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**Olga Campbell-Thomson**

## **The Soviet Reception of Selma Lagerlöf**

### **Abstract**

*The focus of this paper is Selma Lagerlöf's literary presence in Soviet Russia. Despite being one of the most translated and published foreign authors in pre-revolutionary times, Lagerlöf made very infrequent appearances on the Soviet literary scene for 40-odd years between 1917 and the end of the 1950s. The process of literary production is examined in this paper in search of an explanation for the changing pattern in the publication of Lagerlöf's texts. To problematize the process of literary production in the newly-established Soviet state, Foucault's conceptualization of the process of knowledge construction is utilized to describe, understand and explain the interplay between critical resources, such as linguistic and literary expertise, individual initiative and the government-controlled publishing enterprise in the Soviet state. I argue that the agency of literary workers remained relevant to the literary process, despite increasing ideological pressure on literary production, and that they paved the way towards the official re-introduction of Lagerlöf to the Russian Soviet readership during the 1950s.*

**Key words:** Selma Lagerlöf, women writers, literary production, travelling texts, Soviet publishing

### **Lagerlöf in Russia**

When Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940) of Värmland, Sweden, became the first woman writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1909, her texts had already gained great popularity in Russia. Following the first Russian publication of her short story *The Fallen King* (*En fallen kung*) in the journal *Severnyj Vestnik* in St Petersburg in 1895, a number of other texts began appearing in newspapers and literary journals. Her first novel to be published in Russia was *Jerusalem* (*Jerusalem*). Its first edition was printed in 1902 and this was followed by a new edition in 1903. *Christ Legends* (*Kristuslegender*), which was published in Russia in 1904, the same year as its publication in Sweden, was particularly

popular, and according to Ivanov (2008), was reprinted at least eight times between 1907 and 1916. The tale *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (*Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*) was printed and re-printed to cater for the increased circulation.

According to Braude (1972), some of Lagerlöf's texts of 1900–1910 published in Russian were translations from other languages. These translations were frequently anonymous and the texts were full of omissions and distortions. Yet, there were serious translations and reviews of the writer's work. A well-known translator of Scandinavian literature at the beginning of the twentieth century, Maria Blagoveshchenskaya, translated a number of Lagerlöf's books. These include: *The Miracles of Antichrist* (*Antikrists mirakler*) in 1903, *Gösta Berlings Saga* (*Gösta Berlings saga*) in 1904, *Jerusalem* (*Jerusalem*) in 1905, *Mr Arne's Money* (*Herr Arnes penningar*) and *The Tale of a Manor* (*En Herrgårdssägen*) in 1908. Many of these texts were published in a 12-volume edition of the complete works of Lagerlöf printed between 1909 and 1911 by the publishing house of Sablin in Moscow. The Russian publications of *Liliecrona's Home* (*Liljecronas hem*) in 1912, *The Phantom Carriage* (*Körkarlen*) in 1913, and *The Emperor of Portugallia* (*Kejsarn av Portugallien*) in 1915 also appeared in Blagoveshchenskaya's translations.

Swedish literature, along with the literatures of other Scandinavian countries, experienced a period of extraordinary interest in Russia around the beginning of the twentieth century, and this could be explained by the general development of political and cultural relations between Russia and the Scandinavian countries (Feinstein, 2001). Lagerlöf's texts appeared amidst volumes of Scandinavian literature of varying merit; however, the writer was singled out for her talent and originality by Russian critics.

In 1903, the literary critic Lev Umanets named Lagerlöf as one of the best Swedish writers, whose texts had “inexplicable charm” (Umanets 1903, p. 133). Reviews praising

Lagerlöf's work were written by Lyubov Khavkina (1871–1949), a prominent bibliographer and one of the founders of the Library Sciences in Russia. In her introduction to *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils (Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige)* Khavkina (1912) stated that, whereas national literatures were not always of interest to a foreign reader, Lagerlöf's books were unquestionably worthy of attention from readers far outside Sweden.

A well-crafted narrative style, humanity, love of nature and a masterful portrayal of believable human characters appear to be the recurring themes in a number of critical reviews of Lagerlöf's work in Russia (Umanets, 1903; Norov, 1905; Peterson, 1904; Khavkina, 1912). In Norov's (1905) view, these features of Lagerlöf's writing explained why her depiction of the daily life of Swedish peasants, and her retelling of old Scandinavian tales and legends, transcended national boundaries and were favourably received by Russian readers.

Apart from enjoying literary and commercial success in Russia, Lagerlöf was also receiving accolades as a woman writer in her own right. To Norov (1905), she was the advent of a woman genius who stirred the world of literature. Another critic, Viktor Gofman, claimed that there were no other women writers at the time who could compete with Lagerlöf, and that in the whole of Scandinavian literature Lagerlöf occupied first place after Knut Hamsun (Gofman, 1909). In his review of a submitted manuscript by a new author, Maksim Gorky wrote in 1910: "Let me refer you to two women writers, Selma Lagerlöf and Grazia Deledda, who have no equals either in the past or at present... We, men, would do well to learn from them" (Gorky, 2012a, pp. 86–87).

A champion of women's rights, Lagerlöf was a celebrity speaker at the International Woman Suffrage Alliance Congress in 1911. The words of her speech, in which she advocated the recognition of women outside the domestic sphere, would resonate later with those of Alexandra Kollontai at the Conference of Women Workers held in Moscow on 16–

21 November 1918. Kollontai, a seasoned revolutionary of noble origin, announced in her speech the end of domestic servitude for women, and stated her vision of a new type of relationship based on “a union of affection and comradeship, a union of two equal members of the communist society, both of them free, both of them independent, both of them workers” (Wade, 1991, p. 276).

A woman of remarkable achievements, and a teacher who could sustain herself through her own labour, Lagerlöf was well fitted for the newly established social order in Soviet Russia, where a handful of female Bolshevik leaders exemplified the liberated type of women partaking in the construction of a new socialist state on a par with men. Lagerlöf’s interest in the life of the common people also responded to the task set by the new authorities to supply the toiling masses with the type of literature that would appeal to their social consciousness. Notwithstanding all these credentials, Selma Lagerlöf’s name and books did not gain much recognition following the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, and the handful of publications that did appear during the 40-some years after 1917 were in stark contrast to the large volume of pre-revolutionary circulation of the writer’s work.

There is no evident reason for this change of heart towards Lagerlöf’s work in the newly established Soviet state, but then, the entire process of literary production changed alongside the drastic transformation of the political, economic and social order in Soviet Russia. The process of literary production is examined in this paper in search of an explanation for the differing fortunes of Lagerlöf’s work in Russia. I argue that literary workers who strove to preserve the Russian tradition of literature as high art remained relevant to Soviet literary production despite the increasing ideological pressure, and that they paved the way towards the official reintroduction of Lagerlöf to the Russian Soviet readership during the 1950s.

To problematize the process of literary production in the newly established Soviet state, I utilize Foucault's conceptualization of the process of knowledge construction to describe, understand and explain the interplay between critical resources such as linguistic and literary expertise, individual initiative and the government-controlled publishing enterprise in the Soviet state.

Foucault's own historical critical analyses of the relationships between organized institutional rules and the behaviour of individuals are revealing of their power relations and suggest that there is a constant interplay between structural constraints and individual choice and action. Anonymous structures, networks of knowledge, and social and cultural institutions all embody, as well as produce, the structural environment. At the same time, an individual is not a passive product of existing power relations who merely follows the model set by the structures. A person is capable of choosing how to act and what choices to make among the models available in his or her environment. It is the agency of individuals which "permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and the way of being..." (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

Such an approach allows us to avoid the dichotomy between structure and agency, and is relevant in this context because it offers a productive conceptualization of the complex interactions between multiple resources as parts of the same process, and is embedded in the specific historical and political setting of literary production in Soviet Russia, with the focus on Lagerlöf's literary presence.

### **The structural context of Soviet literary production**

The structural context of literary production in Soviet Russia was, to a large extent, determined by the censorship and centralization of the publishing enterprise.

Censorship of the press was introduced immediately following the Bolshevik coup on 25 October (7 November) 1917 in Russia. “Decree on the Press”, issued on 27 October (9 November) 1917, ordered the closure of all the organs of the press that were seen as “inciting to open resistance or disobedience towards the Workers’ and Peasants’ Government” (Wade, 1991, p. 13). The decree effectively meant the closure of *all* organs of the press, apart from the publications of the Bolshevik faction itself. Soon afterwards, on 4 (17) November 1917, “The Resolution on Matters of the Press” ordered the confiscation of private printing presses and paper supplies and their transference to the ownership of the Soviet government. By a Decree of 20 May 1919, one central publishing house, *Gosizdat* (State Publishing House), was established in Moscow, and this absorbed all other publishing houses still in existence. The central censorship office *Glavlit* (Main Administration for Literature and Publishing), which was established on 6 June 1922, was “to carry out all forms of censorship” and to undertake “the preliminary examination of all matters intended for publication or distribution” which included periodical and non-periodical publications, “Russian as well as that imported from abroad” (Wade, 1993, p. 390). Fitzpatrick (1970, p. 133) notes that private book publishing was not immediately curtailed by the decrees on the freedom of the press of 1917 and 1918, and that the establishment of *Gosizdat* in 1919 simply brought existing private publishers under its control and requested the submission of all manuscripts to *Gosizdat* for approval prior to publication. Kassof (2015) also suggests that *Gosizdat* itself was not under strict censorship, and scrutiny in censoring during the 1920s mainly applied only to the private publishers.

A few books by Lagerlöf were published in 1917; yet, this was the year of the great transition and it is difficult to make a judgement on the effects of the ensuing censorship and centralization of the publishing business in the country, however imminent these measures were at the very start of Bolshevik rule. The publishing house of I. N. Knebel, which

specialized in literature for children, published Lagerlöf's *Tales and Legends* (*Сказки и Легенды*) and a complete volume of *Christ Legends* (*Kristuslegender*) in 1917. The Knebel printing press was requisitioned in 1922 and all the company's manufacturing facilities were handed over to the publishing organ *Novaya Derevnya* [*New Village*] to handle literature on rural and agricultural topics (Juniverg, 1997).

One of Lagerlöf's texts, *The Emperor of Portugallia* (*Kejsarn av Portugallien*), translated by Maria Blagoveshchenskaya, was reissued in Moscow in 1917 by an independent publisher, *Parus* [*The Sail*]. This was a publishing venture of Maksim Gorky. Established in 1915, it published books for children and on a range of philosophical, political, sociological and ethical issues. At the end of 1915, *Parus* also began publishing a journal, *Letopis* [*Annals*], which included works by the leading writers of the time. The final publications of *Parus* appeared in June 1918, after which the publishing firm ceased to exist. Lagerlöf's text was among the company's last few publications.

A book of short stories, *Trolls and People* (*Troll och människor*), and Lagerlöf's novel *The Outcast* (*Bannlyst*) would be published by *Gosizdat* in 1922 and 1924, respectively. The publication of these two texts by *Gosizdat* itself was noteworthy because, following the end of the Russian Civil War in 1922, serious restrictions on printing came into force. These restrictions were mainly the outcome of the chronic shortage of paper and the non-functioning of the printing press (Fitzpatrick, 1970). As the unrestricted sale of books was banned by the Decree of April 1919, *Gosizdat* gained a sole monopoly of the publishing and distribution of literature, which was subsidized by the state. There was also a decline in the importing of foreign literature, and in the translation of foreign texts. Safiullina and Platonov (2012) record that, from a total of 134 foreign books translated in 1918, the number dropped to 19 in 1921, and they attribute this to the growing political and cultural isolation of the country and to economic devastation.



If the release of Lagerlöf's two books in 1922 and 1924 by *Gosizdat* is positioned within the structural context, the event of their official publication can be viewed as indicating a favourable attitude towards the writer and her work. This does not suggest that this favour emanated from the central authorities, as the highly centralized Soviet publishing enterprise was a complex network of resources that included the activity of men of letters, and of officials alike. So it is important to understand the individual involvement in the process of literary production that facilitated the release of Lagerlöf's texts at a time of very restrictive book printing conditions in Soviet Russia.

### **Agents of literary production**

An important agent of literary production in the new Soviet state was Anatoly Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar of the Enlightenment, who had the primary responsibility for literature and the arts. A writer, translator and literary critic himself, Lunacharsky was well-read. His interest in arts and literature, and his personal association with representatives of the literary world, established important links between officialdom and writers. The eagerness of the People's Commissar of the Enlightenment to support artistic initiative, and to promote works of art, is well-documented by Chukovsky in his *Diaries* (Chukovsky, 2003) and his hand-written almanac *Chukokkola* (Chukovskaya, 2008), and these are confirmed by the numerous testimonies of individual writers, translators and literary critics of the time (Deich, 1985).

A number of prominent writers and publicists with vast experience of organizing publishing ventures in pre-revolutionary times were recruited by the new authorities as "specialists". Knebel and Gorky were among these. Gorky's involvement in state publishing activities is particularly relevant to the focus of this paper on Lagerlöf's reception in Soviet Russia as Gorky positioned himself at the centre of production of foreign literature for Soviet readers.

The dire need of the new state for “specialists” extended to literary talent. Many literary workers did not formally declare their allegiance to party doctrine but were viewed as non-oppositional to the new order. They were quite different from one another in terms of style and subject matter, but they shared a loyalty to high art, rather than to ideological utilitarianism in literature. “The Resolution on Literature” of 18 June 1925, which outlined Party policy in the sphere of literature, reaffirmed its view on the significance of “specialists” in literature and indicated that “the party must be tolerant of intermediate ideological forms, patiently helping these inevitably varied forms to live out their lives in increasingly close and comradely cooperation with the cultural forces of communism” (Wade, 1995, p. 310).

### **The organized interests of writers, translators and the authorities**

Writers’ “close and comradely cooperation with the cultural forces of communism” (Wade, 1995, p. 310) began early on. The need for cooperation was mutual. The new Bolshevik rulers, who did not enjoy popularity following their usurpation of power in October 1917, were eager to attract prominent names, writers among them, to their side (Fitzpatrick, 1970, 1992). Gorky’s cooperation was viewed as particularly significant (Lunacharsky, 1924) because his status and influence among writers both in Russia and abroad was immense. Gorky was not by any means an eager supporter of the new regime, and openly expressed his views of the Bolshevik leaders, especially Lenin and Trotsky, as dangerous “adventurers” and “lunatics” (Barratt & Scherr, 1997, p. 178). The newspaper *Novaya Zhizn*, in which Gorky was broadcasting his criticism of the Bolsheviks, and of the spreading terror in the country, was closed on 16 July 1918. Having lost the opportunity to openly engage with the public via the media, or to realize the literary visions he had planned for *Parus* publications, Gorky turned his energy to a number of literary projects whose realization required the support of the new establishment.

Thinking with Foucault enables an understanding of this unlikely union between Gorky and the Soviet authorities as a power relationship in which the exercise of power is viewed as “a mode of action upon the actions of others” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790), and where freedom is an essential component of the exercise of power. Foucault (1982) emphasizes that freedom is an important element because individual or collective subjects are “faced with the field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse compartments, may be realised” (p. 790).

Foucault (1982) writes:

At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of an “agonism” – of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle, less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation. (p. 790)

Gorky’s activities, and the entire process of literary production in Soviet Russia, seem to exemplify this relationship of “a permanent provocation”, whereby the agents of literary production found ways to positively channel the process of literary development within the structural constraints.

One of the most grandiose undertakings of the time was the launching of the project *Vsemirnaya Literatura* [World Literature]. This project was initiated by Maksim Gorky and his former partner in *Parus* publishing, Vladimir Tikhonov, and was supported by Lunacharsky. An agreement on the establishment of *Vsemirnaya Literatura* was signed by Gorky and Lunacharsky on 4 September 1918. Gorky attracted the best talent to work on the project, many of whom were well-known to him from their earlier publications in *Parus* and as names in their own right. Fitzpatrick (1970) notes that *Vsemirnaya Literatura* employed up to 350 highly qualified translators and provided a refuge for the Petrograd literary intelligentsia (p. 132). The team of translators included, among others, experienced translators of Scandinavian literature A. N. Ganzen, K. M. Zhikhareva and S. G. Zajmovsky.

The plan for publications ran to several thousand volumes of foreign texts constituted of seven series: Basic, Popular, News of International Literature, Children's Literature, Library of World Classics, Memoirs of the Great French Revolution, and Culture of the Orient.

A book of Lagerlöf's stories, *Trolls and People* (*Troll och människor*), translated by Zajmovsky, and edited by Zhikhareva, was published as a part of the series "News of International Literature". Deich (1958) confirms that this volume was included in the publication plan by Gorky himself. This was a 100-page edition and included the following stories: "Sister Olivia's Story" (*Syster Olivias historia*), "Legend of St Lucia" (*Luciadagens segend*), "Solar Eclipse" (*Solförmörkelsedagen*), "How an Adjunct Charmed an Abbot's Daughter" (*Hur adjunkten fick prostdottern*), "Babylonian Princess" (*Prinsessan av Babylonien*), "Tomten from Töreby" (*Tomten på Töreby*), and "Skull" (*Dödskallen*). This would be the last and only publication of Lagerlöf's work accomplished by *Vsemirnaya Literatura*, despite the output projections for Scandinavian literature.

Khlebnikov (1971) notes that the work on translations was moving fast due to there being no shortage of experienced translators and editors among the staff of *Vsemirnaya Literatura*. Although the pile of manuscripts was growing, the publication of planned volumes could not go ahead. Continuous correspondence between Gorky, Lunacharsky, Lenin, and the editorial staff of the project is revealing of the daily life and tribulations of the entire team involved in the *Vsemirnaya Literatura* project (Barratt & Sherr, 1997; Chukovsky, 2003; Chukovskaya, 2008). Attempts to organize the publication of books abroad were also unsuccessful, although a number of volumes were released by foreign publishers (Khlebnikov, 1971; Barratt & Scherr, 1997).

In 1921, Gorky left Soviet Russia but retained an intense interest in the literary developments in the country and his involvement in the affairs of *Vsemirnaya Literatura*. His deputy, Tikhonov, remained in charge of publishing matters but would soon be removed from his position. This was just one of many changes in the staffing of all publishing organs in the country.

The reorganization of *Gosizdat*, which began in May-June 1923, initially affected the publication of Russian classics. Ilya Ionov, who was put in charge of the Russian classics selection committee, would later be promoted to the headship of the entire *Gosizdat* enterprise. The replacement of qualified editorial staff by Party appointees inevitably affected the choice of literature for publication.

Concerns about the “drastic reforms, reorganisations, staff changes and all sorts of nonsense”, expressed by Gorky in his letter to F. A. Braun on 18 June 1923 (Gorky, 2012b, pp. 195–196), would be confirmed later. This was Gorky’s reaction in 1925 to the appointment of Ionov: “Now the entire *Gosizdat* is in the hands of Ilya Ionov; he is not a bad man and likes making books but he is crotchety... They say he is difficult to deal with...” (Gorky, 2012c, p. 125). In his letter to Romain Rolland on 23 January 1925, Gorky complained about the appropriation of *Vsemirnaya Literatura* by *Gosizdat*, noting that *Gosizdat* would not be capable of managing the project (Gorky, 2012c, p. 114). He explains that the state publishing organization lacks skilled cadres among “its own communist staff”, and that the cadres who had previously worked at *Vsemirnaya Literatura* would most likely be excluded (p. 114).

In 1924, the entire editorial board of *Vsemirnaya Literatura* was dismissed and the project was abandoned. Only about 200 books were published between 1918 and 1924. Considering the small number of publications during these six years, the appearance of

Lagerlöf's book of stories in the series is evidence of her continued recognition in Russian literary circles.

At the point when *Vsemirnaya Literatura* ceased to exist, a number of manuscripts of translated work were ready for release. Lagerlöf's anti-militarist novel *The Outcast* (*Bannlyst*, published in Swedish in 1918) was translated by Maria Blagoveshchenskaya and published by *Gosizdat* in 1924. The period around World War I provides the background for Lagerlöf's novel, in which she resorts to the common themes of vengeance and curses found in Scandinavian legends that are frequently integrated into the plots of her stories and novels. This novel's plot traces a chain of events in which crimes committed by family members are punished across generations and there is constant interaction between the living and the dead through family history and through experiences of the reality of raging war. Lagerlöf creates a vivid depiction of the carnage of war, and of a transnational burial scene, that has a transformative impact on the characters. The publication of the novel in Soviet Russia was timely. Although the site of Lagerlöf's narrative was her native Sweden, the novel's call for peace and reconciliation was in tune with the aspirations of the Russian people, who were exhausted by a devastating civil war (1918–1922) and the reigning spirit of hostility in the country.

The executive decision to publish *The Outcast* (*Bannlyst*) by *Gosizdat* was apparently based on the artistic and literary merits of the text. It is possible that the novel's didactic character, so typical of Lagerlöf's texts, was also considered by the current editors. It is unlikely that all these considerations would constitute satisfactory criteria for an ideological zealot of the state publishing enterprise. The underlying message of the novel, breaking down the barriers between friend and foe, local and foreign, did not correlate with the ideological agenda of the Soviet authorities, which required a clear separation between loyalty and disloyalty to Party doctrine.

Returning to the conceptualization of the process of literary production as the interplay of structure and agency, it is possible to view the instance of Lagerlöf's publications during the 1920s as illustrative of the engagement of the agency of individuals in this complex process. The role of editors is significant in this context. The editors of *Gosizdat* exercised their prerogative to select and censor literary texts. This act of “permanent provocation” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790) was made possible because *Gosizdat* did not undergo the same degree of censorship as did the remaining private publishers (Safiullina & Platonov, 2012; Sherry, 2015). As long as the editorial staff consisted of “specialists” in literary production, it was a matter of their literary expertise and personal choice in deciding what was published. The publication of *The Outcast* in 1924 by *Gosizdat* can thus be viewed as a fortunate “slipping through the net”, in which editorial permission was issued by a literary “specialist”. During that year, *Gosizdat* was undergoing reorganization, and by 1925, well-qualified editorial staff were being gradually replaced with Party functionaries.

In his detailed account of the workings of Soviet censorship, Blyum (2003) emphasizes that editorial censorship was far more stringent, and more dangerous, than that of the administrative employees of the censorship office. He explains that a new generation of Soviet editors, nurtured by the Party machine, were “in the vanguard” of filtering literature because they were better educated than the ordinary censors, and could note things that censors would overlook, such as the “covert citation of forbidden texts” and “undesirable allusions” (Blyum, 2003, pp. 5–6). Albeit new editors were better educated than ordinary censors, the removal of multilingual knowledge bearers from the editorial staff limited the scope of literary knowledge available to the entire literary enterprise. When the matter of foreign literature production was fully appropriated by *Gosizdat*, the multilingual team of experts employed by *Vsemirnaya Literatura* was replaced by a single person, Alexandr Gorlin, who was commonly described as a “third-rate translator” (Chukovskaya, 2008, p.

305). There was also a de-legitimization of translators as a category of trusted literary workers. Kukushkina (2014) remarks that translators themselves were falling into the category of the remnants of the exploiting classes and were placed under ideological control in the mid-1920s. She adds that ideological control was mainly executed by individuals who did not possess knowledge of foreign languages and, thus, could not judge a translator's level of professionalism. There was intuitive suspicion that translators were slowing down the process of the reformation of writers into converts of the new political system (Kukushkina, 2014). In addition, translators were viewed as dangerous due to their potential links with the outside world. This unease in the relationship between the parties involved in literary production undermined trust in foreign literature as such.

The tales about Swedish cavaliers and their ladies (*Gösta Berling's Saga*), the Swedish farmers who emigrated to the Holy Land to wait for the Lord's coming (*Jerusalem*) or the stories about Swedish geography, history and cultures (*The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*) were unlikely topics of interest for the new editorial staff in an ideological apparatus that was engrossed in the class struggle and the revolt of the collective. Thus, the replacement of editorial staff in the mid-1920s would have a significant effect on further decisions about the timeliness and value of Lagerlöf's work.

Lagerlöf's name was in free circulation in Russia at the time, and it appeared mainly in a literary context. One such instance is Lunacharsky's reference in his essay *Last Plays of G. Hauptmann* published in 1922 (Lunacharsky, 1922). Lunacharsky writes that, in his play "Winter Ballad" (*Winterballade*), Hauptmann used the plot from Selma Lagerlöf's novella *Mr Arne's Money*, and refers the reader to Lagerlöf's text in the 12-volume Sablin publication of her works from 1911. Gorky makes a passing reference to Lagerlöf in his letter of 26 June 1923 to V. F. Khodasevich, when writing about an incident in the PEN club,<sup>1</sup> which he describes as "an international but apolitical organisation of writers", of which



Galsworthy was the chair, and the members are “all sorts of people: R. Rolland and Merezhkovsky, S. Lagerlöf and Hauptman, and so on” (Gorky, 2012b, p. 202).

Whether Lagerlöf can be viewed as “apolitical” is debatable, but this should be positioned in the context of the then Soviet ideological climate. During the 1920s, Lagerlöf devoted considerable time and effort to women’s causes, but such activity was of no political significance to the Soviet state. The writer did not appear to openly promote or condemn the Socialist cause and did not generate any particular notice by the Soviet authorities who meddled in literary affairs. Her main interest seemed to remain in literature. During the 1920s and 1930s, Lagerlöf wrote several significant literary works. Apart from publishing a number of short stories, she wrote a biography of a Swedish-speaking Finnish author of historical novels and tales, Zachris Topelius (*Zachris Topelius: utveckling och mognad*, 1920), and the Värmland trilogy, *The Ring of the Löwenskölds (Löwensköldska ringen)*, *Charlotte Löwensköld*, and *Anna Svärd* (1925–1928), which told the story of the destruction of a prominent family until the curse was removed by a peasant girl (Anna Svärd). The narrative plot of the trilogy evolved against the historical setting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Sweden. Lagerlöf also wrote three autobiographical books (*Mårbacka* 1922, 1930 and 1932).

None of these texts were acknowledged in the Soviet press, and there is no record of attempts to obtain, translate or publish these texts in the Soviet Union through any official channels. This observation is based on a review of subscriptions listed in the journal *Krasnyi Bibliotekar (Red Librarian)* 1923–1940, reports of *Kominolit* (The Committee on Foreign Literature) 1921–1930, and publications in the literary journals *Sovremennyj Zapad* (1922–1924), *Vestnik Inostrannoj Literatury* (1928–1930), *Literatura Mirovoj Revolyutsii* (1931–1932) and *Internatsionalnaya Literatura* (1933–1943).

Foreign publications that proliferated in these journals mainly included confirmed lists of writers who were viewed as friends or sympathizers of the Soviet state (Romain Rolland, Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, William Saroyan, André Maurois). Lunacharsky's *Introduction* to "An Approved List of Proletarian Literature" noted that it was necessary to "offer lists of first class literary productions by our comrade authors of all countries" (Wade, 1995, p. 285). Lunacharsky promised to "shortly compile a list of works by the writers of some of the most important European countries" (Wade, 1995, p. 285). Lagerlöf was not included (or not approved for inclusion) in the list of "our comrade authors" (Wade, 1995, p. 285) selected for Soviet publications of any kind.

### **Individual initiative within the structural constraints**

Official lack of interest in Lagerlöf does not mean there was no interest in the author or her work among writers, translators and editors in the Soviet state. Fitzpatrick (1992) notes that throughout the 1920s "the state's interest was in securing the cooperation of the intelligentsia rather than antagonizing it" (p. 92). She notes further that, although this approach operated "within a framework of ideological control through censorship, the security police, the state monopoly of the press, and the restriction of private publishing" (Fitzpatrick, 1992, p. 92), there was still room for a difference of opinion, at least until 1928. The point that individual initiative played a significant role in obtaining foreign literature, selecting texts for translation and promoting the translation of texts for publication is supported by Kassof (2015) as well as Saifullina and Platov (2012).

One particular group of individuals interested in Lagerlöf may have been the Section of Translators (1924–1932) attached to the Leningrad branch of the All-Russian Union of Writers (1920–1932). One of the aims of this organization was to gather all literary talent in order to authoritatively represent Russian literary tradition and to safeguard the interests of the writers in new historical conditions (Kukushkina, 2014). Kukushkina (2014) states that

the Union of Writers was the most significant institution managing to preserve the continuity of the literary tradition in the country, and that the writers in the Union were the most earnest opponents of official cultural policies throughout the 1920s.

The liquidation of *Vsemirnaya Literatura* in 1924 gave impetus to the formation of this Section of Translators and, according to Kukushkina (2014), practically all members of the section had previously worked at *Vsemirnaya Literatura*. The two leading positions of chair and secretary were occupied by two women translators from Swedish, Anna Ganzen and Ksenia Zhikhareva. Both Ganzen and Zhikhareva had been previously involved in translating and editing Lagerlöf's texts; however, Lagerlöf was not included in the new work produced by these two translators. This could be a reflection of their personal choices but also of the structural constraints surrounding literary production.

Kukushkina (2014) quotes Ganzen's statement from her 1924 work file: "currently, there is no work" (p. 340). This was representative of the general state of affairs. Among the reasons for the lack of work, as reported by translators at the time, Kukushkina (2014) lists an absence of information, absence of orders from publishers and difficulties in obtaining books for translation.

After 1921, the import of foreign publications was in the hands of *Kominolit*, the central committee in charge of the purchasing and distribution of foreign literature. The Decree of 14 June 1921 banned independent subscriptions to foreign literature (*Kominolit*, 1921). Library exchanges with other countries, ordered by Lenin in November 1917, mainly focused on scientific and technical publications (Simsova, 1968). Choldin (1991) relates Lenin's angry reaction to the report of *Kominolit*, where he spotted "belles-lettres and luxurious art publications" (p. 138) and commanded the punishment of those who were guilty of purchasing untimely literature. Safiullina and Platonov (2012) point to a series of articles

complaining about the lack of an orderly process for importing literature, and quotes a translator, Nadezhda Rykova, who stated in 1929 that literary importing was “the most backward type of import” (p. 243) in the country.

Concerns about the status of translated literature were expressed on a number of occasions. An article by Deich, published in *Vestnik Inostrannoj Literatury* in 1929, talked about the necessity for high-quality translations of foreign literature for the mass readership (Deich, 1929). Ivich (1929) specifically addressed a concern about the spread of poorly translated texts of foreign classics. Lunacharsky’s article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* in November 1929 was obviously a response to the raging polemics on the availability and translation quality of foreign literature (Lunacharsky, 1929). Despite these discussions in the press, restrictions on the import of foreign literature remained in place.

Attempts to gain access to foreign literature by members of the Section of Translators are described by Kukushkina (2014). These included requests for the relaxation of regulations on subscriptions to foreign publications, catalogues of foreign publishing houses, permission for individual subscriptions to books in return for payment for translations, and permission to gain access to the library of *Gosizdat*. It is reported that, at the beginning of 1925, members of the Section were allowed to view French-, English- and German-language literature in the foreign literature section of *Gosizdat*, but the translators’ petition to speed up the process of gaining access to subscribed literature did not receive a positive response (Kukushkina, 2014).

Safiullina and Platonov (2012) state that, until the late 1920s, the quantity and quality of foreign literature reaching Soviet readers through bypassing official channels largely depended on the initiative of individuals travelling abroad. They suggest that it was still possible to bring foreign books into the country during the 1930s and refer to an instance of

James Joyce's *Ulysses* circulating freely among readers who knew foreign languages. Safiullina and Platonov (2012) further suggest that a number of translators actively corresponded with Western authors up until the 1930s and were able to receive manuscripts for translation directly from the authors. This observation, however, mainly relates to contacts with approved foreign authors.

The fact that none of Lagerlöf's texts written during the 1920s and 1930s were published in Russia can be explained by the lack of access to her texts. It is conceivable that Maria Blagoveshchenskaya, who translated Lagerlöf's novel *The Outcast (Bannlyst)* at the beginning of the 1920s, obtained the original manuscript by her own means. The text may have been sent by post, or brought into the country at the translator's request. Until the prohibition on the free entry of foreign texts into Soviet Russia was imposed in 1921, the delivery of manuscripts from abroad would not have been problematic for Soviet citizens. As the international isolation of the Soviet state intensified, opportunities for delivering foreign texts were largely impeded. A ban on international travel and, eventually, on international correspondence, would further reduce the scope of individual initiative.

A dedicated translator of Lagerlöf, Maria Blagoveshchenskaya, did not feature in any rosters of translators' professional bodies. References to her name in recently published sources appear to lose track of her life after the 1920s (Feinstein, 2001). Those translators from Swedish who continued their work throughout the 1920s and 1930s (e.g. Ganzen and Zhikhareva), were restricted in their personal contacts and the means to seek and bring literature from abroad, and worked only on the texts that were made available to them. Ganzen produced a number of translations from Danish, and Zhikhareva at the time was mainly involved in translating H. G. Wells and O. Henry. It is unfortunate that Lagerlöf's work did not intersect with the gifted translators who were seeking work in Soviet Russia.

### **Changes in the regime of truth**

Foucault's conception of power relationships relates to his proposition that "each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth" with "the ensemble of rules" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131), knowledge of which permits individuals to act upon other actions within the boundaries of the regime. An examination of the process of literary production during the first years of the Soviet order reveals constant changes in "the regime of truth" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131) and the rules of the game. The rules of the game were certainly changing in the Soviet State with Stalin's consolidation of power at the end of the 1920s. The turning point for Soviet cultural policy is often dated to 1928 (Fitzpatrick, 1992; Holmes, 1991). In 1929, Lunacharsky was forced to resign from his position as Commissar of the Enlightenment, and was replaced by a political appointee, Bubnov, who had a limited understanding of arts and education, but extensive experience of administrative service in the Party's propaganda machine (Holmes, 1991, p. 119). This was indicative of the ongoing changes in all institutions impacting on literary activity.

The Decree of 23 April 1932 commanded all writers to be united into one union (Yakovlev, 1999). The decree noted that this would be a union of writers who supported the ideological platform of the Soviet state and were willing to participate in socialist construction. Formed in 1934, the Union of Writers became the central organ controlling literary production. Stalin divided his servants into faithful and unfaithful. Faithful mediocrities were placed in charge of literary journals, and a tightly knit network of faithful officials supervised literary production. Free professional associations of writers and translators were disbanded. Most translators and writers/editors involved in publishing foreign literature were absorbed by the Union of Writers or had to consider various other occupations to provide a means of existence.

“The Modification of Censorship Statute” was issued on 6 June 1931 (Cummins, 2000). Censorship was tightening in all areas of literary production and distribution. The 1930s saw unprecedented purges of libraries. This consisted mainly of a hunt for names that had to be removed from the sight of the Soviet readership. These names belonged to individuals who had recently held high positions in the Party and the State and were now personal enemies of Stalin (e.g. Kamenev and Trotsky), or any other *personae non grata* who had fallen out of favour with the regime. Their books could be banned absolutely, banned to the public (these could be placed in special collections for selective viewing) or permitted with excisions. In most cases, librarians, under the supervision of censors, were commanded to black out with ink any portraits or passages, or to tear out complete chapters, containing unwanted names and information (Blyum, 2008).

Blyum’s (2008) review of the index of banned books by foreign writers indicates that the pre-revolutionary editions of Lagerlöf’s *Christ Legends (Kristuslegender)* were banned absolutely, and that this ban extended to *all* editions. Blyum (2008) points out that this is one of the very rare cases of an absolute ban on a pre-revolutionary publication. He explains that the reason for the ban was religious content. Blyum (2008) also refers to an entry in the “Literary Encyclopaedia” published in 1932, which calls Lagerlöf “one of the most reactionary women writers of the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries” (n.p.).

The separation of Church and State was already confirmed by 1918 and, following the issuance of the “Law on Religious Associations” of 8 April 1929 (Cummins, 2000), religion fell under increased control of the state. A modification of the Censorship Statute issued on 6 June 1931 reiterated *Glavlit*’s mandate to forbid the publication or distribution of any works which might arouse religious fanaticism (Cummins, 2000, p. 341).

It is understandable why a zealous censor might find *Christ Legends* unsuitable for distribution on the grounds of content, although it would be a stretch of imagination to view Lagerlöf's legends as inciting religious fanaticism. In any case, this ban on Lagerlöf's work is an isolated case as this was a ban on the content, not on the author. The reference to her as "reactionary" in an encyclopaedia is also not indicative of a widespread attitude to the writer in Soviet Russia.

There was definitely no ban on Lagerlöf's name in the Soviet state. In 1927, she was featured in a critical essay on Western European literature by a well-known critic, Friche (Friche, 1927). In 1928, Lagerlöf sent a letter to Maksim Gorky on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. In her letter, Lagerlöf praised Gorky's masterful depiction of his grandmother, "the most charming image of all the Russian female characters [she] had found in world literature" (Gorky's Archive, 1960, p. 431). This incidental correspondence was a purely private matter. Yet, Lagerlöf's letter came into public circulation when it was included in Gruzdev's publication *Modern Western Views on Gorky* in 1930 (Gruzdev, 1930).

If there is any traceable affinity between Lagerlöf and the Russian writers, it is in her relationship with Maxim Gorky. Lagerlöf's sentiments towards Gorky could be explained by similarities in their childhood accounts, in which both gave leading roles to their grandmothers. Lagerlöf, who was surrounded by the warmth of her family during her early years, particularly cherished fond memories of her grandmother. In the stories of her childhood in Mårbaka, the writer paid tribute to her grandmother, a veritable story-teller who brought to life local folktales and legends and whose voice, perhaps, could be heard in Lagerlöf's folktale-like narratives. Gorky's autobiographical book *Childhood* related the image of his grandmother to the idea of kindness amidst the misery and violence. She told endless folk stories, whose words "were like music and like flowers" and "bloom[ed] in [his] memory like everlasting blossoms" (Gorky, 2001, p. 8). Cruel treatment of his grandmother



by her husband prompted Gorky to develop an aversion to the mistreatment of women in general. He wrote in his autobiography:

What disturbed me most at the time was the common masculine attitude toward women. From my reading I had come to look upon women as all that gave life beauty and meaning. Grandma had nourished this in me with her accounts of Madonna and the wise Saint Natalie, the laundress, and by those countless smiles and loving looks with which women, the source of life, offset this sordid existence. (Gorky, 2001, p. 420)

A number of intersecting leitmotifs can be found in the lives and works of both Lagerlöf and Gorky. Both writers were striving for the full-fledged equality of women and men, from voting rights to fair treatment in the workplace and the pursuit of freedom in all areas of life. Both were prolific writers who rooted their narratives in the richness of the folktales of their respective homelands whilst appealing to the common themes of humanity. The two writers each articulated their recognition of the other's work. Gorky's loyalty to Lagerlöf and her art was expressed in his direct involvement in the publication of her texts within the very restrictive possibilities of the 1920s.

I have not located any record of a meeting between the two writers. In his reference to Lagerlöf's only visit to Russia (St Petersburg, 1912), Ivanov (2008) states that in her letters to a close friend at the time, Sophie Elkan, there is no mention of any contact with Russian publishers, translators or writers (Gorky himself was in exile until 1913 and was not present in Russia during Lagerlöf's visit). There is also no record or account of Lagerlöf meeting with Russian writers, translators or officials during the Soviet period.

While Lagerlöf was enjoying worldwide recognition as a woman of remarkable achievements, another remarkable woman from Russia, Alexandra Kollontai, served as the Soviet Ambassador to Sweden (1930–1945). It is possible to draw a few parallels between the lives and accomplishments of these two women. Like Lagerlöf, Kollontai disavowed the term "feminist" (Clements, 1979), but she was an ardent advocate of women's rights and was

a frequent speaker at international conventions of women workers during the 1910s.

Kollontai continued to promote the cause of gender equality throughout her life. A prolific writer on gender issues, she proposed the first programme of pre- and post-natal care for women to the Russian government. One of the first women diplomats, Kollontai broke the stereotype that diplomacy was for men. She was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Finland's Prime Minister, J. K. Paasikivi, in 1946, but the prize went instead to the American religious leader J. R. Mott and economist and social reformer Emily Greene Balch.

It is reasonable to assume that the two women, Lagerlöf and Kollontai, not only knew of each other but had a number of opportunities to meet. However, no such meeting seems to have taken place. In her *Diplomatic Diaries* (1922–1940), Kollontai included only one reference to Lagerlöf. This was a retelling of an anecdote in which the unmarried Lagerlöf, “world-famous woman-writer, winner of the Nobel Prize for her literary work, a member of the Swedish Academy” (Kollontai, 2001, p. 27) was asked to concede the first cup of coffee to an undistinguished married woman. This anecdote was presented in the context of Kollontai's description of the Swedish “ceremoniousness” (Kollontai, 2001, p. 27). No record of personal encounters with Lagerlöf is left by Kollontai.

During her official visit to Sweden in 1934, the Soviet poetess Vera Inber publicly proclaimed that of all Swedish writers she “was especially fond of Selma Lagerlöf, whose Nils Holgerson she had read as a child and later read to her daughter” (Hellman, 2013a, p. 28). Hellman (2013a, p. 19), provides a detailed description of this rare trip by Soviet writers abroad and notes that this three-month journey through the Nordic countries was “undertaken ... under the close supervision of the security service”, when “every ill-considered word or meeting could create serious problems at home”. Hellman's (2013a) account of the visit does not suggest that Lagerlöf herself was present at any of the meetings with the Soviet visitors.

The name of Lagerlöf was included by Louis Aragon in his draft proposal for the preparation of the International Congress of Writers in Paris written in 1935 (Arias-Vigil, 2012). Following discussions with the Soviet side, Aragon's programme for the Congress was accepted with minor changes, but Lagerlöf did not appear in the final invitation list. However, her name did feature in the records of the Second International Congress of Anti-Fascist Writers, held in Spain in the summer of 1937. The "Diary of the Congress" was published in *Internatsionalnaya Literatura* in 1938, No. 9, and the name of Selma Lagerlöf appeared among the elected members of the Presidium of the Writers' Association. The fact of her physical presence at the Congress is not confirmed. In an earlier publication of *Internatsionalnaya Literatura* (December, 1937), a half-page biography of Lagerlöf was presented amidst biographies of other anti-fascist writers; it provided a brief outline of Lagerlöf's literary work and indicated that she was sympathetic towards the peasantry, promoted women's causes and was actively involved in the anti-fascist struggle. When Lagerlöf died on 16 March 1940, there was an obituary of her in the March issue of *Internatsionalnaya Literatura*.

It is difficult to draw specific conclusions about the personal or professional relationship between Lagerlöf and the Soviet literary world, or its officials. Until 1940, the year of her death, she seemed to have remained an elusive figure in official Soviet discourse, despite casual references to her as a familiar name, and an open recognition of her contribution to the anti-fascist movement. Her own agency in establishing connections with the Russian Soviet literary world is not visible. This may have been due to her custom of living in solitude and being "apprehensive at the thought of facing the world" (Frentz, 1969), to put it in her own words from her Nobel Prize speech in 1909. It may also have been due to her "passive resistance" to an ill-famed regime. This remains unknown until further evidence is uncovered.

### **Lagerlöf's reintroduction to the Russian Soviet readership**

The reintroduction of Selma Lagerlöf to the Russian Soviet readership took place in 1940, with the publication of a shortened version of her tale *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (*Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*) in a “free retelling” by Alexandra Lyubarskaya and Zoya Zadunajskaya. The main character of the tale, Nils Holgersson, is shrunk down in size by the *tomte* in punishment for his mischief. Nils and his domestic goose Morten join the wild geese who take them on an adventurous trip all across Sweden. The tale is a captivating story of a little boy learning about nature, animals and friendship, with Swedish folklore woven into the narrative. The tale was published by *Detizdat*, the central publishing organ in the Soviet Union responsible for the production and publication of books for children.

The availability of the original text for this free translation would not have been an issue. Even the few isolated references to Lagerlöf made in passing (e.g. by Lunacharsky, Inber, Gorky) indicate that her texts were well-known to the educated reader (and writer) and were present in personal libraries, whether in published translations or as originals. Whereas public libraries underwent serious purges, many personal libraries remained intact. The practice of sharing foreign books from private libraries is acknowledged by Safiullina and Platonov (2012, p. 245), who also indicate that this was one common source for supplying translators with manuscripts for translations and publications throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The publication of Lagerlöf's tale in 1940 is another indication that the author herself was not under ban. Yet, a few other factors contributed to the possibility of this appearance of her tale.

The State Publishing House of Literature for Children (*Detgiz* 1933–1936, renamed *Detizdat* 1936–1941), established by government Decree on 9 September 1933, was a

significant undertaking which allowed the literary tale to thrive. The creation of this centre for the production of children's literature was an initiative of Kornej Chukovsky. It was supported by Gorky, who returned to the Soviet Union in 1928 at the personal invitation of Stalin. Chukovsky and Gorky, who had collaborated previously at *Vsemirnaya Literatura*, and the chief editor Samuil Marshak, gathered the best writers, translators and artists to be involved with this publishing venture. Similar to the case of *Vsemirnaya Literatura* during the first years after the 1917 revolution, this new venture provided a refuge for the literary intelligentsia.

A noticeable pattern of action emerging from this review of literary production in Soviet Russia is the constant grouping and re-grouping of literary workers into professional associations and state-sponsored publishing projects. One possible explanation for this is that it was a survival strategy. It was difficult to survive without the support of a larger organization or official endorsement by the authorities. Membership of the associations under the government's protection, such as *Vsemirnaya Literatura* and *Detizdat*, also permitted freedom of artistic expression. At the same time, the government's actions in centralizing publishing enterprises occasioned the mobilization of literary workers into clusters of talent, which were potent centres in terms of creative potential. This chain of actions is what Foucault (1982) describes as a power relationship, in which "certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions" (p. 791). This is where agents' capacity to strategize, to make choices when faced with a field of possibilities, can be observed.

A group of talented women editors Tamara Gabbe, Alexandra Lyubarskaya, Zoya Zadunajskaya, Lidia Chukovskaya were in charge of the production of the literary tale. The genre of the fairy-tale itself was one of few relatively safe areas of literary production at the time. The assault on fantasy and the fairy-tale, led by Lenin's wife Krupskaya during the 1920s, was in the past. Krupskaya and her followers were themselves removed from the

political scene in the early 1930s. A number of researchers even suggest that literary translation, as well as children's literature, remained the areas where writers could create without constant sideways glances at ideology and censorship (Hellman, 2013b; Safiullina & Platonov, 2012; Sherry, 2015). The lack of knowledge of foreign languages by the ordinary censors could be one of the reasons behind the lax censorship of foreign children's literature (Kukushkina, 2014; Sherry, 2015). An even more significant lapse in the organizational pyramid of censorship structure was the editorial staff of *Detgiz (Detizdat)*.

When describing the importance of editors in the censorship structure, Blyum (2003) specifically singles out the "Marshak group" among "a number of talented and concerned individuals who exerted themselves to resist [the] ideological and political dictates" (p. 5). During the 1930s, this Marshak group prepared new editions of the tales of Hans Christian Andersen, Wilhelm Hauff, the Brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault, and Zachris Topelius for publication. Lyubarskaya, who was involved in the production of *Kalevala* and the tales of Topelius, came up with the idea of telling Soviet children the tale of Nils Holgersson flying on the wings of his goose Morten (Lyubarskaya, 1995).

The free retelling of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* reduced the original 55 chapters to 17. Apart from shortening the tale, Lyubarskaya and Zadunajskaya also "censored" the content. Choldin (1991) compared this practice of rewriting foreign texts as part of the process of translating during Soviet times to the "permit with excisions" (p. 136) verdict in censorship practice. The "regime of truth" prescribed the "ensembles of rules" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131) to be followed. Instances of playing the game and playing by the rules by translators are widely recorded and explained in the literature on Soviet translation practices of the time (Blyum, 2003; Choldin, 1991; Sherr, 2015; Hellman, 2013b). The translators and editors knew well what to "ink out" of the original texts. The taboo on religion was one delicate area; hence, Lyubarskaya and Zadunajskaya removed any references to

religion from Lagerlöf's original. Thus, in their free retelling, Nils' parents go to the fair, rather than to Sunday church service. Nils is left at home to do homework, rather than to memorize passages from the Bible. Overall, there was crafty manoeuvring from two skilful translators and editors, who did not break the rules of the game and placed the right emphases on good (e.g. the virtues of a poor sailor) and evil (e.g. the cruelty of the king). The final product was a readable and engaging text, and did not seem to harm the excitement of the adventure, neither did it undermine the quality of the narration. The first edition of this translation of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* was so successful that a second edition was published in 1941. Further printings would be released in 1948, 1959, 1960, 1969, 1978, and 1979.

The reintroduction of Lagerlöf to a mass readership cannot be viewed in the full sense of the word on the basis of one tale alone. Still, multiple editions of *Nils*, and the popularization of the tale in an animated film, *The Enchanted Boy*, which was released in 1955, made Lagerlöf a familiar name among readers. The publication of more of Lagerlöf's work would soon follow. A novel, *Gösta Berling's Saga* (*Gösta Berlings saga*), was published in 1958 with a carefully written afterword, in which it was noted that Lagerlöf's novel was a celebration of labour, creation, an all-embracing sense of motherhood and everlasting nature (Deich, 1958). The stories "Uncle Reuben" (*Morbror Ruben*) and "Babylonian Princess" (*Prinsessan av Babylonien*) were published in 1964, and the *Löwenskölds* trilogy in 1972.

This edition of the *Löwenskölds* trilogy was the text translated by Lyudmila Braude, a Scandinavian philologist, who would become the primary authority on Lagerlöf, and would produce a number of reliable and thoroughly researched manuscripts on her life and work. Braude (also a translator of work by another Swedish woman writer, Astrid Lindgren) engaged in a painstaking study of Swedish history, geography and culture and this allowed

her to make an accurate translation of the complete original text (with “no excisions”) of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*. All 55 chapters would be published in Russian in 1982.

This revival of interest in Lagerlöf’s work in the Soviet Union was flagged by a ceremonial launch in 1958 when, on the occasion of the centenary of Lagerlöf’s birth, a commemorative event was organized in the Central House of the Art Workers in Moscow. The Swedish Ambassador in the USSR, Sohlmans, and the USSR’s Ambassador to Sweden, Gusev, were among the guests at the celebration. The celebratory speech was delivered by Vera Inber. The event was reported the next day in *Pravda*, which also published the full text of Inber’s speech (Inber, 1958).

The text of the speech was very informative and praised Lagerlöf’s writing, her life’s achievements and her contribution to world peace. Lagerlöf was reprimanded for her erroneous vision of the peaceful coexistence of the rich and the poor, and her inadequate understanding of the social order. Yet, she was praised for her intimate understanding of the simplicity of the life among the common people and for her celebration of productive labour. Selma Lagerlöf had finally been singled out and supported officially for her talent, her activism and her humanity, and posthumously forgiven for her bourgeois prejudices, which “did not invalidate the writer’s noble work” (Inber, 1958, p. 6).

Lagerlöf received a number of compliments for her achievements as a woman. Inber noted that Lagerlöf was the first Swedish woman to become a member of the Swedish Academy of Sciences. Inber also quoted from Lagerlöf’s speech at the Congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1911 where the writer challenged the social and political order of the time and emphasised the state’s responsibility for equal protection for the rights of all its members.



Inber stressed in her speech that Lagerlöf's work was highly praised by Maksim Gorky. By that time, there was also a resurgence of interest in Gorky's literary and critical heritage. Favourable reviews of Lagerlöf's work by Gorky in his letters (Gorky, 1955) were also quoted in introductions and afterwords to re-published editions of Lagerlöf's work (Deich, 1958).

It seems that the official approval of Lagerlöf's place in the Russian Soviet canon was based on appraisals of her talent by Gorky, Chukovsky, Marshak, Lyubarskaya, Zadunajskaya, the editorial staff of *Vsemirnaya Literatura* and *Detgiz (Detizdat)*, rather than on the decisions of occasional censors who had issued an absolute ban on the books of a "reactionary writer". Small endorsements in *Internatsionalnaya Literatura*, which has been distinguished from among the literary journals of Soviet times for the relative independence of its editorial staff (Sherr, 2015; Safiullina & Platonov, 2012), can also be viewed as contributing to public awareness of Lagerlöf's existence.

The individual and collective initiative, the opportunity to strategize, to "play the game" by the rules set by the current regime of truth, enabled the intermittent appearances of Lagerlöf's texts and name within the structural constraints of the centralized control of the process of literary production. The institutional structures themselves, however, reveal a number of cracks. Lagerlöf's case is an interesting example revealing the absence of well-coordinated actions of centralized control by the "veritable army" (Blyum, 2003, p. 7) of *Glavlit* and *Kominolit* censors.

The point in history when Nils Holgersson flew into the view of the Soviet Russian readership on the wings of his goose Morten (or Martin in its 1940 version) is significant. The Soviet-Finnish war of 1939–1940 had just come to an end (the peace treaty was signed on 13 March 1940). During the war, Selma Lagerlöf donated her Nobel Prize golden medal to

the Swedish National Fund supporting Finland as it fought the Soviet army. This act alone, if known, could have incensed the Soviet regime. The fact that the Soviet Ambassador in Stockholm, Alexandra Kollontai, protested to the Swedish Government over its aid work on behalf of Finland is revealing of the official condemnation by the Soviet government of acts of assistance to the Finnish cause (Clements, 1979). Obviously, Kollontai, who was receiving frequent orders to report on Sweden's sentiments towards Finland (Clements, 1979), did not report Lagerlöf's deed, and Soviet literary censorship was not cognizant of it.

Freedman (1992) aptly notes that talented writers can write and act in no other way than with talent. By their very presence in the network of Soviet literary production, writers, translators, and editors – all those who placed the high art of literature above ideological utilitarianism – succeeded in delivering to the Soviet readership literature that appeals to common human values, rather than to transitory ideological dogma. Perhaps this is why, in Frankel's (1981) words, the idea that the creative artists owe

ultimate loyalty to [their] own vision of the truth...which has its own rules different from and even superior of those of the state – has survived through the Soviet period and reasserts itself given the slightest opportunity (pp. 1-2).

The sporadic appearances of Lagerlöf's work in Soviet Russia during the 1920s through to the 1950s were no small achievement. It was an accomplishment of the teams of writers, translators and editors who ensured that “the lofty idealism, vivid imagination and spiritual perception” (Nobel Prize in Literature, 1909) of the first woman writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and the first woman member of the Swedish Academy, Selma Lagerlöf, became accessible to the Russian Soviet reader.

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<sup>1</sup> PEN is an English-language acronym of Poem, Essay, Novel – an international organization of writers established in 1921. Gorky was elected an honorary member on 22 November 1921. However, he declined two invitations from its chair Galsworthy to attend its First international Congress in London on 1 May 1923. (Gorky, 2012b, p. 574)