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Author(s): Reuter, Martina

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Brev från en resa i Sverige, Norge och Danmark*. Translation, introduction and notes by Elisabeth Mansén (Lund: Ellerströms, 2022). 302 s.

Martina Reuter, University of Jyväskylä

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (London: J. Johnson, 1796) has a long history of translations into Swedish. As early as January–March 1797 *Åbo Tidningar* published a four-part series of translations from Wollstonecraft's descriptions of Sweden with the translator's comments on her often quite critical views. The series begins with a short introduction, presenting Wollstonecraft as one of England's many fine living female authors and mentioning her previous works on the rights of woman as well as the French revolution (*Åbo Tidningar* 2/1797, p. 2). The story is published anonymously, but Frans Michael Franzén is a likely translator and author. He wrote regularly for *Åbo Tidningar* at the time, he had returned from a one and a half years travelling around Europe in November 1796 after spending that spring and summer in Britain, he owned the 1796 edition of Wollstonecraft's *Letters* at the time of his death, and his unpublished travel notes mention Wollstonecraft twice.[1]

The series in *Åbo Tidningar* is particularly important, because the first book-length Swedish translation of these letters, *Bref, Skrifna under et kort wistande i Sverige, Norrige och Danmark* (Stockholm: J. C. Holmberg, 1798) is not only anonymous, but also lacks a preface or afterword to tell the story of how Wollstonecraft and her works were perceived in Sweden in the late 1790s. The next Swedish translation of *Letters*, *Brev skrivna under en kort vistelse i Sverige, Norge och Danmark* (trans. Jane Lundblad; Stockholm: Tiden, 1978) almost two centuries later,

[1] For a detailed discussion of the evidence for Franzén's authorship see Martina Reuter, 'Mary Wollstonecraft, Frans Michael Franzén och *Åbo Tidningar*', *Sphinx*, Yearbook 2022–2023 (Helsinki: Societas Scientarium Fennica, 2023), forthcoming.

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introduced Wollstonecraft to a modern Swedish readership and participated in the revival of works by female authors. At the end of the twentieth century, it was followed by *Till försvar av kvinnans rättigheter* (trans. Ingrid Ingemark; Stockholm: Ordfront, 1997), the first Swedish translation of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1792).

Elisabeth Mansén wrote the introduction to the first editions of *Till försvar av kvinnans rättigheter* and is now continuing her persistent work on Wollstonecraft's writings with a third full Swedish translation of the *Letters*. In her introduction, Mansén discusses the need for a new translation. Her first reason, that the translation from 1997 is out of print, is not so much grounds for a new translation as for a new edition. However, Mansén's second reason is important. She points out that language has changed since 1997. One might add that this issue is particularly urgent in the case of translations, which age faster than works in their original languages. A good translation requires a certain transparency that must not be interrupted by unintended anachronisms. Mansén has done a decent job. Her translation successfully balances the need to stay close to the original against the need not to get caught up in English expressions, but rather rewrite in good Swedish.

Mansén's third reason for retranslation is the fact that much has happened in Wollstonecraft scholarship and more notes needed to be added to the text. Her notes are in many respects excellent and tell the reader a lot about the historical context as well as Wollstonecraft's sources. The book includes a useful list of relevant scholarly literature, but unfortunately the introduction and notes do not engage in critical dialogue with previous interpretations. The reader learns little about what Wollstonecraft scholars have discussed or of how Mansén positions her own interpretations in relation to the rich scholarly literature.

However, scholarly readers will be interested in Mansén's discussion of who may have been the anonymous translator of the 1798 translation. Her argument is briefly summarized in the introduction and expanded elsewhere.[2] Based on a critical study of information primarily from the database of Swedish translators *Svenskt översättarlexikon* and the library catalogue Libris, Mansén draws the conclusion that Carolina Weltzin (born Rutström) is the most likely candidate. Weltzin was a productive translator, who translated from English, and she translated travel literature as well as books on and by women. Mansén's hypothesis is strengthened by my hypothesis that Frans Michael Franzén is a likely translator and author of the series in *Åbo Tidningar*. Franzén was a close friend of Weltzin's brother Carl

[2] Elisabeth Mansén, 'Jakten på den anonyma översättaren av Mary Wollstonecraft's resebrev', *Biblis* 98 (Summer 2022), pp. 32–43. The article is completed after Mansén became aware of the series in *Åbo Tidningar*, which is not mentioned in the introduction to her translation.

Birger Rutström, he knew both siblings well and he belonged to the same literary circles in Stockholm. *Åbo Tidningar* motivates the publication of translated passages 'Til dess boken hinner bli öfwersatt' (*Åbo Tidningar* 2/1797, p. 2), indicating that the author of these words may have been aware of or even involved in the plan to translate the whole book. However, a comparison of the 1797 and 1798 translations shows it to be unlikely that they are translated by the same person.[3] If Franzén translated for *Åbo Tidningar*, we can with great likelihood exclude him as translator of the *Bref*.

Many interesting questions about the early Swedish reception of Wollstonecraft's works remain. Mansén is quite right to quickly exclude Thomas Thorild from the list of likely translators, but Wollstonecraft's possible influence on his *Om Qvinnokönets naturliga höghet* (Copenhagen: Johan Rudolph Thiele, 1793) is still seriously understudied. His argument that a woman must first be considered as a rational being with corresponding rights and dignity, second as a human being with corresponding rights and dignity, and third as a citizen with corresponding rights and dignity, strongly resembles Wollstonecraft's argument in *Rights of Woman*. When we know more about who read Wollstonecraft in Sweden during the 1790s, we may be better equipped to determine the identity of the anonymous translator(s) of *Bref* and of Wollstonecraft's posthumously published novel, translated into Swedish as *Maria, eller Missödet at vara qvinna* (Stockholm: J. C. Holmberg, 1799). Mansén assumes that the two works are by the same translator, but she does not present evidence for this claim. A digital comparison of the two texts would with great likelihood be able to solve this part of the puzzle.

[3] For an example, see Reuter, 'Mary Wollstonecraft, Frans Michael Franzén och *Åbo Tidningar*'.