

Autumn 2022 |

SWEDISH CONTEMPORARY FICTION

SLE SWEDISH
LITERATURE
EXCHANGE

WELCOME!

Welcome to this new guide from Swedish Literature Exchange!

This booklet is for everyone who's interested in contemporary Swedish literature, but who may be uncertain where to start. It's also for professionals around the world who have published one or two Swedish books in translation and would like to publish more.

We have selected some of Sweden's novelists whose books have already been translated into several languages, reaching readers in countries all over the world. Along with a brief presentation of each author, we highlight some of their books that have been published abroad in translation. Details of the original publisher and foreign rights contacts are given for each featured book.

At the back of this booklet, you will find contact details for the literary agencies and foreign rights departments that handle translation rights for the authors featured here.

If you're interested in grants available to support the translation and promotion of Swedish literature abroad, you can find out more on our website www.swedishliterature.se. We also post articles about various aspects of Swedish literature on that site.

Enjoy!

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

Note: The authors featured here were chosen from nominations submitted by Swedish literary agencies and publishers that sell foreign rights for Swedish fiction. The agencies and publishers were asked to nominate several authors and books that have reached international audiences. In order to ensure coverage across a broad range of publishers and agencies, a team from the Swedish Arts Council made the final selection from the nominations received. The author portraits were written by four independent literary critics – thanks to Ingrid Elam, Yukiko Duke, Annina Rabe and Jonas Thente for their contributions.

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SUSANNA ALAKOSKI

(b. 1962)

When Susanna Alakoski won Sweden's prestigious August Prize in 2006 for her debut novel *Beyond* ('Svinalängorna'), many people said it heralded a new golden age for Swedish working-class literature. Alakoski has been a standard-bearer for that tradition with her novels, non-fiction, children's books and drama.

Poverty and class issues are ever-present themes in her books. She avoids simplistic explanations, choosing instead to view class issues in all their complexity. She provides subtle, nuanced portrayals of shame, feelings of inferiority, squalor, and alcohol and drug abuse. But amidst the misery there are also strong friendship, love and survival instincts – and plenty of dreams and desires.

Another recurring theme is social mobility and the toll it takes on those who climb up the ladder. Susanna Alakoski has made that journey herself. She grew up in a poor family that had immigrated to Sweden from Finland. There were serious addiction issues in her family – not unlike the main character's circumstances in *Beyond*.

She also spent some time as a social worker. Her two non-fiction chronicles, *October in Swedish Deprivation* ('Oktober i Fattigsverige', 2012) and *April in Quiet Despair* ('April i anhörigsverige', 2015), combine notes from her childhood with observations of daily life, where many vulnerable people lack a safety net. Statistics on homelessness and poverty are interspersed among the notes Social Services made about Alakoski's own family in her childhood.

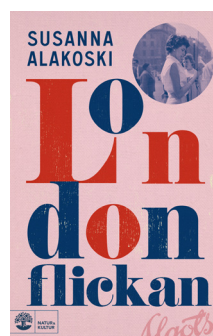
With *Cotton Angel* ('Bomullsängeln', 2019), Susanna Alakoski returned to the novel as a form. That book is the first volume in a planned tetralogy depicting the lives of working-class women in Finland and Sweden through the 20th century. The story deals with social class and work, as well as love and friendship and the ties between the two countries. As ever, Alakoski takes a thorough approach. The narrative is bolstered by information about the rise of trade unions and the cotton mill that employed large numbers of Finnish women. Nevertheless, she always places the human stories at the centre. In Susanna Alakoski's world, the macrocosm is always portrayed via the microcosm, through individual lives.

Annina Rabe

Rights sold to: 8 countries



Foto: Sara Moe Key



The London Girl
332 pages, 2021, Natur & Kultur
Rights: Nordin Agency

It's the 1950s. Greta has left her mother Hilda and the old cotton factory in Vasa for a better life in Stockholm. She shares a room with her best friend Aili and works as a nanny and a hospital orderly before her dreams take her even further away: to London.



Cotton Angel
426 p. 2019, Natur & Kultur
Rights: Nordin Agency

Two girls dream of a new life in the nearby city, working at the imposing cotton factory. Cotton will be their way out, both a blessing and a new burden. A powerful novel about the exploitation that girls endure, about female friendships and women's constant thirst for knowledge.



Beyond
260 p. 2006, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Nordin Agency

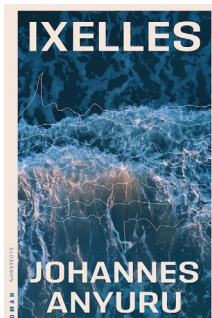
A recently built housing estate in Ystad is filled with immigrant families and low-income earners during the 1960s. A moving story about social class, children's vulnerability and their capacity to survive.

JOHANNES ANYURU

(b. 1979)



Foto: Andreas Rundberg



Ixelles

400 p. 2022, Norstedts Rights: Norstedts Agency

One day, Rut hears about a boy lying in a coma in hospital. He possesses a recording of her son Mio's voice. Mio is supposed to be dead. He says, 'There are rooftops here where you can see all the way to the sea. Here in the library over nothing.'



They Will Drown in Their Mothers' Tears

294 p. 2017, Norstedts Rights: Norstedts Agency

An intense story filled with sorrow at the state of the world today. It is a story about hope and hopelessness, about friendship and betrayal, and about the ugly theatre of terror and fascism.



A Storm Blew in from Paradise

248 p. 2012, Norstedts Rights: Norstedts Agency

Over a period of many years, we follow P's struggles – as a refugee, as a military camp prisoner, as a man on the run. He never stops dreaming of a life as a pilot, but he will never get to fly again.

Johannes Anyuru has been a major name in Swedish contemporary literature ever since his debut in 2003 with the poetry collection *Only The Gods Are New* ('Det är bara gudarna som är nya'). He updated the image of Sweden's mid-20th-century planned suburbs from sleepy commuter towns to places where police lights flash across the sound of languages from all over the world. He invokes images from Homer's *The Iliad*, its heroes and lost figures.

After another two volumes of poetry, Anyuru's first novel, *If I Were to Die Under Other Skies* ('Skulle jag dö under andra himlar') was published in 2010. It follows an easily distracted sculptor from a provincial Swedish town and the love affair that prompts him to piece together his past.

Anyuru's real breakthrough came with his novel *They Will Drown in Their Mothers' Tears* ('De kommer att drunkna i sina mödrars tårar', 2017). The title sounds as if it could be a line from a terrorist's self-filmed martyrdom video on YouTube – that's the intention. The book portrays a dystopian future Sweden – at least if you believe one of the main characters, who claims to come from the year 2030. In that future, immigrants are forced to salute the Swedish flag and eat pork to prove that they belong in Sweden.

It is a dark, bleak novel that begins with a terrorist attack on a bookshop. Nour, the protagonist, is tasked with filming a hostage. A controversial, explosive novel, it was chosen as the winner of the August Prize, the most prestigious award for Swedish literature, in 2017.

Johannes Anyuru's next book was published in 2018. *Children of the Power Outage* ('Strömavbrottets barn') is a collage of diverse texts: poems, articles, fragments and notes. It is the sort of book you can dip into, lingering to affirm subjects that feel familiar. Even on a small scale, Anyuru's skill as a stylist is evident. He demonstrates the way to maintain a balance between apparently conflicting worlds that actually have more in common than they think. Personally, I rate this sort of firecracker bricolage more highly than some of Anyuru's more restrained writing.

Jonas Thente

Rights sold to: 18 countries

LINNEA AXELSSON

(b. 1980)

Linnea Axelsson is an art historian. She grew up with a Sámi mother and a Swedish father. Her maternal grandmother came from one of the Sámi families who were forcibly relocated from Karesuando, a village on Sweden's northern border, in the 1920s. Cross-border reindeer grazing had long been a source of political conflict between Sweden and Norway and the Swedish government used a variety of methods to force North Sámi families to relocate to unfamiliar areas further south. The collective memory of this oppression remains painful for the descendants of those who were uprooted from their lands. That is the pain for which Linnea Axelsson provides an outlet in her writing.

Axelsson made her literary debut in 2010 with the novel *The Twin Jewel* ('Tvillingsmycket'), subtitled 'A sibling legend'. It tells of a woman called Anja who gives birth to twins while on the run, trying to reach the northern fells. The story of the twins' lives is told in a highly distinctive, archaic style with elements of folk tales.

Linnea Axelsson achieved real literary acclaim with *Aednan* ('Ædnan', 2018), a grand lyrical epic that depicts North Sámi life from the early 20th century to the present day. Three women – Ristin, Lise and Sandra – speak directly to the reader from three different eras. Their experiences of oppression, rootlessness and conflict are distinct yet shared.

Aednan is a story of land rights being denied to a people. Of lives hemmed in by mines and dammed rivers, a vanishing language and the humiliation of being subjected to pseudo-scientific ethno-racial experiments. But it is also a story of people searching for their roots, trying to preserve whatever they can of their culture.

Linnea Axelsson portrays their individual stories in spare, stark stanzas as clear, pure and resonant as a mountain stream. In her verse, the Sámi experience is not reduced to a single voice; the numerous narrators form a multifaceted chorus that leaves no reader untouched.

Linnea Axelsson was awarded the 2018 August Prize for *Aednan*. A dramatic adaptation has also been performed in Sweden.

Yukiko Duke

Rights sold to: 2 countries



Foto: Sofia Runarsdatter



The Magnificat
150 p. 2022, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Bonnier Rights

The Magnificat is both an immediately present and mythically tinged story of love and sorrow, about seeking a home in a world that remains alien. Linnea Axelsson's tonality is distinctively lyrical, terse, with hidden depths of emotion.



Aednan
766 p. 2018, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Bonnier Rights

In Linnea Axelsson's stunning verse novel, she narrates the story of two Indigenous Sámi families in northern Sweden, whose fate mirrors Sámi history from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day.

THERESE BOHMAN

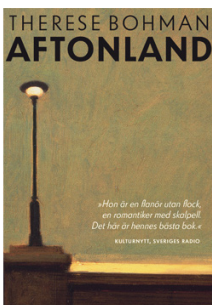
(b. 1978)

Foto: Norstedts



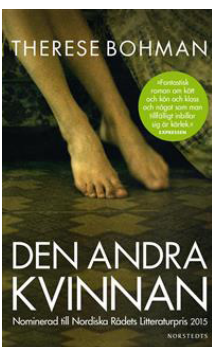
Andromeda
198 p. 2022, Norstedts
Rights: Nordin Agency

A young woman starts working as an intern at a famous publishing house, staying for many years and gaining more responsibility. The novel grows into a story about tradition and modernity, expectations and disappointments, idealism and crass reality.



Eventide
230 p. 2016, Norstedts
Rights: Nordin Agency

When Karolina starts to tutor a new postgraduate student, she is affected by his self-confidence. He claims to have found new information on an unknown female painter. Karolina soon finds herself entangled both professionally and emotionally.



The Other Woman
202 p., 2014, Norstedts
Rights: Nordin Agency

This novel is a passionate psychological drama where questions of power and sexuality are brought to a head. But it is just as much a novel about finding one's dreams and challenging the fears within.

Drowned ('Den drunknade'). *The Other Woman* ('Den andra kvinnan'). *Eventide* ('Aftonland'). The titles of Therese Bohman's novels may seem mundane. That is quite intentional. She chose those titles as a way of playing with clichés, but also to evoke a certain timelessness. While Therese Bohman exists firmly in the present day, her writing also has a classic, timeless quality – both in her carefully crafted prose and the subjects she deals with: exclusion, loneliness, passion and power games.

Her characters perceive themselves as loners in an incomprehensible, banal environment. The young woman in *The Other Woman* (2014) works in a hospital kitchen and dreams of a world filled with art, literature, beauty and higher learning. When she embarks on an affair with a senior physician, she dares to hope that he will be her gateway into that life, though she knows deep down that her role is that of the outsider, 'the other woman'. But then the power relation shifts, and the resolution comes as both a surprise and a relief.

Therese Bohman provides a fresh, smart take on one of the most overused clichés – love in a hospital setting – and turns it into a sharp, intelligent analysis of social class.

In *Eventide*, Bohman continues her examination of loneliness and exclusion. Karolina, a single, childless middle-aged art professor is ill at ease in the contemporary world. She has got stuck in her joyless existence. She feels out of place among shameless careerists at the university where she works. Her love life is nothing to write home about either, though she has no trouble attracting men. Bohman's observations on relationships and the hypocrisies of academic life are razor-sharp. The settings she conjures up are reminiscent of the classic paintings that are Karolina's area of expertise.

Therese Bohman's writing has a timeless quality – not least of all in her outstanding ability to escalate a seemingly event-free story, leaving the reader uncertain how things will turn out until the very last pages.

Annina Rabe

Rights sold to: 11 countries

LINDA BOSTRÖM KNAUSGÅRD

(b. 1972)

Linda Boström Knausgård debuted in 1998 with a volume of poetry entitled *Make Me Comfortable for the Wound* ('Gör mig behaglig för såret'). That collection was well received, but it took well over a decade before she published her second book, the short-story collection *Grand Mal* ('Grand Mal', 2011). In between those two books she got married, had several children and read a great deal about herself in her husband Karl-Ove Knausgård's six-volume magnum opus *My Struggle* ('Min kamp'), the final instalment of which came out the same year as her short stories.

Since then, she has regained control of her story and her life in one book after another. Not until her most recent novel, *October Child* ('Oktoberbarn', 2019), did she use her own full name and the names of her family members, but other titles that came out earlier in the decade – *The Helios Disaster* ('Helioskatastrofen', 2013) and *Welcome to America* ('Välkommen till Amerika', 2016) – were also based on autobiographical material. The narrator is always a girl or young woman who looks back on her childhood shaped by a parent's mental illness, a sense of abandonment and fear that literally renders the child mute.

Living so close to mental illness sharpens one's sensibilities. Linda Boström Knausgård writes brief, dense books in a poetic style that creates palpable images and scenes. She listens to the silences between sentences and sees what is hidden from others. She is able to recreate traumatic childhood moments with painful precision. Reading her is to be drawn into a scene where every gesture is an attempt to gloss over a family tragedy.

In *October Child*, her family's legacy of bipolar disorder has caught up with Linda, the narrator. She is admitted to a psychiatric hospital for electroshock therapy. Her memory – perhaps an author's most important tool – fades and falters. Between treatments she struggles to preserve scraps of the past, of her childhood, her marriage, the birth of her children and finally her divorce. It is a fragmented book, written with great sensitivity and perceptiveness. Even its form reflects the struggle to hold her life together when everything she once had has been lost.

Ingrid Elam

Rights sold to: 18 countries



Foto: Jasmin Storch



October Child.
192 p. 2019, Modernista
Rights: Copenhagen Literary Agency

The narrator's childhood, youth, marriage, motherhood, and divorce flicker by as she struggles to grasp them. The novel is at once a searing critique of psychiatric care and an increasingly desperate attempt to hold on to memories that are slipping away. A story full of anguish and vulnerability that calls out to be told.



Welcome to America
96 p. 2017, Modernista
Rights: Copenhagen Literary Agency

Welcome to America is an exquisite portrait of a sensitive, strong-willed child in the throes of trauma, a family on the brink of implosion, and the love that threatens to tear them apart.



The Helios Disaster
112 p. 2013, Modernista.
Rights: Copenhagen Literary Agency

This modern spin on the myth of Athena plunges us deep inside the mind of an unlikely twelve-year-old goddess confined to a small Swedish town.

KERSTIN EKMAN

(b. 1933)



Foto: Bodil Bergqvist

Kerstin Ekman is one of few Swedish writers who has retained her intellectual credibility as her books reached wider audiences. This *grande dame* of Swedish literature has over 40 titles to her name – mainly novels and essays, but also crime fiction, TV and film screenplays, and an opera libretto. She is a master of style, producing deceptively simple prose that is crystal-clear and loaded with meaning. With a perceptive eye for what motivates people, she writes deeply human characters in all their frailty and strength.

The Wolf Run ('Löpa varg', 2021), Ekman's first novel in ten years, is a compact novel that manages to pack in most of the themes that have recurred throughout her career. She made her literary debut in 1959 with *30 Metres of Murder* ('30 meter mord'), which she followed up with six well-received psychological thrillers in quick succession. In *The Wolf Run* she plays with well-known crime fiction tropes, but here the victim is not a person but a wolf.

Ekman's critique of civilisation is a common thread that runs through her books, from the Katrineholm Suite of novels, which marked her first big commercial success. The suite examines the ways people's lives were transformed by industrialisation in the late 19th century. Modern society's exploitation of nature is also the central theme of her acclaimed volumes of essays.

Kerstin Ekman lived in northern Sweden for many years. Her love for the northern landscape and the people who inhabit it is evident in *The Wolf Run* as well as other works, such as her widely praised *Wolf Skin Trilogy*, about three generations of women who live in a fictional northern community.

In *The Wolf Run*, the relationship between a forester and his wife plays a central role. She is his rock when his whole existence starts to crumble. Love is a crucial, powerful force in Ekman's novels. She possesses a rare ability to conjure up the trust that comes from life-long love in just a few lines.

Kerstin Ekman has stated that *The Wolf Run* will be her last novel. Let's hope she changes her mind.

Yukiko Duke

Rights sold to: 14 countries



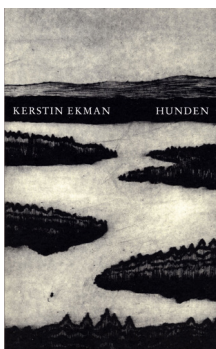
The Wolf Run
150 p. 2021, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Bonnier Rights

A story of a community and a wolf – and how an unexpected encounter between man and wolf has the power to change the course of the lives of everyone in the small town of Loåsen.



Blackwater
432 p. 1993, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Bonnier Rights

On her way through the deep forest, Annie stumbles upon the site of a grisly double murder – a crime that will remain unsolved for nearly twenty years, until the day Annie sees her grown daughter in the arms of a man she glimpsed that eerie midsummer night.



The Dog
100 p. 1986, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Bonnier Rights

A puppy gets lost and is left to struggle for survival in the wild. The puppy turns wild, trusting no human. But one man is intrigued by the feral dog and very slowly begins to gain its trust.

JONAS HASSEN KHEMIRI

(b. 1978)

Families, and particularly father-son relationships, are one of the perennial themes of world literature. They feature in stories about everything from war and love to generational conflicts and bankruptcies. And every era has its own unique family problems. Families in Jonas Hassen Khemiri's novels always combine different languages and cultures – and are always split along the same lines. His first novel, *One Eye Red* ('Ett öga rött', 2003), tells of Halim's path from a childhood of limited means to an independent life and promising career as a writer. It differs from the usual template for stories of growing up and moving on, in that it is Halim's father who advocates integration, modern ideas and critical thinking, while the son is a fundamentalist who demands faithfulness to history and tradition.

Fathers have a special place in Jonas Hassen Khemiri's novels. Fathers as deserters, fathers as misunderstood figures, fathers as their sons see them and create them. Khemiri's four novels may appear to be thinly veiled autobiographies, but in fact they skilfully subvert our expectations. Today, when 'autofiction' is such a dominant genre, every novel written in the first person is bound to be regarded as autobiographical. Khemiri solves that problem by playing with roles and language in different ways. In his first book, he has Halim create his own version of what most Swedish critics misunderstood as genuine 'immigrant Swedish'. In *Montecore: The Silence of the Tiger* ('Montecore: en unik tiger', 2006), personal pronouns are used in unexpected ways, so that the narrator addresses himself as 'you', while another character is 'me'. In his latest book, *The Family Clause* ('Pappaklausulen', 2018), most pronouns are omitted in favour of designations like 'a father', 'a son', 'a wife' and so on – reminiscent of Expressionist theatre.

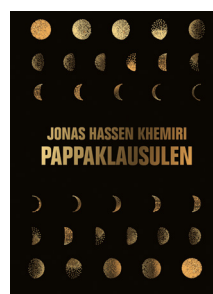
Language conveys power. It also exercises power. Khemiri's novels place themselves in a tradition with strong tropes, but then he breaks with that tradition by insisting that today's Sweden is a different country from the one where writers like Eyvind Johnson and Harry Martinson could rise up from poverty and illiteracy to reach the Swedish Academy. Khemiri enriches the language with foreign words and new meanings, using them to take control of the narrative of his own 'life' and 'self' in the world.

Ingrid Elam

Rights sold to: 30+ countries



Foto: Pierre Björk



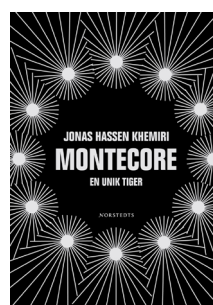
The Family Clause
367 p. 2019, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Wylie Agency

An ode to families, their dynamics, their boundaries and their silences, in all their messy glory, it reveals one of the real challenges in life: how to stop your family defining your destiny.



Everything I Don't Remember
334 p. 2015, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Wylie Agency

A young man named Samuel dies in a horrible car crash. Was it an accident or was it suicide? By employing the detective novel's narrative suspense and shifting perspectives, Khemiri has created a story that grips us by the throat and refuses to let us go.



Montecore: The Silence of the Tiger
358 p. 2006, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Wylie Agency

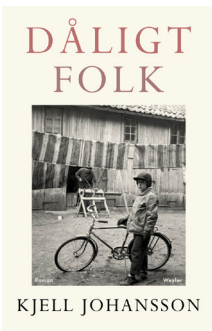
A wild ride of unrelenting linguistic ingenuity that is as much about the power of language itself, as it is a heart-breaking portrayal of an estranged father and son.

KJELL JOHANSSON

(b. 1941)



Foto: Weyler



Bad People, 227 p. 2021, Weyler Rights: Sebes & Bisseling Literary Agency

When David, a retired school janitor, suffers a breakdown at his old workplace, he reluctantly agrees to speak to the school psychologist, Lotti. Over a series of visits to David's home – the formerly ramshackle suburban house that David grew up in – Lotti teases out some of the details of his past.



It Was Not Me, 204 p. 2011, Weyler Rights: Sebes & Bisseling Literary Agency

Eva – the daughter from *The House by the Dam* – has fallen in love with Axel, a distant relative of her father. Axel has decided to follow her back to Stockholm, and with him, she dreams of a life where she could belong in the world. But the memories of her childhood are hard to escape.



The Room Under the Floor 341 p. 2006, Weyler Rights: Sebes & Bisseling Literary Agency

In a poor district south of Stockholm, two children have made a secret room under the floor. That's where they go to hide when reality becomes too scary. The third part of the Midsummer Wreath series is set in the late 19th century.

I have an unusual perspective on Kjell Johansson. I walk around in his novels every day and can hear echoes of his lads, old men and women when I open my window in the morning. The Midsommarkransen neighbourhood, where I live, was Stockholm's first planned suburb. In those days it was a little factory community just south of the metropolis, built for the workers at the L M Ericsson telecoms company.

Today, Midsommarkransen is populated mainly by media folk, web designers and other assorted people, but in Kjell Johansson's Midsummer Wreath series ('De utsatta', 1997–2011) – consisting of four novels so far: *The House By The Dam* ('Huset vid Flon'), *The Lake Without A Name* ('Sjön utan namn'), *The Room Under The Floor* ('Rummet under golvet') and *It Wasn't Me* ('Det var inte jag') – set mainly in the 20th century, times were tough. Many things were different then, but even more things are the same.

Kjell Johansson made his literary debut in 1972 as part of the left-wing trend in culture that often displayed more political commitment than literary talent. His novel *Gogol's Face* ('Gogols ansikte') was published in 1989 to well-deserved critical acclaim.

But with *The House By The Dam*, Johansson followed the advice to 'write what you know'. The results hit home in more ways than one. He emerged as a modern proletarian writer portraying the working class who built the nation, without resorting to lecturing or sentimentality.

He paints life in the little neighbourhood on a large scale. Matters large and small, shifting class markers, inner conflicts between those who have a little something and those who have nothing at all. Humour and tragedy. It is a peerless, passionate set of novels.

My favourite passage – from *The Room Under The Floor* – tells of children clearing out their deceased mother's apartment in Midsommarkransen. They talk about how the next tenant will delight in ripping up the cork floor covering and varnish the wooden floorboards underneath, which their mother had called the 'poor man's floor'. That sums up the transformation of society in a single image.

Jonas Thente

Rights sold to: 7 countries

BALSAM KARAM

(b. 1983)

Balsam Karam was born into a Kurdish family in Iraq. Like many other Kurds, her family was deported from Iraq to Iran in the early 1980s as part of the Saddam regime's purges. When war broke out between the two countries, the family was forced to flee. They had to relocate frequently around the region. Karam's early years were marked by war, with no opportunity to put down roots before it was time to move on again. Experiences of persecution, resistance and being a refugee form a dark foundation in the two books she has published so far.

Balsam Karam works as a librarian. Her first novel, published in 2018, is a work of science fiction entitled *Event Horizon* ('Händelsehorisonten'). The title refers to the boundary around a black hole. Anything that passes an event horizon can no longer be observed because the black hole's gravitational field is so powerful that nothing can escape, not even light. In the story, a 17-year rebel named Milde is captured and sent on a deadly mission right into a black hole.

Another astronomical phenomenon lent its name to Karam's second novel, *The Singularity* ('Singulariteten', 2021). A singularity is the point in a black hole where all matter is compressed together. Gravity is so intense at that point that nothing can resist it. In this book, though, the characters are not in outer space. Instead, the gravitational force consists of a shared grief, an inherited loss, that binds a number of women together.

Balsam Karam, who grew up speaking Kurdish, Persian and Arabic, writes painfully beautiful, linguistically innovative prose. She has said that she endeavours to transgress the norms of language in her aim to write from the perspective of the oppressed. She also bends and stretches literary forms. *Event Horizon* is in the form of a fragmented existential saga, written in evocative, poetic language. *The Singularity* is an elegant composition in three quite distinct but intertwined parts. But when you examine the sentences, they seem slightly 'off' – despite being grammatically correct. It is as if the language is in the process of breaking down or imploding. It is a language of desperation, spoken by someone struggling to keep control of their world, even as they know they cannot. With just two books out so far, Balsam Karam is already a major voice in contemporary Swedish literature.

Yukiko Duke

Rights sold to: 5 countries



Foto: Carlo Orrego Veliz



The Singularity
228 p. 2021, Norstedts
Rights: Norstedts Agency

What kind of mother could keep on living after the disappearance of her child? Balsam Karam's novel is an emotionally powerful and political work of grief and can be read in conjunction with her radiant debut novel *Event Horizon*.



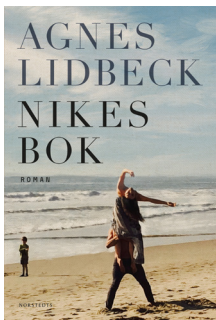
Event Horizon
250 p. 2018, Norstedts
Rights: Norstedts Agency

Milde is arrested, imprisoned, tortured and eventually presented with a final choice: to face execution in the city or to be sent into space, into a black hole, into the Mass, as part of a research project. Milde chooses space – and eternity.

AGNES LIDBECK

(b. 1981)

Foto: Elvira Gläntte



Nikky's Book

740 p. 2021, Norstedts

Rights: Norstedts Agency

Disaster. It all begins with absolute disaster. Three young families, their backgrounds vastly different. Some of them pretty and poised. Others fiercely ambitious and unable to hide their fangs. Still, they are bound together, a bond that grows into love, a love rooted in that first disaster.



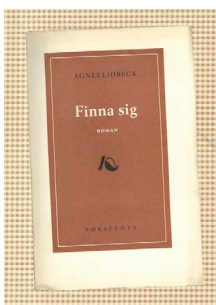
At a Loss

250 p. 2019, Norstedts

Rights: Norstedts Agency

The small truths and the big

The small truths and the big lies in our lives, the difference between our aspirations and our potentials, the explosive nature of our emotional reactions and our rational explanations for why we couldn't achieve more.



Supporting Act

194 p. 2017, Norstedts

Rights: Norstedts Agency

Agnes Lidbeck investigates voluntary submission, away from the context of sexual domination. It is a thorough examination of modern womanhood, as well as an in-depth portrait of Anna as mother, lover and carer.

Agnes Lidbeck grew up in an artistic family and understood early on what it can cost families to live with people in creative occupations. That's why she decided to get an office job and live as ordinary a life as possible. But after a few years as an environmental analyst, she was unable to resist writing.

She made her literary debut in 2017 with the novel *Supporting Act* ('Finna sig'), which was well received. She quickly followed that with a volume of poetry entitled *From* ('Ur', 2018) and two more novels: *The Rift* ('Förlåten', 2018) and *At a Loss* ('Gå förlorad', 2019).

Lidbeck's nakedly personal poems address the themes of origin and inheritance: the death of a father, becoming a mother, the fear of mental illness and the path of becoming a writer. She does not attempt anything radically new in her poems, choosing to combine elements from a central lyric tradition with contemporary narrative poetry. *From* also contains intriguing elements of mysticism, which are absent in her novels.

Instead, her severe, coolly analytical novels revolve around recognisable close relationships. She makes an effort to break down and complicate the usual clichés. Lidbeck has described her novels – about a mother, two siblings and a father – as a way of investigating the family as a phenomenon and forgiveness as a humane act. Lidbeck writes about spiky, sometimes downright unsympathetic people to test the boundaries of our humanity. Can we understand and forgive her characters if we don't find them likable or sympathetic?

In her novel *Nikky's Book* ('Nikes bok', 2021) – the first in a planned series – Agnes Lidbeck shifts her focus; her style is now warmer and more dynamic. Her severe, analytical gaze has softened. The story starts in the 1980s in the sleepy fictional fishing community of Kummelvik on Sweden's south-east coast. Life goes on as it always has done, until an artist's family moves to the village. After a dramatic day at the seaside, three families' lives become permanently entwined. The narrative follows their lives in the fishing village for 40 years. Lidbeck has created a story with such inner warmth and psychological insight that the reader is sad to leave little Kummelvik.

Yukiko Duke

Rights sold to: 4 countries

MIKAEL NIEMI

(b. 1959)

The Torne River Valley straddles the border between Sweden and Finland in the far north. People there speak Swedish, Finnish, Sámi and Meänkieli, a minority language similar to Finnish. Mikael Niemi grew up in that mixture of cultures. His maternal grandmother was Sámi and his father was a Finnish speaker. He began by writing poetry and children's and young adult (YA) books. His big breakthrough came in 2000 with a novel for adults: *Popular Music from Vittula* ('Populärmusik från Vittula') is about a boy called Matti who recalls episodes from his life – mainly madcap adventures. One humorous predicament leads to another, and everything revolves around the main story of a boy's formative years in the remote northern community of Pajala.

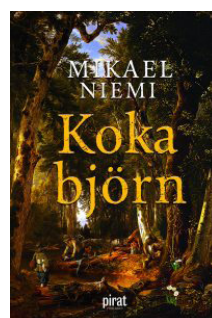
In that novel, Niemi portrays the Torne River Valley as a strange land where ancient customs, untranslated Finnish words and phrases, large quantities of hard liquor, saunas and Beatles songs are blended into a brew that tasted exotic even to fellow Swedes from further south. The book was an immediate success. It sold in record quantities. Translations were published in 30 languages and it was made into a film. There had been no shortage of books about northern Sweden, but readers were used to stories of characters driven out by poverty and religious piety into the big city, not zany comedy and tall tales.

Niemi followed that success with science fiction-flavoured stories in *The Gristle Hole* ('Svålhållet', 2004). He has also written more for teens, as well as a crime novel and a play.

His two most recent books, *Fall Water* ('Fallvatten', 2012) and *To Cook a Bear* ('Koka björn', 2017), are also set in the Torne River Valley. While they are also fast-paced and entertaining, the comedy has been toned down in favour of greater realism. Each story begins with a crime. Niemi goes beyond the usual crime fiction tropes, though. In *To Cook a Bear* he highlights difficult, painful aspects of the history and present in the far north: destitution, strict religion, oppression of the Indigenous Sámi people, environmental destruction. A dark cloud would hang over the pages, if it were not for Niemi's love for – and talent for describing – the beauty of nature and people's inexhaustible ability to survive.

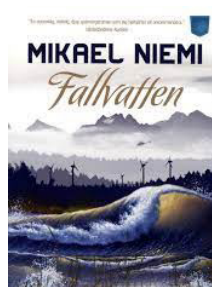
Ingrid Elam

Rights sold to: 32 countries



To Cook a Bear
420 p. 2017, Piratförlaget
Rights: Hedlund Agency

The fantastic story of revivalist preacher Lars Levi Laestadius and the young Sámi boy he saves from a ditch and cares for in the summer of 1852. The novel manages to both entertain and burrow deep down into life's great philosophical questions.



Fall Water
250 p. 2012, Piratförlaget
Rights: Hedlund Agency

Mikael Niemi's dramatic story reads like a psychological action thriller, focusing on a group of people and how they are affected by a disaster: are our reactions in an emergency ever predictable?



Popular Music from Vittula
238 p. 2000, Norstedts
Rights: Hedlund Agency

A story of a rural Sweden at once foreign and familiar, as a magical childhood slowly fades with the seasons into adult reality. A jolly and rather wild tale from the north, a harsh yet tender description of those formative years.

KAROLINA RAMQVIST

(b. 1976)



Bread and Milk

**332 p. 2022, Norstedts
Rights: Ahlander Agency**

When Karolina finds herself a single mother to a young daughter, food becomes the way for her to show her love, but also to instil a complicated legacy. A gorgeous, meditative, and essayistic memoir about the way what we eat is inexorably intertwined with how we love.



The Bear Woman

**347 p. 2019, Norstedts
Rights: Ahlander Agency**

In 1541, a young woman goes on one of the first French colonial expeditions to the New World but is abandoned on an uninhabited island in the North Atlantic. Centuries later, an author comes across the legend of her, the Bear Woman, and becomes obsessed.



The White City

**176 p. 2015, Norstedts
Rights: Ahlander Agency**

A woman's battle to pull herself up from the paralysing depths of despair and an arresting study of what it means to lose control – over your body, your life, and your fate. Loyalties shift in the blink of an eye and people are easily discarded in this taut and elegantly realised novel.



Karolina Ramqvist was born a generation after feminism first made its mark on contemporary Swedish literature in the 1970s with women's confessionals and manifestoes. Ramqvist continues the thread in her novels, in which young women listen absent-mindedly to their feminist mothers while giving themselves over to conspicuous consumption, clothes and pleasure. With critical empathy, she captures the zeitgeist of an 'ironic' generation whose parents had already gone through all the big words and political projects. It is for them to live the freedom their mothers fought for, but that lifestyle requires money. In Ramqvist's novel *The Girlfriend* ('Flickvännen') from 2009, a young woman named Karin finds a gangster to pay her way. A few years later, in *The White City* ('Den vita staden', 2015), Karin has a child, the gangster has been shot, it is winter in Stockholm, and now the bailiffs are at the door to add up everything she has.

Ramqvist writes her novels in the first person, but her narrators always have a dual stance. They describe reality as it is without moralising or even analysing, while they also observe themselves without explaining why they do what they do. Her young female narrators are targets for male lust but uncertain of their own value. They have grown up with grand tales of love and desire, struggle and freedom, but their days are filled with the mundane. Her latest novel, *Bread and Milk* ('Bröd och mjölk', 2022), is about a woman who seems to have a great deal in common with Ramqvist in terms of their relationship to food and the role of food in relationship to their body, to love and family and friends.

In her previous novel *The Bear Woman* ('Björnkvinnan', 2019) the narrator was difficult to distinguish from Ramqvist herself, but the similarities concealed a complex relationship between fiction, reality and truth. The first-person narrator is a writer trying to write a book about a real 16th-century French woman who was stranded on an uninhabited island on a transatlantic voyage. The author wonders what we can know beyond the information passed down in (men's) adventure tales. How have they distorted reality? Can it be reconstructed? Karolina Ramqvist uses her imagination and her own experience to describe what daily life might have been like on that island in a novel that is both an account of the mundane and an aesthetic statement of intent.

Ingrid Elam

Rights sold to: 13 countries

ALEX SCHULMAN

(b. 1976)

Leo Tolstoy's statement that every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way applies particularly well to Alex Schulman's writing, which centres on his own family. Most of his books are biographies or reportage rather than novels. His 2009 debut focused on his father, a prominent TV producer. In *Forget Me* ('Glöm mig', 2016), his mother's alcoholism is the central subject. She was also a public figure, first in television and later in business. Then in *Burn All My Letters* ('Bränn alla mina brev', 2018), Schulman turned his attention to two leading figures from Sweden's cultural sphere in the second half of the 20th century. His own grandfather, a conservative author and journalist, was against everything the largest Swedish broadsheet newspaper's chief literary critic stood for. Now, with both men long dead, Schulman could reveal the personal reasons behind their antagonism – namely, Schulman's grandmother, who was unhappily married to one and had a long-term affair with the other.

While his own family is unique, there are traits reminiscent of other family chronicles where addictions and affairs are concealed and kept silent. If that were not the case, Schulman's books would not resonate with readers the way they do. The family has its secrets but the narrator, a child, has a particular talent for sensing moods, reading gestures and silences, sensing when it is dangerous to be around his parents, when a caress becomes a slap. Schulman's narrator is intensely present in the settings he describes, seeing and hearing everything. He cannot understand how parents can prefer the company of alcohol over their children, but he tries.

When Schulman turned his hand to fiction in his latest book, *The Survivors* ('Överlevarna', 2020), he continued to build on his previous material. This novel is about another family shattered by the parents' alcoholism and their indifference to the children's feelings and needs, which are fuelled by their dependency.

Stories of childhood occupy a special place in Swedish literature, and Alex Schulman's psychologically insightful, well-pitched portrayal makes that place a little bigger.

Ingrid Elam

Rights sold to: 33 countries



Foto: Thron Ullberg



Malma Station
250 p. 2022, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Ahlander Agency

Five people are on a journey through Sweden. They are all heading to Malma Station, and neither they nor the reader know how their fates are connected – nor do they suspect that what is about to happen at their final destination will come to redefine their lives.



The Survivors
272 p. 2020, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Ahlander Agency

A devastating story of a family falling apart and a stunning chronicle of a mind unravelling in the wake of a tragedy. This cyclical novel explores the relationship between siblings and the way in which the intimate bond of brotherhood opens up for the greatest betrayal of all.



Burn All My Letters
280 p. 2018, Bookmark
Rights: Ahlander Agency

The summer of 1932 has just begun when Karin falls hopelessly in love with a young writer named Olof. But there is one problem: Karin is married to Sven, a blustering high-profile author with a cruel streak. This is at once a gripping love story and an intricate literary thriller.

STONE SCHUNNESSON

(b. 1988)



Tone Schunnesson is one of the new leading lights of Swedish literature. In her two novels published so far, she strikes the perfect notes to convey a lost, anxious generation's search for the meaning of life. Her books are like an MRI scan of an empty, self-obsessed contemporary milieu: searching, desire, and a lack of boundaries are everywhere you look. Her female protagonists dream of freedom and autonomy, but they have lost their foothold in life. They sink deeper into misery and desperation in an indifferent Stockholm.

The narrator in Schunnesson's debut novel *Trip Reports* ('Tripprapporter', 2016) is a young, lonely, unemployed woman who escapes a bleak environment in Stockholm and embarks on a booze- and drug-fuelled odyssey. She has nothing to be proud of, having stolen from her family and friends, manipulated and exploited those closest to her. She could be a little sister to 39-year-old Bibbs in *Days and Days and Days* ('Dagarna, dagarna, dagarna', 2020), a jaded, has-been influencer with too many bad debts piled up.

Women authors have always written about how money rules the world and how it affects relationships between men and women. For the people in Tone Schunnesson's novels, everything seems to be a transaction: people give and people take; nothing is given for free. Sometimes Schunnesson's Marxist ideals come to the surface. Some of her characters choose destruction and social exclusion as an escape from society's demands for productivity. 'It's bittersweet to choose to be unhappy and alone, because it gives me a sense of superiority [...] isolation makes me an elite,' says the narrator of *Trip Reports*.

Tone Schunnesson writes without a seat belt. Her impressionistic high-speed prose is wild and unruly, veering from the poetic to the grotesque. She conjures up her none-too-sympathetic protagonists with real understanding and warmth. Her lethal humour lightens claustrophobic scenes from their lives, paradoxically making them even more affecting.

Yukiko Duke

Rights sold to: 4 countries



Days and Days and Days
268 p. 2020, Norstedts
Rights: Norstedts Agency

Bibbs is just about to turn thirty-nine. Even though Bibbs lacks talent, she has been famous for a while. Now, though, the good life is beginning to slip through her fingers. And there seems to be a never-ending flow of unexpected expenditures. Like the rent.



Trip Reports
169 p. 2016, Norstedts
Rights: Norstedts Agency

She is living on the edge all the time, using others and letting herself be used. She protects herself from her memories by never stopping drinking. Sometimes, though, she does sober up and then she wonders: Could there yet be someone that could save her? An uncompromising and poetic journey exploring a young woman's mental state.

STEVE SEM-SANDBERG

(b. 1958)

Steve Sem-Sandberg once told an interviewer, 'As a writer, I'm motivated by my desire to understand. How people act in situations with impossible choices.' Existential issues are always closely linked with history in Sem-Sandberg's novels. Several of them deal with some of the darkest parts of Europe's history. Again and again he addresses the unbearable issues at the very core of evil.

In his award-winning, painstakingly researched polyphonic novels *The Emperor of Lies* ('De fattiga i Łódź', 2009) and *The Chosen Ones* ('De utvalda', 2014), he focuses on the Holocaust and Nazi atrocities in the Second World War. *The Emperor of Lies* tells of the Jewish ghetto set up by the Nazis in the Polish city of Łódź and its leader, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski. A Jewish man who did the Nazis' bidding: how could he? *The Chosen Ones* is set in the real-life Spiegelgrund Clinic in Vienna, where hundreds of children were subjected to medical experiments and murdered during the Second World War. One of the main characters is Anna Katschenka, a nurse who becomes a key participant in carrying out the terrible deeds at the clinic. She is not an adherent of Nazism, yet she becomes one of its key enablers. What was the motivation for her actions?

The question of responsibility crops up again and again in Steve Sem-Sandberg's novels. His breakthrough work *Theres* ('Theres', 1996) is about the West German terrorist Ulrike Meinhof and the underlying motives that influenced her choices. Sem-Sandberg laid the groundwork in this book for the documentary method of literary writing that is one of his trademarks. Excerpts from court transcripts, letters and newspaper articles are interwoven with fiction to create highly charged prose that often verges on the lyrical.

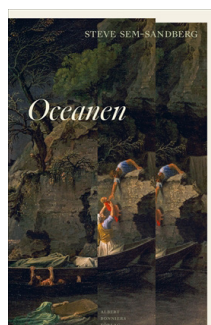
Steve Sem-Sandberg has continued to employ this documentary technique, incorporating real documents and facts in his narratives. He is constantly exploring new storytelling methods, testing where the boundaries are between fact and fiction. But his powerful, in-depth character studies are what make him such a unique guide down in the darkest depths.

Annina Rabe

Rights sold to: 18 countries



Foto: Thron Ullberg



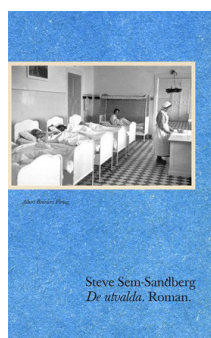
The Ocean
250 p. 2022, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Nordin Agency

In 1765, Rousseau spends 45 days at Île Saint-Pierre. His writings have made him one of the most noted figures in Europe. The Ocean is a gripping novel about an uncompromising, unique person whose only refuge lies in the plants that he collects on the island.



W
421 p. 2019, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Nordin Agency

This is the story of Woyzeck, a loyal foot soldier who, in a fit of jealous rage, kills the woman he loves. It is a historical novel about a lonely man who joins the army to escape his misery and participates in one of the many wars in the early 19th century.



The Chosen Ones
552 p. 2014, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Nordin Agency

The Nazis placed children whom they deemed superfluous at the Spiegelgrund Clinic in Vienna. Weak and critically ill children became test subjects in gruesome experiments before being put to death. A new chapter in Sem-Sandberg's continuing oeuvre about Europe during the Second World War.

KARIN SMIRNOFF

(b. 1965)



Foto: Johan Günséus

In 2018, journalist Karin Smirnov's first novel was launched by the publishing house Polaris. The novel, entitled *My Brother* ('Jag för ner till bror'), told of a woman who leaves the big city and returns to her small hometown in northern Sweden. It was nominated for Sweden's prestigious August Prize, achieved excellent sales and could be termed the year's literary sensation.

Smirnov published another two novels – *Our Mother* ('Vi för upp med mor', 2019) and *I Return* ('Sen för jag hem', 2020) – in what came to be known as the Jana Kippo trilogy, named after the protagonist.

There are two key themes in Smirnov's trilogy that are typical of contemporary Swedish fiction on a broad scale. The first is the notion of homecoming, which has become very popular in novels and short stories since the turn of the millennium. A character comes back from the bustling metropolis to her childhood home, where everything seems to have stood still and old ghosts lurk on the gravel roads.

The second theme has been around longer. We can call it 'the North', or Västerbotten to be more precise – Sweden's second-northernmost county, and the setting for what feels like at least a third of Swedish post-war literature.

The premise of Smirnov's trilogy is Jana Kippo's return to her hometown to rescue her twin brother from the slough of alcoholism. Eventually she gets a job as a carer, which gives her an opportunity to confront the wounded souls she had once left behind – and to come to terms with events in her own childhood. The narrative is crammed with violence, murder, incest, passion and injustice.

Karin Smirnov is following tradition in writing in dialect – sometimes authentic, sometimes invented, violating the rules of standard spelling and capitalisation. She paints images of horrible events in Jana's hometown. Things get bloody and booze-soaked. This is also in line with Swedish tradition – one that Karin Smirnov has mastered.

Jonas Thente

Rights sold to: 13 countries



The Elephant Symphony

317 p. 2021, Polaris

Rights: Politiken Literary Agency

It's the 1980s and Agnes, Kristian and Miika are growing up in Södertälje. They have nothing in common until their unique talents bring them together and they end up becoming close friends. This is a story about music, outcasts and enigmatic love.

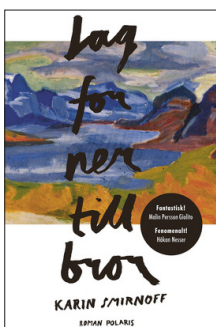


My Mother

349 p. 2019, Polaris

Rights: Politiken Literary Agency

After their mother's death, twins Jana and Bror return to their hometown of Kukkojärvi, in Sweden's far north. They inherit their mother's family home and soon notice that life in Kukkojärvi is very different. *My Mother* is a sequel to the acclaimed debut novel *My Brother*.



My Brother

318 p. 2018, Polaris

Rights: Politiken Literary Agency

Jana is returning to see her twin brother Bror, still living in the small family farmhouse in rural northern Sweden. They are both damaged by horrific childhood experiences, buried deep in the past. This is the story of a homecoming without a home, a story of forgiveness.

SARA STRIDSBERG

(b. 1972)

Like many other writers of her generation, Sara Stridsberg has written a number of works for the theatre. Adapting drama to prose (and vice versa) has allowed her to approach her subject matter from different angles. And what subjects does she deal with? Feminism, outsiders and mental illness – all of which are present in *The Faculty of Dreams* ('Drömfakulteten'), the novel that marked her arrival on the scene in 2006. If anyone embodies feminism, outsiderdom and mental illness, it must be Valerie Solanas. She was the American who wrote the radical feminist 'SCUM Manifesto' in 1967 and is best known as the person who shot Andy Warhol and a journalist in Warhol's studio that same year.

The Faculty of Dreams is a fantasy centred on a shattered life. In it, Valerie Solanas explains herself to a psychiatrist, a friend, her publisher, the author Sara Stridsberg ... Sometimes it takes the form of a dramatic dialogue; sometimes it looks back on a traumatic life.

Sara Stridsberg also translated Solanas' manifesto into Swedish a few years before the publication of *The Faculty of Dreams*.

Stridsberg frequently enlists fictional or quasi-fictional women in her works. Some of them include Medea, Dolores Haze (Lolita in Vladimir Nabokov's notorious novel of the same name) and Sweden's Queen Christina.

In 2018, Sara Stridsberg resigned from her seat in the Swedish Academy exactly two years after her election. She was one of several members to resign in reaction to the Academy's handling of the #MeToo scandal that shook literary Sweden. The scandal and its consequences have led at least five prominent Swedish writers to include an elaborate tale of a strange organisation with mysterious rites and rituals in their recent literary works. One such book is Stridsberg's latest book, a short-story collection entitled *Hunter in Huskvarna* ('Hunter i Huskvarna', 2021). There can be no doubt which organisation is meant.

Yet again, Stridsberg's new volume of stories demonstrates her sensitive touch and her enormous range, extending from myth to realism, from measured rhythm to free flight.

Jonas Thente

**Rights sold to: 27 countries
(until 2021 handled by Hedlund Agency)**

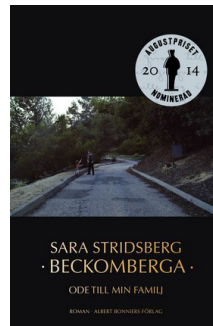


Foto: Thron Ullberg



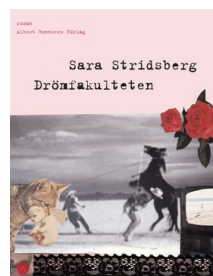
The Antarctica of Love
313 p. 2019, Albert Bonniers
Rights: RCW Literary Agency

Inni lives her life on the margins, but it is a life that is full and complex, filled with different shades of dark and light. Until she is brutally murdered. This is the story of the moment her life is violently extinguished, but it is also about the time before, and about the lives that carry on afterwards.



The Gravity of Love: Ode to my Family
355 p. 2014, Albert Bonniers
Rights: RCW Literary Agency

When Jimmie is admitted to Beckomberga psychiatric hospital outside Stockholm, his daughter Jackie starts spending increasing amounts of time there, and when her mother leaves for a holiday by the Black Sea, the hospital becomes Jackie's whole world.



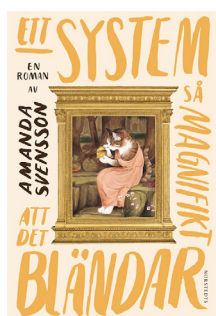
The Faculty of Dreams
364 p. 2006, Albert Bonniers
Rights: RCW Literary Agency

In this novel's fictitious background story, the author visits Valerie Solanas at the end of her life in the hotel in a red-light district in San Francisco where Solanas was residing when she died in April 1988. Sara Stridsberg mixes documentary material and fiction in feverishly vibrant prose.

AMANDA SVENSSON

(b. 1987)

Foto: Alexandra A. Ellis

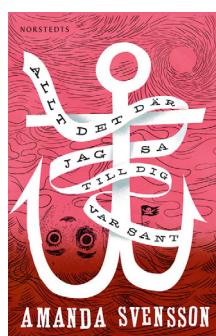


**A System so Magnificent
it is Blinding**

552 p. 2019, Norstedts

Rights: Norstedts Agency

Amanda Svensson's fourth book is a quirky, maze-like novel about small, seemingly insignificant details that may just be pieces of a bigger picture. But more than anything, it is a story about family, about misunderstandings, shortcomings and forgiveness.



**All Those Things I Said
to You Were True**

224 p. 2014, Norstedts

Rights: Norstedts Agency

She arrives at the creative writing school, somewhere in the countryside, with an ambition to learn how love tastes. A story about stories, about how they divide and heal and about a young woman and her struggle to find her own identity.



Welcome to this World

240 p. 2011, Norstedts

Rights: Norstedts Agency

Greta works in a hip restaurant, but dreams of becoming a DJ. Then one day she meets Simon who is the best triangle drawer in Copenhagen. With Simon follows Claus. It soon becomes clear that this is not a golden triangle, but one that inevitably must break.

The quality that characterises Amanda Svensson's writing most of all is perhaps its inexhaustible energy. There is something hyperactive and slightly restless in both her prose style and her way of looking at the world. She has maintained that energy through all her novels, even as they have grown over the years in terms of subject matter and scope.

The main character in her first novel *Hey Dolly* ('Hey Dolly', 2008) is a young woman on the threshold of adulthood. She is deeply insecure and irrepressible at the same time, living partly in a dream world and partly in the real, modern-day world. Dolly's awkward search for her identity ranges from the funny to the serious.

Hey Dolly is the first title in a loose trilogy about young people, primarily women, lost and on the cusp of adulthood. *Welcome to This World* ('Välkommen till den här världen', 2011) is a love triangle set in a chaotic artists' collective, the club scene and restaurant jobs in Malmö and Copenhagen. And in the follow-up, *All Those Things I Said to You Were True* ('Allt det där jag sa till dig var sant', 2014), Svensson continues with the theme of searching for an identity. The protagonist is in a controlling, self-destructive romance with an unpleasant, pretentious young man at a creative writing school. He takes control of her identity until she is rescued by a female friend who whisks her away on a meandering make-believe pirate adventure. The story is a tribute to the power of storytelling – and friendship.

In her latest novel, *A System So Magnificent It Is Blinding* ('Ett system så magnifikt att det bländar', 2019), Amanda Svensson picks up a wider range of moods in an uneasy contemporary setting marked by the climate crisis and conflicts. At the centre is a fragmented family with three very different sisters who are triplets. In a dizzying plot, their internal and external relationships are stretched to breaking point. With its punchy dialogue and intricately constructed plot, this book almost seems more a part of the English-language tradition than the Swedish. It is a dystopian work, but it is written with such a breezy voice that it might also convey some hope of survival.

Annina Rabe

Rights sold to: 9 countries

ANNE SWÄRD

(b. 1969)

'Beware of love.' That is the advice Lo, the protagonist of Anne Swärd's novel *Breathless* ('Till sista andetaget', 2010), receives from her mother. When three of Swärd's novels were republished in a special single-volume edition, the collection bore that warning as a title. 'Beware of love' could serve as a summary of much of Anne Swärd's writing. Time after time, she returns to the themes of dangerous love, forbidden and destructive love. There is also the urge to surrender to love, to leap right into the danger. Powerful forces and big emotions are always circulating in Anne Swärd's books, expressed in sensuous, clear prose.

In her debut novel *Arctic Summer* ('Polarsommar', 2003), she portrays a family drama, as seen from the six family members' different perspectives. *Quicksand* ('Kvicksand', 2006) is loosely connected with her first book. It is a dark future dystopia about a disintegrating society.

Swärd's most recent novel, *Jackie* ('Jackie', 2020), begins with a young woman on a train bound for the city, where a new, unfamiliar life awaits. She is meant to be starting art school, but on the train she is drawn into a passionate love story, an adventure she eagerly embarks on. But as time goes on, the man becomes increasingly controlling and then violent. Swärd is skilled at gradually increasing the pressure in her novels, slowly tightening the noose until catastrophe is inevitable.

Her 2017 novel *Vera* ('Vera'), set around the time of the Second World War, describes the conditions for refugees and exile. A very young pregnant woman flees from the horrors of war to Sweden, where she marries into an icy cold upper-middle-class family with dark secrets.

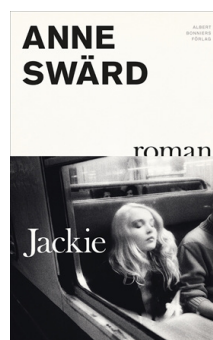
You could say that Anne Swärd works with contrasts. Dark is set against light, ice against fire, a restricted life against one lived to the full – with all the risks that entails. Her writing drills down into big, life-and-death questions and all the hazards involved in living.

Annina Rabe

Rights sold to: 17 countries



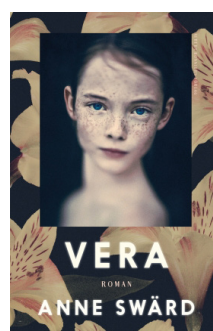
Foto: Thron Ullberg



Jackie

**370 p. 2020, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Nordin Agency**

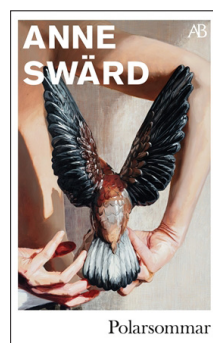
A novel about a young woman on her way to Stockholm and the life that is waiting for her there. It's the hot summer of 1988; nothing has happened yet. The man she ends up meeting is beyond anything she could ever imagine.



Vera

**344 p. 2017, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Nordin Agency**

Young Sandrine comes from the darkness of war into a sun-drenched lull in Sweden. The year is 1945. Her only baggage is a child she's planning to get rid of, and a secret she's prepared to do anything to keep.



Arctic Summer

**206 p. 2003, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Nordin Agency**

Kristian returns to his childhood home to look after his sister Kaj. During a few emotionally charged summer weeks, a family drama unfolds. At the centre of events is Kaj – the innocent, unpredictable 22-year-old, and the reason why their father left his family.

LINA WOLFF

(b. 1973)



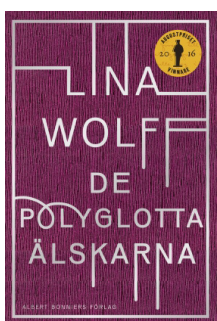
Foto: Gustav Bergman



The Devil's Grip
262 p. 2022, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Salomonsson Agency
A woman arrives in Florence, where everything seems strange and overwhelming. Terra cotta roofs, church spires, all the couples in love. The man she has met. This is a story about them, about their bodies and senses. About her grip on him, and his ever tighter grip on her.



Carnality
262 p. 2019, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Salomonsson Agency
A Swedish writer travels to Madrid in search of inspiration. She finds it in a stranger, a man in a bar with an unusual tale to tell. What follows is a yarn of fantastical proportions and even wilder elements: a shadowy internet show with its own morality clause.



The Polyglot Lovers,
291 p. 2016, Albert Bonniers
Rights: Salomonsson Agency
Ellinor is from a small town in southern Sweden. Max Lamas dreams of a polyglot lover. And then there is Lucrezia, in Italy, made to witness her grandmother's final downfall in a deserted palace. A manuscript wanders in and out of their lives and hands, binding them together.

Lina Wolff creates her very own sort of literary art within Swedish contemporary writing. She spends most of her time abroad, mainly in Italy and Spain, and her writing is as far from autofiction as it can be. True, one of the main characters in her novel *Carnality* ('Köttets tid', 2019) is a 45-year-old Swedish woman who is doing the 'writing', but it is impossible to read Wolff's novels as autobiographical works. They are clearly works of imagination with tightly structured plots and an invisible narrator who keeps the reader on tenterhooks.

In terms of literary style, Wolff seems to draw more inspiration from Spanish-language writers like Gabriel García Márquez (whose works she has translated into Swedish) than the terse realism that is so common in Scandinavian prose. Her language is capable of being simple and straightforward, depending on the narrator, but it is also filled with multi-layered symbolism. Wolff sets up sensuous relationship dramas in her novels with women as the driving force, while the men are needy or merely unpleasant hangers-on, sometimes aggressive and violent. They are all trapped in their inadequate bodies, longing for something: forgiveness, meaning, love, being needed. Or simply a living soul. The material – plots and characters – appears exotic, taken from an imaginary world populated by innocents and assailants, while the ideas are firmly anchored in the real world. Wolff addresses the work of another writer of ideas, the French author Michel Houellebecq, in her novel *The Polyglot Lovers* ('De polyglotta älskarna', 2016).

Lina Wolff interrogates gender roles and moral stances, and she takes care to maintain a certain mysteriousness in her characters' psychological make-up, so that they cannot be fully explained or understood. One is motivated by the desire to be better, one by revenge; most are motivated by both, without actually being aware of it themselves. This complexity creates a strong tension in her novels: Why does that person do that? What is actually going on? Who has the most reasonable attitude to life?

Ingrid Elam

Rights sold to: 20 countries

NINA WÄHÄ

(b. 1979)

Nina Wähä grew up in a multicultural family. Her Bulgarian father came to Sweden as a refugee in the late 1960s, and her mother came from a large family in the Torne River valley along the Finnish border in Sweden's far north – an area with a border culture all its own. Four languages are spoken there: North Sámi, Meänkieli (a minority language similar to Finnish), Swedish and Finnish. That area has a strong storytelling tradition, and the local culture is influenced by a strict Lutheran Christian revival movement. Nina Wähä grew up in Stockholm but spent a lot of time in the Torne River valley. Her experiences in the far north have left their mark in her writing – particularly in her playful sense of language and her proximity to oral storytelling. Each of her books has its own tone of voice and linguistic style.

Nina Wähä made her literary debut in 2007 with the novel *As in Sister* ('S som i syster'), about two sisters' vastly differing memories of their childhood plagued by alcoholism and their parents' divorce.

Wähä took a major stylistic leap forward with her deadly serious, yet highly entertaining, novel *Don't Look Back!* ('Titta inte bakåt!', 2010), about two people whose stories are skilfully interwoven. Alexander, a young Bulgarian with dreams of becoming a writer, leaves his homeland in 1968 in the hope of reaching the United States. Forty years later, 22-year-old Sabina discovers Alexander's notebooks.

After a nine-year break she returned with *Testament* ('Testamente', 2019), a wild, earthy family epic that was nominated for Sweden's prestigious August Prize. In her novel about the Toimis, a sprawling family from the Finnish side of the Torne River valley, Wähä's vibrant, muscular prose really comes into its own.

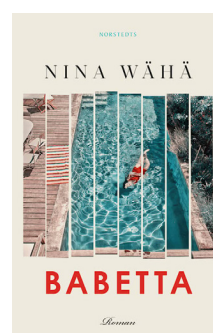
Her latest novel *Babetta* ('Babetta', 2022), is entirely different: a creepy portrait of female friendship that goes into overdrive, when closeness tips over into vampirism. Once again, Wähä displays her exuberant linguistic balancing act and her ability to construct a playful structure with existential gravitas. *Babetta* is a novel that stays with you long after reading.

Yukiko Duke

Rights sold to: 16 countries

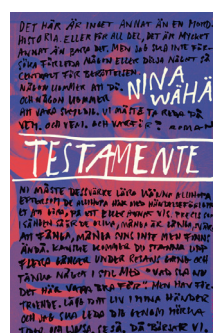


Foto: Kajsa Göransson



Babetta
330 p. 2022, Norstedts
Rights: Norstedts Agency

An enigmatic psychological chamber play that is also a tribute to the art of filmmaking with all its heroes and villains. Wähä explores the symbiosis of a female friendship bordering on exploitation, with echoes of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* and Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*.



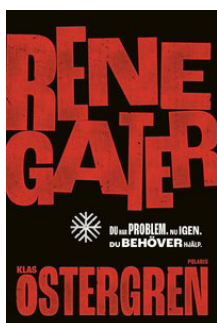
Testament
344 p. 2019, Norstedts
Rights: Norstedt Agency

Siri and Pentti Toimi run a small farm in northern Finland. Pentti rules the family with an iron fist. It's almost Christmas, and most of the children have gathered for the preparations for the days ahead. Something is about to happen.

KLAS ÖSTERGREN

(b. 1955)

Foto: Charlie Drevstam



Renegades
748 pages, 2020, Polaris.
Rights: Politiken Literary Agency

The narrator, familiar from the previous books, *Gentlemen* and *Gangsters*, gazes out across the fields from his farm in southern Sweden. It is the spring of 2018, a turbulent time. In the far distance he sees a figure who seems somehow familiar. He is correct in his suspicion – it is Henry Morgan.



Gangsters
488 p. 2005, Albert Bonniers
(latest edition : 2021, Polaris)
Rights: Politiken Literary Agency

Klas Östergren perfects his own form of literary fraud in this critically acclaimed sequel. *Gangsters* is an even darker story about arms deals, persecutions and state abuse. The sequel has wit, razor-sharp language and the ability to register how every aspect of society affects us.



Gentlemen
512 p. 1980, Albert Bonniers
(latest edition: 2021, Polaris)
Rights: Politiken Literary Agency

Written with an intense regard for storytelling and style, *Gentlemen* is one of the most important literary works to emerge from Sweden in the past thirty years – simultaneously celebrating and mourning the post-WWII era with its jazz music, poetry, hidden treasures and espionage.

It is no exaggeration to call Klas Östergren a national treasure. He is one of only a few writers who can get even committed male non-readers to devote themselves to a 600-page novel. His direct approach never gets tangled up around the language or the questions he puts to society and the individual. In his most highly praised books, he casts himself in the central role – or at least a first-person narrator called Klas Östergren who is a writer and has the same biography as the polite, slightly reserved man who writes stories.

He published his first work in 1975, putting out three somewhat desultory novels before achieving his big break in 1980 with the novel *Gentlemen* ('Gentlemen'). It was a phenomenon then and still is, with new editions finding their way to new readers.

In *Gentlemen*, we follow a young, aimless Klas Östergren in Stockholm as he encounters the mysterious Morgan brothers and moves into their grand apartment. Readers today can see how this book captured the end of an epoch with uncanny accuracy. What it could not have known was that a new era was dawning – a time of merciless reckoning with the left-wing currents of the post-war years. Or did *Gentlemen* somehow see it coming?

Östergren handled his success remarkably well, continuing to produce a steady stream of brilliant prose works. Some were broader in scope; others were on a more intimate scale. Then in 2005 came the sequel to *Gentlemen*, entitled *Gangsters* ('Gangsters'). The story delves further into the Morgan brothers' mysteries as well as Sweden's shadowy activities during the Second World War and the post-war years.

A third volume, entitled *Renegades* ('Renegater'), was published in 2020. In it, Klas Östergren writes about 'Klas Östergren' being commissioned to write about his time in the Swedish Academy as one scandal after another piled up, finally prompting him to resign from his membership of the prestigious body.

Klas Östergren is 67 years old, but his writing remains as young and vital – and his vision as sharp – as ever.

Jonas Thente

Rights sold to: 3 countries

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Swedish Contemporary Fiction

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