



Forays into Swedish Poetry

Lars Gustafsson

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When poet/critic Lars Gustafsson was the editor of *Bonniers Litterära Magasin*, he was bombarded with the question, “What makes a good poem?” *Forays into Swedish Poetry* is his answer.

The fifteen poems in this volume range across the history of Swedish poetry from the 1640s, at the beginning of the Period of Great Power, to the late twentieth century. Poets as diverse as Skogekär Bergbo, Erik Johan Stagnelius, August Strindberg, and Vilhelm Ekelund are discussed from historical, psychological, and sociopolitical viewpoints. However, Gustafsson includes only those poems he considers excellent.

Each essay begins with a presentation of the poem both in Swedish and in English translation. Gustafsson’s analyses are built upon his subjective experiences with poems and poets and upon a more objective structural approach that investigates the actual machinery of the poems. Thus, Gustafsson enlightens us with his always imaginative, sometimes daring analyses, and we learn a great deal about the critic himself in the process. One of his main concerns is what he calls, in his discussion of Edith Södergran, the very mysteriousness of human existence. Time and again, Gustafsson emphasizes the enigmatic, arcane aspects of life in his analyses. In contrast, his vocabulary and approach also bespeak a constant interest in science and technology.

In his introduction, Robert T. Rovinsky, the volume’s translator, presents examples of Gustafsson’s various thematic interests as voiced in his poems, several of which are translated here for the first time. While “The Machines” explores his theory of people as automatons and “Conversation between Philosophers” his linguistic pessimism, Gustafsson’s work as a whole shows his enchantment with its major theme: the intrinsic mystery of life.

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