

## MAGNUS LJUNGGREN

(October 25, 1942 – June 19, 2022)

In June 2022, a sudden heart attack ended the life of the renowned Swedish literary scholar, Professor Magnus Ljunggren, putting an end to his lifelong dedication to Russian literature and thought.

Like many other Swedish Slavists, Ljunggren learned Russian at the Armed Forces Language School in Uppsala. In the sixties he worked as a journalist for Swedish newspapers and magazines, often writing outspokenly about his meetings with Soviet writers who visited Stockholm. Among these writers were Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Anatoly Sofronov, Yevgeny Dolmatovsky, Ilya Ehrenburg and Bulat Okudzhava. On his visits to the Soviet Union, he met and interviewed, among others, Joseph Brodsky, Viktor Shklovsky, Nikolai Khardzhiev, Lev Kopelev, Lydia Chukovskaya, Marietta Shaginyan, Anastasiia Tsvetaeva and Konstantin Azadovsky. In Paris he met Boris Zaitsev, Irina Odoevtseva, Viktor Nekrasov and Alexander Zinoviev, just to name a few.

Gradually, Magnus Ljunggren started to follow the struggle of Russian dissidents for democracy and human rights. Together with Lars Erik Blomqvist, he compiled a volume, *Sovjet-protest! Den nya ryska oppositionen i dokument* (Stockholm 1969), which included central documents showing the growing number of protest actions against the Soviet regime. One result of his articles about the trials and imprisonment of dissidents was that he was denied a visa to the Soviet Union for a period of five years.

As a student at the Slavic department at the Stockholm University, Ljunggren wrote his licentiate thesis in 1968 about allusions in Andrey Bely's novel *Petersburg*. An influential force behind the choice of theme was the highly respected Professor Nils-Åke Nilsson. A doctoral dissertation followed in 1982. Four years later, he was awarded a lectureship in Russian language and literature at the University of Gothenburg. There he was promoted to a full Professor in Russian "with a specialization in Literature" in 2002. When Ljunggren retired in 2009, he was presented with a Festschrift, *Литература как миропонимание. Literature as World View*.

Professor Magnus Ljunggren was an excellent teacher and supervisor who was much loved by his students. His lectures were extremely well prepared, and perfect in both form and content. His love for Russian literature and culture was transmitted in full to his audiences.

Magnus and his wife, Kazimiera Ingdahl, who passed away in 2017, worked together both in Slavistics and in their pursuit to combat anti-semitism in Russia, Poland and Sweden. During his final years, he worked with the publications of his wife's scholarly projects concerning the preserved diaries of Jewish children from the Polish ghettos in the Second World War. He was relentless in bringing to light the dark past of public figures who had supported different Eastern European dictatorships through words or deeds during the post-war period.

At the early stage of his career, Ljunggren's scholarly interest in Russian literature focused on the Symbolist writer Andrey Bely. His doctoral thesis *The Dream of Rebirth: A Study of Andrej Belyj's novel 'Petersburg'* was an attempt to reconstruct the genesis of the novel up to its last version. A Freudian approach was used to uncover the autobiographical subtext of the novel with an emphasis on the author's split personality and his relationship with his father. In addition to this, Rudolf Steiner's influence was scrutinized.

Magnus Ljunggren consolidated his position as a leading Bely scholar with the volume *Twelve Essays on Andrej Bely's Petersburg* (Gothenburg, 2009). In these essays the novel is seen as dealing with the collapse of Russian Symbolism but also with the author's emotional crises. Nietzsche, Freud and Steiner are repeatedly drawn upon, as well as Russian classics from Pushkin and Dostoevsky to Bely's Symbolist colleagues. Ljunggren's plenitude of approaches also included a discussion of *Petersburg* as an antisemitic novel.

Through Bely and his novel *Petersburg*, Ljunggren became interested in the introduction of psychiatry into Russian cultural circles, an interest that resulted in the volume *Poetry and Psychiatry: Essays on Early Twentieth Century Russian Symbolist Culture* (Brighton, 2012). Here Bely shows how the Symbolist dream of a fundamental transformation of life in Russia and the feeling of being on the threshold of an apocalyptic upheaval led to a collision between the forebod-

ings of the Symbolists and the political reality. This intellectual turbulence created a need for influential new alternatives, one of which was psychoanalysis.

Emilii Medtner, Russian publicist, critic and editor, is a name that often crops up in connection with Ljunggren's research on Bely. In *The Russian Mephisto: A Study of the Life and Work of Emilii Medtner* (Stockholm, 1994), a book which also appeared in Russian translation, Medtner is presented as an important intermediary between Russian and German culture. One of these meeting points, shown by Medtner, was the kinship between Bely's brand of Symbolism and the analytical psychology of Carl Gustav Jung. Ljunggren also focused upon Medtner's later position as a "prefascist", stressing the publicist's ideas of race and his admiration for Mussolini and Hitler. The book was based upon unpublished material from Russian and American archives, but also upon sources received through personal contacts with Medtner's relatives.

An important project for Ljunggren was the compilation of a bibliography, *Andrej Belyj's Petersburg: 1000 Monographs, Articles and Commentaries on Andrej Belyj's Novel*, realized together with Hans Åkerström. The fourth and last edition from 2020 includes an impressive number of one thousand titles, of which over forty were written by Magnus Ljunggren himself.

Small vignettes on Russian cultural history, most of them originally published in *Svenska Dagbladet* were collected in the volume *Rysk kulturmosaik. 200 miniatyrer 1988–2018* (Stockholm, 2018). A special interest is taken in the cultural contacts between Sweden and Russia, including the theme of Russian writers and the Noble Prize in Literature. In *Tjugo ryska klassiker* (Stockholm, 2021), Ljunggren gave his personal reading of Russian classics, from Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* to Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*. As a kind of motto, Ljunggren states in the foreword: "Out of the immense Russian suffering an almost unsurpassed literature is born."

A collection of letters, compiled and edited by Ljunggren, makes up the volume *"My Dear, Close and Distant Friend": Nina Berberova's Letters to Sergej Rittenberg (1947–1975)*, published in 2020. Berberova's letters from a period of three decades, offer fascinating glimpses into Russian émigré life.

Another work on Ljunggren's relationship with Russia is *Fifty-Five Years with Russia* (2016), an autobiography of sorts. He characterizes Russia as something of a second native country to him, with shifting periods of hope and disillusion. His struggle against Russian dictatorship continued tirelessly during the Putin era, and in one of his last articles he commented on the Putin's ideological thinking in relation to Russia's war against Ukraine.

Given the present time, it is worth closing with Magnus Ljunggren's ultimately optimistic words, written in 2016: "Just now, things seem gloomier than they have for a long time. Experience has taught me, however, that we must never give up – there is always another Russia that offers resistance."

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