

Till My Change Come

Nature, Justice, and Redemption in Åsa Larsson's *Until Thy Wrath Be Past*

JOHN LINGARD

ABSTRACT: Åsa Larsson's *Till dess din vrede upphör* (2009) [*Until Thy Wrath Be Past* 2011] is the fourth of five Rebecka Martinsson mysteries. Larsson enhances the genre with an exceptionally vivid depiction of the Swedish Arctic. All the characters are affected by the forbidding landscape of forests, frozen lakes, and mountains. The harshness of nature in this region leads some to violence and death; others to self-understanding and redemption. The novel's most striking feature is, however, a remarkably successful introduction of the supernatural into the story. The first narrator is the spirit of a murder victim, who hovers above the other characters, influencing their actions and thoughts. Freed from the constraints of time and place, she is able to travel back as far as World War II and witness the dark collaborationist underworld of a so-called neutral Sweden. With her skilful interweaving of mystery, nature, and the supernatural, Larsson has created a powerful and moving addition to Nordic crime fiction.

RÉSUMÉ: *Till dess din vrede upphör* d'Åsa Larsson (2009) [Jusqu'à ce que ton ire soit passée, publié en anglais en 2011] est le quatrième de cinq mystères de Rebecka Martinsson. Larsson améliore le genre par une représentation exceptionnellement vive de l'Arctique suédois. Tous les personnages sont affectés par le paysage inhospitalier de forêts, de lacs gelés et de montagnes. L'aridité de la nature dans cette région mène certains à la violence et à la mort; d'autres à la compréhension de soi et à la rédemption. La caractéristique la plus frappante du roman est, cependant, une introduction, effectuée avec un succès remarquable, du surnaturel dans l'histoire. Le narrateur principal est l'esprit d'une victime morte assassinée, planant au-dessus des autres personnages, influençant leurs actions et leurs pensées. Libérée des contraintes de temps et d'espace, elle est en mesure de voyager aussi loin que la Seconde Guerre mondiale et d'être témoin du sombre monde souterrain de la collaboration d'une soi-disant Suède neutre. Avec son imbrication habile de mystère, de nature et de surnaturel, Larsson créé une puissante et émouvante addition à la fiction criminelle nordique.

John Lingard taught English and Drama at Cape Breton University until his retirement in 2007.



sa Larsson's *Till dess din vrede upphör* (2009) [*Until Thy Wrath Be Past* 2011] is the fourth of five Rebecka Martinsson/Inspector Anna-Maria Mella novels. The setting is again Kiruna and its environs, just below the 68th parallel. This region, one of Western Europe's last wildernesses, represents for Swedes what Glenn Gould, in a Canadian context, called "The Idea of North." Though Kiruna itself is a modern town, with an economy based on iron-ore mining and tourism, its population is small—22,972 in the 2012 census—and the mountains and forests, bordering on Norway to the West and North and Finland to the East, are sparsely populated. In Steven Peacock's words, north of Kiruna, "there is only roadless, uninhabited land. To the East, boreal forests stretch for hundreds of miles into Finland and Russia" (125). In *Until Thy Wrath Be Past*, Larsson fully exploits not only the isolation and harsh winters of this region, but its liminality, in a literal and metaphoric sense. The inhabitants are Swedes, Finns, and Sámi, the latter still semi-nomadic and reliant on their reindeer herds. Even the Finno-Ugric language speakers differ from their Finnish neighbours: they speak, according to Laurie Thompson's translation, "Tornedalen Finnish" (52). Moreover, animals in the novel—reindeer, elk, fox, and above all bear, dogs, and ravens—are important to atmosphere, plot, character development, and symbolism and interact with the human characters. The most important threshold crossed is, however, that between life and death. This particular crossing occurs not simply because this is a murder mystery, but, uniquely in Nordic crime fiction, because one of the narrators is already dead, and her spirit hovers above the characters, influencing their decisions and acting as a second narrator. I know of only one parallel example of a spirit-character in crime fiction: Hamish MacLeod, a Scottish soldier, shot for so-called cowardice in World War I, whose invisible presence accompanies Charles Todd's detective, Inspector Ian Rutledge, offering him wanted or unwanted advice and always reminding him of the fact that Rutledge, a senior officer, ordered Hamish's execution by firing squad.¹ However, Hamish's posthumous existence is attributable to Rutledge's post-traumatic stress syndrome, whereas the spirit of Wilma Persson in Larsson's novel is clearly intended to be a supernatural entity.

Larsson's epigraph for *Until Thy Wrath Be Past* is a passage from *Job*:

Akk, att du ville gömma mig i dödsriket,
fördölja mig, till dess din vrede hade upphört,
staka ut för mig en tidsgräns och sedan tänka på mig –
fastän ju ingen kan få liv, när han en gång är död!
Då skulle jag hålla min stridstid ut,
ända till dess att min avlösning komme

Du skulle då ropa på mig,
och jag skulla svara dig;

efter dina händers verk skulle du längta:
 ja, du skulle då rakna mina steg,
 du skulle ej akta på min synd.
 I en förseglad pung låge då min överträdelse,
 och du överskyldde min missgärning.

Men såsom själva berget faller och förvittrar,
 ock såsom klippan flyttas ifrån sin plats,
 såsom stenar nötas sönder genom vattnet,
 och såsom mullen sköljes bort av dess flöden,
 så gör du ock människans hopp om intet.

Du slår henne ned för alltid, och hon far hädan;
 du förvandlar hennes ansikt och driver henne bort.
 Om hennes barn komma till ära, så känner hon det icke,
 om de sjunka ned till ringhet, så aktar hon dock ej på dem.
 Hennes kropp känner blott sin egen plåga,
 hennes själ blott den sorg hon själv får förnimma.

(*Job kapitel 14 verserna 13-22 (5-6)*)

[13 O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret,
 until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember
 me!

14 If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait,
 till my change come.

15 Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of
 thine hands.

16 For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin?

17 My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity.

18 And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out
 of his place.

19 The waters wear the stones: thou washest away the things which grow out of
 the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man.

20 Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth; thou changest his
 countenance, and sendest him away.

21 His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but
 he perceiveth it not of them.

22 But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn.]

(*Job Chapter 14: verses 13-22. The Holy Bible, King James Version 1989, 466*)

Just as an opera's overture will prefigure melodies and motifs in the work itself, so this passage, spoken by Job, gives us a number of clues to Larsson's novel. Job's first request to God is that he hide him, "until thy wrath be past"; and most of the novel's important characters are, in some manner, hidden or in hiding. Rebecka has left a well-paid job in a Stockholm law-firm to become Kiruna's District Prosecutor. As Kiruna is her childhood home, she loves the North, and the move

may seem at first sight an “innocent” one. She is, however, using it to escape a relationship with Måns Wenngren, one of her senior colleagues. More importantly, she is seeking to heal the scars, physical and mental, from an incident that occurred some years before in the village of Kurravaara, which Larsson narrates in her first novel *Solstorm* (2003) [*Sun Storm* 2006].

Hjalmar Krekula is also hiding in plain sight; he and his younger brother Tore have a history of violence and murder, though the police have never been able to assemble enough evidence to charge them. When the novel begins, two teenage divers, Wilma Persson, 17, and Simon Kyrö, 19, are searching for the wreck of a German warplane, which, as an old man, Johannes Svarvare, tells them, may have crashed and sunk en route from occupied Norway in 1943 in the middle of Lake Vittangijärvi (194). Even this attractive young couple has kept their search secret by pretending that they are carrying out depth sounding of the lake for the SMHI (11), the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute (5). This is slightly more than a white lie; it is illegal, and hiding their real intentions becomes a factor in their deaths. Their search takes place in October, some months before the novel’s main events, and the lake is frozen. Kerttu Krekula, Hjalmar and Tore’s mother, does not wish the plane to be discovered for reasons that will emerge later in the story. She and her sons drive out to the lake and find the young couple’s diving hole. Kerttu cuts the safety rope, which is attached to a wooden cross positioned over the hole (292). She removes the cross and tells Hjalmar to fetch a door from a nearby farmhouse. He lifts a door off its hinges, brings it to the lake, places it over the hole, and stands on it. Simon dies in the plane’s fuselage. Wilma dies attempting to fight her way to the surface, unable to move the door, though she does scratch it with one bare hand, thus providing valuable evidence for the pathologist, Lars Pohjanen. The brothers move her body to a river, Torneälven (41),² some distance upstream from the lake to draw investigation away from the scene of the crime. Hjalmar is also hiding from himself and the thought of the far better man he could have become had he not given way to Tore, his sociopathic younger brother, and his tyrannical parents. He is waiting in vain until *their* wrath be passed. As a schoolboy, Hjalmar discovered that he had a gift for mathematics, and his high school teacher and principal both urged his parents to allow their son to pursue an academic career at college and university. They refuse. Izak Krekula rages at his 13-year-old boy:

Det ska du veta att lektorn åkte ut på öronen härifrån, hojtar han till Hjalmar. Det ska fan inte bli någon bleksiktig siffermänniska av mina grabber, det sa jag till honom. Matte, va? Vad tror du att du är? Är du för fin för att jobba på åkeriet, vad? Passar det inte gunstig herrn? Det är åkeriet som har gett dig mat på bordet under hela din livstid.

(234)

[I'll have you know that I kicked your teacher out of here, he yells at Hjalmar. I'll be damned if a son of mine becomes some kind of sissy number-cruncher, I told him that. Who do you think you are? Too high and mighty to work in the business, eh? Doesn't suit our nice young gentleman? It's the business that's put the food on your table the whole of your life.]³

This is a father's wrath, which echoes God's wrath in *Job* with the important qualifier: that Izak's anger is *wholly* cruel and unjustified and is aimed at crushing rather than testing his son. Izak is moreover a war profiteer whose actions have only been protected from prosecution by Sweden's neutrality in World War II. Izak runs a haulage company. He has good reasons for hiding *his* past. During WWII, he shipped weapons, supplies, and men, including the SS (226), for the Germans to Norway and Finland, even after Swedish Railways cancelled their own transportation agreement with Germany (265). This brings the novel into a larger political arena, involving the whole of Sweden and not just its arctic region, and revealing the degree of pro-Nazi sympathy, which was relatively open from the late 1930s to 1943 when the tide of war began to turn in the Allies' favour especially after the German surrender at Stalingrad on January 31st of that year (139; Hastings 329). As Kerstin Bergman comments on recent Swedish crime fiction:

Since the 1990s, it has become public knowledge that Sweden was not as neutral during World War II as had previously been claimed in the Swedish public arena. There was actually extensive support for the Nazis in Sweden during the war: from individuals, groups, and political parties. In the 1990s and early 2000s, these revelations were addressed by numerous Swedish crime writers.
(57)

Even Sweden's greatest film director, Ingmar Bergman, admits in *Laterna Magica* (1987) [*The Magic Lantern* 1988]: "For many years, I was on Hitler's side, delighted by his successes and saddened by his defeats" (123). Only after the horrors of German concentration camps were revealed in 1945 was Bergman hit by "self-contempt" (124) at his admiration for Hitler; in words that must have struck a chord with many Swedes, Bergman writes: "The surface lustre blinded me, and I did not see the darkness" (124). Svarvare, who is Rebecka's neighbour, tells her: "Jävlar vad det krusades för consul Weiler, alla gruvarbetare som inte behövde göra militärtjänst för att vi sålde stål til tysken, inte var de ledsna för det. Nej, det var efteråt som det började heta att vi hade kniv mot strupen. Kungen selv var sympatisör" [Jesus! How they supported Consul Weiler, all the miners who got out of military service because we were selling steel to the Germans, and they felt no shame about it. It was only later that the story changed: we'd had a knife to our throats. The king himself was a sympathizer] (195).

The act of hiding—the self or an object—runs through the book. Tore Krekula hides in an attic from the police (253-54). Axel Viebke tells Kerttu, with foolish pride, that “det är jag som gömt dem” [I’m the one who’s hidden them] (272), that is to say three Danish resistance fighters. Simon’s car is “översnöad” [covered in snow] (49) through the winter and proves to be a valuable clue for the police, when it is found; even the car key is hidden on top of a tire (52). Allusions to Job’s wish that God hide him in the grave and keep him secret are, then, “hidden” as it were, even in small details the reader only perhaps recognizes in retrospect. However, the most important act of hiding in plain sight is Kerttu Krekula’s, Hjalmar’s mother, and the most evil character in Larsson’s book. She too was blinded by the “surface lustre” of Nazism and has never really seen its darkness. It is her hidden actions in the war, and not just the murder of Wilma and Simon, that drive the plot. As an attractive 17-year-old, Kerttu had a flirtatious relationship with William Schörner, the head of an SS unit that appears to have had *carte blanche* to operate in northern Sweden. She sells him allied secrets and, in her most treacherous moment, charms a young Swede, Axel Viebke, into revealing the hiding place of three escaped Danish resistance fighters. She is forced to watch as the Danes and Viebke are murdered by German soldiers (289). Moreover her transgression is *literally* “sealed up in a bag.” After the deaths of Viebke and the Danes, Kerttu learns from the Germans that “en sändning” [a package] (289) is being shipped to her from Narvik by air, but the plane never arrives:

Izak får reda att transportplanet försvunnit och Kerttu ser hela tiden framför sig att det har kraschat i skogen någonstans och att någon kommer att hitta det och att det ligger en portfölj där i planet. En portfölj som liknar Schörners svarta svinlädersportfölj. Och att däri skall stå allt som hon, Kerttu, räven, hjälpt tyska armén med. I bärplockningstider blir hon ständigt sjuk av oro.
(289-90)

[Izak learns that the transport plane has disappeared, and Kerttu has a constant vision of the plane crashing somewhere in the woods, and of someone coming upon it and finding a briefcase in the plane. A briefcase like Schörner’s black pigskin briefcase. And that it will contain documents listing all Kerttu the Fox’s acts of collaboration with the German army. When the berry-picking season comes, she is always sick with fear.]

It is only in the present-day action of the novel that Kerttu learns that the plane had sunk in Lake Vittankjärvi.

In 1943, the British know that someone is betraying the Allies, and they call him “Räven” [the Fox] (229), assuming that the informant is a man. Later, Rebecka will connect the dots. She sees a photo in Hjalmar’s album showing Kerttu as a

young girl standing between Viebke and Karl-Åke Pantzare, another resistance fighter, who is still alive in the novel's present time:

Kerttu, tänker hon. Och sedan tänker hon på att Hjalmar och Tore är vithåriga på det där sättet som rödhåriga personer blir. Det syns att de varit rödhåriga och de har mycket ljus hy. Råven, tänker Rebecka. Sa inte Karl-Åke Pantzare att ängelsmännen kallade Tyskarnas informatör för råven. Kettu betyder räv på finska. Kettu. Kerttu.
(285)

[Kerttu, she thinks. And then she thinks that Hjalmar and Tore are white-haired in the way that red-haired people become. They seem to have been red-haired, and they have very light skin. The fox, Rebecka thinks. Didn't Karl-Åke Pantzare say that the Englishmen called the Germans' informer the Fox. Kerttu means fox in Finnish. Kettu. Kerttu.]

Here “fox” is used as a name and as a metaphor for cunning and betrayal. However, the animal itself features in the novel as one of countless reminders that Larsson's characters are surrounded and at times dwarfed or threatened by their natural surroundings. When, for example, Hjalmar and Tore get lost as children, their fear is heightened, as in a Gothic novel, by what they hear: “Skogen är full av annorlunda ljud. Värmen släpper från träden och får dem att knäppa. Det later nästan som steg. Ett otäkt ljud från en skällande räv” [The forest is full of different sounds. The heat thaws the trees and makes them give out a clicking sound. It sounds almost like footsteps. An unpleasant sound from a barking fox] (105). Anni Autio hears “ett skrig från en hare. Den låter som ett spädbarn. Spökligt genom dimman. Förmodligen tog råven den” [a scream from a hare. It sounds like a little baby. Ghostly through the mist. Probably the fox took it] (138). The Gothic effect of this passage is heightened by the fact that it is narrated by the spirit of the dead Wilma Persson.

Job is afraid of God's power over nature as well as man. If “the mountain falling cometh to naught, and the rock is moved out of his place” by the hand of God, what chance is there for “the hope of man”? From the very beginning of the novel, we are aware of nature's presence, beauty, and destructive power. God is removed from the equation, except at the end for Hjalmar Krekula. In God's place we are left with an image of humanity face to face with a nature that is, for the most part, indifferent to man. For the seventeen-year-old Wilma Persson, the scene near Lake Vittangjärvi, with its forest and nearby mountains, seems “så överjordisk vackert” [so unearthly beautiful] (8). Sweden's highest mountain, Kebnekaise (2111 m.), is visible from a hill near the lake (8), and for Wilma, “bergen var urminnes tider och oföränderligt” [the mountains stood for times immemorial and the unchanging] (8). However, in a cruel stroke of irony, a few hours after she has had these thoughts Wilma will drown beneath the lake's frozen surface

(19). Her body will be hidden under river ice until the following April. We can assume that divers will eventually find Simon's body in the plane and the documents incriminating Kerttu.

The transition experienced by Wilma from a sense of nature's beauty to terror is a repeated rhythm in the novel. The next morning, Östen Marjavaara takes pleasure and pride in a personal sense of being alone with a fine late-winter's morning: "Snön låg som en naturens viskning över älven. Hysch, sa den, var stilla. Nu är det bara du och jag" [The snow lay like nature's whisper over the river. Hush, it said, be quiet. Now it's only you and I] (22). If readers feel a proleptic eeriness in this whisper, they are right. Only minutes later, Marjavaara will dip his water bucket into a hole in the ice, discover a rotting corpse, and throw up the contents of his stomach into the snow (23).

Rebecka's relationship to nature will go through the most dramatic change, after Wilma's. Job feels helpless in the face of God and nature; both forces can destroy "the hope of man." Early in the novel, Rebecka takes a radically different view:

Snö, tänkte kammaråklagare Rebecka Martinsson och rös av välbehag när hon klev ur sin bil på garden i Kurravaara ... Jag behöver det här, tänkte hon ... Det är bra för mig att vara liten inunder det sprakande norrskenet, liten bredvid den tunga älven. Naturen och universum är så tätt inpå här. Mina bekymringar och knepigheter krymper ihop. Jag tycker om att vara obetydlig.
(27-28)

[Snow, thought District Prosecutor Rebecka Martinsson, and shivered with pleasure, as she climbed out of her car at the house in Kurravaara. ... I need this, she thought ... It's good for me to feel small under the sparkling northern lights, small beside the rushing river ... Nature and the universe are so close up here. My troubles and anxieties shrink to nothing. I enjoy being insignificant.]

This feeling will intensify as she walks towards her grandmother's house, which she has inherited: "Hon är ett med resten. Med snön, med himlen. Med älven som strömmar dold under isen" [She is at one with it all. With the snow, with the sky. With the river that flows hidden below the ice] (36). Near the end of the novel, however, Rebecka will experience being "made one with Nature" (Shelley 486) in a terrifying way. The snow, ice, and rushing river will combine to draw her to the threshold of death. Similarly, she thinks of herself, proudly, as "ensamvargen" [the lone wolf] (27) on Thursday 16 April. When she is pursued by Tore Krekula on Thursday 30 April, her animal self-image has changed: "Hon är en renkalv på darriga ben. Vargen är nära" [She is a reindeer calf on trembling legs. The wolf is close] (306).

Larsson's emphasis on nature, beautiful, sublime, or destructive, is a sign of what Kerstin Bergman sees as a topical shift in Swedish crime fiction from the

big cities—Stockholm, Gothenburg—to the “Neo-Romantic countryside” (103-19). Bergman selects Larsson’s novels as a significant example of this trend: “The Kiruna area is a landscape with long, dark winters and short, bright summers, a place where people and animals co-exist, dependent on each other for food, shelter, and protection. Animals—dogs in particular—also play important parts in Larsson’s crime stories” (109). Moreover, the interaction between ravens and characters, notably Wilma Persson and Rebecka Martinsson, makes it clear that Larsson has composed a rare, if not unique, blend of realistic police procedural with a subtly Gothic ingredient that is indebted to the author’s most famous Swedish literary forebear, August Strindberg.

The novel begins with a startling paragraph:

Jag minns hur vi dog. Jag minns och jag vet. Det är så nu. Vissa saker vet jag fast jag inte har varit med själv. Men jag vet inte allt. Långt ifrån. Det finns inga regler. Som med människor till exempel. Ibland är de öppna rum som jag kan gå in i. Ibland är de stängda. Tiden finns inte. Den är liksom söndervispad.
(7)

[I remember how we died. I remember and I know. That’s how it is now. I know some things even though I wasn’t there myself. There are no rules. As with people, for example. Sometimes they are open rooms I can enter. Sometimes they are closed. Time does not exist. It seems to have been whisked away.]

At a first reading, this is idiomatic and unliterary: the voice of a seventeen-year-old girl who just happens to be dead. Larsson plants a clue, however, half way through the novel, when Rebecka is questioning Johannes Svarvare in a seniors’ home: “Det är synd om människorna, tänkte hon. Jag vill inte dö ensam” [Mankind is to be pitied, she thought. I don’t want to die alone] (196). “Det är synd om människorna!” [Mankind is to be pitied] is probably the best known line in Swedish drama. It is a phrase used by the god Indra’s daughter in Strindberg’s symbolist play of 1901, *Ett drömspel* [A Dreamplay], to register her feelings about what it means to be human. She first speaks the words after witnessing an absurd quarrel between the Officer’s parents (Strindberg 1986, 118). Returning from Rebecka’s recall of the line to the opening of the novel, a reader will realize that Wilma is, almost certainly unconsciously, alluding to *Ett drömspel*, specifically Strindberg’s “Erinran” (1986, 108), a word that means literally “reminder” or “admonition,” but has been translated as the weaker “Author’s Note” (Strindberg 1976, 553; 1998, 176) or “Author’s Preliminary Note” (Strindberg 1974, 33):

Författeren har i detta drömspel med anslutning till sitt förra drömspel “Till Damascus” sökt härma drömmens osammanhängande men skenbart logiska form. Allt kan ske, allt är möjligt och sannolikt. Tid och rum existera icke; på en obetydlig verklighetsgrund spinner

innbildningen ut och väver nya mönster: en bländning av minnen, upplevelser, fria påhit, orimligheter och improvisationer.

Personerne klyvas, fördubblas, dubbleras, dunsta av, förtätas, flyta ut, samlas. Men ett medvetande star över alla, det är drömmarens; för det finns inga hemligheter, ingen inkonsekvens, inga skrulpter, ingen lag. Han dömer icke, frisäger icke, endast relaterar.

(1986, 107, Strindberg's italics)

[In this dreamplay, with its connection to his former dreamplay *To Damascus*, the author has tried to imitate the disconnected but seemingly logical form of the dream. Everything can happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist; on an insignificant basis of reality, the imagination spins out and weaves new patterns: a mixture of experiences, free associations, absurdities, and improvisations. The characters split, multiply, double, evaporate, condense, fly apart, come together. But one consciousness stands above it all: that is the dreamer's. For him there are no secrets, no inconsequentiality, no scruples, no law. He neither acquits nor condemns; he simply relates.]

Wilma's "erinran" is not as sophisticated or wide-ranging as Strindberg's, but it does contain two sentences that connect with his: "Det finns inga regler" [There are no rules] and "Tiden finns inte" [Time does not exist]. Moreover, as her narrative develops, it becomes evident that space as well as time presents no hindrance to her. She can be on the frozen lake one moment and in her great-aunt's kitchen the next: "Och innan jag hade tänkt tanken klart, var jag hemma i Annis hus" [And before I had completed the thought, I was at home in Anni's house] (25). Similarly, she can narrate present-day events and observe those in a past as distant as 1943 (269). She exists in a continuous present without reference to linear time. To support this pattern, the novel's other narrator shifts from the past to the present tense, as if she has tuned into Wilma's frequency. There is, however, an important difference between Wilma's spirit-self and that of Strindberg's dreamer: he "neither acquits nor condemns"; Wilma does condemn—notably the story's three irredeemable villains, Izak, Kerttu, and Tore Krekula—and she both acquits and helps to heal one murderer, Hjalmar Krekula. Neither she nor the author is a traditionally omniscient narrator. Wilma admits that some characters are open rooms to her while some are closed, but as their narratives weave together they achieve a measure of omniscience. Wilma relates to the novel as a whole, in a way that is similar to any single member of Kiruna's police, legal, or forensic-science team: she assists in the cause of revealing hidden crimes. However, she goes beyond police authority and, along with Rebecka Martinsson, brings a measure of peace and healing to other characters, notably Hjalmar.

Wilma's spirit plays a role that is not unlike Indra's daughter's. She is from another plane of experience, death; just as the Daughter is from heaven, both suffer from empathy with ordinary mortals but are ultimately separate from the

living world. Wilma, in particular, hovers above and sometimes even sits with the living characters, much like the angels in Wim Wenders' film *Der Himmel über Berlin* (1987) [*Wings of Desire* 1988], invisible presences who can listen to human thought. The crucial difference between Wilma and the angels is that, as I have noted, she is able to influence the lives of characters in the novel and thus to bring about change. In *Wings of Desire*, an angel sits by and suffers with a man about to commit suicide by jumping from a high building. The angel feels the man's pain and loneliness but cannot prevent his death. Wilma, however, directs the police and Rebecka towards a solution of the crimes committed in the novel and saves Hjalmar from despair. She is, in short, directly or indirectly instrumental in the cause of justice and redemption. Like William Shakespeare's similarly swift and omnipresent spirit, Ariel, she has important tasks to perform before she can be free (Shakespeare 979).

Paradoxically, for a story in which one character is free from time and space, the main plot, with some laxity suitable to the longer novel genre, obeys the unities of time, place, and action associated with Greek tragedy. The main events are contained within a period of exactly 14 days, from Thursday 16 April to Thursday 30 April of one year; they occur in Kiruna and its immediate environs; and there is one action: the tracking down of two murderers. Kerttu cannot be convicted, for lack of evidence, but as Krister Ericksson points out, "hon dömer sig själv till ett hårdare straff än samhället skulle ha gjort" [she has condemned herself to a harsher punishment than the court could have given her] (326). Moreover, there is a kind of chorus—Wilma and her familiars, the local ravens and crows. On 16 April, while she watches Östen Marjavaara discover her body:

En korp kom flygande. Den gav ifrån sig sin karakteristiska klang, som när man slår med en kapp på et tomt oljefat. Den landade på isen, precis bredvid mig. Vred huvudet ifrån mig på fåglars sätt. Från sedan.
(25)

[A raven flew towards me. It gave its characteristic cry, like someone hitting an empty oil-drum with a stick. It landed on the ice, just next to me. Turned its head away from me in the way that birds do, and looked at me. From the side.]

In the evening of the same day, Wilma visits Hjalmar. This time two ravens perch on his roof. He tries to scare them off, clearly sensing that they are omens, but the birds simply shift their perch to a tall pine. As Wilma knows, "Dem blir han inte av med" [He won't be rid of them] (39). Ravens in the novel appear to combine aspects of Norse mythology with a popular version of Sámi lore. Óðinn has two ravens, Huginn and Muninn (Turville-Petre 57-58). E. O. G. Turville-Petre says that these birds "must be seen as Óðinn's spiritual qualities in concrete form. A man's fetch, appearing in the guise of an animal, is sometimes called *hugr*, *hugr*

being the root-word for Huginn” (58).⁴ H. R. Ellis Davidson translates the ravens’ names as “Thought and Memory” (146), both of which torment the essentially good but weak-willed Hjalmar until he confesses all his crimes to Martinsson. Ellis Davidson sees Óðinn as a shaman-figure (140-49), and when Rebecka enters the town hall on Wednesday 29 April, “Hon njöt av att vidröra de vackra handtagen som var snidade som schamantrummor” [She enjoyed touching the beautiful door handles which were carved like shamans’ drums] (202). According to Ellis Davidson, the shaman, in a state of trance, “is believed to journey in spirit to the furthest heaven or to the land of the dead, so that he may visit the gods to obtain knowledge, or rescue some soul which disease or madness had expelled from its body” (141-42). The shaman will often beat his drum to induce his trance, and his costume is “sometimes modeled on some particular creature, such as a bear or a bird” (118). Larsson ascribes the gift of rescuing a soul to Wilma and Rebecka. Óðinn “delighted especially in fratricidal strife and in conflict between kinsmen” (Turville-Petre 51), the very curse that destroys the Krekula family. Both he and Thór receive human and animal sacrifice. Shortly before their deaths, Simon tells Wilma that “det finns en gammal samisk offerplats däruppe” [there is an old Sámi place of sacrifice up there on a mountain above Lake Vittangjärvi] (9).

One incident, narrated by Berit Sillfors, a neighbour of the third murder victim, Hjörleifur Arnason, is so bizarre and apparently irrelevant that it must have symbolic resonance. She had once visited Arnason to buy mosquito repellent and discovered his billy goat hanging by its horns in a birch tree. He had killed it and tossed it up into the branches, because it had been butting him: a harmless and common habit of male goats (117), with which anyone who has lived on a farm will be familiar. Many readers will remember the “ram caught in a thicket by his horns” in Genesis 22:13, which an angel prompts Abraham to sacrifice in place of his son Isaac (*The Holy Bible: King James Version*, 18). Adam of Bremen writes of humans and animals sacrificed and hung from trees in Uppsala (quoted in Turville-Petre 244)—these rites appeared to have lasted well into the 11th century. Also, according to the Norse poem *Hávamal*, Óðinn is believed to have “been pierced with a spear and hanged on a tree, a sacrifice for the attainment of wisdom” (Ellis Davidson 51). Turville-Petre sees a possible combination of Christianity and paganism in the sacrifice of Óðinn (42-43). The connection between the Arnason anecdote and certain pagan and Christian motifs, beliefs, and rituals seems at least a strong possibility.

Wilma and her ravens will be the nexus of the Sámi and Norse references. It is made clear early in the novel that her spirit is a supernatural being, which means that her story cannot simply be read as a shift to symbolist narrative. This is evident when Rebecka becomes the first character to see Wilma in the April following her death: “JAG SÖKER UPP åklagaren. Hon är den första som har sett mig sedan jag dog. Hon är vidöppen” [I visit the Prosecutor. She is the first to have seen me since I died. She is completely open] (38). Rebecka wakes up, or

dreams that she wakes up, at four in the morning of 16 April, almost the same moment that Marjavaara chances upon Wilma's body. Wilma is sitting on Rebecka's bed, naked. She tells her that her death was not an accident and that she did not die in the river. Rebecka replies, "Jag vet" [I know] (37). Wilma goes on to give a detailed description of her drowning, including the fact that she broke her nails trying to claw through the ice. Fully awake, Rebecka finds herself standing by her bed, as if she has been sleep-walking. When she falls asleep again, she dreams of "svarta fåglar som lifter ur tallkronur" [black birds that fly up from the crowns of pines] (37). Whether or not she has dreamed her conversation with Wilma, she has gained knowledge of the young girl's death by supernatural means. This is proved by the fact that she cannot yet know that Wilma's body has been found by Marjavaara. When Rebecka tells Pohjanen, who is conducting Wilma's autopsy, that she dreamed about Wilma and that she did not die in the river, he becomes, not unexpectedly, angry, and Rebecka beats a swift retreat. However, Pohjanen regrets his reaction immediately and notices that "de döda som omgav honom var ovanligt tigrande" [the dead that surrounded him were unusually silent] (66). In a proleptic sense, Rebecka's story has gotten through to him, and he will prove that the water in Wilma's lungs came from Lake Vittangijärvi and not the river (73). He will also discover that traces of green paint under her broken fingernails (64) came from the door stolen by Hjalmar and used by the Krekula brothers to seal off Wilma and Simon's diving hole.

Wilma's afterlife is an empathy with nature and human suffering and not a conventional "heaven." Larsson places special emphasis on Wilma's identification with birds, especially ravens and crows. I am grateful to two specialists in Sámi culture, Thomas A. Du Bois and Harald Gaski, for answering my questions about ravens. Du Bois drew my attention to Nils Gaup's film, *Ofelaš* (1989) [*Pathfinder*], set in the Scandinavian Arctic, which centres on a boy accompanied by a raven as a spirit-guide. In Du Bois' opinion, the association of ravens with Sámi culture stems from the film. Gaski also mentions the film and says that, though ravens do not play a special role in Sámi lore (as they do in that of some North American First Nations),⁵ they are sometimes seen as predictors and messengers. These are two of the roles given them by Larsson. A raven plays a crucial role, for example, in directing Rebecka, through Wilma, towards Hjalmar as a prime suspect in the three murders. Certainly, Gaup's film and Larsson's novel have a number of common elements. These include the Sámi, shaman drums, an omnipresent raven in Gaup, that appears to act as a spirit-guide, and ravens and crows in Larsson. In both film and novel, a central character is suddenly confronted by a rearing bear and survives the encounter. A ghost reindeer appears in the film, and the young Tore and Hjalmar Krekula come upon a lone reindeer with "stora, svarta ögon" [large, black eyes] (104), a characteristic of Gaup's reindeer whose eyes we see in close-up. Both film and novel take place in a snow-bound landscape, with frozen lakes, thin birches, and mountains. Wilma and Simon die under the ice of

a frozen lake. In the film's most shocking scene, we see the body of a murdered girl dropped through a hole in lake ice, cut by the Sámi for drinking water. This foreshadows the escape hole in the lake ice, cut by Wilma and Simon, and the hole cut in river ice by Marjavaara. Finally, in both film and novel, villains, far more numerous in Gaup, terrorize the inhabitants of an arctic region until they are lured to their deaths in an avalanche by the film's young hero or drowned, the fate of Tore in Larsson, or brought to justice, Hjalmar's source of punishment and redemption.

While the police are searching Tore's house, Wilma sits on the roof, accompanied by a raven that senses her presence (167). "Så lättar den och flygar hundrafemtio meter bort till Hjalmar's hus. Sätter sig i storbjörken och ropar till mig. I ett nu sitter jag där bredvid på grenen" [Then it takes off and flies a hundred and fifty metres to Hjalmar's house. Perches in the large birch and calls to me. In an instant I am sitting next to it] (168). Then Wilma intensifies her pressure tactics on Rebecka:

Jag lander i åklagarens hår. Jag är som en korp på hennes hjässa. Jag drar med klorna i hennes mörka slingor. Jag vridor hennes huvud mot Hjalmar. Hon ser honom sitta där i polisbilen och blinka. Hon öppnar dörren till bilen och pratar med honom. Jag hacker på hennes huvud. Hon måste vakna nu.
(168)

[I land in the Prosecutor's hair. I'm like a raven on the crown of her head. I drag my claws through her dark locks. I turn her head towards Hjalmar. She sees him sitting there in the police car, blinking. She opens the door and talks to him. I peck at her head. She must wake up now.]

For Wilma's spirit the afterlife is an identification with the whole of nature, not the traditional heaven of most religions. When Arnason is murdered, Wilma senses that nature mourns, not as a pathetic fallacy but a real event: "Jag hör skogens inandning av förfäran. Marken skälver, kränger under blodet som är utgjuts" [I hear the forest draw in its breath in fear. The earth shudders, recoils from the blood that's spilled] (145). Hjalmar's suffering ends when he acknowledges God and nature's power and is prepared to wait "Till my change come." It is one of Larsson's strengths as a writer that she allows her characters to change, for better or for worse, under the pressure of events. In a moment that is apparently irrelevant to the plot, Mella tells Pohjanen, who has just phoned her, that her son Marcus is watching a film, which "ska visst var djup på något vis" [is supposed to be deep in some way] (71). The film is Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006) [*The Lives of Others* 2007]. Its central character, a Stasi Captain, Gerd Weisler, memorably played by the late Ulrich Mühe, undergoes a psychological and political change after listening to bugged conversations of

suspected dissidents. He ends up saving the life of a playwright he has been ordered to trap and condemn. In this way, the film is another Larsson clue to the meaning of her novel.

Tore Krekula simply hardens when it becomes increasingly clear that his own crimes and those of his family can no longer be hidden from the light. Izak appears to have some sense that his and, even more, his wife's collaboration with the Nazis was a form of treason, even in a neutral country. At the very least, he cares for Kerttu enough to fear that a discovery of the plane in Lake Vittangjärvi will reveal her *de facto* war crimes. After Svarvare has mentioned his theory that the plane came down in one of the lakes near Kiruna (179), Izak suffers a heart attack: "Izak har rest sig upp till hälften vid köksbordet. Han är vit i ansiktet. Och så faller han. Handlöst. Slår huvudet i bordskivan på väg mot golvet" [Izak has stood half way up by the kitchen table. He is white in the face. And then he falls. All strength is gone from his hands. He hits his head on the table-edge on his way to the floor] (180). The seventeen-year-old Kerttu was horrified when she was forced to watch the murder of Viebke and the Danes (289). She has a sense that when disaster threatens her family, "det är straffet" [it's the punishment] (120) for her part in the resistance fighters' deaths. However, like Tore, she has hardened to the point where she is incapable of true remorse and murders Simon and Wilma to hide her secret past.

It is Hjalmar who comes closest to Gerd Weisler, perhaps even Job, in his need to change. He senses that the ravens are in some obscure way messengers from Wilma's spirit-world. His tormented conscience triggers nightmares in which Wilma's hand comes up through the ice of Lake Vittangjärvi and drags him down into the water (197). Here, Larsson may have had the last, nightmare, sequence of John Boorman's 1972 film, *Deliverance*, in mind.

Hjalmar's climactic moment of change comes from nature. On 30 April, Hjalmar, in Wilma's narration, is skiing through the forest when he is suddenly confronted by a bear which "reser sig på bakbenen framför honom" [stands on its backlegs in front of him] (257). Hjalmar remains unexpectedly calm:

Nu är det natta, tanker Hjalmar. Tre sekunder till. Och under tre sekunderna blir det helt stilla i Hjalmar. Det blir som det blir med det, tanker han om sin egen död. Gud tittar på Hjalmar genom björnens öga.
(257)

[This is the end, Hjalmar thinks. Three seconds to go. And during the three seconds Hjalmar feels quite calm inside. What must be, must be, he thinks about his own death. God is looking at Hjalmar through the eyes of a bear.]

The bear can be seen as Hjalmar's fetch, though he does not die. In dramatic terms, Hjalmar's encounter with the bear is his peripeteia. As he will tell Rebecka:

“Det var som något större än jag. Och då menar jag into björnen. Sedan visste jag bara att jag måste bekänna. Det måste ut ur mig. Lögnerna” [It was like something bigger than me. And by that I don’t mean the bear. Afterwards I only knew that I had to confess. It had to come out of me. The lies] (302). Guided by Wilma, her crows, and ravens, Hjalmar and Rebecka meet at Wilma’s grave (242). At first she is afraid, since she and Mella are now certain that Hjalmar and Tore Krekula committed all three murders. However, she begins to sense two things: that she need not fear him (242-43) and that he is on the verge of a confession. Later he does confess to the crimes by telephone, and Rebecka decides to visit him at his cottage to obtain a confession face to face.

She drives there, with two dogs on board: Vera, inherited from Arnason, and Krister Ericksson’s tracker dog, Tintin, which she is taking care of for the day. Unable to reach Mella directly by cellphone, she leaves a voice message about her destination (277) and is able to tell Ericksson directly that she is heading for Piilijärvi. Once at Hjalmar’s cottage, she bonds with him through a shared interest in the Bible. Hjalmar identifies with Jonah and reveals an understanding of his own life: “det är intressant at han måste dö innan han kan förändras” [it’s interesting that he has to die before he can change] (*Jonah 2:1-10, The Holy Bible*, 762; 282). Rebecka notices a bookmark in the Bible and a verse from *Job*, which Hjalmar has underlined: “Ack, att du ville gömma mig i dödsriket, fördölja mig, till dess din vrede hade upphört” [O ... that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past] (282). Hjalmar is now ready to tell the story of his and his family’s life and crimes.

In a cinematic denouement, Tore Krekula and the Kiruna police converge on Hjalmar’s cottage. Tore arrives first. Rebecka escapes the cottage and attempts to cross the river on frozen snowmobile tracks. Tore pursues her on his snowmobile, but the spring ice cannot take its weight, and he drowns in the river. Martinsson nearly drowns but swims beneath the ice and manages to clamber ashore. The whole sequence of events has been influenced by Wilma, her ravens, Tintin, and finally Hjalmar. In an almost humorous reversal of those stories in which the iconic Lassie saves her master, Rebecka saves Tintin by pushing her back onto the firmer ice. Hjalmar holds Tintin by her collar and comes to an understanding of his own life:

Han håller hunden och tänker att det har han. Det är det enda han har just nu. Att hunden i alla fall lever. Att den skall leva. Hunden gnäller. Det låter som att den gråter. Den lägger ner i snön och piper. Och då börjar Hjalmar också gråter. Han gråter över Wilma. Över Rebecka. Över Tore grater han och över Hjörleifur. Över sig själv. Över allt detta fett som sitter som i ett skruvstöd i snön.
(310)

[He holds the dog and thinks that he has secured her. She's the only thing he has now. The dog is alive. It will live. The dog whimpers. It sounds as if it's crying. It lies down in the snow and whines. And then Hjalmar begins to cry as well. He cries for Wilma. For Rebecka. He cries for Tore and for Hjörleifur. For himself. For this lump of fat sitting in the snow as if in a vise.]

He begins to sing a hymn about salvation. As the rest of the police arrive, Rebecka swims beneath the ice to safety. She has been saved by an uncanny transmission: from Wilma's spirit, through the ravens, perhaps Tintin, and her own success in obtaining Hjalmar's confession which also turns into his redemption.

The novel could have ended on this note of melodrama, but Larsson needs to resolve two other strands of the plot. First, in the author's finest piece of writing to date, Wilma narrates how her spirit comforts Anni, then how Hjalmar becomes a spiritual leader for his fellow prisoners and takes joy from new books on mathematics (320). Finally, Wilma is rowing across a lake. Her ravens "flygar med kraftiga vingslag bortåt det håll jag kom ifrån.⁶ Försvinner genom himlen. Jag rör. Jag är stark och obetvinglig som en älv och jag rör. Jag spjärnar emot med fötterna, drar årorna i långa tag. Jag kommer, tanker jag lyckligt. Nu kommer jag" [fly with powerful strokes of their wings towards the place from which I came. Disappear through the sky. I row. I am strong and irresistible like a river and I row. I press down hard with my feet, pull the oars with long strokes. I'm coming now, I think happily. I'm coming now] (321). This is a happy ending without sentimentality. Larsson's prose rises to catch Wilma's joyful sense of achievement and homecoming.

Other relationships are healed or changed towards the end of the novel. Mella has felt estranged from her husband, Robert, for a long time, but this estrangement ends the night before the death of Tore and Hjalmar's arrest (173). On 30 April, a professional divide is resolved between Mella and her colleague Sven-Erik Stålnacke: "Det tar några sekunder, men det hinner hända en del på de sekunderna. Anna-Maria ser på Sven-Erik. Sven-Erik ser på henne. Till slut säger han: - Det är som det är med den saken. Vi åker till Piilijärvi. Och allt det tunga rasar av Anna-Maria. Som snön från ett tak på våren" [It takes a few seconds, but a lot can happen in those seconds. Anna-Maria looks at Sven-Erik. Sven-Erik looks at her. Finally he says: - That matter's closed. We'll go to Piilijärvi. And a great weight falls from Anna Maria's shoulders. Like snow from a roof in spring] (294).

A dog, Tintin, is the go-between for Rebecka and Krister Ericksson. On Friday 17 April, Rebecka dog-sits Tintin for Ericksson while he tries out his new tracker dog, Roy. Tintin immediately takes to Rebecka in a way that surprises and pleases Ericksson on his return (54-55). Rebecka is still carrying on an affair by text-message with Wenngren, but she knows that she has found a kindred spirit in Krister. In the last section of the novel, which takes place on Sunday 3 May

(322-33), after the main plot has been resolved, Måns comes up from Stockholm to be with the still-shaken Rebecka. By now, however, Krister knows that a bond has developed between him and Rebecka, and as a sign of this bond he gives her one of Tintin's puppies in Måns Wenngren's presence (324-26). The gift sets up a TV drama series-style expectation. The reader will feel bound to buy Larsson's next novel, *Till offer ätt Molok* (2013) [*The Second Deadly Sin* 2014], first published in 2012, to follow this new romance.

With Wilma's other-worldly narrative voice and association with her ravens, both expertly woven into a realistic police procedural, Larsson has broken new ground in Nordic crime fiction. The strongly redemptive ending refutes a widely held opinion that the genre is "frequently gloomy, pensive and pessimistic in tone" (Nestingen and Arvas 2). Larsson has, moreover, a quietly dark sense of humour. The band plays "Ain't Misbehavin'" (Waller, Brooks, and Razaf) just before Kerttu betrays the resistance fighters (269). The important role played by Anna-Maria Mella and her colleagues in the successful investigation of three murders also contradicts Andrew Nestingen's opinion that "vigilante individualism" (180) has taken over the genre. There is a balance between empowered female law-enforcers—Martinsson and Mella—and their male colleagues: Erickson and Pohjanen. Whether or not Kiruna's harsh arctic landscape is "neo-romantic," the remote northern setting serves to release Larsson from dwelling on what could be called "the decline of Sweden" question to concentrate on what Henrik Ibsen called, with reference to *Rosmersholm*, "a story of human beings and human destinies" (1964, 265). Since the completion of Henning Mankell's Kurt Wallander series, with its vivid evocation of Skåne, other landscapes have been equally well evoked in Swedish mysteries, notably Mari Jungstedt's Gotland and Camilla Läckberg's Fjällbacka. There is, however, a strong case for Larsson's Kiruna region as the most memorable landscape in Swedish crime fiction.

No writer is above criticism, and Larsson's novels are in danger of becoming predictable in their resolutions. We know, for example, that a Larsson novel will end with Rebecka Martinsson confronting a known or suspected murderer *alone* and that she will somehow save herself or be saved in a cliff-hanging finale. How many popular films have just such an ending? However, Larsson's success in the creation of suspense, landscape, fully-realized characters capable of growth and change, a realistic depiction of police investigation, her engagement with justice in all her novels, and redemption in *Till dess din vrede upphör*, combine to make her a major practitioner of crime fiction in Sweden and beyond.

NOTES

1. See, for example, *The Confession* (Todd 2012).

2. Torneälven means “Thorn-river”; since the idea of Christian redemption is a factor in the novel, it is possible to see Wilma as a Christ-figure, though she does not seem to be religious herself.
3. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Swedish are my own.
4. A fetch is defined in *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. I, as the “apparition, double, or wraith of a living person,” that usually appears as an omen of death (173).
5. According to an online source, Venefica 2007, the Raven in Native American Indian lore, is “a creature of metamorphosis, and symbolizes change/transformation.” The bird “is also a keeper of secrets, and can assist us in determining answers to our ‘hidden’ thoughts. Areas in our lives that we are unwilling to face, or secrets we keep that harm us—the Raven can help us expose the truth behind these (often distorted) secrets and wing us back to health and harmony.” This concept of the Raven is so apposite to Larsson’s novel that it needs to be recorded, even if only as an analogy.
6. Although this might suggest a Christian heaven in the sky, I think it more likely that the two ravens are an allusion to Wotan’s Huginn and Muninn. At the end of Richard Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* [*The Twilight of the Gods*], Brünnhilde tells these birds to fly home to Wotan in Walhall. The stage directions read: “Two ravens fly up from the rocks on the shore and disappear in the background” (Wagner 327). Brünnhilde then rides Siegfried’s horse Grane onto his funeral pyre in an ecstatic *Liebestod*. Wilma’s rowing towards a reunion with Simon in some kind of afterlife and the disappearance of her ravens into the sky both suggest a parallel with Wagner’s scene. This parallel is not necessarily weakened by the fact that Wilma is rowing a boat and not riding a horse. In *The Age of the Vikings*, Anders Winroth says, with reference to Gotland’s picture stones and Viking ship burials: “It is at least possible that people of the Viking Age imagined that one had to take a ship to get to Valhalla... The belief that the way to Valhalla went over the sea would explain why so many Viking Age people were buried in ships” (234).

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