

# “Millenium” Woman: Madonna of Justice, Avenging Whore and the Making of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Heroine

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate a new kind of fictional heroine whose name has become famous around the world because of a best-selling Swedish trilogy, the first volume of which was published in 2005. Up to 2010 the book has sold more than 27 million copies and has been translated into more than forty languages.

The fame of its main fictional character, Lisbeth Salander, has been further enhanced and, more importantly, her visual representation, has been fixed in the public mind by the success of the trilogy of films from Sweden; a further three films planned as Hollywood remakes for the English-speaking market promise to extend the influence of the “*Millenium*” world franchise. Given present ‘globalization’ trends in marketing, there can be little doubt that in future there will be other cultural products exploiting the “*Millenium*” brand, such as video games, *manga* and *anime*.

The world-wide impact of *Millenium* has become a socio-cultural phenomenon, crossing lines of sex, class, nationality, politics and religion, all of which justifies an investigation of the provenance and significance of the *Millenium* phenomenon, regardless of the literary value of the writing, or the artistic merits of the films.

Consequently, any discussion of Lisbeth Salander, the fictional heroine must include a consideration of the meaning of this publishing and marketing phenomenon. We may ask why a book of popular fiction should merit serious consideration, or why we should deliberate about a fictional heroine at the center of an incredible tale of corruption and conspiracy, perversion and violence.

The answer is that any marketing phenomenon of popular fiction whether book or film which is consumed by millions of people will have a cultural, social and even political impact on society. Cultural products informed by the *Zeitgeist* can tell us much about ourselves by holding up a mirror, as it were, to our humanity and to its opposite less flattering reflection, the *lupus est homo homini*, of the Romans.

Thus before examining the construction of the central character of the trilogy, Lisbeth Salander, and the meaning of her iconic status as a new type of heroine, we need to consider the socio-cultural background from which she originates.

## The Author and Swedish Society

There are many reasons for the phenomenal success of the *Millenium* trilogy, but the enormous publicity surrounding the sudden, tragic death of the author Stieg Larsson at the

age of fifty before the books were first published in Sweden in 2005, and later, the huge controversy arising from the injustice of his common-law wife's exclusion from the inheritance to his immense fortune, have helped to create a legend around him that has no doubt aroused people's curiosity and promoted book sales. This imbrication of the author's life and work situate *Millenium*, a work of so-called "escapist" popular fiction, firmly in a concrete social milieu, whose connection to the plot and themes of this modern Scandinavian saga Stieg Larsson was always at pains to emphasize.

All who read these books are very conscious of the dead author who never knew he had become the world's most famous Swede, and one of its wealthiest writers. The fact that Larsson is dead means that there will be no further novels, so readers and fans still hungry for more, must look into the lore surrounding a writer who was intensely private, such as the reminiscences of Kurdo Baksi who points out that his friend had more in common with Lisbeth Salander than with his presumed *alter ego*, the womanizing extrovert Mikael Blomkvist (Swash).

Thus out of two thousand pages of mystery, suspense and violence, the two pages describing Lisbeth Salander's shopping expedition (TGWPWF, 96-8) and listing the items she bought to furnish her luxury apartment, paid for with the money she purloined from the bank account of the criminal businessman Hans-Erik Wennerström, may strike the sensitive reader, aware of the imbrication of reality and fiction in Larsson's trilogy, in an unexpectedly affecting way: perhaps these purchases were the beautiful things that Larsson, might have desired for himself and for his partner, Eva Gabriellsson, but was not able to afford. However, he could at least enjoy imagining the happiness of his heroine exercising the freedom given by her sudden purchasing power. In fact, Larsson has explained that he wrote the crime novels in the evening as a way of relaxing from his stressful life as an investigative journalist who sometimes received death-threats from right-wing political foes. (Winkler, 2010)

Larsson was a journalist who founded *Expo*, a magazine which investigates corruption and crime in business and government, and especially the activities of neo-nazi and right-wing nationalist groups. His extraordinary capacity for hard work on behalf of the victims of society, his absolute solidarity with women, for whom he had the greatest admiration and respect, have created a heroic image of a selfless crusader for justice and the dignity of the individual.

Larsson felt an unusual empathy with women, for their peculiar existence as counterpoint to that of the male, for their role in rearing children and their social contribution to the construction and maintenance of society. But he also felt angry because of their long-suffered inferior status and gender-based treatment in submission to the will of dominating males, especially as victims of violence at the hands of men over centuries of patriarchal rule.

According to Baksi, Larsson was also motivated by feelings of guilt over an incident

of rape he had witnessed but had done nothing to prevent. Undoubtedly, Larsson's deeply-felt philogyny was also the consequence of his personal experience: living as a child with his grandparents, the influence of his beloved communist grandfather, and his mother's commitment to trade union activism. After completing military service in Sweden, he traveled to Africa in the 1970s, witnessing and even participating in the war in Eritrea on the side of the rebels; the courage of the women warriors left an indelible impression. In *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, or the more telling Swedish title: *Män Som Hatar Kvinnor* (*Men Who Hate Women*) each part of the book is prefaced by a statistic on the violence against women in Sweden. From Larsson's personal experiences of women and their struggle for dignity, there developed a deep sympathy and solidarity with the "weaker sex", without which a heroine with the captivating power of Lisbeth Salander could never have emerged from the male imagination.

Larsson's experience in journalism, like that of Georges Simenon, gives a tough, realistic veneer, despite the clichés of the genre, to a dark, frightening portrait of Swedish society which belies Sweden's image in the world as a peaceful and prosperous country with a clean and open society based on democratic values. The book turns over the rock of Swedish society exposing the dirty secrets of the highest circles, the murky lives of the denizens of the underworld and their symbiotic alliance with the undemocratic forces lurking in the twilight world of the "security state" which conspire to do mischief whilst operating under the guise of legality, and wrapping themselves in the flag of the patriot.

Although it might be thought that such a portrait of Sweden, overturning preconceived notions and confounding the expectations of the foreign readership, might confuse and alienate readers, this counterintuitive picture of Sweden has, on the contrary, contributed to its reception, and to the cult status of the *Millenium* universe.

As much as the shocking incidents themselves, which, after all, belong to the genre of the crime novel, the fresh and unique Scandinavian ambience infusing the suspense-filled story, has been a factor in the success of *Millenium*. And yet, the unfamiliarity of Larsson's Sweden presents no cultural barrier to foreign readers comfortable with the concept of *nihil humanum mihi alienum est*.

### **Millenium and Swedish Society**

Thus another reason for the success of *Millenium* is the readers' *frisson* of recognition that Sweden is just another corrupt society where the élites conspire and exploit, luxuriating in a culture of impunity. All the way through the story runs the red thread of a grave injustice that the heroine and her "side-kick" relentlessly seek to remedy, doing battle with the dark forces crushing people's rights, threatening the lives of citizens whose existence is inconvenient for "the powers that be", and ultimately imperiling the fragile structure of Sweden's democracy.

The social welfare system, built up during the 1930s to deal with the wide-spread immiseration exacerbated by the Great Depression, continued through and beyond the Second World War, bringing unprecedented prosperity and social justice to the Swedish people, and established Sweden's reputation as a "model" society. However, by the 1960s the veneer was starting to peel off Sweden's proud image as a bastion of social democracy, as the ruling élites embraced the US-led Cold War ideology and the incentives offered by international capital.

Today the problems of economic and social injustice in mature democracies seem to be increasing as the political economy deteriorates to the disadvantage of the middle classes and working masses, and yet the higher levels of education among the populace, the proliferation of electronic media, and the resulting increase in people's political astuteness and sophistication mean a greater transparency has become possible. The growing demand for more accountability is an alarming development for society's élites whose sense of entitlement and security derive from their presumption of impunity, and depend on their ability to weave webs of lies and deceit.

Thus elections can be manipulated through computerized voting machines, citizens are spied on, their phones and computers are tapped, illegal wars of aggression are waged, and war crimes go unpunished thanks to a culture of secrecy based on phony "national security" concerns, and to the unscrupulous complicity of media corporations which operate against the interests of the people. Despite the pervasive sense of helplessness that many people feel, the democratic nature of computer technology enabling individuals to outwit powerful organizations is one of the more hopeful prospects highlighted in the trilogy. The exposure of US government cover-ups by Wikileaks in 2010 lends a measure of plausibility to Larsson's convoluted plot.

The question arises then whether *Millenium* owes some of its success to the growing public anger and frustration over the myriad inequalities and injustices that are blighting the lives of millions: helpless citizens whose welfare is being sacrificed to the interests of banks and corporations protected by their political henchmen; many countries under pressure from both domestic and international capital, are dismantling their structure of welfare provisions, thus threatening the future of the middle classes, and throwing the poor and weak to the wolves. The socio-economic changes of the last thirty years to the detriment of the majority, but to the benefit of the upper echelons of society, may be reaching a tipping point. Are the politics *Millenium* a sign of protest against this trend of immiseration for the majority and enrichment of the minority, a token of resistance to the burgeoning power of the bureaucratic state and the bullying bluster of the "security state"?

Larsson's anger and frustration at the willful destruction of the welfare state and the growing inequality does not end in cynicism. The threat to citizens' rights and the dangers faced by a democracy, menaced by the increasing lawlessness of government officials who commit crimes with impunity under the pretext of "state security", must have been a factor

motivating Larsson to use the thriller genre to fight against the *anomie* and fear suffusing his disturbing vision of Sweden, in order to give himself and his readers hope for the future. Lisbeth Salander, the symbolic victim of the saga, is the instrument he created to seek redress for the injustices suffered by the weak, but not, as it turns out, the helpless.

It is this political aspect that takes *Millenium* beyond the normal confines of the crime genre. This is one of the reasons why *Millenium* appeals to intellectuals who have endorsed and promoted the books and films in enthusiastic articles (Cohen, 2009). One could even characterize *Millenium* as “Harry Potter for intellectuals”, emphasizing the intellectual level of the story (i.e., not for children), but also acknowledging its phenomenal popularity, based on the extraordinary demographics of the readership: from intellectuals with highbrow tastes to aficionados of pulp fiction and crime genre. Thus *Millenium*, like *Harry Potter*, may be considered a “gateway” book that is also bought by people who are not habitual readers. Men as well as women seem to be equally drawn to the story, a significant fact indicating the heroine’s bi-sexual appeal.

In order to understand the social context of “Millenium” and the significance of the central character Lisbeth Salander, we must consider the gradual transformation of Swedish society which began in the 1980s.

Apart from the anxiety caused by economic insecurity, many Swedes felt a growing sense of unease as their rather homogenous society experienced a number of immigration waves, so that today Sweden has a population of 9 million people, 1 million of whom are immigrants. Swedes are now being forced to rethink their national identity which has long been based on the idea of the *folkhemmet*. (the welfare state for the people) Not surprisingly, there has been a strong reaction from right-wing groups and outbreaks of violence and racism targeting immigrants.

This dark side of Swedish society can be seen in Tomas Alfredson’s film “Låt den Rätta Komma In” (2008), which uses the metaphor of a young, dark-haired foreign-looking girl ( in reality, a vampire) who befriends a lonely blonde Swedish boy victimized by his peers to suggest the “outsider-native” confrontation inherent in the immigration problem.

Another film, Lukas Moodysson’s “Lilya4ever” (2000) describes violence against women, especially the sexual exploitation of women immigrants from East Europe. These two films turn over the clean, shiny rock of Swedish society to reveal the dark, dirty underside, crawling with inequality, crime, cruelty and vice.

Actual cases in 2010 include ex-police chief Goran Lindberg, once considered Sweden’s top expert on morality and ethics, who was jailed after being found guilty of “sadistic sexual violence” (rape, and other sex crimes); even the Swedish King, Carl Gustav, has been exposed as a salacious philanderer with a sordid history of licentiousness.

## Author and Genre

Larsson is not the first Scandinavian writer to enjoy a worldwide reputation. Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg are giants of world literature. Hans Christian Andersen, Selma Lagerlöf, Astrid Lindgrén, author of the children's classic Pippi Longstocking and Tove Jansson, creator of the Moomin world, have enchanted the children of the world with tales of their heroes' adventures. Why have these small nations produce cultural figures of such eminence? Is it the need of these peoples living on the margins of northern Europe to go out, not as they did in the past as Vikings, and later as Normans to conquer, but now to reach out in solidarity to their fellow men and women living beyond their borders?

The phenomenal success of these Scandinavians can perhaps be explained by the unvarnished humanity of their unforgettable heroes and heroines. Georges Simenon, too, from tiny Belgium amassed readers around the world with the creation of "le commissaire Maigret", while his *romans durs*, the literary platform for his tireless *recherche de l'homme nu*, continue to appeal to a heterogeneous readership. Simenon, like Balzac, Dickens, Zola and other "popular" writers, created a *milieu*, a fictional universe which the reader can enter and establish a vicarious relationship with the characters. Larsson creates a *milieu* in which his heroine can come alive in the imagination of the reader.

As mentioned previously, Sweden's extremely positive and favorable image in the world, and the Swedes' own flattering self-image, create a kind of "cognitive dissonance" among foreign and Swedish readers respectively, when they dare descend into the dark side of Swedish society. This may be one reason for the success not only of "Millenium", but may also explain the extraordinary, international *cachet* enjoyed by Scandinavian crime thriller writers which had started in the 1960s and 70s with the books of Maj Sjöwall and her partner Per Wahlöö who criticized Sweden's capitalists as corrupt and culpable accomplices in the USA's wars of aggression against Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

However, the man who really established the genre of the Scandinavian crime novel as a transnational phenomenon is Henning Mankell whose fan base in Germany established his reputation as the *primus inter pares* of Scandinavian crime writers. His anti-hero detective, Kurt Wallander, is a grumpy, middle-aged alcoholic with diabetes and racist prejudices, who does not just talk to prostitutes, like the kindly Commissaire Maigret, but sleeps with them. He, like millions of other Swedes, ruminates over the bewildering changes in their society that have complicated their self-understanding; he struggles to explain to himself the criminal mind, and the horrific crimes he investigates.

Mankell's genius is to entertain the reader with the genre of the crime novel while at the same time reveal the presence of the Other, refracted through the prejudiced eyes of Kurt Wallander, a method employed by director Oshima Nagisa in *Death by Hanging* to open the eyes of the Japanese to the reality of their racist attitudes towards Koreans.

By the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, Swedes realized their country had

changed in ways few had anticipated. The Wallander novels helped them to understand the meaning of these changes by offering the readers what Andrew Nestingen calls a “dual vision”: the awareness that they, the Swedes, look at the Other, but the gaze is not one way only; they are also seen by the Other. Mankell teaches the importance of a transnational view so that Swedes can build bridges of solidarity with people from other countries.

Larsson’s trilogy continues Mankell’s trajectory of social activism, writing crime stories which provide entertainment combined with a mission of political enlightenment, but with an emphasis on the struggle of ordinary citizens victimized by powerful, malevolent individuals, or by an invisible and unaccountable cabal of unscrupulous men ensconced in the rotten heart of the state security apparatus.

The crime thriller genre, especially the American brand, can be characterized by its nihilism and pessimism, or its conservative ideology of reassurance, ultimately confirming the legitimacy of the status quo, whereas the Scandinavian crime novels, especially Stieg Larsson’s fiction, is ultimately optimistic, holding out the hope that individuals can fight back against the abuse of power by the state or corporations.

Speaking of the popular thriller genre and its power of agency, Nestingen (41) writes:

Popular fictions create new terms, images, and assemblages, which generate novel forms of self-understanding and recognition, which in turn respond to challenges and dialogues undergoing transformation. By struggling over the typicality of these images and this language, popular fictions participate in struggle over social transformation.

A similar argument is made by Vincenzo Ruggiero in *Crime in Literature: Sociology of Deviance and Fiction* (3):

Dolin argues that canonical fiction serves ‘to probe law’s *nomos*, offering adversarial narratives on behalf of those who are marginalized by the criminal or civilian law. Fiction becomes both a legal test site and an unofficial court of appeal’ (Sutherland, 2001: 26). Storytelling and literary imagining, in sum, can provide essential ingredients in rational arguments (Lara, 2000).

The transformative power of fiction to function as ‘spaces of display’ (Nestingen, 37-47), and as a forum for readers, both individually and collectively, to participate in “the social imaginary” and “imaginary instituting”, as posited by Charles Taylor and Cornelius Castoriadis respectively, explicating mechanisms of social transformation, might also constitute one of the fundamental motives for Larsson’s fiction, as well as the creation of his memorable heroine around whose mysterious identity and life-story the trilogy revolves.

The appositeness of these claims can be amply demonstrated not only by the themes and content of the story (the defense of individual rights against willful abuse of power, using computer technology as a means of democratic resistance to the hegemonic forces of

capital and the state), but also by the way the *Millenium* books and films have been successfully promoted and marketed around the world using internet technology, thereby giving rise to the creation and circulation of myriad publics. Nestingen (36) writes:

The formation of publics, then, is what we see around autobiographical and thriller texts. In both, there is intense attention to the struggles of individuality and a taking of positions that challenges established categories, as Erikson shows. Through display and circulation around these problems, demands can be articulated that draw clear divisions. One is gendered, as Rojola suggests, as women readers demand revisions of a life worthy of attention.

This transformative possibility is the hope held out by *Millenium*, both as a publishing and marketing event, and as the story of a woman who fights for her freedom and dignity to win the respect of men. Surely a heroine for the new millennium whose fruits belong equally to women.

## **21<sup>st</sup> Century Heroine**

A woman stands at the center of the trilogy, for it is her story that rivets the attention of the reader and, like Scheherazade, she smoothly seduces the reader from one book/film to another until the tale is told. Thus, although genre is the marketing vehicle which initially attracts the readership, it is the addictive format of a trilogy, the genre-busting, byzantine plot, and the unique characterization of the heroine, Lisbeth Salander, that are ultimately responsible for the phenomenal worldwide success of *Millenium*.

Nobody understands this better than the actress Noomi Rapace, who has become the face and iconic embodiment of the heroine/anti-heroine; she now owns the character of Lisbeth Salander on account of the visual media's power to insert an image into the public space, establish its iconic status and dominate the public's imagination. Her numerous interviews, explicating the character she inhabited for all three films, add more to the texture of Lisbeth's personality for the fans who crave more insights into her psychology.

The title of this paper refers to the ambivalent moral status of a heroine whose passionate pursuit of the truth and justice for herself and others can only succeed at the cost of neglecting certain moral scruples.

Although one might say there is more of the Erinyes than the Eumenides in her actions, she is mainly driven by the instinct for self-preservation rather than pure revenge; she is able to maintain her essential Madonna-like innocence because, like the Eumenides, she is, together with Mikael Blomkvist, a guardian of justice. Thus she never loses the sympathy of the reader. "Whore" ironically articulates how she is viewed by "men who hate women".

The ambivalence of the title also wishes to draw attention to the curious hollowness



of heroes and heroines, a characteristic which enables them to function as “empty signifiers”, since, as Ernesto Laclau theorizes, they can articulate demands for social change and transformation. Each reader has their own Lisbeth.

This symbolic power is inherent in the ambivalent figures of heroines or anti-heroines. The symbolic significance of such female characters, often originating in primitive myth and later, through the classical traditions of Greece and Rome, exercising their influence on western culture from the Renaissance on, is convincingly illustrated by Marina Warner in *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism*, which traces the long journey of Jeanne d’Arc from witch to saint, first reviled then revered and, in modern times a political icon claimed by both the Right and Left.

Larsson, living for a time alongside, and reputedly even training Eritrean women soldiers in their struggle against Ethiopian invaders, was impressed by the capacity of women to defend themselves. On the first page of the final book, paying tribute to the military prowess of women, he writes, “Historians have often struggled to deal with women who do not respect gender distinctions, and nowhere is that distinction more sharply drawn than in the question of armed combat.”

Lisbeth Salander is, above all, a fighter, and thus has antecedents in the pantheon of female warriors, such as the Amazon queens, Hippolyta and Penthesilea, Semiramis of Assyria, Artemis-Diana, Boudicca, Camilla, Judith and, most famous of all, Jeanne d’Arc.

Like Jeanne, Lisbeth crosses another gender line with her transvestism, dressing like a man, in black jeans, shirt, leather jacket and boots; her hair is cut short like a boy; ears, nose, lips and tongue are pierced with rings and studs, her back decorated with a big dragon tattoo. Her pale Asiatic face with its high cheek bones contrasts with her all-black attire; her mouth ringed with black lip-stick, she sports the punk look and thus declares her “un-Swedish”, outsider status. She is tiny and fragile in appearance, like a doll (150cm), slightly built (41kg) with thin arms and legs, and no breasts.

However, her vulnerable appearance belies a physical strength that makes her a formidable fighter who has trained as a boxer.

Larsson has given Lisbeth something of his own introverted, rebellious and restless character, feeding on a fierce pride, and driven by a hate of violence against women and injustice. That their names have the same initials, albeit in reverse, may be an acknowledgement of a shared identity.

Undoubtedly, her character also owes something to Larsson’s extensive knowledge of American crime novels, especially Carol O’Connell’s heroine, Kathy Mallory, but to answer the question of where she derives her physical power, leads us to Larsson’s original conception of the character, which had less to do with illustrious female warriors of the past than with a model closer to home: Lasse (2) quotes Larsson:

It was not until 2001 that Larsson stumbled upon the spark that would bring the

Millenium trilogy into being. "I considered Pippi Longstocking," he said, referring to the most famous creation of the Swedish children's author Astrid Lindgren, a girl so strong she could carry a horse. "What would she be like today? What would she be like as an adult? What would you call a person like that, a sociopath? Hyperactive? Wrong. She simply sees society in a different light. I'll make her 25 years old and an outcast. She has no friends and is deficient in social skills. That was my original thought."

Lisbeth, in fact, suffers from Asperger's Syndrome and is blessed, or cursed, with a photographic memory that will never allow her to forget how different she is from others. However, she is a lucid thinker, an abnormally fast learner, able to rapidly process and retain vast amounts of information; these qualities enable her to become a computer "genius", a "super-hacker", excelling in a field in which men like to consider themselves superior. Where Jeanne wielded a sword against men on the battlefield, Lisbeth uses her computer and hacking skills to outwit and vanquish her powerful enemies who have access to money or can employ the state security apparatus.

Her character is filled out by her traumatic childhood, witnessing brutal scenes of domestic violence against her mother which finally led her to retaliate violently against her father. Through the intrigues of Sapo, the Swedish state security organ, she is hospitalized, forcibly medicated and subjected to brutal, physical and sexual abuse while still a child, and later, as an adult, she is stigmatized by the authorities as "mentally ill", and, as a ward of court deprived of all her freedoms and rights as a citizen. She is brutally assaulted by a gang of drunken delinquents, fights for her life in a mission to unmask an anti-semitic, Christo-fascistic, sadistic, serial sex killer with incestuous instincts.

Her fury against men who are making war on women reaches its apogee when she realizes there is no way she can receive justice from men who have decided on her annihilation. She therefore feels that she has no choice but to extirpate the two males in her family, who wish her dead. Patricide symbolizes her hatred for the harsh patriarchal system that arose in the desert of the Middle East, was codified in Leviticus, inherited in some degree by Christianity, and can still be found today in the so-called *sharia* laws used by Muslim bigots to maintain their domination over women.

Her patricidal plans fail, but her war against "men who hate women" becomes the *leitmotiv* of the trilogy that justifies the heroine's steely determination to defend herself against the enemies of her sex. This is also the *raison d'être* of Larsson's feminist project.

There can be little doubt that the trilogy is not only Larsson's *cri de coeur*, on behalf of women victimized by men, but is also a feminist work written by a man. The male characters are either decent men who respect and love women, or misogynist brutes, sadistic predators, cold-blooded cynics bent on murder, or simply fools who feel threatened by female intelligence; the female characters, with the exception of the matriarch of the nazified Vangers, are mostly positive, emotionally independent, hard-working women with

their own individuality.

Larsson clearly loves to *épater les bourgeois*: with Scandinavian insouciance he describes how the married Erika Berger, the office manager and part-owner of Millenium has her husband's consent to sleep with Mikael Blomkvist whenever she feels like it. Lisbeth Salander's individuality is expressed by her bi-sexual relations, described in a matter-of-fact way, as is Larsson's thick description of every-day Swedish life, drinking innumerable cups of coffee and eating pizza. The accumulation of mundane details of daily life in Stockholm's locales creates a world of normality, like in the feminist crime-fiction of Leena Lehtolainen of Finland.

But the typical middle-class normality of the coffee-drinking folk in Stockholm is contrasted with another reality: a Kafkaesque, nightmare world of bizarre events, criminality, sadistic, sexual violence and murder, which constantly threatens to overwhelm decency and democracy. This tension creates the suspense and thrill of the genre that grips our attention and does not let go until the mystery of Lisbeth's life story is resolved and we are reassured of a happy *dénouement* for a heroine we have come to care about.

Many characters in *Millenium* have foreign names that reflect the reality of the multi-ethnic population living in modern Sweden. Lisbeth herself is no all-Swedish heroine, but rather an anti-heroine who displays little of the Swedish virtue of *lagom*, or moderation, nor is she able to curb her aggressions to indulge in *jante*, the personal modesty that can so easily be exploited by others.

However, possessing an inner strength, the young, introverted and taciturn Lisbeth is free, like Pippi,; she works independently, is self-sufficient, especially after she hacks her way into Wennerström's illicit cache to acquire the equivalent of "Pippi's gold". However, she cannot openly show her feelings, and avoids intimacy; she is an emotionally damaged individual, traumatized by sexual violence and horrific abuse at the hands of bureaucrats from Sapo, the Ministry of Justice, and a venal psychiatrist. They conspire first to deprive her of her freedom by making her legally incompetent, then later to incarcerate her forever.

Lisbeth's unlikely collaboration with the jaded, extrovert muckraker Mikael makes them an odd couple, an awkward team, but somehow it works, and they win against all odds; they give each other mutual support, and ultimately owe their lives to each other. In the end, she learns to trust Mikael more, and there is evidence of Lisbeth's growth in social confidence and emotional maturity. Larsson's feminism is realistic and optimistic, recognizing that only mutual respect and cooperation can enable the two sexes to create a humanistic society and live together in relative harmony.

So finally, why should Lisbeth Salander be considered a 21<sup>st</sup> century heroine? She herself cannot be considered as a feminist role-model: she has too many personal issues to deal with, and needs all her energy for self-preservation. Some feminists may gasp when she undergoes an operation for breast-enlargement, but this is only a small gesture of wanting to feel a little more "normal", as well as a concession to her all too-human vanity.

Probably this was Larsson's idea of winding up the overly politically correct comrades.

Every age needs its own heroines. The rapid changes of the last fifty years have finally produced a fictional (anti-) heroine who not only makes no concessions to bourgeois stodginess, but also opens the way for a new paradigm where women can use both their body and mind to challenge the hegemony of oppressive patriarchal values. Lisbeth's strange individuality is a perfect expression of the multi-ethnic societies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where difference needs to be celebrated, not feared.

Feminists can rejoice that such an unfeminine figure as Lisbeth can win the respect, sympathy and the acceptance of millions of male readers and cinema-goers who have been biologically programmed and culturally conditioned for a heroine of different dimensions.

Despite her child-like appearance that can both elicit a protective response as well as excite the basest instincts in men, she possesses, like Pippi, a charisma, so admired by Stieg Larsson, of a courageous woman who, without self-pity, refuses to be broken by bullying males; she fights giving no quarter, in the mould of Dolores Ibarruri (*No Pasarán!*), who adopted Emiliano Zapata's famous apothegm: it is better to die on your feet than live on your knees.

Thus Lisbeth Salander, in a most significant way, has validated and vindicated the feminist project as we enter the new millennium. She has creatively carved out her own identity, free of -isms and ideology. Aware of her own deficiencies, has a voracious appetite for knowledge, knowing that it is one of the keys to self-improvement as well as self-empowerment. She is not a paragon. She is a *Vorbild*, not as modern Germans call a heroine to be emulated, but in the original sense of the word: a picture placed before one's eyes for contemplation. Perhaps it is more like a mirror, where if we gaze long enough at Stieg Larsson's portrait of Lisbeth Salander, we may see new possibilities for our humanity as men and women,

It is, of course, an unfinished picture. Lisbeth might have changed, healed her psychic wounds, and even found happiness. We can never know, because, despite the rumors of a fourth novel, with Larsson's death, she has died, too.

We are left, however with one last conundrum. Lisbeth measured herself against men, wore their clothes, learned to box and defend herself, and proved superior to men in computing skills, yet all these accomplishments were gained by emulating men. Does this mean that equality between men and women can only be achieved, if women become more like men? Must it be a one-way street? Is the next stage of the feminist project persuading men to be more like women? Or, when patriarchal societies are no more, and women have achieved equal rights with men, will the biology of testosterone prove to be the final, impassable barrier?

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## 『ミレニアム』の女：正義のマドンナ、復讐の妖女、そして 21 世紀ヒロインの誕生

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本稿の目的は 2010 年までに 40 か国語に訳され 2700 万部も売れた世界的ベストセラー、スウェーデンのスリラー三部作「ミレニアム」を取り上げ、女性主人公のイメージと描写を検証し、現実にはあり得ない虚構的人物が作品をベストセラー化した要因を説明することである。

死後出版のこの人気三部作が提起する問題点を挙げる。著者スティグ・ラーソンとはだれか？ 彼のアルター・エゴであるミカエル・ブロムクヴィストと驚異の女性主人公リスベット・サランダーによって「一夜にして」大衆小説界を支配した謎は何か？ スカンジナビア、なにかんづくスウェーデンの犯罪小説がかような名声を得、世界中の読者層に大きな影響力を及ぼしている理由は何か？ 大衆犯罪小説はいかなる意味と価値を持つのか？ 文化的起動力として果たすその役割は何か？

大衆文化が果たす、社会変化のバロメーターとしての固有の役割は、アンドルー・ネスティンゲンの理論的モデルであり、それが私的、社会的アイデンティティの再構築に果たす力はコルネリウス・カストリアディスやチャールス・テイラー、エルネスト・ラクラウらによって報告されている。それらに言及しつつ、本稿は上述の問いを發するものだが、その際いわゆるネオリベラルな経済政策、換言すれば「グローバリゼーション」、文化的所産の市場化、それがジェンダー、階級、民族性を含むアイデンティティの問題に与える影響に注目するものである。

最後に、「女性主人公」の描写における主要素としての視覚的イメージの役割を考証する。スウェーデンにおける映画化がノオミ・ラパスをスターダムに打ち上げたからである。「女性主人公」としての彼女の身の丈はハリウッド版の三部作が一般大衆にお目見えする時さらに高さを増すだろう。

結論として、スウェーデンの長大なテレビ・シリーズの衝撃がなかったとしても、ノオミ・ラパスといまだ知られざるハリウッドの女優はリスベット・サランダーのイメージを伝説的な新女性主人公として定着し、それによってフェミニスト的企画を 21 世紀へと継続させる力となる、といえよう。