fragments when scraps of newspapers haphazardly travel on the wind and land on his potato field in the far north of Sweden. He picks them up and tries to make sense of the dramatic events taking place in a distant world. The war has nothing to do with him; his only task is to rove the autumn field from early morning until sunset, digging for the last remnants of potatoes. This is, thus, not a novel about the international conflict, but about a remote and isolated life lived at the same time, untouched by big events.

The distance to World War I is also a distinct element in Lo-Johansson's *Godnatt, jord*. Although this novel is set much further south and not very far from the capital, international politics do not affect the farmers and the farmworkers. The war reaches the local piece of land "as a mere echo": "the affairs of the world were far away". The local labourer, we are told, "doesn't pay any attention to strikes and wars, he just plows" (448). Johnson's protagonist is digging, Lo-Johansson's is ploughing—their lives are rooted, strictly bound to the particular field they stand upon.

In Fridegård's *Jag Lars Hård*, international associations are also sparse. The protagonist, Lars, tries to break free of his geo-cultural limitations by earning a cosmopolitan identity and outlook through international literature, but since there is nobody else in his milieu with similar ambitions and no one with direct international experiences, he fails. Unlike Harry Martinson's Martin, who has access to the world not only through books but also through internationally experienced sailors, basket-makers and family members, Lars' surroundings are culturally limited. The fact that Fridegård's novel contains very few international elements—in the world depicted and in the narration—outside Lars' bookish ambition, confirms the difficulty of his project.

Swedish Working-Class Fiction in the World

So far, the novels have been discussed as they appear in their Swedish original versions in a Swedish cultural context. Being central texts in the construction of the national ideas of modern society, their regional, national and international aspects predominantly function as confirmations, adjustments or alterations of the grand narrative of Swedish 20th century history. Swedish working-class fiction does not, however, only exist in Sweden and in Swedish. On the contrary, these authors have been translated into many languages, including Russian, Japanese, Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Korean, Turkish, and Thai. Appearing in

new linguistic forms and in new cultural contexts, the novels' geo-cultural dynamics are changed.

All the novels mentioned in this article have been translated into English. In the US, Edwin Björkman's early translations of Vilhelm Moberg's trilogy, *Memory of Youth* (1937) and *The Earth is Ours* (1940), were followed much later by Robert E. Bjork's translations of Jan Fridegård's trilogy, *I, Lars Hård* (1983), *Jacob's Ladder & Mercy* (1985), and Ivar Lo-Johansson's *Only a Mother* (1991), Margaret S. Lacy's translation of Moa Martinson's *Women and Appletrees* (1985), and Rochelle Wright's translation of Lo-Johansson's *Breaking Free* (1990). In the UK, Naomi Walford's early translation of *Flowering Nettle* (1936), was followed forty years later by Mary Sandbach's translation of Eyvind Johnson's *Nu var det 1914*, titled *1914* (1970). And Margaret S. Lacy's American translation of *Kvinnor och äppelträd* was published in London as *Women and Apple Trees* in 1987. Transformed into English and transferred to a British or an American literary culture, the novels' geo-cultural changes are manifold and complex, but there is an overall tendency: the narratives' regional rootedness is generally made less distinct and less apparent, while their national resonance and cosmopolitan significance are strengthened.

Towards the National

One of the most difficult aspects of literary translation is the problem of colloquial language. The specificities of colloquial expressions, grammar and pronunciation tend to be standardized in translation, reducing the narrative's rootedness in particular social and regional milieus. In this process, the complex differentiation of the translated language is made invisible, and an impression of the foreign cultural space as linguistically—and, by implication, socially and culturally—homogenous is created. This is distinctly the case in the English translations of Swedish working-class fiction. The translators' inability to transform colloquial Swedish to colloquial English deprives the novels of a crucial literary device of depicting differences within Sweden. In reducing colloquialisms as such, social markers are omitted, and in reducing regionally specific colloquialisms, such as dialect, Sweden is made less geo-culturally differentiated. The foreign place is put forward as a nation, a homogenous geo-cultural space united by a common linguistic identity.

This reduction of linguistic differentiation affects the novels to different extents, depending on how important dialect is in the Swedish novel as a signal of regional embeddedness. In Mary Sandbach's *1914*, for example, Johnson's heavy use of dialect in *Nu var det 1914* is substantially neutralized. The way the dialogues work as a constant reminder of the northern setting and the characters' regional belonging is lost. But dialect is only one device of many by which

Johnson signals northernness. The region's specificities are evident in many other ways, thematically as well as in characterization and motifs, and these regional aspects remain in Sandbach's version. In Ivar Lo-Johansson's *Bara en mor*, on the other hand, dialect is the most important device for signalling regional specificity. As discussed above, *Bara en mor* is predominantly national rather than regional in scope, but the novel is far more culturally bound to the province of Södermanland than Lo-Johansson's *Godnatt, jord*, partly due to Lo-Johansson's use of dialect. In Robert E. Bjork's *Only a Mother*, this dialect is gone, which renders the novel a more unambiguous national character.

The most significant consequences of reducing dialect occur in Margaret S. Lacy's *Women and Appletrees*. In this translation, many Swedish words are kept—for example words for economic value (“kronor” and “öre” instead of dollars and cents) and the colloquial word “ja” (yeah, yes), which appears frequently in italics throughout the novel—but the translator has not been able to keep any trace of the thick Norrköping dialect. Lucy's strategy of using many Swedish words in her English text has a strong foreignizing effect: the Anglophone reader is constantly reminded of their linguistic and cultural distance from the setting of the story. Since this impression of foreignness is based on specificities of the Swedish language as a whole, and since all traces of dialect are gone, Lucy's text enforces a national understanding of the novel at the expense of Martinson's depiction of regional differentiation. Whereas the foreignness of *Kvinnor och äppelträd* is historical, social, and regional, the foreignness of *Women and Appletrees* signals Swedishness.

Most changes of geo-cultural dynamics are, however, hermeneutic rather than linguistic. Compared to Swedish readers, the readers of the translation face another cultural distance from the narratives, something that affects the way geo-cultural spaces can be understood. The novels contain a large variety of phenomena signalling regional specificity that would be difficult for many British or American readers to recognize as more specific than Swedish, Scandinavian or Nordic. Several different categories could be presented as examples of this—local wildlife and natural environments, for example, or customs distinctly recognizable for a Swedish reader as typical of a certain area—but let us concentrate on the most concrete: geography. In most of the novels, a whole range of place names are mentioned denoting different kinds of geographical spaces. In order to understand these geographical references, the reader must, first, know what kind of geographical category the name refers to (local or distant, natural or administrative, small-scale or large-scale) and then get a sense of how it is related to other places mentioned in the text.

The translation of Harry Martinson's *Nässlorna blomma* illustrates how hard this may be. In Naomi Walford's *Flowering Nettle*, the reader is, first of all, faced

with different names for the region where the novel is set; it is alternately called Blekinge, Göinge and Lister. A Swedish reader knows that these names refer to slightly different geo-cultural categories and denote slightly different areas, but only slightly. The three place names overlap, indicating the ambiguity of the region and the protagonist's belonging. This is, however, not at all apparent for a reader who lacks a distinct knowledge of Swedish geography, and he or she is not helped by the fact that the ambivalently named region in itself contains a wide range of other place names. Throughout the novel, references to local places like Nättraby, Augerum, Fjälkinge, Näsrum, Örkened, Willand, Elmen, Trollvik, Nite, Brednäs, Bothult, Vilnäs, Harasjö, Vemsjö, and Romme pass by. These places give the region of Blekinge/Göinge/Lister a very differentiated character, especially since they do not have a stable relation to each other: some of them are parishes, some are villages, and others are lakes and forests. The local place names must be understood in relation to each other and to the region, and the region must, in turn, be related to the novel's references to places outside Blekinge: other regions like Skåne, Västergötland, Uppland, Dalarna, Norrland, and Lappland; cities and towns like Lund, Svalöv, Växjö, Stockholm, and Rättvik; nature-based spaces like the lakes Hjälmaren and Mälaren denoting the cultural power of central Sweden; and historical subdivisions of the country like Svea, Göte, and Vende. Adding to interpretative difficulties, Martinson and Walford do not refrain from mentioning Scandinavian places outside Sweden as well (e.g. Smøgen in Denmark and Snehætten in Norway), without any information of these being foreign.

Without the nationally conditioned vernacular knowledge of south-eastern Swedish geography and its relation to other parts of the country, Walford's reader may be very confused, or, more likely and more importantly, unable to recognize the novel's geo-cultural significance. Hence, a crucial aspect of the novel—the issue of complex and ambiguous geographical and cultural belonging—may simply be lost. From the cultural distance of the translation reader, the novel's asymmetrical mosaic of different places and spaces is likely to be comprised into one single, Swedish space.

The inclination to understand these novels nationally rather than written from a particular and distinct space within Sweden, is reinforced by the paratexts of the translated versions. The presentation of a foreign book and author almost always mentions their country of origin, thereby framing the narrative with a national preconception. Vilhelm Moberg, Harry Martinson, Moa Martinson, Eyvind Johnson, Jan Fridegård and Ivar Lo-Johansson are all introduced to Anglophone readers—on dustjackets and in introductions and afterwords—as Swedish writers. Furthermore, this identification of national origin is often accompanied by a description of what Sweden is like. Giving background infor-

mation for *Women and Appletrees*, for example, Margaret S. Lacy's afterword describes how Swedes celebrate Christmas (201), and in her afterword to *Breaking Free*, Rochelle Wright gives a brief account of the economic history of the Swedish 20th century (463f.), as does Robert E. Bjork in the introduction to Fridegård's *I, Lars Hård* (ix). On the dustjacket of *1914*, Mary Sandbach confirms quite a stereotypical notion of Sweden when she writes that "the novel describes the way of life of a whole remote country, with its merciless winters and its eerie light summer nights, with its spiritual and material poverty softened and ennobled by a basic human decency".

A particular kind of national frame is given to the novels when they are placed in a Swedish cultural and literary tradition. Addressing a readership not familiar with the foreign country, the translators sometimes make connections that would be unlikely in a Swedish context. Margaret S. Lacy connects Moa Martinson to the film director Ingmar Bergman (207), and Robert E. Bjork compares Jan Fridegård with Nordic sagas and the 19th century writer August Strindberg (xi, xii, xv). These comparisons are probably partly the results of the fact that both *Women and Appletrees* and *I, Lars Hård* are published by university presses with students of Scandinavian languages and literature as their main targets. The paratextual comparisons confirm and build students' repertoire of Swedish culture. This publishing situation is presumably also the cause of Rochelle Wright's and Robert E. Bjork's substantial endnotes in *Breaking Free* and *Only a Mother*, complementing the narratives with information on Swedish history, customs and traditions. With these endnotes, the novels are distinctly framed in an educational situation in which reading the narratives is, at least partly and perhaps mostly, a way of learning about a particular country rather than a specific region, theme, author, or kind of literature.

Towards the Cosmopolitan

Identifying the writers as Swedish and placing their novels in a broadly drawn national context, the paratexts render authors and narratives a representative character they do not hold in a Swedish context—they become illustrative examples of a national literature depicting nationally specific phenomena. At the same time, the very same paratexts often place the authors and their narratives in a larger, international context, giving them a cosmopolitan, or even universal, significance. This paradox probably illustrates a general translational logic.

In my material, the paratexts' cosmopolitan connections slightly overshadow their national framings. In *1914*, *Only a Mother*, *Memory of Youth* and *The Earth is Ours*, Eyvind Johnson's, Ivar Lo-Johansson's and Vilhelm Moberg's international experiences and successes are put forth as a reason why the British

and Americans should read them. On the dustjacket, Johnson is reported to have visited Germany and France, and to have written a “widely praised novel of Charlemagne’s Europe, *In the Days of His Grace* (1960)”. Lo-Johansson’s *Only a Mother*, Robert E. Bjork tells us in the afterword, has been translated into several languages, “including Hebrew, Serbo-Croatian, Russian, Hungarian, and Chinese” (489). Moberg has been to Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, and his books have been translated into six languages (*Memory of Youth* 496 and dustjacket; *The Earth is Ours* 687 and dustjacket). In *Women and Apple Trees*, the cover painting by American artist Mary Cassatt of a woman helping a baby reaching for an apple, helps to integrate Moa Martinson and her novel into a cosmopolitan context of women’s art, rights and experiences. The logo of the British publisher—the name “The Women’s Press” written on the flat surface of an iron—enhances this impression from its position in the bottom right corner of the cover.

In the paratexts, the novels are often connected to an international literary context. Although Mary Sandbach uses a stereotypical notion of Sweden in describing the setting of *1914*, the novel is called “a human document” and connects Johnson to “many other proletarian writers throughout Europe” (dustjacket). Johnson’s novel is positioned in a cosmopolitan literary movement, and his narrative is described as having universal significance. His literary inspiration, the reader is told, comes from James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and André Gide. In the same way, Moberg’s *Memory of Youth* is compared to Knut Hamsun’s and Thomas Hardy’s novels, Lo-Johansson’s *Only a Mother* to John Steinbeck’s fiction and the poetics of Philip Sydney (491 and dustjacket), and Fridégård’s *I, Lars Hård* to the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Alexandre Dumas, Anton Chekhov, Maxim Gorky, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Upton Sinclair, Jack London, and James Cain (x–xiii).

And by their very appearance in the British and American literary markets, these novels enter different cosmopolitan contexts. *Flowering Nettle* enters the catalogue of the London-based Cresset Press, alongside books by John Milton, John Bunyan, H.G. Wells, Graham Greene and D.H. Lawrence as well as authors like Homer, Nikolai Gogol, Heinrich Heine, Josef Kastein, and Tristan Bernard. *Memory of Youth* and *The Earth is Ours* appear in the large publishing context of the New York-based Simon & Schuster. *1914* is published by Adam Books, a small London firm where works by British poets Rosemary Tonks and Paul Roche as well as the American poet Jarold Ramsay, the German-British writer Fred Uhlman and the Romanian art critic Ionel Jianu are published. *Women and Appletrees* and *My Mother Gets Married* (1988) become parts of an international feminist context at the Feminist Press in New York, whose program includes “reprints of important works by women, feminist biographies of women, and

nonsexist children's books", both originally written in English and translated (289). The catalogue of its British counterpart, the Women's Press, where the UK version of the novel is published, includes translations of Danish writer Tove Ditlevsen and Norwegian novelist Cora Sandel. *Breaking Free* and *Only a Mother* are published in the series Modern Scandinavian Literature in Translation, introducing Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and Finnish writers to the American public by the University of Nebraska Press.

Furthermore, the American translations enter, confirm and strengthen a specific kind of non-Swedish context: Scandinavian-American culture. It is quite likely that Moberg's novels, translated in 1937 and 1940, have been read by many Americans with Scandinavian roots, enhancing the emotional and cultural links to their Nordic background. And the Modern Scandinavian Literature in Translation series was probably launched with students of Scandinavian culture and literature in mind, reaching out to young American-Scandinavians curious about their cultural heritage. According to Doris Bachmann-Medick, all literary translations create a hybrid space not simply defined as a target culture encountering a source culture, but rather as "a leeway of cultural syncretization" (15). Such a space is thus established every time Swedish novels are translated and published abroad, but when they meet American-Scandinavian readers they enter a cultural space that is already hybrid. The translated novels, then, reinforce the idea of a European homeland left behind some generations ago, and participate in cultivating a specific kind of American identity. The Swedish novels become a part of the American culture, addressing, confirming and shaping the self-understanding of Americans.

Entering the British and the American cultures, the novels are detached from their Swedish literary, cultural and political context and reconstituted elsewhere. This fact is most evident in the way that the specific context of Swedish working-class fiction is absent in and around the translations. The novels' strong and specific position in Swedish cultural history illustrates perfectly what Alexander Beecroft calls "a national-literature ecology". What survive and thrive in the ecology of national literature, Beecroft writes, "are of course those texts that fit the narrative of literary history especially well" (239). Working-class fiction from the 1930s not only fits the story of Swedish 20th century literature, but also the narrative of Swedish modern history and the establishment of the welfare state. This strong national position is crucially supported by a specifically Swedish significance of the concept of working-class fiction (*arbetarlitteratur*), strongly connected to certain authors and novels, and thought of as particularly Swedish. Such a particular position in foreign literary ecologies is difficult to explain, and in my material only the translators of Fridégård's trilogy and Lo-Johansson's *Breaking Free* make an attempt to do it. In the para-

texts of all the other novels, the Swedish phenomenon of working-class fiction is not addressed. So when Moa Martinson writes about her “colleagues” in her 1956 foreword to *Mor gifter sig*, translated and published in *My Mother Gets Married*, the translation reader must have difficulties understanding what she means. For most Swedish readers, it is obvious that she is referring to her fellow working-class writers.

These novels are picked from a particular place in one literary ecosystem and given a chance to thrive in a different way in another, more extensive system. Margaret S. Lacy describes the process accurately: “Now, to a still larger audience of readers throughout the English-speaking world, Moa Martinson’s stirring first novel, *Women and Appletrees*, compassionately shows the brave endurance of women, strong and beautiful as apple trees” (210). In its translated version, Martinson’s novel is no longer an example of Swedish working-class fiction, but a cosmopolitan account of women’s hardships through all times and across the whole world.

This cosmopolitanization of the novels is reinforced by many detailed changes in the texts themselves. The translators’ trouble with what Emily Apter calls “untranslatability”, often has an effect of lifting the narrative from a culturally specific realm to a more general frame of reference. As mentioned above, almost all the use of colloquial language is heavily reduced or omitted by the translators, and when this colloquialism is generally Swedish rather than dialectal, which is often the case, the narratives are removed from a national rather than a regional vernacular. Similarly, many generally Swedish idioms, proverbs and sayings are either omitted or transformed into British and American ones—without ever, of course, bearing an equivalent significance. Other cases of untranslatability are titles and units of measuring length and weight. In some of the novels, the words for the Swedish currency—“kronor” and “öre”—are kept in the translation, in others they are converted into pence and pounds, cents and dollars, giving the stories an impression of international commonality.

Neutralizations of proper names have the same effect. In some translations, Swedish names of people, streets and places are kept, but quite often they are anglicised. The letters å, ä, and ö are often omitted, and in *Memory of Youth* and *The Earth is Ours* Edwin Björkman has decided to change Gösta to Gustav and Kajsa to Karin, keeping a somewhat Germanic impression, but deleting the particularly Swedish foreignness (e.g. *Memory of Youth* 5 and 19). Other instances of cultural neutralization occur in connection with food and drink, especially the latter. Judging from these translations, there is one Swedish phenomenon proving more difficult to translate than any other: the habit of drinking liquor. The verb “supa” (drinking heavily, as opposed to just drinking,

“dricka”), is simply translated to “drinking”, and the word “brännvin” is dealt with in a variety of ways: “brandy” (Harry Martinson *Flowering Nettle* 7; Jan Fridegård’s *I, Lars Hård* 19; Moa Martinson’s *Women and Apple Trees* 25 and *My Mother Gets Married* 6), “potato-spirit” (Johnson 1914 28), “booze” (Lo-Johansson *Breaking Free* 29), “aquavit” (Lo-Johansson *Only a Mother* 229), and, finally, kept as a foreign word in italics, “*brännvin*” (Moberg *Memory of Youth* 21).

A particularly troublesome task is to translate passages where language itself is in focus. Inability to write correct Swedish, for example, is thematized in Moberg’s *Sänkt sedebetyg*. The protagonist’s mother’s lack of education is apparent in her letters from Småland to her son in Stockholm. In *Memory of Youth*, Edwin Björkman translates the letters into clumsy English, but he cannot convey her misspellings, antiquated words, and inconsistency (Moberg *Sänkt sedebetyg* 51–52 and 83; *Sömnlös* 44 and 72–72). The lyrical style of Harry Martinson’s prose, with its many word plays and unusual contractions, is also very difficult to deal with. Throughout *Flowering Nettle*, Naomi Walford is very ambitious in replacing the details of Martinson’s personal diction with corresponding effects in English, creating an almost equally unique style in the target language. In this process, however, the novel’s special use of the Swedish language vanishes—Walford must find other kinds of particularities in the English language that, one way or another, signal the originality of Martinson’s style. She thus domesticates the text, neutralizes its Swedish character, and improves its possibilities to function in a broader context away from its original home.

Conclusion

The novels discussed in this article were all published in Stockholm between 1933 and 1939 and written by self-educated authors born around 1900. In the 1930s, they were received as parts of a common literary phenomenon, and ever since they have been perceived as a vital, collective force that reshaped Swedish literary history. Despite these similarities, however, their relations to regional, national and cosmopolitan spaces are very varied. Some of the novels are deeply rooted in particular Swedish regions, whereas others predominantly establish national ties. Without any apparent connection to these regional or national tendencies, some of the narratives depict life as internationally conditioned, whereas others tell of existences undisturbed by the world outside the Swedish border. In these differences, four types of geo-cultural conditions can be distinguished: a regional-national dynamic, a regional-cosmopolitan dynamic, a national-cosmopolitan dynamic, and a lack of geo-cultural dynamics.

This variety is altered when the novels are translated into English and published in the UK and the US. In the process of translation and cultural recontextualization, the narratives' regional rootedness weakens considerably, giving them much stronger national and cosmopolitan characteristics. The novels are nationalized through a reduction of linguistic differentiation, an enhancing of hermeneutic distance, and through paratextual framing. They are cosmopolitanized through paratextual framing, changes in publishing situation and cultural position, as well as through linguistic neutralization. Due to the differences in which the Swedish versions relate to the world, these changes affect the novels in different ways. The general tendency is, however, that the novels' settings appear more national in the translations while their theme of social and economic injustice gains in cosmopolitan significance. As a contribution to a world literature of social hierarchy, Swedish working-class fiction in English gives a nationally conditioned variant of the widely significant theme of human stratification.

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