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# Re-Mapping Lagerlöf

Performance, intermediality,  
and European transmissions

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# Re-Mapping Lagerlöf

The volume and its parameters

*Bjarne Thorup Thomsen*

The present volume aims to offer an international audience a variety of insights into a new interdisciplinary discourse on the Swedish world-literature writer Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940), the first woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1909. It is the first English-language volume to present a comprehensive conspectus of current Lagerlöf scholarship, conducted by researchers representing a range of national affiliations. Taken together, the innovative investigations presented in the volume provide the reader with a new and multicoloured map of developments and connections in Lagerlöf's wide-ranging work, canonical as well as lesser known, of its ideological significances, contexts, and impact, of its multiple travels between media and transmissions across countries, and of the astonishing attraction and influence of Lagerlöf's public persona during her career and beyond.

The history of the critical approaches taken to Lagerlöf's work and authorial figure since the beginning of her writing career projects, broadly speaking, a development from what could be described as more 'confining' perspectives in various forms to much more expansive and diverse ones, and *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf* may be seen as a further advancement along this route. While earlier criticism tended to tie Lagerlöf's literary activity to her home region of rural Värmland in western Sweden, and to remove artistic agency from the author by constructing her as the voice of a tradition of oral storytelling, as a mouthpiece for the Swedish soil itself, or as an embodiment of moral values,<sup>1</sup> the subsequent critical 'turns'—from the textual turn of the 1950s and 1960s to the application of a number of 'beyond text' approaches thereafter—have shaped a much more multifaceted understanding of the complexities,



Illus. 1. Selma Lagerlöf c.1881.

innovative force, and impact of Lagerlöf's work and persona. *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf* may thus be viewed as a unique window onto the current proliferation of perspectives on a writer, the appreciation of whom continues to grow.

The perspectives on display in this book cover Lagerlöf in the context of the international feminist movement and as a writer whose work offers a richness of alternative discourses on gender. They position her as an international peace campaigner, but also as a celebrity and a literary 'star' whose status in her own time could rival that of royalty. They cover Lagerlöf's key contributions to nation-building and early welfare agendas in her own country and beyond, and to the national imagination as such, but also the transnational thought inherent in much of her output, of obvious relevance to present-day political and cultural concerns. The perspectives include illuminations of important strands of Lagerlöf's work with reference to intertextuality, canonicity, and generic hybridity. The perspectives provide, moreover, a range of insights into the vibrant, and continuing, re-mediation of Lagerlöf's output, including, significantly, the seminal role of her work in sup-

plying plot lines, spectacles, and thematic concerns to the emerging and expanding cultures of national and global cinema, which would markedly increase her already considerable audience. A further segment of perspectives in *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf* concerns the transmission of Lagerlöf's work into different, mainly European countries and cultural contexts, demonstrating how its reception speaks to very varied cultural constituencies and domestic interests. These transmission and translation histories illustrate a remarkable ability of the 'cultural capital' that Lagerlöf's work and persona increasingly represented to retain its currency through paradigmatic shifts in ideology and cultural politics beyond Sweden's borders.

This plethora of perspectives has been gathered into three main sections, while at the same time recognising that the essays, precisely due to their interdisciplinary impulses and desire to establish new connections, may straddle sectional boundaries. Each section is introduced by a 'portal' which sets out a common framework for the section and presents the essays. The first of these sections, 'Readers, performance, constructions', examines the author's construction of her celebrity persona in texts, environments, and public performance, as well as investigating, complementarily, the understanding of Lagerlöf by members of the general public, as manifested, for example, in an extensive collection of letters to the author from very wide and varied segments of readers, both domestic and international. The second section, 'Intermediality and film', assesses the role of Lagerlöf's narratives in advancing early Swedish cinema in a cultural period that figured a productive dialogic relationship between canonical literature and the emerging art and entertainment form of film. The section contains, moreover, incisive new film studies of some of the most significant Lagerlöf adaptations or reworkings, which have achieved iconic status in international film history, along with gendered readings of illustrations and images in both print and film form. The third section, '(Trans)national narratives and European transmissions', contains five case studies which explore the transmission and translation of Lagerlöf's work into a variety of languages, contrasting cultural and political climates, and different periods. The main focus is on Europe, but Lagerlöf's important role in the US is also covered in one contribution. The cases have been selected with the aim of representing diverse regimes and ideological environments, ranging from Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic before, during, and after communism, via Nazi Germany, to the Netherlands, the UK, and



Illus. 2. Selma Lagerlöf c.1891. She adopted a short hairstyle in the spring of 1889, at the same time as she experienced a stylistic breakthrough in the development of her debut work, *Gösta Berling's Saga* (1891).

the US. In addition to sketching this trajectory from east to west, the cases also capture the function of Lagerlöf's work and the fascination of her persona in linguistic environments that range from the Frisian 'minor'-language culture to the world-language culture of English. These case studies are preceded by explorations of the role of transnational thought and international and public space in Lagerlöf's texts, along with examinations of the formation of canon, the construction of gender, and the role of the uncanny in Lagerlöf, the latter with a particular emphasis on the internationalised climate of the First World War period, appropriate in a volume published on the centenary of the outbreak of the war.

Thus, overall, the present volume may be seen as a road-map to the multifarious ways in which Lagerlöf and her work have engaged with and impacted on culture and ideology, a new orientation in one of the most significant and influential world-literature writers to emerge from the Nordic countries. In keeping with the recurring emphasis in the volume on word-image relationships and on pictorial representation

as such, *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf* is richly illustrated, with many of the images rarely or never published before. They include reproductions of archival material and a range of illustrations relating to film adaptations of Lagerlöf's work and her important role in early cinematic culture. With its incisive perspectives, reader-friendly structure, detailed notes, extensive bibliographical section, and innovative range of illustrations, *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf* is designed to provide a tool for future Lagerlöf scholarship. Given the plurality of approaches and the variety of theoretical underpinnings used in the book, it is hoped, moreover, that the volume may serve as a source of inspiration for further interdisciplinary research in the arts and humanities.

The publication of *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf* coincides with an ongoing series of new translations into English of seminal works by Lagerlöf, launched by Norvik Press of London in 2011 under the umbrella heading of 'Lagerlöf in English' (see Carbone & Forsås-Scott, forthcoming), which is fuelling a new international interest in Lagerlöf's work. So far, four translations have been published—*Lord Arne's Silver* (2011), translated by Sarah Death; *The Phantom Carriage* (2011), translated by Peter Graves; *The Löwensköld Ring* (2011), translated by Linda Schenck; and *Nils Holgersson's Wonderful Journey through Sweden* (2 vols, 2013), translated by Peter Graves—with further translations to come. *Charlotte Löwensköld*, translated by Linda Schenck, will appear in 2014, while *Anna Svärd*, likewise translated by Linda Schenck, is due to follow in 2015. The availability of new and more accurate translations will facilitate internationally further progress along the lines of enquiry presented in *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf*.

## Notes

- 1 For a comprehensive study of the Swedish reception history of Lagerlöf's work, see Anna Nordlund's monograph *Selma Lagerlöfs underbara resa genom den svenska litteraturhistorien 1891–1996* (2005, 'Selma Lagerlöf's Wonderful Journey through Swedish Literary History, 1891–1996').