

Direct and Indirect Influence: The Impact of the American Short Story on Swedish Literature

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***Abstract:** This article examines the influence of American short story writers on the Swedish short story during two peak periods, the 1940s and 1994-2002. It distinguishes between direct and indirect influence, the former characterized by the Swedish author's acknowledgment of such an influence and corroborative evidence in his/her short stories, the latter influence going via an author directly influenced by an American author. The two dominant short story writers impacting the Swedish scene were Ernest Hemingway and Raymond Carver, particularly the former who also in the nineties had both a direct and an indirect influence.*

***Keywords:** Short story—direct influence—indirect influence—1940s—1990s—Ernest Hemingway—Raymond Carver*

Some circumstance seems to have laid upon Hemingway a continual sense of the obligation to put forth evidence of red-blooded masculinity... This trait of his character has... begotten a veritable school of fiction-writers—a literary style, you might say, of wearing false hair on the chest.

Max Eastman 1933

When an art form has become content with a set of aesthetic formulas and well-worn themes, it immediately runs the risk of becoming circumscribed and parodied ... It is time to exchange Carver and Hemingway for new forces of inspiration.

Jonas Thente, "The Cloned Short Story Writers," 2002

When dealing with the question of literary influence and intertextuality, one must tread carefully. In this study I will discuss the relationship between

the American and the Swedish short story. In outline, my argument runs as follows: Compared to many other countries, such as France, Russia, and the United States, Sweden cannot brag of a strong short story tradition. Evidence of this is that no history or anthology of the Swedish short story exists, whereas in, for instance, the U. S. numerous such overviews have appeared on the American short story. There are, however, two, maybe three, exceptional periods: the late 1930s and the 1940s, on the one hand, and the period 1994-2002,¹ on the other. In both these periods Swedish writers turned to the short story to an increasing extent and, curiously enough, in both periods it was American short story writers who played pivotal roles as models for the Swedish writers. The most influential ones were Hemingway for the first period and Raymond Carver for the second. But I hope to complicate and problematize this simplistic view as I go along.

My presentation of Swedish short story writers who were "influenced" by American counterparts builds on the assumption that there is no simple one-to-one influence. Obviously, many precursors contribute to any writer's art, leaving an imprint more or less visible. To take one Swedish example from the 1940s: although Stig Dagerman was inspired by Faulkner, he also counted as his masters Eyvind Johnson and Franz Kafka. In addition, and not least important, his art was shaped by the fact that he lived through WWII with its attendant insecurities, fears, and absurdities, its dreamlike, nightmarish existence. This experience probably molded him and his writing more than any literary source of inspiration. Röjaldalen correctly points out that the American influence was fused with indigenous and other foreign impulses (Röjaldalen 22-39). We should thus not only ask in what respect a particular writer influenced or was influenced by another, but also, as Göran Hermerén has suggested, try to answer a number of other questions, such as the following: In what respect was the author *not* influenced by a particular artist, in what respect has he or she transformed the first artist's ideas into something new, and has the influence from this other artist helped him or her find a style or an expression of his or her own? (Hermerén 6).

1 Barbro Ståhle Sjönell and Gustaf Rune Eriks claim that also the 1880s-1890s could be regarded as such a peak period in the history of the Swedish short story. Ståhle Sjönell, "Novellens pånyttfödelse i Sverige. Föredrag på Nobelbiblioteket den 4 april 2003," 2; Eriks, "Vad har hänt med novellen?" 67-69. The reason why I put less emphasis on the 1890s is the fact that the short story as a genre was then less discussed or drawn attention to by the critics; the short story was not foregrounded then as it was in the 1940s and 1990s.

Below I will distinguish between *direct* and *indirect* influence or connection. A direct influence would in this case exist when a Swedish author acknowledges a link to an American literary model, when critics corroborate such a connection, and when the short stories of the Swedish author give evidence of such an influence. To give an example from the 1940s, Hemingway's presence in the writings of Thorsten Jonsson and Olov Jonason is easily demonstrable and generally recognized, and they themselves willingly acknowledged their debt to him. In the 1990s, Hans Gunnarsson was explicit concerning his debt to Raymond Carver; critical assessment and his own texts also corroborate this link. But a direct influence may also be much more subtle. It may be implicit in the sense that Swedish authors learn from American writers without letting that fact be explicitly expressed in their literary work. Several Swedish authors have acknowledged a debt to Hemingway but have not adopted the American author's literary style. Or, the direct influence may be only temporary; several writers have been inspired by, for instance, Hemingway in their early work—like Walter Ljungquist and Ivar Lo-Johansson—only to abandon it and move in another direction.

An indirect influence may be illustrated by how Hemingway in the 1940s had an impact on Thorsten Jonsson, who, in his turn, became a literary model for some of the short story writers both in the 1940s and in the 1990s. Hemingway was also an inspiration in the 1990s to the Norwegian author Kjell Askildsen, who, in turn, became a point of reference to Swedish writers. Similarly, Chekov was a molding factor in Carver's art (Gentry/Stull 46-47, Kelly, Nettet 94-97), which became important to the Swedish writers of the 1990s; at the same time, Chekov was a direct source of inspiration to, or influence on, the same authors ("Novellboomen" 57, 68).

The Forties

The 1930s and 1940s was a time "when Swedish authors more than ever before became interested in the form of the short story" (Holmqvist 22).² Coinciding with this development, American literature had—primarily through Hemingway but also through writers like Faulkner, Saroyan, Caldwell, and James M. Cain—a remarkable impact on Swedish writing, particularly on

2. Translations from Swedish, here and below, are mine.

the short story. Hemingway had a similar effect on the authors of many other countries, for instance Britain and Germany. In Germany, for instance, Hemingway's "short fiction was imitated by a great number of German authors at the time, who endeavoured to overcome the 'Blut und Boden' literature of the Nazi period. Writers such as Heinrich Böll, Ernst Kreuder, Elisabeth Langgässer and many others studied Hemingway's concreteness and absorption in physical detail and tried to apply these principles to the German language" (Heller 30).

To give a sketchy, and thus simplified, picture of Swedish literature in the forties, the writers of the time may be divided into two groups, the Fortyists and the "hard-boiled" school. The Fortyists—mainly poets and intellectuals—were connected to the journal *40-tal* (The Forties). The most influential voices of this phalanx were Karl Vennberg, Erik Lindegren, Lars Ahlin, and Stig Dagerman. The Fortyists found in Faulkner, among others, a model and a source of inspiration. The other group, loosely referred to as the "hard-boiled" writers, included names less well known today. Thorsten Jonsson and Gustaf Rune Eriks are probably the only ones whose reputations have lasted, while writers like Olov Jonason, Peter Nisser, Mårten Edlund, Harry Ahlberg, and Sven Bergström have now taken a backstage position. To these "hard-boiled" authors the most important literary expression was the short story, greatly inspired by the work of Hemingway. One must keep in mind, however, that short stories were written also by other, not hard-boiled writers, such as Dagerman, Ahlin, Sivar Arnér, Birgit Tengroth, Eva Neander, and Lars Göransson. Between 1944 and 1949 no less than thirty Swedish authors published collections of short stories (Thörnvall 55-57).

One may try to explain why, during a limited period of fifteen years, a country's culture becomes more willing than before to write, publish, and read short fiction, but exhaustive answers are hard to find. One partial explanation of what happened in the 1930s and 1940s is the fact that the conditions for short story publication changed during this period. Several journals like *Folket i Bild*, *All Världens Berättare*, and *Vi*, interested in publishing stories, came into existence. Newspapers started including short stories in their Sunday supplements. And, as a consequence, publishers followed suit. Thus, eight to ten short story collections were published yearly after 1945, a large number for a small country like Sweden, "a number that during the subsequent decades quickly was to dwindle to a low point" (Julén 18; see also Eriks, "Vad har hänt med novellen?" 73).

By 1944 the “modern American realism” had become such a significant phenomenon that *Dagens Nyheter* invited a group of young Swedish writers to comment on their relationship to the “hard-boiled” authors. Gustaf Rune Eriks, Harry Ahlberg, Olov Jonason, and Lars Ahlin had all recently published short story collections; the fifth author in the group, Sven Bergström, was primarily a novelist. All of them recognized the importance that the new American way of writing had had for their own development as authors, but they also emphasized the limitations of the new technique, the danger that it might turn into a strait-jacket. Several of them held that their dependence on Hemingway and other Americans was not as great as was often claimed. The hard-boiled world view of Hemingway could not, they argued, be transposed to a Swedish reality without problems, since Swedish writers had not gone through the bitter experiences—world wars, strikes, gangster wars—that the Americans had. So, what they felt they had gained from Hemingway and the other Americans was their style and technique, of seeing the words as building blocks to construct with rather than strings to play on, of being “objective,” of finding a natural dialogue, of excising the unnecessary from their texts, of compressing and alluding rather than stating, and of abstaining from interfering in the story (“Rostfritt Amerikastål”).

One of the main functions of Hemingway—in the forties and later, in Sweden and elsewhere—has been that of a writer’s writer. He has served as a teacher to fledgling authors. In their apprentice work, many writers studied Hemingway’s writing, particularly his short stories, analyzing them and attempting to reproduce them (Jonsson, *Sidor av Amerika* 237). Although many of these authors did not end up writing like Hemingway, they nevertheless pay tribute to his significance for their development. One may easily give Swedish examples of such apprenticeships. In his first book, the novella *Ombyte av tåg* (1933, Changing of trains), Walter Ljungquist demonstrated a skillful transposition of Hemingway’s method to Swedish circumstances (Lundkvist, “Novellens förnyelse”). But only two years later he tried to free himself from Hemingway’s influence in *Släkten står på trappan* (1935, Relatives at the front door), and in the short story collection *En dörr står på glänt* (1937, A door ajar) he had left Hemingway behind for “a more romantic, symbolic art of suggestion” (Lundkvist, “Novellens förnyelse”; see also Nerman 314-41). Artur Lundkvist admonishes us not to forget the importance in this context of Ivar Lo-Johansson’s short story collection *Statarna I-II* (1936-1937, The agricultural laborers). In these

stories Lo-Johansson “follows a path which seems to run in the middle between Tolstoy and Hemingway (who by the way regards Tolstoy as his prime master).” According to Lundkvist, Lo-Johansson’s “matter-of-fact observations do not suppress the poetic in his approach but rather support it, release it by concretizing it” (Lundkvist, “Novellens förnyelse”).

One may further mention Tage Aurell who in the 1930s wrote three short novels, all characterized by the pared-down, allusive style of an “American” hard-boiled kind, inspired by both Faulkner and Hemingway, and who in the 1940s published two short story collections—*Smärre berättelser* (1946, Short tales) and *Nya berättelser* (1949, New tales)—which could not have been produced without a fair knowledge of Hemingway’s art. Finally, one may point to Lars Ahlin, whose short story collections *Fångnas glädje* (1947, The joy of the imprisoned) and *Inga ögon väntar mig* (1944, No eyes are awaiting me) were very influential, also to the authors of the 1990s. In the 1944 survey in *Dagens Nyheter* mentioned above, Ahlin told of his contact with the hard-boiled style. He had suffered, he wrote, a two-year writer’s block, when he happened to read Thorsten Jonsson’s *Fly till vatten och morgon* (1941, Flee to water and morning). He reacted very enthusiastically to Jonsson’s short stories and started writing again and reading Hemingway. “I consequently owe a great debt of gratitude to the literary ‘Americanism’,” he wrote. “However, in my case it has primarily functioned as a wake-up call and a provider of impulses” (“Rostfritt Amerikastål”; see also Röjdalen 40-43). The short fiction pieces discussed above are examples of an implicit or temporary direct influence; it is not obvious that Hemingway was the main source of inspiration, since others, like Tolstoy, Faulkner, Obstfelder and Kafka, were also important influences, and since Hemingway’s prose did not have a lasting effect on these writers.

There were, however, in the 1940s a group of writers who deliberately adopted Hemingway’s simultaneously hard-boiled and romantic view of life, and who seriously tried to make his narrative technique their own. They are expressions of a direct influence, since they make no secret of whom they call their master and model, since their dependence on their master is generally recognized, and since their own short fiction carries signs of a direct influence. Some of these authors succeeded in integrating—“Swedifying”—Hemingway’s narrative strategies, creating an artistic expression of their own, while others remained paragons, poor copies of the master model. Many have testified to the importance of Thorsten Jonsson. He was a strongly contributing factor to the renewal of the short

story in the 1940s and to opening the eyes of young writers to Hemingway's short stories (Lundkvist, "Novellens förnyelse"). In his first two books, the short story collections *Som det brukar vara* (1939, As it usually is) and *Fly till vatten och morgon* (1941, Flee to water and morning), Jonsson proved himself not simply an imitator, but a mature writer who had managed to assimilate Hemingway's iceberg technique and paratactic style into a typically Swedish setting, (see also Erixon, 36-41, 78-80, 86-94, 147-52). Particularly the latter collection was seen as a "revelation" to both critics and younger authors. While Jonsson was composing these stories, he was also in the process of translating not only *To Have and Have Not* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* but, more importantly, Hemingway's short stories, *Snön på Kilimandjaro och andra noveller* (1942, *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories*). *Fly till vatten och morgon* contains a series of fictionalized criminal cases about, for instance, a man on his first day outside prison, or a man running away, panic-stricken, from a white house, heading for a lake. Vital information is kept from the reader, including the nature of the prisoner's crime and what has taken place in the white house. We learn only of the consequences and the results of previous events. Jonsson is seemingly a mere recorder of events, abstaining from passing judgment.

Gustaf Rune Eriks is a representative case when it comes to Hemingway's impact on this generation of Swedish short story writers. After reading his first Hemingway story he wrote to a friend: "It's really good! That is the style I want to arrive at. A complete lack of external action. This is what the short story eventually will come to, I'm sure" (Thörnvall 80). In the 1940s Eriks published five short story collections. In the first two, *Hänryckningens tid* (1944, Time of ecstasy) and *Flickan som försvann* (1946, The girl who disappeared) there are several stories, such as "Åska" (Thunder) and "Pubertet" (Puberty), very consciously written in the Hemingway style. "Åska" reads like a Swedish version of "Cat in the Rain." The former collection is introduced by an epigraph from Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." Artur Lundkvist reviewed this book: "The introductory motto is appropriate as a reminder both of a stylistic ideal and a supporting model. But what his short stories remind us of is not Hemingway's sensational bravura pieces but his most artless, low-key, down-to-earth stories" (Lundkvist, "Återkomster" 11). But Eriks was also inspired by Thorsten Jonsson and a lyricist like Hjalmar Söderberg. After these two collections of stories Eriks freed himself from the extreme hard-boiled style and found

a form of his own, where traces of both Söderberg and Hemingway are noticeable (Thörnvall 103, 122, 127, 136).

The other authors of the “hard-boiled” school—Peter Nisser, Mårten Edlund, and Olov Jonason—are less skillful in applying the iceberg technique, in looking askance rather than head on, in implying rather than stating. In 1943, Jonason published his short story collection *Parabellum*, about army life during WWII. His attempt to emulate Hemingway is comparatively successful in the sense that he has understood the American writer’s strategy of understatement, but in the end he emerges as less original than Thorsten Jonsson. The less independent Hemingway disciples were often criticized of assuming an “empty pose,” of being, beneath the hard surface, little weeping boys. Stig Dagerman, the *wunderkind* of Swedish fiction at the time, accused them of wearing the emperor’s new clothes—or false hair on their chests, to refer back to Eastman’s statement. Dagerman claimed that they had borrowed a narrative technique like “an amateur carpenter borrows a precision drill from a master and uses it to extract nails from waste wood” (Dagerman, *Essäer* 126).

In the 1950s the conditions for the short story deteriorated. Publishing houses became less interested and so did the monthlies and weeklies. Short stories were of course still being written but the generous attitude of the 1930s and 1940s was gone. The prestige gained by short story authors of that period was in the 1950s given to writers of other genres (Eriks, “Vad har hänt med novellen?” 72-73).

The Nineties

Since the 1950s until recently, the Swedish short story has not received the attention it deserves, Ståhle Sjönell points out; it has lived in the shadow of the novel (Ståhle Sjönell 3). In the 1970s and 1980s the Swedish short story was more or less dead, according to critics and publishers (Beckman). Publishing houses automatically rejected short story manuscripts, publisher Svante Weyler stated, with the motivation that short stories simply do not sell in Sweden (Rubin “Novellen”). In the 1990s, however, there was an explosion in the publication of short story collections, a dedication among publishers, writers, readers, and critics not felt since the 1930s-40s, the “golden age” of the Swedish short story. For instance, in 1998 about sixty short story collections were published (Ståhle Sjönell “Novellens pånyttfödelse,” 6), a very high figure for Sweden. Many of these short story writ-

ers could be defined as “minimalists,” or, to use the European term, “dirty realists.”

How does one explain such an eruption of short prose fiction? First, compared to what took place in the 1940s, it was now the result of the general breakdown of the genre concept; the boundaries between novel, short story, poetry, etc., were no longer sacred; increasingly, novelists wrote novellas, chronicles, collages; poets wrote prose poems; authors hesitated or felt awe at attempting to write the Great Novel (Beckman). A second, related cause was the circumstance that in a fragmented, time-ridden world both authors and readers found the short story an attractive form of fiction: authors found it problematic to depict a fractured world within one single plot, preferring to present their conception of existence from a multitude of different perspectives. Authors, Lars Jakobson held, had less time at their disposal. In their pursuit of bread for the day, they occasionally managed to get a day off for writing. “A day is seldom enough to write novels,” he wrote, implying why so many writers turned to short fiction (Jakobson 13). Readers, in their turn, had less and less quiet, uninterrupted time; they were exhausted and overstimulated, and preferred a more manageable form of writing.

A counter-argument to this attribution was the fact that the short story is difficult not only to write but also to read. The problem with reading a short story collection is that one has to start anew again and again (Jakobson 11). This may explain why many readers prefer long novels; they do not have to familiarize themselves with new protagonists, themes, and settings over and over again. Thirdly, it seems obvious, even if difficult to prove, that the creative writing courses—a Swedish import from the U.S.—which had then existed for more than two decades and attracted many wannabes, encouraged the writing of short stories rather than novels, (see also Ståhle Sjönell 7). Fourthly, and lastly, inspiration from abroad was clearly of great significance to the Swedish short story renaissance. Norway underwent a similar short fiction revolution in the 1980s and served as a precursor and model for Sweden. The American minimalists—Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, Tobias Wolff, Bobbie Ann Mason, Jayne Anne Phillips—likewise had a strong impact on Swedish writers.

It has been argued that the short story boom started in 1994 with the publication of Cecilia Davidsson's debut collection *En av dessa nätter* (One of these nights; Jönsson 7). But of course nothing starts with a single something. The ground had been prepared for quite some time, and Davidsson

merely happened to become the first in a long row of modern Swedish short story writers. If one looks at Swedish publication history in the decade preceding 1994, one finds that the interest in the short story was considerable, perhaps not in the contemporary Swedish short story, but in the short story in general. Several of the short story collections from the 1940s—by Jansson, Ahlin, Jonason, Dagerman, and Aurell—were reprinted during these years. And numerous collections from North America were translated, story collections by Carver, Ford, Wolff, Jayne Anne Phillips, Bobbie Ann Mason, Cheever, Peter Taylor, James Purdy, Singer, Atwood, and Munro. In addition, Hemingway's stories were reprinted, and Faulkner's collected stories appeared for the first time in 1990, long after the original American publication. The Swedish short story might have been dead, but the short story as such was not. Clearly then, even if the eruption seemed sudden in 1994, the period of gestation actually covered several years.

If measured by Swedish standards, however, the scope of the indigenous short story production during 1994-2002 was considerable. According to Ståhle Sjönell, statistics on the number of volumes published are hard to establish (Ståhle Sjönell 6). She lists, as we have seen, sixty short story collections for 1998. In 2001, Arnborg claims, about twenty new collections appeared (Arnborg 47). The best known of these writers were Inger Edelfeldt, Ninni Holmqvist, Åke Edwardson, Hans Gunnarsson, Oline Stig, Jerker Virdborg, Peter Törnqvist, Joakim Forsberg, Lars Jakobson, Mats Kempe, Stefan Lindberg, Cecilia Davidsson, Alejandro Leiva Wenger, and Mats Kolmisoppi. While many of them could be defined as minimalists or dirty realists, that concept certainly did not apply to all. And while many of them had strong ties to American short fiction writers, this did not include all.

Their stories most often take place in regional, or local, settings. They paint bleak pictures of, generally, working-class or lower-middle-class people, who live conventional lives in which they fail to communicate even with those closest to them. These characters try to fill their lives with surrogates like TV, hopeless dreams of the past or the future, travel, or material objects. Many of these short stories depict the ordinariness of ordinary people in very ordinary circumstances. It is a world of surface—not a shining surface but one soiled and lustreless—beneath which desire, sorrow, and unfulfillment constantly strive to break through. The themes in this underworld fiction range from unfaithfulness and jealousy, to alcoholism, unemployment, insomnia, desperate loneliness, worries over money, and the

fear of cancer and of being rejected. Dan Jönsson held that many of these initially traditional stories of psychological realism transform into strange, dreamlike, surrealistic ones. The reader is constantly confronted with the question: what is real, what is not? (Jönsson 8-9).

These stories are often written in a paratactic style, with alternating first and third person narrators and little use of adjectives or metaphors, lacking peripeteia, closure, and epiphany. Repetition abounds, as do catalogues of ordinary, everyday objects and events and references to topical issues of the most varied kinds. We meet slices, or fragments, of undramatic lives, stories with an intentionally low degree of narrativity. These authors are the latterday vivisectionists, presenting cutouts from living—or living dead—humans.

A way to illustrate this minimalist trend is by summarizing, for instance, the title story of Hans Gunnarsson's *En kväll som den här* (2001, An evening like this), portraying a young, bored, alienated woman, who has just been dumped by her boyfriend Robert. She agrees one evening to go on a blind date with a blind boy. In the pub they have a conversation on UFOs, go back to her place, where she immediately becomes sick from having had too much wine at the pub. When she returns from the bathroom, the blind boy is gone. She sits down to watch an Al Pacino movie. End of story. To take another example, in the title story of Cecilia Davidsson's *Utan pengar, utan bikini* (1998, No money, no bikini) the female narrator, of well-to-do background, has just moved to the city for a summer job as a sanitary worker at a hospital. She does this to distance herself from her parents, to show that she can make it on her own. Since her salary does not go far enough, she lives in a small shabby room. She gets into bad company with two criminals, Alexander and Leo, and the story ends, without closure, when she, on her way to shoplift a bikini, is more or less forced into Leo's car.

Apart from being inspired also by writers like Chekhov, Thorsten Jonsen of the 1940s, and the Norwegian Kjell Askildsen, a very influential Hemingway disciple, many of these short story writers looked upon Raymond Carver as their model and master. Hans Gunnarsson, for instance, stated in 1999: "My fiction writing started when I read Carver ten years ago and felt a strong affinity. He enters straight into people's lives, meets them with the greatest sincerity, and, in spite of the ordinariness of his style, his prose possesses a special electric charge" (Rubin, "Tre kortdistansare"). Many others, Cecilia Davidsson for instance, also testified to their having been influenced by Carver, but when interviewed tried to downplay his

importance (“Novellboomen” 20, 22, 40, 50, 58, 68). Beate Arnborg even claimed that to many writers-to-be Carver came as a liberator (Arnborg 46). The collection *Short Cuts*, and, even more so, Altman’s movie, seem to have played a special role in this inspirational process (Jönsson 12, Virdborg 32–33).

It seems to me, however, that, although Carver’s influence has been exaggerated, a general American, minimalist—or hard-boiled—influence cannot be denied. This form of literary expression did, as we have seen, characterize a group of writers in the 1930s and 1940s who were primarily inspired by Hemingway. And the spirit of Hemingway was still in the 1990s hovering over Swedish prose (see also Jönsson 12; Virdborg 29). In the 1980s and 1990s fifteen Hemingway titles appeared in thirty Swedish editions. *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Old Man and the Sea* were reprinted four times each during this time. In a single year—1986—no less than nine different Hemingway titles were published in Swedish. In 1996 his collected short stories were reprinted. In addition, biographies, TV programs, and special magazine issues were devoted to the inventor of the iceberg technique. Thus, also in the 1990s and the first years of the new millennium Hemingway must be recognized as a direct influence on Swedish short story writers, which authors like Davidsson readily acknowledge (“Novellboomen” 22).

But Hemingway makes his imprint in other, indirect ways as well. Carver himself, like many of the other minimalists, was a Hemingway disciple, even if he, in accordance with the Bloomian anxiety-of-influence theory, killed off his master by rejecting Hemingway’s sentimentality and machismo. Kjell Askildsen, the Norwegian author referred to above, who was a source of inspiration to short story writers like Mats Kempe and Stefan Lindberg (“Novellboomen” 58, 68), made no secret of the fact that he was greatly indebted to the Hemingway legacy. When we add to this picture the popularity at the time of the hard-boiled writers from the 1940s—primarily Thorsten Jonsson—it becomes clear that there were numerous indirect influences from Hemingway on the short story scene of those years. But the nineties authors did not seem aware of this indirect influence. When Inger Edelfelt acknowledged that her main inspiration when she started out was Jonsson’s short stories, she forgot to mention Jonsson’s indebtedness to Hemingway (“Novellboomen” 38). And when Dan Jönsson in 2002 expressed reservations concerning the American influence, stating that Lars Ahlin’s *Inga ögon väntar mig* (1944) was “probably the most important

single influence on young short story writers of the nineties," he seemed unaware of Ahlin's gratitude to the "literary Americanism" discussed above (Jönsson 15).

My discussion so far of the short story production may have given the impression that these writers were all US-inspired minimalists. If so, this is a reductive presentation; the variety among these writers was great and several of them cannot be characterized as dirty realists at all. Jerker Virdborg, for instance, wrote stories that instead of being static, frozen moments were built on suspense, invoking the mysterious. The same interest in the inexplicable characterized Stefan Lindberg's stories, often portraying a weird, dreamlike world.

Yet another development took place during those years. Until then Sweden had almost completely lacked a tradition of short story composites, or cycles,³ particularly if one makes a comparison with the United States. The authors of the 1990s, however, rediscovered this genre, and several such composites were published. The appearance of this narrative form was then explained by the impact of Altman's *Short Cuts*, with its structure of interfoliated story lines, and by the development of the Net (Jönsson 12-13). The indirect influence of the American short-story-cycle tradition was not recognized, however, in spite of the fact that numerous American and Canadian short story composites were translated into Swedish in the 1980s and 1990s, works by Faulkner, Hemingway, Selby Jr., Munro, O'Brien, Erdrich, Doctorow, Naylor, Otto, Kincaid, Phillips, Gaines, and Tan. It seems obvious to me that the presence of all these cycles was of importance for the emergence of such interlinked stories in Sweden (Lundén, "Det lyriska spåret" 43).

In Edwardson's *Genomresa* (1999, *In transit*), a chronicle of several young men's growing up in Småland, a region in southern Sweden, characters, themes, and events are recurring, from one autonomous story to another, forming a loosely interlinked whole. The same is true of Gunnarsson's *Februari* (1999, *February*), in which two apartment buildings, facing one another, and their inhabitants, form a collective world, further unified by an overweight traveling salesman trying to sell vacuum cleaners to sev-

3 For a definition and a discussion of the short story composite, see Lundén, *The United Stories of America*, 11-51. Ståhle Sjönell points to Swedish predecessors in the genre, such as Lorenzo Hammarsköld's *Sju timmar på Fittja* (1821), August Blanche's *Hyrkuskens berättelser* (1863-65), August Strindberg's *Giftas* (1884), and Selma Lagerlöf's *Kristuslegender* (1904) ("Novellens förnyelse" 13-14).

eral of the tenants. The unifying structure of Ninni Holmqvist's *Något av bestående karaktär* (1999, Something of lasting nature) is also an apartment house (maybe inspired by Gloria Naylor), where the tenants interact in stories independent of each other. The links between the stories are subtly made, and the accumulation of information implicates the reader into an active participation in constructing a larger whole. Other such short story composites were Ninni Holmqvist's *Kostym* (1995, Costume) and Kristian Fredén's *Ostkaka* (1996, Cheese cake).

The most recent "short story boom," as it was called, is now over. As in the 1950s, when the interest in short stories waned after the "Golden Age" of the 1940s, we now see a period of calm compared to the 1990s eruption of short story writing and publishing. Of course short stories are still being written and published, but to a lesser extent. The media interest, fickle and rapidly changing as we know, is going in other directions. Both the peak periods of short fiction discussed above lasted 10–15 years, and forty years elapsed between the first and the second. One can only hope that we will not have to wait another forty years for the next peak period. The fact that no history of the Swedish short story has yet been written reflects Sweden's lacking short story tradition, and if such a history were produced, it might contribute to a greater and more stable dedication to the tradition and significance of short fiction in Sweden. Whether Hemingway and Carver, or other Americans, will crop up in the future as models for short story writers, we do not know; in this age of transnationality it would not be surprising if the inspiration came from other parts of the world.

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