

TWO PIECES ON THE WAR IN SKÅNE BY PETRUS LAGERLÖF



By Peter Sjökvist

The War in Skåne between Sweden and Denmark (1675–1679) was not only fought with arms. In this article we meet two poetical pieces composed by the prominent Swedish Latinist Petrus Lagerlöf (1648–1699), which are both connected to the events of this conflict. One is a panegyric poetic paratext on Charles XI, written for an orator celebrating the 21st birthday of the King in 1676. The other is a satirical epigram on the fall of Kristianstad in 1678. The poems are not only rhetorical masterpieces, but also both very representative of Swedish propaganda of the time.

It is difficult to believe today that the Swedes and the Danes were always enemies back in the old days. Now we only see occasional exceptions to mutual respect, when it is time for football games between the national teams, or at similar events. But it took some time to get where we are, and traces from the period of enmity can still be found with ease. At Uppsala University Library, where I work, I had the privilege of cataloguing a collection called *Danica vetera* some time ago.¹ There we find many items with Danish origin that were once taken as war booty by the Swedish armies in the 17th century.² But the fact that the laws of war in the 17th century allowed victorious armies to take such booty does not mean that librarians in the 21st century feel completely comfortable with this acquisition method.³ We often have to explain – defend, as it were – a behaviour of the Swedish army that nobody in our time can consider as anything but disgusting.

¹ See further: www.ub.uu.se/finding-your-way-in-the-collections/selections-of-special-items-and-collections/danica-vetera.

² As regards Danish war booty in Swedish libraries, see further Walde 1916–20, 1, 218–227; 2, 205–438.

³ Valuable discussions on these two aspects of the literary war booty can be found in Göranson 2016 and Munkhammar 2016.

Even more important than the war booty material at Swedish institutions, however, are the several territories that were added to the Swedish kingdom in the 17th century, which used to belong to Denmark. We may today think of the borders of Sweden and Denmark as natural, divided by the strait of Öresund as the countries are, but for a long time they were not. As we all know, the regions of Skåne, Blekinge and Halland did not become Swedish until 1658, by the peace treaty of Roskilde. Somewhat later the Swedish King Charles X Gustavus attacked Denmark again, with the intention to conquer all of Denmark, but he failed to do so and soon passed away himself in 1660. It is true that the peace that followed lasted somewhat longer, but the question was not really *if* the Danes wanted to take revenge or not, but *when* they would decide to do so. In 1675 there seemed to be an opportunity.⁴

The Swedish King Charles XI was young, only 18 years old at the time when Denmark declared war in September that year. Sweden had become involved in the European war between France and its antagonists, suffered a serious defeat at Fehrbellin in Brandenburg, and met great adversities at sea. So when the Danes landed and occupied the major part of Skåne in the summer of 1676 the situation was precarious, to say the least. By an enormous effort from the Swedes, they were, however, able to fight back successfully. The terrible battle of Lund on the 4 December 1676, causing the loss of approximately 14.000 lives altogether, is generally regarded to be the turning-point. The Swedish victory was small, but decisive, and step by step they managed to win parts of Skåne back from the Danes thereafter. This was, in short, the contemporary political situation when our poet composed the first of the two pieces to be discussed here.

Petrus Lagerlöf was born in 1648 in the Swedish region of Värmland, and arrived at Uppsala as a student in 1665. Ten years later he defended his dissertation *pro gradu* (for the degree) and won the master's degree. He would end his career as a celebrated professor of eloquence at Uppsala University and as Swedish *historiographus regni* (royal historiographer), the most prestigious scholarly position in the country, when he died prematurely in 1699.⁵ By posterity he has usually been regarded as one of the most prominent Swedish writers of Latin ever.⁶ At the beginning of 1677, when he wrote the first of the two poems to be treated in the following, Lagerlöf had

⁴ The history of this war, the background, the Danish landing at Råå in Sweden, the battle of Lund, etc., is given in different articles in *Kampen om Skåne* 2005. See also Rystad 2001, 40–119.

⁵ For the most exhaustive treatment of Lagerlöf's biography, see Olsson 1977. A selection of Lagerlöf's Latin poetry is published in Sjökvist 2010.

⁶ E.g. Ihre & Wählberg 1739, 28–29; Helander 1994, 41 and 43; Aili 1995, 149; and Piltz 2006, 33.

recently finished his university studies, and was now responsible for the education of the son of the nobleman Lars Fleming. Just as in almost all other cases when Lagerlöf wrote poetry, his reason for doing so was a certain occasion, this time a speech held at Uppsala University.

At the academies at the time, when rhetoric was a very important subject, solemn orations were often delivered by students on contemporary events of great significance, and on members of the Royal family.⁷ These speeches were often printed and spread, since they contributed to the dissemination of Swedish propaganda and displayed loyalty to the Royal house. And when they were published, the speaker as a custom received congratulatory poems from academic fellows, which were included in the publication *gratulationis loco* (in the place for congratulations). This is what happened this time.

On the 9 January 1677 the 21 year-old student Carl Liedeman gave an oration in Uppsala on the birthday of Charles XI, which had taken place one and a half month earlier, the 24 November 1676, during the campaign in Skåne. So when Petrus Lagerlöf writes his congratulatory text for the publication, there are in reality two events and two persons to celebrate, the young student and his oration, as well as the King and his marvellous deeds. Two further circumstances unite these two addressees: they both carry the first name Carl (Charles), and they happen to be born on exactly the same day. This is of course wonderful, and perfect stuff for a poet writing in the 17th century, who is prone to making rhetorical points with all kinds of associations and similarities. The Latin text⁸ is:

CAROLE, dum Castris, hiberno et pectora Marti,
Objicis, in medio docta calere gelu,
Oraque non miti praebes violanda pruinae,
Quae verni semper sideris instar habent.

5 Dum male perjurum toties stimularis in hostem,
Victrici ulturus foedera rupta manu.

Festinatque Tuis pugnare in partibus aether,

Fataque jam caussa pro meliore manent.

En! Tibi ter septenus adest Natalis, et aevum

10 Miratur meritis tardius ire Tuis.

Cumque Tuos ausus reteggit, numerarier ultra

Postulat, et fastis vix putat esse fidem.

Dumque stupet gaudetque simul, dum saepe reverti

⁷ As regards Latin eloquence in Sweden, see further Tengström 1983, 12–22.

⁸ Petrus Lagerlöf is, as far as I know, the only Latin author from Sweden whose collected works have been edited and published separately. This was done by Samuel Älf in 1780, under the title *Petri Lagerlöfvii ... Orationes, programmata ac carmina varia*. The Latin text here follows this edition (page 184), which was supposed to be the first part of a major collection of Neo-Latin poetry.

Se vovet, et Domino plaudere saepe suo,
15 Excipit alloquio LIEDMANNUS, et auspice Phoebo
Paene suis annis altius audet opus.
Oraque facundos juvenilia solvit in orsus,
Verbaque materiae concipit aequa suae.
Ingenium, Rex, ipse facis, facis esse disertum,
20 Parvaque difficile est, Te subeunte, loqui.
Nec nihil est nasci Tecum, lux fertilis illa
Dotibus, et genii dives ubique fuit.
Lux praesaga fuit, quae Te cum gigneret orbi,
Praeconem hunc una protulit alma Tibi.

O Charles, when you expose your chest to camp life and wars in
[winter time,
your chest which has been taught to glow warm in the midst of
[cold weather,
and when you let your countenance be injured by hard frost,
the countenance that shines forth as an appearance of the star of spring,
5 when you are spurred on repeatedly against an evil perfidious enemy
in order to avenge broken treaties with a victorious hand,
then heaven hastens to fight on your side,
and destiny remains with the better cause.
Behold! Your twentyfirst birthday is here, and is amazed at the fact
10 that time passes more slowly because of your merits.
And when it reveals your hazards, it demands that they be accounted for
again, and it almost cannot believe the chronicles.
When it wonders and rejoices at the same time, and promises that it
shall return many times and applaud its Lord many times,
15 then Liedemann starts to speak, and under Febus's guidance
he dares an enterprise that is almost above his age.
His youthful mouth starts to speak eloquently,
and finds words that are equal to his subject.
You yourself, O King, you make the mind eloquent,
20 it is difficult to talk about small things when you are present.
And it is not nothing to be born together with you, that day was fertile
talents, and it was rich with genius in all respects. [with
The day was prophetic, which when it gave birth to you to the world,
at the same time propitiously brought forth this panegyrist of yours.

The King Charles XI is immediately addressed in the vocative, and he remains the person spoken to all through the poem. The King is waging war in the winter, and we know that it was in fact unusually cold this year. But his passion for the enterprise is ardent, and the cold does not affect him. His face is similar to the sun in the spring, and we here easily recognize the model in Horace's words on Augustus in *carm.* 4.5.5 ff., where the emperor's gaze

makes life better for the people: *Instar veris enim vultus ubi tuus / Affulsit populo, gratior it dies / et soles melius nitent* (For when your countenance shines like the spring upon the people, the day passes more pleasantly and the sun is much brighter).⁹ He is attacking the perfidious enemy, and will victoriously take revenge for the broken treaties. Well, the Danes are generally described as false and oath-breaking in Swedish neo-Latin literature¹⁰, but this time it was at least formally correct that they had broken the peace and declared war against Sweden. Luckily for Charles XI, however, heaven takes side with the Swedes and decides to fight for the better cause. Also here we have to do with a very common theme in Swedish propaganda, where the Swedes are so often described as God's own new chosen people, the new Israel, however odd such an idea may sound to us today.¹¹ And then, during this campaign, Charles XI celebrates his 21st birthday, and this day in personification is amazed by Charles's astonishing deeds. He has performed so many great things that it can hardly believe this and trust the chronicles. Now, in line 15, the other Carolus (Liedemann), starts to speak under Apollo's guidance and dares an enterprise for which he is probably too young. Panegyrics, as will be remembered, is something for old men, not for youngsters, according to the classical tradition.¹² But Liedemann speaks eloquently and manages to find words that are suitable to the magnificent subject. How is this possible? It is the subject of the speech himself, Charles XI, who makes the young man successful and able to speak about things that are above his age, corresponding to the topos that Curtius called *puer senex* (an old boy).¹³ It is impossible to talk about small things when the King is close. In addition, as was mentioned above, the King and Liedemann were both born on the same day, and this is of course wonderful. What a great and fertile day it was that brought forth both the glorious King and his eloquent panegyrist at the same time. Two *Caroli*, born on the same day, and nothing can go wrong!

So, without taking any focus away from the King, Lagerlöf manages to praise the young student as well for producing something far better than his age would allow him to. This is done indirectly in the poem, but directly considering its function as a paratext in the printed oration. Lagerlöf does so by evoking several standard themes in the propaganda of the time, but also

⁹ Comparing the ruler with the sun is of course common all over Europe in the 17th century. See further e.g. Johannesson 1968, 103ff., and Helander 2004, 391ff.

¹⁰ Helander 2004, 352f.

¹¹ Helander 2004, 408ff., but also especially Ekedahl 1999.

¹² Arguments used by Lagerlöf in support of young men about to deliver panegyrics at the academy in spite of their young age have been discussed in Sjökvist 2012.

¹³ Curtius 1978 [1948], 108ff.

by using some classical topoi. If this poem is in many ways representative of the Latin poetry of the time in Sweden, albeit far more masterful than most other specimens, the next short epigram is surely a rarity in Lagerlöf's own production. I cannot remember having seen another piece of the same satirical kind.

When the Danes invaded Skåne in 1676 they soon captured Helsingborg and Landskrona, and in August they did the same with Kristianstad. For a while they controlled all of Skåne, with the only exception of Malmö. After the battle of Lund the Swedes started to reconquer the region, and Kristianstad was soon surrounded and besieged, but the Danes sent more troops to the city, and the siege was raised in the summer of 1677. A new siege, however, was started in May 1678. On the 21 July the Danish army of 11.000 men arrived at Önnestad, close to Kristianstad, with the aim of relieving the city, but there was no real attempt to do so. On the 4 August the troops in Kristianstad had to surrender to the Swedes, despite the fact that the Danish army was so close, when the Danish King some days earlier had left his soldiers and travelled back to Copenhagen. With the loss of Kristianstad, the hope of winning Skåne back was also lost. According to the peace treaty settled one year later, no territories would be surrendered by any side in the conflict. The fall of Kristianstad was also the subject of a distich by Lagerlöf, in which he ridicules the Danish effort:

Dane, rogas, quam ob rem citius non ceperit urbem
Svecus? Rem voluit te speculante geri.

O Dane, you ask why the Swedes did not capture the city more quickly.
They wanted it to happen while you were watching.

Lagerlöf immediately addresses a fictive Dane explicitly in the vocative, and asks him why the Swedes did not capture the city more quickly. "They wanted it to happen while you were watching", is the answer, and as we can see this refers to the abovementioned circumstance that a large Danish army was standing very close to Kristianstad, without being able to make the troops in the city avoid a surrender. It is of course not true that the Swedes would have waited to capture the city on purpose, just to have the opportunity to do it while demonstrating their superiority in front of the Danes. But in a scornful epigram, pleasing the Swedish authorities, that did not matter. From a rhetorical perspective the short poem is surely successful anyhow. I guess that could be said safely.

Be that as it may, what we have seen here are two poetical pieces that are very representative of Swedish propaganda from the time of the war against the Danes in Skåne in the 1670s. We have seen praise of the Swedish King and slander of the Danes, in direct connection to recent events in the conflict. Typical themes, classical topoi and satire were part of the rhetorical

repertoire, and many of them would return during the Great Northern War at the beginning of the 18th century, when Sweden and Denmark were at war again.¹⁴ What this reminds us of is of course that wars were never fought only in the battle-field, neither in the 17th century. To establish certain ideas among the people as undoubtedly true, in all genres, was obviously fundamental as well.

It is of course true that anyone interested in historical research must try to understand the ideas of the time under investigation, but sometimes a comparison with our own sentiments can be just as justified. It shows so clearly that some of the incitements and arguments for those bloody wars are in fact very far from what we could possibly conceive of today. Would any Swede with full mental capacity today use the sun as a simile for the Swedish King? Or claim that he has performed so many great deeds that no one could believe it? I think similar things are still being said about the ruler of North-Korea. That anyone praising him would automatically be eloquent himself? Would anyone call the Danes false and perjurious? Impossible! And the Swedes as God's new chosen people? Well, anyone who has seen the Swedish national football team in action has a good reason to doubt such a statement. And there could perhaps be other proofs as well for the incorrectness of this idea.

¹⁴ See Dahlberg 2014, 65–100.

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