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LITERATURE
EXCHANGE

**NEW
SWEDISH
VOICES**

WELCOME!

Are you curious about which new voices in Swedish fiction we're listening to right now? Then this publication is for you!

In this publication you'll find an overview article by Lena Kvist, a journalist and critic and a former administrator of Borås Tidning's Debutant Prize. Kvist picks out key themes that new, up-and-coming Swedish authors are writing about. We also introduce you to a selection of recently published Swedish novelists, each with a book or two under their belts and already taking steps onto the international stage. Alongside each introduction you'll find information about original publishers and representation.

On the final pages we've provided contact details for the agencies handling rights for the authors presented here.

Grants are available for the translation and promotion of Swedish literature. If you would like to know more about these grants and how to apply, you'll find all the information on our website, where we also publish articles about other topics in Swedish literature: www.swedishliterature.se.

Happy reading!

Susanne Bergström Larsson
Head of Swedish Literature Exchange,
Swedish Arts Council

Note: The authors presented in this publication were selected based on nominations by agencies and publishers who sell rights to Swedish fiction. Agencies and publishers were asked to nominate authors and books that have attracted strong interest in Sweden and deserve to be read in translation. To ensure a good distribution across publishers and agencies, a group at the Swedish Arts Council made the final selection from among the nominees. Four independent critics, also representing an upcoming generation, contributed texts about the selected authors – our thanks to Aurora Holm, Bob Mattson, Emmy Odeskog and Saga Wallander.

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ELIN CULLHED

(b. 1983)

Elin Cullhed once told an interviewer that good literature has a disturbing quality. Perhaps it was precisely that approach to writing that kicked up a storm around Cullhed's first adult novel, *Euphoria* ('Eufori'). It did something that few before Cullhed had dared to try: it resurrected the cult author and poet Sylvia Plath (1932–1963). Described as an imaginative retelling of the last year of Plath's life, the novel sends the reader hurtling between Plath's love for her children and her craft on the one hand, and her experience of constantly having to stand aside for her husband's career on the other.

The sales figures are incontrovertible, but the gambit of bringing Plath back from the dead did not charm everyone – although Cullhed also draws on her own experience in her imaginative portrayal of the poet. We should thus not see *Euphoria* as a biography, even if Cullhed approaches her subject during some of the most difficult years of the poet's life.

The book's dark, taboo qualities nevertheless appealed both to readers and to the jury that awarded the August Prize, Sweden's most important book award, to *Euphoria* in 2021. Among the less enthusiastic, a debate flared on the arts pages. Did the novel deserve the recognition, or was it just the latest in a string of middle-class perspectives on women's history?

Cullhed opts not to occupy the space allocated to her as woman: someone raised to be soft and 'good.' In answer to her critics, she says she doesn't agree that literature is a perspective. She would rather write texts that pick a fight with the reader, texts that can be brutal, texts that sometimes feel wrong and taboo. Texts that disturb.

Aurora Holm



Foto: Sofia Runarsdóttir



Euphoria
296 p., 2021, Wahlström & Widstrand

Rights: Ahlander Agency
Rights sold to: Bulgaria, Brazil, Catalonia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, UK (World English)

Euphoria is a fictionalized portrayal of Sylvia Plath's final years and a vivid portrait of a brilliant mind engaged in battle with the world, with those she loves – and with herself.

JOHANNA FRID

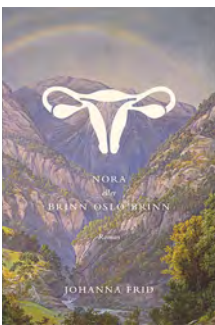
(b. 1988)

Foto: Thron Ullberg



Harald's Mother
250 p., 2023, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Grand Agency
Rights sold to: Finland, Norway, Denmark

A daughter-in-law meets her mother-in-law at an airport. Their flight is delayed. As the hours pass, the confrontations become increasingly unrelenting. What happens when you realize there are suddenly three people in a couple?



Nora, or Burn Oslo Burn
187 p., 2018, Ellerströms
Rights: Grand Agency
Rights sold to: Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, North Macedonia (Albanian), Norway, Poland, Russia

Johanna's boyfriend's ex-girlfriend, Nora, is everything Johanna is not: beautiful, Norwegian, a social media darling. Via Instagram, Johanna conducts a thorough investigation of Nora that never seems to come to an end. Meanwhile, Johanna is consumed from within by envy and a constant stabbing pain in her womb.

Johanna Frid made her publishing debut in 2017 with the poetry collection *A Family Epic* ('Familieepos'), co-authored with Gordana Spasic. It is a book about what family means, the things that happen inside a family, and how to find a family of one's own. Frid's 2018 follow-up, *Nora, or Burn Oslo Burn* ('Nora eller brinn Oslo brinn'), also takes family as a major theme. Johanna, the main character, is dating Emil. Not long into their relationship, a message turns up from Nora, Emil's ex. The obsession begins – and for those with obsessive tendencies, the internet is a violent place.

Nora, or Burn Oslo Burn is not so much about Johanna's boyfriend as it is about Nora. It is also a book about pain. Johanna learns that her extreme period pain, recurring monthly for years, is endometriosis. The pain in her abdomen and the pain of Nora go hand in hand. Together, they open up a kind of abyss. As Johanna takes out her anxiety on Emil, their relationship deteriorates. She can't stop herself asking things like: "Do you want to fuck her in the ass?" And she asks about things she doesn't really want to know: "Why did you fall in love with her? What did you do when you were together?"

Nora, or Burn Oslo Burn is in many ways a cynical novel. It is less about love than about how to deal with knowing that the person you love has loved somebody else.

Frid's novel *Harald's Mother* ('Haralds mamma') lets us into another world of ugliness, recklessness and unreason. This time, the pain stems from addiction. The narrator lives in Malmö with her boyfriend Harald, a man with the personality and temperament of a golden retriever. But Harald is ill; he lives with bipolar disorder and severe ADHD. When he starts taking medicine for anxiety, the couple's relationship quickly devolves into a fog of sleeping pills, dirt and Harald's mania. Harald's mother, who turns up at regular intervals, becomes an element of the nightmare. Or is it the relationship with Harald itself that's the nightmare? Or the narrator's view of the world? No matter the reason for life's abhorrence, *Harald's Mother*, like *Nora, or Burn Oslo Burn*, is a novel about feeling very alone – both in one's relationship and in the world.

Saga Wallander

ELIN GRELSSON

(b. 1983)

Writing modern working-class fiction isn't easy. So often it is too political, too insistent, too black-and-white. We can't accuse Elin Grelsson of that. All her novels have been recognized as vital contributions to a long tradition of Swedish working-class fiction, none more so than her most recent book, *Nothing Will Overgrow Me* ('Inget ska växa över mig'). Jenny, the book's main character, moves to Stockholm from a fictional town in northern Sweden. She has the typical goals of someone trying to move up the socioeconomic ladder: fitting in in the big city, getting a high-status job, finding love. But is a perfect climb up the class ladder possible? Can Jenny get rid of her inheritance? Does she even want to?

As Grelsson's story unfolds, we recognize that Jenny feels a compulsion of sorts to succeed. If earlier Swedish working-class literature deals with surviving at the bottom of society, in its more modern guise focuses on getting up and out. On the surface at least, Jenny finds what she is looking for: a downtown apartment, a job in PR, a boyfriend with the right pedigree. Grelsson's portrait of Jenny is a portrait of someone mustering the strength to break free, and nearly succeeding. Within this terrain, a larger story about class takes shape. Grelsson describes a gap between Jenny and her boyfriend that lies not in their characters or their abilities, but in their inheritances. Jenny seems unable to shake off that inheritance, and her new habitat becomes a reminder, not an erasure, of her past. Grelsson's prose, spare and detached with a caustic subtext, suits the story she tells. *Nothing Will Overgrow Me* is a novel about surviving in a world that might never be your own.

Bob Mattsson



Foto: Sofia Runarsdatter



Nothing Will Overgrow Me
230 p., 2023, Natur & Kultur
Rights: Nordin Agency
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When Jenny leaves her sleepy hometown for Stockholm, she also leaves behind her uncomprehending parents and the younger sisters she once planned to conquer the world with.

In Stockholm she meets Sebastian, smooth and urbane, to whom Jenny's background seems like an exotic asset.



Dogs on Main Street
(*'Hundarna på huvudgatan'*)
288 p., 2016, Atlas
Rights: Nordin Agency
All rights are available

Johanna grows up with one foot in the labour movement, the other in the Church. She looks large-eyed at the world, filled with a desire to do good. When she fails at her self-imposed mission to keep an unaccompanied minor from being deported, her idealistic worldview crumbles.

HANNA JOHANSSON

(b. 1991)



Foto: Lisa Thanner



Antiquity
223 p., 2020, Norstedts
Rights: Norstedts Agency
Rights sold to: UK, US

The narrator, a woman in her thirties, meets an older artist named Helena. Helena invites the narrator to join her and her daughter Olga on the Greek island of Ermoupoli.

Antiquity is a queer Lolita story, as sensual as it is disturbing, as gorgeous as it is complicated, plumbing the depths of memory and power.

On the very first page of Hanna Johansson's *Antiquity* ('Antiken'), something hard to define happens. As I read about the men sitting at the outdoor tables on a hot day in Greece, see them drinking white wine and Cokes as their eyes follow everything around with them with great seriousness, a kind of melancholy fills me. This scene forms the backdrop for the story, and the observer's gaze is oddly distanced. The environment remains a large part of the drama throughout the novel. The narrator recalls the weeks on the Greek Cyclades with keen focus but also from a distance; although the narrative is fragmented, the narrator seems to personify the power of memory, recalling the settings, the people, almost frame by frame.

After giving us a fly-on-the-wall description of the Greek men at the outdoor tables, the narrator zooms in on her focal points: Helena and her teenage daughter, Olga. If the men have any direct relationship to the narrator, we never learn it. Instead she seems almost obsessed, first with Helena, then with Olga.

Marguerite Duras wrote many novels about desire: about forbidden yet non-negotiable love in environments that are almost tangible. In *Antiquity*, Hanna Johansson achieves the same interplay between the overstepping of boundaries and a sense of place. *Antiquity* is a brutal portrayal of attraction that should never arise, but for precisely that reason is so titillating. In the aftermath of the hot summer, it seems, the main character is fighting to stop her memories from slipping away: becoming antique. Perhaps she tells her story to keep the power of the memories alive. The setting and the relationships between the three women intertwine. As summer ends, the truth begins to fade, and we reach the inflection point at which the narrative begins.

Bob Mattsson

ANN-HELÉN LAESTADIUS

(b. 1971)

You might think that the Swedes, living in one of the world's most northerly nations, would be tired of the cold and dark. That doesn't appear to be the case. Many recent Swedish novels take place in Sweden's barren northern climes, and they have found a big audience. One author who writes about life up north is Ann-Helén Laestadius. A writer and journalist who portrays collisions between Sami and Swedish culture, she is also one of the most talked-about authors of recent years.

Laestadius' books constructs chains of events that reveal her characters' struggles with identity and their mixed feelings about belonging to different cultures and the role of family ties in their lives. In *Stolen* ('Stöld'), nine-year-old Elsa sees a man kill one of her family's reindeer. Instead of helping, the police brush her off. Threats by the perpetrators keep her silent and she is drawn into a longstanding conflict between the Sami and the other villagers that has poisoned generations before her.

To date, Laestadius has published the first two novels in a suite that has been dubbed the Sápmi trilogy. *Stolen* portrays hate and threats against Sami and against their reindeer, which become pawns in the oppression of the Sámi people. The sequel, *Punished* ('Straff'), describes how Sámi children in the 1950s were torn from their families and put in so-called nomad schools. The nomad schools made racism, neglect and abuse a part of daily life for many children, including Laestadius' mother.

As a writer, Laestadius seeks redress for the Sámi people. And she has gotten it. In 2021, *Stolen* was named the Bonnier book club Book of the Year; in 2022 it was announced that the novel would be adapted into a feature film by Netflix, with the film premiere slated for 2024. Laestadius first debuted as a young adult writer and her YA books have also made her a role model for many Sámi young people. Her novel *Ten Past One* received the August Prize for children's and young adult literature in 2016.

The road to redress is long. But many people are massing behind Laestadius – not least the tens of thousands of readers avidly turning the pages of her narratives of northern Sweden.

Aurora Holm



Foto: Elisabeth Ohlsson



Punished

350 p., 2023, Romanus & Selling Rights: Ahlander Agency Rights sold to: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, US

Until the 1960s, Sámi children were forced to attend so-called nomad schools. They were forbidden to speak their native language and taught to be ashamed of their heritage. *Punished* is a searing novel about trauma, memory, love and loss, tautly written and vibrating with righteous rage.



Stolen

441 p., 2021, Romanus & Selling Rights: Ahlander Agency Rights sold to: Canada, Catalonia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Northern Sámi, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, UK, US

Stolen portrays a young woman's struggle to defend her Sámi heritage in a time when xenophobia is on the rise, climate change poses a threat to reindeer herding, and desperate young people are losing their lives to suicide. The novel also depicts the tensions that arise when modern ideas come up against a traditional culture with deeply rooted patriarchal structures.

JOHANNE LYKKE NADEREHVANDI (b. 1987)

Foto: David Möller



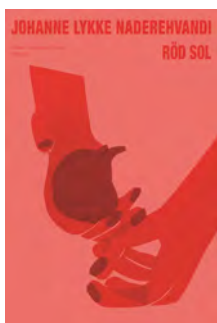
A vague sense of threat pervades *Red Sun* ('Röd sol'), the latest novel from Johanne Lykke (Holm) Naderehvardi. *Red Sun* tells the story of a couple, India and Kallas, who live in an unnamed city. They leave the city to visit a friend at the coast (in another unnamed town). When three children turn up out of nowhere after an accident, the story grows increasingly stranger. The sense of threat dwells in the language itself, which constantly verges on the surreal. It is reinforced by the strange events that keep happening: a forest fire, an out-of-control argument, a fistfight. Not to mention the children, appearing from out of the blue.

What happens to children who don't want their parents, or children who have no parents at all? These questions confront India and Kallas, whose own relationship also becomes more visible after the children appear. They love each other very much, but the dynamic between them is uneasy. Like the oppressive heat and the smoke from the hillside fires, Kallas' fits of rage and India's passivity come to feel smothering.

A vague unease also drives the narrative in Lykke Naderehvardi's previous novel, *Strega*. Nine young women are supposed to be seasonal workers at a hotel in the Italian village of *Strega*, but no guests come. Life takes on an increasingly surreal tinge, turning to terror when one night, during a party at the hotel, one of the women disappears without a trace. As women, all nine know the constant danger of violent death. That awareness and the fear it instils braids together their fates until they almost become one.

Naderehvardi has a striking ability to weave together language and events that suck readers in and force them into a state of unease – a state that, paradoxically, we don't wish to leave.

Saga Wallander



Red Sun
312 p., 2023, Albert Bonniers
Rights: RCW Literary Agency
Rights sold to: Denmark

India and Kallas are invited to stay at a friend's large house by the sea. One evening three children appear with nowhere to go. India and Kallas become attached to the children. They begin to indulge in the kind of love and care usually reserved for parents. Meanwhile, the shadow of the inevitable creeps closer.



Strega
200 p., 2020, Albert Bonniers
Rights: RCW Literary Agency
Rights sold to: Bulgaria,
Denmark, France, Germany,
Hungary, Italy, Macedonia,
Netherlands, Poland, Turkey,
UK, US/Canada

Powerfully inventive and atmospheric, *Strega* is a modern gothic story about nine young women on the cusp of inheriting society's submission to violence, and the age-old myths that uphold it.

NEGAR NASEH

(b. 1984)

A former king is dying of cancer; a grown man has severe eating disorders; a revolution goes awry; a political leftist turns out to be a terrible boyfriend; exile engenders a homesickness that is difficult to express when home is no longer recognizable and the revolution has scattered friends and family across the world. All of these things are both extraordinary and ordinary, as we read in *A Handful of Wind* ('En handfull vind').

Negar Naseh's family epic begins in Tehran in 1978 and concludes in the present day. Minou's husband Hassan has moved to Sweden. A pregnant Minou plans to follow him as soon as she can. As the revolution in Iran reaches its height, Minou opens her home to demonstrators to help them escape government forces. In parallel with Minou's story, we glimpse the life of the shah, which is also upended when he is forced into exile.

A Handful of Wind has a large chronological and a large geographical sweep, covering Canada, Panama, Iran, Sweden and Egypt. Naseh moves easily between places and across decades. Her language is deceptively simple; the book seems to jog along. But it is precisely in the almost laconic tone that its greatness lies.

The Displaced ('De fördrivna') also features a density of everyday detail. The characters are always chafing at something: a glass splinter in their foot, a baby not allowed to sleep on its stomach, someone drinking too many gin cocktails. Behind their comfortable but aggravating middle-class lives looms the spectre of death on the Mediterranean: an omnipresent source of conflict.

The novels address very different themes but have in common their subtle portrayal of their subject, be it revolution and exile or middle-class couples adrift in life. Through the seemingly simple language, something very existential trickles in.

Saga Wallander



Foto: Majja Flink



A Handful of Wind
291 p., 2022, Natur & Kultur
Rights: Nordin Agency
Rights sold to: France

It is the fall of 1978 in Tehran. Minou is pregnant and on the street beneath her balcony the revolution is gaining momentum. It is two years before the overthrow of the shah.

Half a life later, in Sweden, Minou's family wanders through the shards of the past, the fragments of what could have been and what was.



The Displaced
174 p., 2016, Natur & Kultur
Rights: Nordin Agency
All rights are available

A couple has left Stockholm for Sicily. The Sicilian landscape is beautiful, the tomatoes mouth-watering, the privacy complete. Yet the situation is tense.

The Displaced asks how isolated we can allow ourselves to be. As cracks appear in the characters' lives, they begin to see new ways of approaching the world.

In New Swedish Fiction, Stockholm Is Not Where It's At

Debut novelists show us the road ahead. So where is Swedish fiction going? It is winding its way along gravel lanes ribboned with grass; it is whizzing down streets far from Stockholm's downtown.



Södermalm in Stockholm, with its many cafés, bars and vintage shops, has long held a reputation as Sweden's mecca for hipsters, artists and writers. Authors certainly do live both here and clustered around other central dots on the Stockholm Metro map. Yet Stockholm does not dominate the landscape of current Swedish debut fiction. Since about 2020 or a little before, most of the top debut novelists in Sweden have looked to different horizons.



Recent Swedish debut fiction displays three main trends: the prevalence of northern voices, the return of the epic, and a new poetry of grief and rebellion. For those finding their way in new Swedish fiction, here are some writers to look out for.

Northern voices

Many of the strongest new literary debuts are about northern Sweden. One of them is *I See All That You Do* ('Jag ser allt du gör', 2020), Annika Norlin's intrepid collection of short stories that range from pitch black to uproariously funny. A woman loses her baby and self-treats her trauma by walking, walking, walking in the woods. A crappy punk band goes on tour with a set of two-minute songs that all have the same bass line. A confirmed redneck bachelor astonishes his neighbours by luring a heel-wearing woman from the Baltic to his rural

backwater. The ending may not be happy, but at least the story is good for a laugh.

Elin Willows' stylish debut *Inlands* ('Inlandet', 2018) features a main character who makes an unusual journey: a young woman who leaves Stockholm for a small community in the interior of Norrland in northern Sweden. Young people migrating to cities have never needed an explanation – in life or in literature – but a move to the country



usually requires a reason. Willows' protagonist moves for her boyfriend's sake and winds up staying when the relationship ends. Her journey of personal growth is familiar from many first novels; the difference is that this journey leads not to the city but away from it.

Karin Smirnoff is the rare debut novelist to achieve both critical acclaim – not quite universal; the biggest Swedish morning paper said something about 'crowd-pleasing clichés' – and broad popularity. In Swedish fiction, the line between the two can be hard to breach. Debut authors who win the most awards and plaudits rarely sell the most books. *My Brother* ('Jag för ner till bror', 2018) unfolds in a village in Västerbotten

"Kippo faces life with fortitude and a healthy dose of gallows humour."

between the cities of Skellefteå and Umeå. The main character, Jana Kippo, is on her way home. The novel begins as she steps off the country bus into the village where she grew up. The rural landscape is full of dark secrets, which has inspired the label 'Norrländ noir' for this and other books from similar latitudes. But Kippo faces life with fortitude and a healthy dose of gallows humour. Smirnoff's debut has already launched a trilogy with sales of over 500,000 copies – a staggering number for little Sweden.

The latest breakout success from the north, Mikael Yvesand's debut *Hang City* ('Häng City', 2022), tells the story of three boys, ages 13, 13, and 11, with a habit of nicknaming things 'Something City', in a play on the name of a local grocery store. The friends seem to dwell in an adult-free world of endless summer vacation, their restless skateboards rattling down the house-lined streets of Luleå. They try to get hold of snuff and cigarettes (illegal for minors...in theory) and work on building their cabin in the woods. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to them, a killer stalks the residential neighbourhoods. *Hang City* is less a thriller, however, than

BOOKS MENTIONED

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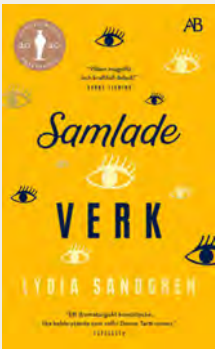
a novel about being a young boy. It has been very successful with male readers, especially.

The new epic

Speaking of men: just as Swedish men read less than Swedish women, male authors have retreated to the wings on the Swedish debut stage. Women account for two thirds of all Swedish award-winning debut novelists since the 2010s.

Among the very most influential is Lydia

"The days have long passed when short experimental prose dominated Swedish fiction."



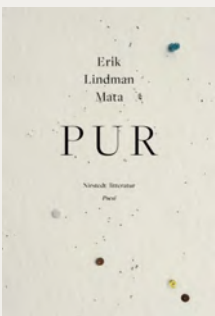
Sandgren, who debuted with *Collected Works* ('Samlade verk', 2020), an epic family saga of nearly 700 pages set in the literature and art world of the late 1980s. *Collected Works* takes place, in fact, in a city, but a rather obscure one by literary lights. Gothenburg is Sweden's unglamorous second city: so much so that surprised Stockholmers asked the critically acclaimed Sandgren (according to an interview in *Vi läser* magazine) if she 'still lived there' after her debut success.

The new authors already mentioned, like Smirnoff and Yvesand, also belong to the epic trend. Novels today exceed 300 pages; the days have long passed when short experimental prose dominated Swedish fiction.

Even the new Swedish poetry sensation might justifiably be called an epic. Marit Kapla's *Osebol* (2019) is a page-turner brimming with stories, a book of poetry that runs to 812 pages, and an unexpected, original, unforgettable debut success. It begins (in Peter Graves' translation):

*'Let me tell you something ...
my life has been like Värmland.
Mountains and valleys.
It's had its ups and its downs.'*

Speaking is Åke Axelsson, one of 42 residents of the village of Osebol on the Klar River in northern Värmland who gave their stories – Kapla asked every resident of the village for an interview! – to be



transmuted into verse that harks back to the New Simplicity. Life in Osebol means hunting moose and weaving rugs, fishing and the potato patch, wild strawberries and lingonberries, the children, the land. An important bit of context: Kapla herself grew up in Osebol. She has since moved away and takes her place in the book only as a listener at the kitchen table, a drinker of coffee, an amanuens of life in the country.

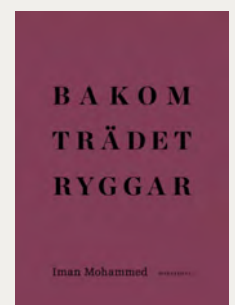
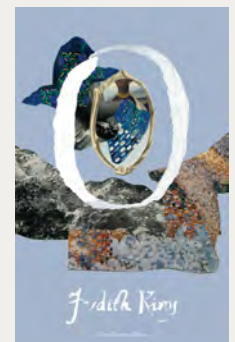
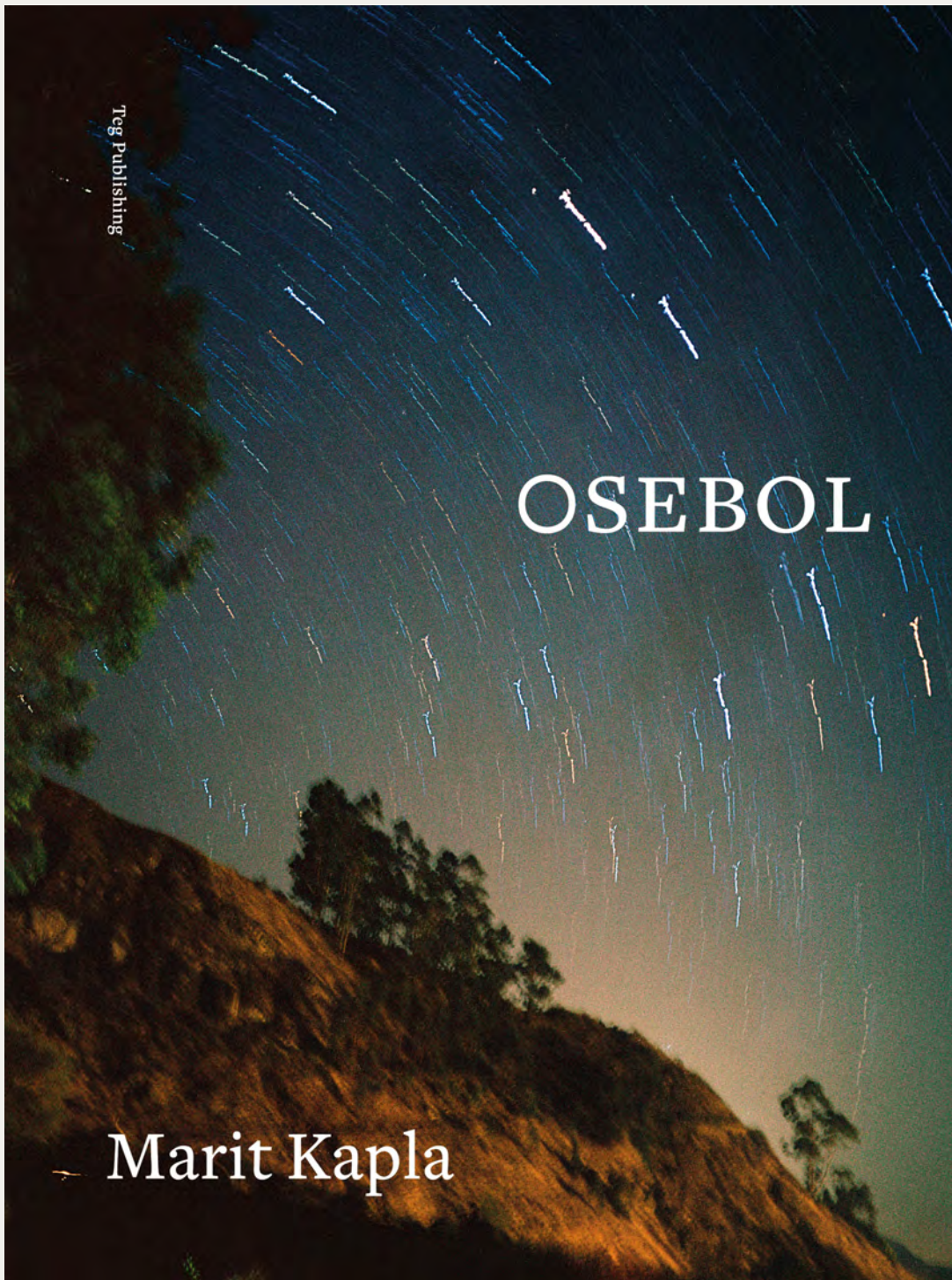
Poetry of grief and rebellion

Can we even speak of a literary trend that involves poets writing from their own experiences of terrible hardship? Some of the most noted debut works of Swedish poetry in recent years have been about sorrow and pain. Their creation can hardly be called a trend; they seem to spring from sheer necessity. Still, in the way they penetrate the clamour and make a strong impression, they seem to capture something we need for the hard times we live in. Formally, their fragmented lines may be unmatched for dealing with weighty topics. These poets write so we feel it. Erik Lindman Mata's *Pure* ('Pur', 2020) deals with the loss of a murdered girlfriend. His verse is deeply personal, of course, but it also borders on the political. In one breath Mata creates new poetic images, in the next he rebels and reclaims women's murders from the

"The days have long passed when short experimental prose dominated Swedish fiction."

popular true crime genre, to breathtaking and touching affect.

Sorin Masifi's *State, Sisters, Poetry* ('Staten, Systrarna, Dikten', 2022) also focuses on a loss, this time the loss of a beloved sister. Masifi's own state is Kurdistan, where her family has its roots. She crafts lines about her her sister that speak to a history of oppression and colonialism. 'The thing in your hand is a weapon / The thing in your hand is an archive / The thing in your hand is a poem.'



Iman Mohammed's debut poetry collection, *Behind the Tree Backs* ('Bakom trädet ryggar', 2018), begins with war or at least with violence:

'Brain tissue unwillingly ornamenting the greenery: hortensia, ambra tree, hibiscus, dahlia.

Milk teeth of hegemony.'

Which war, which violence? Which hegemony, whose domination?

I don't know. Mohammed's poem is less overtly narrative than many poems by her peers. 'Ambra tree' at least rules out Malmö, Mohammed's current home. Much of the strongest debut poetry in Swedish connects to experiences of migration and offers testimonies of exclusion and racism. Judith Kiro's smart, playful *O* (2019), inspired in part by Shakespeare's tragic play *Othello*, deals

LENA KVIST ALSO RECOMMENDS

Mimmi Jensen Gellerhed (b. 1970)

***Awake ('Vaken')*, 289 p., 2022, Albert Bonniers**

Rights: Albert Bonniers, Helena Ljungström

All rights are available

A dark and stylish novel about going home. The main character lacks boundaries, and her return to the village she grew up in poses challenges for her world and the reader alike. The author depicts the catastrophic consequences with restraint and polish.

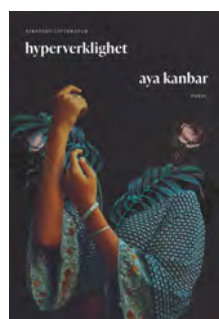


Aya Kanbar (b. 2004)

***Hyperreality ('Hyperverklighet')*, 148 p., 2021, Nirstedt/litteratur**

Rights: Nirstedt/litteratur, Emiliano Sener at Modernista
Rights sold to: Norway

In this dynamic collection of verse, the poet experiments with language and sonority with intuition and flair. Kanbar took the literary world by storm when she debuted at age 17 – Sweden's youngest debut author in ages.



Kayo Mpyoi (b. 1986)

***Mai Means Water ('Mai betyder vatten')*, 254 p., 2019, Norstedts**

Rights: Norstedts Agency
Rights sold to: Finland, France, Germany, Norway

When Ali's little sister Mai is born in Tanzania, her name means water but also has associations with a curse. *Mai Means Water* is a magnetic portrait of a family whose children must navigate a world of colonialism, repression and revolution.



"Swedes are writing as never before, with about 130 writers making their fiction debut each year."

with Blackness and White fantasies. Kiro shows how Blackness is and has been seen as the shadow cast by Whiteness, both in the past and in Sweden today.

Besides these breakout successes, of course, we have books, books, and more books. Swedes are writing as never before, with about 130 writers making their fiction debut each year. I must close with the exception that proves the rule. One of the strongest recent fiction debuts is Daniel Gustafsson's *Odenplan* (2019), a compact novel set in Stockholm (Odenplan is one of those central dots on the Metro map). Of course, Gustafsson's book is also full of Central European memories. Even a novel that puts Stockholm in its title seems to have its gaze turned elsewhere.

Lena Kvist, journalist and literature scholar

ELLA-MARIA NUTTI

(b. 1995)

Just like the main characters in her debut novel *Coffee With Milk* ('Kaffe med mjölk'), Ella-Maria Nutti has Sámi roots. Like many other indigenous peoples around the world, Sweden's indigenous population has been subjected for decades – centuries – to racism and offensive treatment. Nutti shows us Sámi culture as something self-evident, even simple. A utopia, perhaps, but a necessary one.

Nutti has great respect and love for her characters. She lets them live their own lives. *Coffee With Milk* revolves around a mother, Agneta, up north in Gällivare, and her daughter, Tilda, who has left her hometown for Stockholm. While Tilda tries to adapt to life in the big city, Agneta conceals a diagnosis of terminal cancer. In Gällivare Tilda drank her coffee black; in the city she takes milk. She marvels at the awkwardness of Tinder dates and how no one makes eye contact on the Metro. And as time ticks away, the mental and physical distance between mother and daughter – two people who once inhabited the same body – grows. Nutti gets close to her characters, daring to tug at the mother-daughter bond. She writes a life story, an elegy for Agneta, and in the end she also finds words for the reunion between the estranged mother and daughter.

Nutti does not shy from using her own background for material. She has described an important insight: when she writes the way she talks, using her own dialect and Sámi words – unlike Tilda, who tries to scrub away her dialect – she is able to do what she loves most: write for the joy of it.

Coffee With Milk has been nominated for the Norrland Literature Prize (2023) and Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan's Author's Award (2022).

Aurora Holm



Foto: Sofia Runarsdóttir



Coffee With Milk
192 p., 2022, Wahlström
& Widstrand

Rights: Bonnier Rights

Rights sold to: Finland, Germany

Agneta arrives in Stockholm feeling anxious. Will her daughter be able to see the sickness on her: the grey skin sagging off her bones, the thinning hair, the rasping cough? When did this impossible distance between them begin to grow? How do you tell your only daughter you are dying of cancer?

JOEL MAURICIO ISABEL ORTIZ (b. 1987)

Foto: Elvira Glänte



Devotion
192 p., 2023, Norstedts
Rights: Norstedts Agency
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Devotion is a novel about love and sorrow, despair and grace. In a condensed and masterfully constructed narrative, Joel Mauricio Isabel Ortiz depicts an all-consuming passion and the redeeming power of friendship when all else seems lost.



The Song of a Son
272 p., 2018, Norstedts
Rights: Norstedts Agency
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A son confronts his father, reopening old wounds: physical blows, racism, roots never mentioned aloud; and also the violence of being forced into the role of a son, being adopted, being moulded into a man. Now the time has come to stop running and find a home in a hostile world.

As Swedish author Tone Schunnesson once wrote, love is a wonky god to pray to. In our secularized society, it is perhaps also the commonest. In Joel Mauricio Isabel Ortiz' *Devotion* ('Tillbedjan'), a destructive relationship takes the place of faith, hope and community. When an isolated and anxiety-ridden Leandro reunites with his ex-partner Sebastian, for the first time in a long time he feels alive again. At the same time, the unequal balance of power between the two men grows increasingly plainer and the violence more aggravated.

Rootlessness is a theme Ortiz often returns to. So is the search for something unbroken in oneself. Ortiz himself grew up in Sweden but was adopted from Colombia, an experience he shares with some of his characters. His debut novel, *The Song of a Son* ('Sången om en son'), opens as the queer protagonist, Angel, confronts their alcoholic adoptive father. The conflict sparks a process of self-confrontation around which the novel revolves.

Ortiz writes a raw, vulnerable prose. *The Song of a Son* is an uninhibited portrait of young, queer Stockholm and the destructiveness that can pervade it. Drugs, nightlife and rough app-based sex exist side by side with a yearning for true love. Unlike many other writers of today, Ortiz does not romanticize the destructiveness. He gives it an existential dimension and sheds light on the ways trauma can manifest itself in our lives.

Ortiz is a trained dramaturge, director and actor. His novels have something of the character of stage plays, but they also demonstrate a creative versatility. He has an unerring ear for dialogue and portrays both explicit and implicit conflicts. As a storyteller, Ortiz shows us bold new approaches to difficult questions. His work resonates both with readers and in the public debate.

Emmy Odeskog

SARA OSMAN

(b. 1992)

In an era characterized by a surfeit of ways to communicate, you might think a lot would get said. Paradoxically, it seems the opposite is true. In her debut novel *Everything We Didn't Say* ('Allt vi inte sa'), Sara Osman tells the story of three friends living in the heart of downtown Stockholm and the poisonous gap that can open between what we say and what we leave unsaid.

Sofia, Caroline and Amanda have converged on the Swedish capital, a competitive environment where life revolves around housing prices, parties and social media. Osman's fast-paced prose and propulsive narrative reinforce the portrayal of the high-stress setting in which the women live. By shifting among their various points of view, Osman illustrates in a way both funny and frightening how alone we all are in our own heads. At the same time, she levels cutting jibes at the modern age in prose redolent with cynicism. With each passing page, events take a steeper downward turn en route to the final climax: a midsummer weekend where silent cracks come to the surface with devastating consequences.

In Osman's novel, the dissonance between what is said and what goes unsaid becomes a breeding ground for destructive friendships and racism. Sofia, like Osman, is a second-generation Swede and a lawyer. She becomes a canvas onto which Osman projects the experience of being a single Black woman in White spaces. Sofia can never escape a feeling of alienation, and Osman skilfully portrays what it feels like when the onus of proof always lies on you, and the existential loneliness that kind of vulnerability engenders.

Osman's debut novel is both an engrossing page-turner and a weighty social commentary. Finely balanced between deadly earnest and whip-smart humour, it instantly whets the appetite for more.

Emmy Odeskog



Foto: Elvira Glante



Everything We Didn't Say
320 p., 2021, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Salomonsson Agency
Rights sold to: Finland

Three young women are living it up in downtown Stockholm. On the surface everything is glitz and glamour. But beneath the surface, tensions are roiling. *Everything We Didn't Say* is a blend of psychological suspense, dark entertainment and contemporary literary fiction.

DONIA SALEH

(b. 1996)

Foto: Märta Thisner



Ya Leila

**240 p., 2020, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Bonnier Rights
All rights are available**

Leila and Amila are inseparable. Sometimes their deep symbiosis makes them feel immortal; at other times it feels like a claustrophobic nightmare. *Ya Leila* is a novel about loyalty that can both raise you up and confine you, about inherited generational trauma and the intense love between two friends.

Donia Saleh's debut novel *Ya Leila* portrays a feminist struggle that has come unmoored and turned into an extension of the capitalist arm that created it. The Glitter Pussies are a loose group fighting a seemingly courageous political battle against norms and power structures, creating a lot of sound and fury but signifying little in the end. Meanwhile, feminism looks more like a sales strategy successfully deployed by H&M and white girls in high school.

Ya Leila is also a novel about class and racism. Because Saleh does not come from the white upper middle class, she has the tools to illuminate racism in its various guises. She gives voice to a contemporary Swedish perspective that diverges from the white norm that otherwise dominates fiction. In *Ya Leila* the white middle-class girl is not in focus; she is sketchily drawn, peripheral to the story. The main characters Leila and Amila, by contrast, are a complexly rendered odd couple with a dynamic that invites comparisons to Elena Ferrante's Naples quartet: the gentle, cautious protagonist and her robustly loyal companion.

The girls are best friends in the monogamous way that only young people dare to be. Together they navigate the space between childhood and adulthood, between being Swedish and not being Swedish, all against the backdrop of their senior year of high school when everything they know may be about to change. Through the girls and the friction between them, Saleh reflects on what it is like not to belong to a social majority and how it impacts a young person's identity.

Saleh's prose is lyrical, playful and consistent. She is a keen observer of society with a strong sense of language, a combination that promises much for her future as an author.

Emmy Odeskog

ANDRÉS STOOPENDAAL

(b. 1981)

Reading Andrés Stoopendaal's *The Dunning-Kruger Effect* ('Dunning-Kruger-effekten'), I am most struck by his tone: sober, almost expounding, yet simultaneously absurd. Considering whether he would want to have a baby with his partner, his narrator writes: 'If Maria got pregnant, I wouldn't cry bloody tears. More likely the opposite.' It's laugh-out-loud funny.

In the first chapter, my mind goes immediately to French author Michel Houellebecq, whom I also read more for tone than for plot. My reading notes ('keen, warm, laconic, Houellebecqian sense of humour') seem almost comical when, later in the book, in a misguided attempt to 'go all in on writing', Stoopendaal's narrator writes his 'Houellebecq text'. He feels vaguely drawn to both the highly controversial but lauded author Houellebecq and the equally controversial Canadian psychologist and debater Jordan B. Peterson. A shy, rather anonymous man in his 30s, the narrator has a steady job at the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, an equally steady girlfriend and a dog. The contrast between the life he actually leads and his fascination for these two contemporary rebels forms a central part of the novel's message.

But is our narrator's life as steady as it seems? Stoopendaal subtly sows seeds of doubt. In this ambiguity lies the novel's great strength. We follow a young man, seemingly quite in his right mind, as he begins, one summer in Gothenburg, to lose his grip – but never quite lets go. In this sense *The Dunning-Kruger Effect* is a keen, contemporary portrait of a life lived entirely in the no-man's-land between freedom and conformity, dreams and reality. In the final chapter Stoopendaal writes: 'It was not impossible at all that I did not understand what the real world was, that I did not live in the real world, because I did not know suffering personally, although indeed suffering was nothing I wished in earnest to get to know.'

Fiery and formal, all in one sentence.

Bob Mattsson

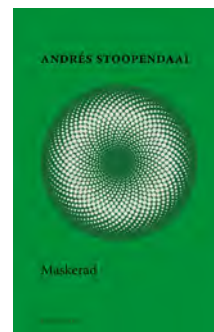


Foto: Sören Håkan Lind



The Dunning-Kruger Effect
221 p., 2023, Norstedts
Rights: Salomonsson Agency
Rights sold to: Canada, Denmark, Norway, Serbia, US

Our main character reads 12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos by Canadian psychologist Jordan B. Peterson, pretends that he's the author Michel Houellebecq, and gets caught up in the delusion that his girlfriend Maria might be an android or possibly just a hallucination.



Masquerade ('Maskerad')
166 p., 2012, Norstedts
Rights: Salomonsson Agency
All rights are available

Masquerade is a beautiful, bewildering, ambiguous story that veers between exterior and interior, portraying the passages between childhood and adulthood, love and hate, cruelty and kindness.

QUYNH TRAN

(b. 1989)

Foto: Kevin Chang



Shade and Breeze
259 p., 2021, Norstedts
Rights: Norstedts Agency
Rights sold to: Denmark, Finland,
Germany, Norway, UK, Vietnam

Mother Má dreams of wealth and grandeur. Big brother Hieu dreams of pretty girls. A little brother watches from the periphery and gradually disappears into his schoolwork, mesmerized by his own astonishing intelligence. *Shade and Breeze* is a story about love, obsession and the meaning of family.

Quynh Tran has described his debut novel *Shade and Breeze* ('Skugga och svalka') as a personal novel. Despite that, and despite the similarities between the author and his narrator, the book is not an autobiography or even a work of autofiction. Nor do we ever learn why the three main characters – the narrator, brother Hieu and mother Má – live in a Swedish-speaking city in Finland. Instead, as the author, Tran adopts a dreamlike style, lyrical and studded with abbreviated paragraphs where the reader must fill in the blanks. One central theme is desire: desire for money, desire for girls, a desire to be something. Other themes include love, obsession and family.

The story centres around the mother and the older brother as observed by the narrator, the younger brother. We see the mother through her child's eyes as she tries to build a decent life for herself and her boys: the long days spent working at a laundry, the hours picking and selling blueberries, playing cards, renting out movies from their apartment. Meanwhile the mother and the older brother fight, usually physically rather than verbally, and the younger brother tries to piece together and understand his wounded family.

Shade and Breeze sparked massive interest even prior to its publication. It was released by three publishers simultaneously: in Finnish and Swedish versions in Finland and by another major publisher in Sweden. Multi-language, multi-country launches of debut authors are very rare. *Shade and Breeze* has won major awards in both Finland and Sweden, including Svenska Yle's Literature Award, the Runeberg Prize and Borås Tidning's Debutant Prize. The jury members, like the book's many readers, were unanimous in finding that Tran possesses a literary voice all his own.

Aurora Holm

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- Translation and production costs
- Events about Swedish literature abroad and the promotion of translated works
- Participation in international fellowship programmes
- Translators' travel and training, sample translations and mentorship projects

New Swedish Voices

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