

ANN BOGLIND AND ANNA NORDENSTAM:

***Från fabler till manga. Litteraturhistoriska och didaktiska perspektiv på barn- och ungdomslitteratur***

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This volume by Ann Boglind and Anna Nordenstam, both at the University of Gothenburg, aims not just to introduce literature for children and young adults but also to outline the major developments in the genre from Aesop onwards, and to enhance the understanding of texts of this kind. Intended for students, teachers, scholars, librarians and others with an interest in literature for children and young adults, the book has a section presenting didactic approaches at the end of each chapter and a comprehensive concluding chapter on didactic perspectives. There are also extensive bibliographies.

The range of texts covered overall is distinctly international, and this perspective along with the wider contextualisation of Nordic and Swedish literature for children and young adults adds to the value of this volume. The opening chapter offers a helpful discussion of the concept of *barnlitteratur*, children's literature. Each of the following chapters then takes its starting-point in a genre that plays a central

role in the literature for children and young adults, and almost every chapter explores a representative *œuvre* in some depth. Thus the chapter on fables, myths and sagas has an in-depth section on H. C. Andersen, the one on the classics has one on L. M. Montgomery, the one on picturebooks explores Tove Jansson, the one on thrillers, sport, humour and friendship discusses Astrid Lindgren, the one on poetry has a section on Lennart Hellsing, and the chapter on modern literature for young adults has an in-depth section on Maria Gripe. While this structure is clearly an attempt to balance the very ambitious – too ambitious? – surveys with their huge quantities of material and no more than mentions or very brief summaries even of important texts, it does not strike me as wholly successful. The two and a half pages on H. C. Andersen are distinctly thin, and all the more so in light of the very considerable volume of research available. The remaining in-depth sections draw more constructively on existing research but still lack analytical depth.

In the concluding chapter on didactic perspectives, the authors take issue with the current Swedish school curricula on literature and make a case for the reading of literature for its own sake, for sheer enjoyment as well as for exploration, discovery, and insight. Literature, they emphasise, is far more than a starting-point for other activities; and the riches of their book, covering many cultures and well over two millennia, and further enhanced by illustrations in colour, provide overwhelming backup. The concluding chapter presents helpful strategies for reading and discussing literature, and for engaging with texts by means of writing, re-writing, painting and so on. Quite rightly, the authors underline the role of textual analysis. However, mere lists of points for the analysis of prose fiction and poetry respectively are hardly sufficient. The chapter would have benefited greatly from actual examples of textual analysis, and all the more so in the light of the shortage of literary analyses in the book as a whole.

Needless to say it is essential in a book of this kind to get the details right. Errors such as ‘Hispanolia’ for ‘Hispaniola’ and ‘Dr Livsey’ for ‘Dr Livesey’, both in *Treasure Island*, and ‘Poros’ for ‘Porthos’ (*The Three Musketeers*) can possibly be classified as spelling errors, but not so the claim that Selma Lagerlöf, elected to the Swedish Academy

in 1914, gave her speech on Zacharias Topelius. As was – and still is – the custom, Lagerlöf spoke on her predecessor, the poet and architect Albert Theodor Gellerstedt. More serious is the claim that Nils Holgersson criss-crossed Sweden on the back of Akka, a wild goose: as readers the world over know he travelled on Mårten, the tame gander, whose safe return is pivotal to the plot of Lagerlöf's novel.

No doubt these and other errors will be corrected in the next edition. Boglind's and Nordenstam's book largely succeeds in its ambitious aims, and *Från fabler till manga* deserves to be widely read and used.

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