

Linnaeus 1907

Oscar Levertin and the Re-invention of Carl Linnaeus as Ecological Subject

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De som ännu våga kalla [Linné] den torre systematikern hava icke funnit mästaren där han skall sökas: i hans härliga resor, hans tal, brev och vissa avhandlingar. I resorna ser han över hela naturen i dess tre riken, stenarnas, växternas och djurens; och han behandlade dem som levande varelser....

— Strindberg, *En blå bok* 335¹

THE BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION of Carl Linnaeus's birth in May 1907 was an unprecedented event in Sweden.² The great eighteenth-century naturalist was celebrated with parades, processions, publications, speeches, and various forms of commemoration throughout Sweden but most particularly with a great *Linnéfest* in Uppsala. In these celebrations, Linnaeus was quite naturally praised for his contributions to science, but even more significantly, they also began to draw attention to his exploration and documentation of the Swedish nation and praised him for his sensitive and observant literary representations of indigenous Swedish nature. The great irony of the commemoration was that the Carl Linnaeus celebrated in 1907—the man lauded for changing how Swedes saw nature and themselves—bore, in many respects, scarce resemblance to the one laid to rest 129 years before.

1. (Those who still dare to call [Linnaeus] the dry systematist have not found the master where he should be found: in his magnificent travels, his lectures, letters and certain dissertations. In his travel writing he looks out over the whole of nature in its three kingdoms, minerals, plants, and animals; and he dealt with them as if they were living beings....) All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

2. Carl Linnaeus changed his name to Carl von Linné in 1762 when he was ennobled. In Swedish he is still known as Carl von Linné, but, following standard English usage, I will refer to him throughout as Carl Linnaeus.

From the final years of his life until the renaissance of interest in his work at the turn of the twentieth century, Linnaeus's image underwent a significant transformation in his native Sweden, but this transformation says far more about changes in Swedish culture than about Linnaeus himself. The 1907 festivities coincided with a rapidly changing conception of the human relationship to nature in European culture generally and in Sweden in particular.

Linnaeus was without question a public figure of considerable notoriety and popularity both at home and abroad during his lifetime, but enthusiasm in Sweden for Linnaeus and his work dropped off sharply in his final years and especially over the course of the century after his death. The reasons for the initial decline in Linnaeus's general popularity after such a meteoric career are complex but arguably come down to a combination of changes in prevailing scientific paradigms, a shift in Sweden's own political climate, key failures in some of Linnaeus's own scientific work, and the rise of romanticism. While his international reputation focused mainly on his work with the systemization and naming of nature, in Sweden Linnaeus was also associated with attempts to use natural knowledge to bolster the nation's struggling economy. Lisbeth Koerner has insightfully argued that Linnaeus's own sense of nationalism combined with his cameral and mercantilist economic philosophy to influence significantly his scientific theories and experiments.³ The failure of many of Linnaeus's projects motivated by conservative nationalist ideologies—such as cultivating pearls in Norrland, raising silkworms in Skåne, growing tea plants in Uppsala, and planting rice in Finland—all contributed, along with fundamental changes within the development of science more broadly, to the decline of Linnaeus's popularity in many quarters toward the end of his life.

After his death, the memory of Linnaeus's economic, political, and scientific failures combined with a more general cultural backlash against the Enlightenment's faith in logic and order to tarnish further Linnaeus's reputation. The imposition of a systematic organization onto the natural world and the disembodied, objective transparency of vision suggested by seminal works like *Systema Naturae* (1st ed. 1735) were still important to scientific discourse but seemed out of step with popular audiences more interested in the romantic fixation on sub-

3. For more on Linnaeus and his failed mercantilist projects see Koerner, "Linnaeus's Floral Transplants" as well as Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation*.

jectivity, experience, and emotion. Only when events like the failure to force tropical crops to grow in Sweden had been forgotten, could Linnaeus be remembered not as the detached, enlightened, rationalist bending natural forces to his will but as an embodied observer willing to engage nature on its own terms.

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, however, Linnaeus's image in Sweden underwent a significant change led by the dramatic changes to Swedish society. Rapid industrialization and burgeoning urbanization inspired nostalgic longings for the authenticity associated with indigenous nature and folk cultures. But while the proximity of the naïve, rural peasant to nature was idealized as an authentic and grounded experience, the deprivations often associated with that condition were hardly enviable. Linnaeus emerged within cultural memory as a figure who could mediate these conflicted feelings about nature. He represented an engagement with the natural environment that, on the one hand, was not naïve but sophisticated, rational (marked by his development of abstract organizations and systems in his scientific writings) while, on the other hand, he also seemed to enjoy a privileged proximity by virtue of his detailed, embodied observation evidenced most plainly in his less commonly known travel writings and essays.

This image of Linnaeus as a mediating figure was fostered, perhaps more than other factors, by the rediscovery of his travel writings and, most particularly, by the 1889 publication (for the first time in Swedish) of *Iter Lapponicum* or *Lappländska resan* [Lapland Journey].⁴ *Lappländska resan* was the travel journal kept by the twenty-five-year-old Linnaeus as he journeyed through Sweden's remote northern provinces in 1732 in order to see first hand and document the details of the "three kingdoms

4. The title, *Iter Lapponicum*, comes from the original manuscript journal's title page written in Latin. With the exception of the title page and individual phrases scattered through out the text, the rest of the journal is in Swedish and hence the account in Sweden is more commonly referred to by the Swedish name, *Lappländska resan* or *Lapplands resa* [Lapland Journey]. This work was curiously first published not in its original Swedish, but in English translation under the title *Tour in Lapland* in 1811 by James Edward Smith who had purchased the rights to the manuscript (as well as the rest of Linnaeus's collection) in 1784. In 1889, when the journal was finally published in Swedish in an edition prepared by Ewald Åhring, it appeared under the Latin title although later editions were published under the Swedish. The sheer number of different editions since the 1889 edition—1913, 1957, 1969, and 2003—attest to the work's popularity. For a complete description of the journal manuscript and overview of its publication history see Sigurd Fries's introduction to the 2003 critical edition.

of nature” and the traditions and customs of the region’s inhabitants. The work was written mostly in Swedish (with liberal sprinklings of Latin words and phrases) during the course of the events it describes and was sometimes recorded, quite literally, while in the horse’s saddle making already poor handwriting at times almost illegible. Linnaeus most likely never intended to make the journal public in its recorded form and possibly intended to use these notes to publish some type of more organized depiction of the region, but this reworking of the material never happened.

When it was finally published in Swedish over 150 years later, it helped initiate an extensive reconsideration of Linnaeus’s reputation as a dry, rational systematist because of the plain, vivid, and straightforward style he used to describe the indigenous yet exotic landscape. The prose in *Lappländska resan* seemed to be almost as rough-hewn as the pristine wilderness landscape it described and stood in stark contrast to the overly-structured and bedecked works of other eighteenth-century literary figures in Sweden. The immediacy of the unaffected, unpolished style enacted the lack of artifice associated with wild landscapes and fed into national romantic interest in embodiment and experience as well as notions of originality and natural authenticity.⁵

Whereas up to this point Linnaeus had been primarily remembered for his contributions to the scientific systemization and naming of nature, this revival of interest in Linnaeus leading up to the bicentennial celebration of his birth drew attention to other dimensions of his work and particularly to his literary sensibilities inviting comparisons for the first time between him and other notables from the Swedish eighteenth century such as Dalin and Bellman. The re-invention of Linnaeus was, thus, also a reinsertion of Linnaeus into literary history allowing him to become the artistic forefather for the generation that rediscovered him and national romantic claims regarding Swedish culture’s privileged relationship to nature took on a historical dimension. After having experienced a century of relative obscurity, Sweden’s

5. Interest in Linnaeus’s account of his journey to the North piqued curiosity in his other travel writings as well which were reissued in new editions. In addition to the journey to Lapland, these travel accounts include journeys to Dalarna (1734, account first published in 1889), to Öland and Gotland (1741, account first published 1745), Västmanland (1746, account first published 1747), and Skåne (1749, account first published 1751).

great eighteenth-century naturalist had returned, re-fashioned to meet the cultural demands of a new age.



In 1906, an important (albeit unfinished) biography of Linnaeus, *Carl von Linné: Några kapitel ur ett oafslutat arbete* [Carl Linnaeus: Several Chapters Out of an Unfinished Work], was published just months before the eagerly anticipated bicentennial celebrations. It was by no means the first Linnaeus biography to be written and certainly not the most exhaustive. Yet even despite its fragmentary nature and later criticism about its lack of original insight, this short Linnaeus biography by Oscar Levertin quickly assumed and has maintained to this day the distinction of being one of the defining documents of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century re-evaluation of Linnaeus as well as one of the key texts articulating what has since come to be known in Swedish literature as the Linnean Tradition.⁶ Over twenty years after Levertin's Linnaeus biography was published, critic C. V. Jacobowsky reflected upon the historical significance of the work describing it as "en vattendelare på den svenska Linnélitteraturens vidsträckta marker" (*Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* 16 May 1929) [a watershed on the plains of Swedish Linnaeus literature]. The significance of the work, according to Jacobowsky is that it invited the reconsideration of Linnaeus "som människa, som historisk person, som författare eller vad som helst utom [som] den store naturvetenskapsman" [Linnaeus as a person, historical figure, author or whatever else aside from Linnaeus as scientist]. The distinction of Levertin's biography was that it did not concern itself with Linnaeus's scientific achievements, but focused instead on Linnaeus's own subjectivity and fostered the image of Linnaeus as a creative artist.

Never in his own generation had Linnaeus been considered a literary figure or artist. He seemed content with his scientific work and his

6. From as early as the mid-1890s, Levertin seems to have had plans for a presentation of Linnaeus and his work. During the first years of the 1900s, Levertin began work in earnest on the project and published several essays and presented numerous lecture series on Linnaeus. His Linnaeus biography was still not finished when he died suddenly in September 1906, but the fragmentary chapters from the unfinished project were published posthumously that same year in time for the bicentennial celebration.

speech colored by a provincial Småland accent. In the introduction to his *Öländska resa* [Öland Journey], he goes so far as to excuse his plain writing style and hopes that it will not be too harshly judged saying, "Skrivarten är mycket enfaldig, varför jag torde bliva hårt ansedd av många Plinii näktergalar. Språket pryder en vetenskap som kläderna kroppen, den som intet själv kan hedra kläderna, måste låta dem hedra sig" (12-3) [This kind of writing is very simple, as such I will be harshly judged by many of Pliny's nightingales. The language dresses a science as clothes the body. He who cannot honor the clothes himself, must let them honor themselves].

Although Levertin is credited with first presenting the argument for Linnaeus's place in Swedish *literary* history—a position Linnaeus would never have imagined for himself—it seems clear that Levertin did not accomplish this re-evaluation single handedly.⁷ His reappraisal of Linnaeus was actually the culmination of the much more sweeping reevaluation of this historical figure starting in the latter years of the nineteenth century. Decades before Levertin published his Linnaeus biography, for instance, Peter Wieselgren in his *Sveriges sköna litteratur* had already praised him as one of the best prose writers of the eighteenth century. But the fact that subsequent literary historians have almost exclusively taken their lead on Linnaeus's stylistic accomplishments from Levertin and not Wieselgren or others suggests this particular biography's influence and the degree to which Levertin's analysis of Linnaeus struck a resonant chord with his times.⁸

My subsequent focus on Levertin's reading of Linnaeus is not because Levertin's reading should be considered originary or definitive, but rather because his work on Linnaeus marks so well a particular historical moment. Through his depiction of Linnaeus as an artist and literary figure, Levertin counters the image of Linnaeus as a disembodied rationalist and presents him as an embodied and embedded subject. Different from other contemporary images of Linnaeus as *blomsterkonungen* [the king of flowers], Levertin presents Linnaeus as what might be termed an ecological subject, an embodied subject clearly grounded in and integrated with his immediate surroundings. The image of Linnaeus in the fragmentary chapters of Levertin's biography is contradictory at

7. Jacobowski recognizes this and explores other possible sources as well as Hagberg (74-9).

8. See also Dixelius 11-2.

best, but these contradictions point to important currents in Swedish culture's own historical engagement and use of the natural environment to represent evolving notions of collective and individual identity. Linnaeus's subjectivity and relationship with his environment (and not his science) is the focus of the investigation. By concentrating on the subjectivity of Linnaeus as embodied observer, Levertin explores the dynamics of observation and representation by erasing boundaries between inside and outside, subject and object, the knowable and the unknowable, and self and other. His representation of Linnaeus strives for a critical thickness that is less interested in *what* Linnaeus saw than in *how* he saw and wrote about it.

Levertin's interest in the Linnean travel writings, most especially *Lappländska resan*, presents itself, first and foremost, as an articulation of the need to close the gap between what Levertin saw as the contemporary subject's estranged position and that subject's natural, authentic, and embodied roots. The journey the accounts provide through the landscape was, for Levertin, metaphorically also a nostalgic journey backward in time that returns the contemporary reader to a primitive, more authentic, undivided, and unmediated unity imagined and projected onto the past. The more remote Linnaeus's destination in the wilderness, the further back and authentic the experience promised to be. Far-flung, wild nature and the people inhabiting it were idealized as exemplifying the point of origin after which man became divided and displaced. This highly romantic valorization of the pre-modern folk in nature—"Rousseauism före Rousseau" (Levertin, *Linné* 52) [Rousseauism before Rousseau]⁹ is typical of Levertin's association with national romanticism and he writes,

I denna lappska resa, liksom i dess syskonverk, är naturen för första gången i svensk litteratur uppfattad som en värld för sig, motsatt civilisationens, en värld, där människotillvaron med ännu osliten navelsträng hängde fast vid jordens moderssköte och där behovens enkelhet skapade en existens, lyckligare och sundare än kulturens och städernas. (52)

9. Rousseau did not begin to publish his theories on nature until seventeen years after Linnaeus's journey to Lapland. He was, however, familiar with Linnaeus and in September 1771 Rousseau sent a flattering letter to Linnaeus concluding exuberantly, "je vous lis, je vous étudie, je vous médite, je vous honore et vous aime de tout mon cœur. J.J. Rousseau" (Rousseau 38:267; letter to Carl Linnaeus 21 September 1771) [I read you, I study you, I meditate upon you, I honor you and love you with all my heart. J.J. Rousseau].

(In this Lapland journey, as in its companion works, nature is, for the first time in Swedish literature, conceived as a world of its own, opposite that of civilization, a world where human existence with a still unsevered umbilical cord clung to the earth's maternal womb and where necessity's simplicity created an existence, happier and healthier than that of culture and the cities.)

Levertin's claim, that Linnaeus's depictions of Norrland (and Sweden) are the first time that Sweden is depicted as its own world is, in essence, claiming that it is the first time Swedish landscape is seen as unique and valuable in its own right and not as an imperfect instantiation of a southern European, Arcadian ideal. At the same time, Linnaeus himself is made into a modern, divided subject suffering from the same weariness of civilization and progress as Levertin's own *fin-de-siècle* Swedish culture. Linnaeus's remote Lapland was diametrically opposed to civilization which had fractured man's primal, originary unity. Lapland lay "bortom kulturens vändkrets" (Levertin *Linné*, 53) [beyond the latitudes of culture] and was "civilisationens motpol" [the antithesis of civilization]. Consequently, Linnaeus looked upon Lapland's indigenous inhabitants, the Sámi, "med samma avundsjuka som på naturens och mänsklighetens flydda barndom eller—kanske rättare och för Linné mer betecknande—med natursonens hemlängtan till det bygdeliv, varifrån han stammade och ur vars jord hans väsens källor runno" (53–4) [with the same jealousy as (he did) upon nature's and mankind's vanished childhood or—perhaps for Linnaeus more significant and to the point—with the longing of a son of nature for the rural life from whence he came and the earth from which the sources of his being flowed].¹⁰ In this way, Levertin manages to make Linnaeus a mouthpiece for national romanticism and all Linnaeus's writings an articulation of contemporary longings for an authentic, grounded existence in an imagined, unique natural landscape.

But Levertin is not simply rehashing contemporary views. The unique perspective of his biography, even within the broader context

10. As one might imagine, Linnaeus's depiction of the Sámi is the matter of some contemporary debate. Levertin and others claim, perhaps with some justification, that Linnaeus's portrayals of the Sámi were remarkably free from the degrading biases of other contemporary accounts. Because of Linnaeus's incredibly diverse interests, they are remarkable examples of early cultural ethnography. Be this as it may, these descriptions are hardly unbiased portrayals of the people and culture. See, for example, Wiklund, "Linné och lapparna" and Koerner, especially her chapter "The Lapp is our Teacher" 56–81.

of the national romantic reinvigoration of Linnaeus at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, is illustrated by a strikingly different Linnaeus biography published just three years earlier in 1903. While Levertin's work is not (and never aspired to be) the definitive work on Linnaeus, this intention was precisely the goal of Thore Magnus Fries's monumental two-volume work entitled *Linné*. Fries's work was the result of his life-long interest in Linnaeus, and it fed as well into the growing anticipation for the 1907 bicentennial celebration of Linnaeus's birth. But from today's perspective, Fries's exhaustive efforts were ultimately not as influential for the cultural reevaluation of Linnaeus as was Levertin's short, fragmentary book. Fries, a scientist by profession born in 1832, was clearly part of a different generation than Levertin. While he was a respected naturalist in his own right (still considered today to be the father of arctic lichenology), his well-researched Linnaeus biography reflects a mid-nineteenth century view of Linnaeus as a scientist that depends on a positivistic, historical approach with complete faith in the historian's ability to catalog and provide an accurate overview. Levertin's biographical sketch, in contrast, engages a much more modern interest in perspective, re-evaluating psychology, subjective identity, and the individual's relationship to his/her environment, all presented with Levertin's own artistic flair, that in certain parts reads like a historical novel.

Levertin clearly stated his intentions and outlined his decidedly different approach to writing a Linnean biography in 1896—seven years before Fries's work appeared—in an essay on Linnaeus's contemporary, Johan Wellander. Very much in the neo-romantic spirit of the times (and not entirely unlike Fries), Levertin describes Linnaeus there as “den store geniale grammatikern och lexikografen, som först lät [naturens] språk förstås, så man kunde läsa dess ord som i en öppen bok” (Levertin, *Samlade skrifter* 100) [the very brilliant grammarian and lexicographer who first allowed the language of nature to be understood so that one could read its words as if out of an open book]. In this view, Levertin was in step with many of his Swedish contemporaries who, despite international scientific criticism like that of German scientist Julius Sachs, praised Linnaeus for his significant contributions to botany, nomenclature, zoology, mineralogy, medicine, etc. But, in contrast to Fries and these other commentators, Linnaeus's scientific work was ultimately much less important to Levertin. Levertin wrote, “Om Linnés betydelse i alla dessa [vetenskapliga] hänseenden finnas många

mer eller mindre uttömmande skildringar. Hvad som däremot än är ogjordt, är en psykologisk analys af den store mannens åskådning och väsen" (*Samlade skrifter* 100)¹¹ [There are many more or less exhaustive descriptions of Linnaeus's significance to all of these (scientific) concerns. What, in contrast, has still not been done is a psychological analysis of this great man's outlook and character]. Levertin clearly does not reject the importance of such studies, but by exploring the psychology, outlook, and character of Linnaeus, he hoped, to explore a different dimension of the man and his work that would account for "hvarför han med sina klassificerande och teleologiska synpunkter understundom blef mer naturbeskrifvare än naturvetenskapsman.... En analys av hans väsen skulle vidare låta oss fatta, ur hvilka källor den förtrollande friskheten kom, som gör Linné, den store systematikern, till den minst torra af vetenskapsmän" (*Samlade skrifter* 101) [why he with his classifying and teleological views occasionally became more a describer of nature than natural scientist.... An analysis of his character would furthermore allow us to grasp from which sources the spellbinding freshness came that makes Linnaeus, the great systematist, the least dry of all scientists].

Whereas most of the previously published interest in Linnaeus related itself to his work on scientific description that seemed to valorize detachment, objectivity, and transparency, Levertin—without denying this dimension of Linnaeus's work—operates from another perspective reading Linnaeus's own subjectivity and engagement with his environments back into the texts. Linnaeus, according to Levertin, was "den mest omedelbara och subjektiva af människor. Hvarje händelse i hans lif, stor eller liten, lycklig eller olycklig, lär oss hur lidelsefullt hans af utomordentligt rörliga och brännbara ämnen danade själ upptog alla intryck" (Levertin qtd. in Beskow 95) [the most immediate and subjective of men. Every incident in his life, large or small, happy or unhappy, teaches us how passionately his soul, formed by exceedingly multifaceted and controversial subjects, took in all impressions]. Rather than focus on the structures and systems of Linnean science or scientific

11. Levertin, in a footnote, references here several of the early romantic biographical sketches of Linnaeus by C. A. Agardh and Elias Fries as well as the work of the first generation of national romantic biographers to rediscover Linnaeus around 1878 including, among others, Th. M. Fries.

accomplishments, as does Fries, Levertin attempts to unearth Linnaeus's subjective experience.

Levertin's interest in Linnaeus as a subject represents a break from how Linnaeus had been approached previously and was an ideal platform from which to launch an analysis of Linnean style. The reason these subjective and stylistic elements had not been dealt with earlier is that this type of study runs contrary to the elements of Linnaeus's work that made up his scientific reputation, a reputation based on the scientist's transparency and impartiality. Ironically, it may have well been the tarnish on that reputation that opened the door for such a reading. To motivate his reading of Linnaeus, Levertin had to downplay the assumed objectivity and transparency at the core of Linnaeus's famous systematic classifications and scientific nomenclature in order to draw out a reading of a more embodied, opaque observing subject. But even though Levertin had to read against the popular memory of Linnaeus as organizer and systematist, he did not ignore this image completely, nor does his study seek completely to overturn it. After all, it was the persistence of this reputation and Linnaeus's ability to intuit connections in the "chaotic" natural world and to see links leading to overarching ordering systems that had instant appeal for this late-nineteenth-century generation obsessed with defining, mapping, and cataloging the boundaries, resources, qualities, and character of the nation and Swedishness.

Levertin too was a significant participant in these efforts to define Swedishness and was interested in what Linnaeus did to delineate the Swedish nation. He did not question Linnaeus historical role as "den svenska naturens och bygdens förste systematiska skildrare och tolk" (*Linné* 58) [the first systematic describer and interpreter of the Swedish nature and countryside] and further wrote that "ur hans reseböcker skulle utan svårighet kunna sammanställas en aforistisk skildring av Svea Rikes och dess olika landskaps utseende och väsen" (58) [from his travel books, one could, without difficulty, compile an aphoristic depiction of the appearance and character of the Swedish Kingdom and its different landscapes].¹² The presumption that Linnaeus's descriptions

12. *Landskap* here designates the different cultural regions of Sweden that sometimes, but not always, also established administrative boundaries. In this usage, it is an imprecise cognate with the English word, *landscape*, as it includes not just the representable nature of a region but also its social, cultural and historical context as well.

have a systematic quality to them, even in the travel writing, harkens back to his scientific reputation as systematist and to the paradigm that makes such a position possible.

Levertin was, in fact, interested in Linnaeus as systematist, but he also sought to modify what such a perspective entails. The imagined distance of such a rational, disembodied observer, while offering the advantage of perspective, seemed too removed and detached in a time when embodiment and place were taking on added significance. What clearly intrigued Levertin was a type of bifurcated vision he saw at work in Linnaeus that was broad enough to see a bigger picture (be it all of the kingdoms of nature or the nation of Sweden), but simultaneously absolutely committed to the individual and particular details of an embodied, subjective experience. Levertin attributes the success of Linnaeus in bridging these two modes of vision, the macroscopic and the microscopic, to the richness and incredible multiplicity of his observations. He writes,

Det, som i den lappska resan, liksom i Linnés senare reseböcker, först väcker läsarens häpnad, är säkerligen iakttagelsernas och synpunkternas underbara mångfald. Det är icke blott naturvetenskapliga idéer och hugskott, som han strör kring sig med en slösares sorglöshet, hans öga tyckes allestädes närvarande, hans tanke ständigt frågande och förklarande. Han iakttagit hur violerna sluta kalkarna för regnet, hur boskapen undviker giftiga örter, sågskärarens bleka hy i röken från vattenfallet, runstenen vid vägen.... Han låter växtnamn och bygdesägner skänka landskapen levande tungomål. Han undersöker det varaktigaste av allt, jordens byggnad och struktur, men glömmet ej heller ögonblickets flyktiga konstellationer på dess yta. (51-2)

(What first strikes the reader with surprise in the Lapland journey, as in Linnaeus's later travel books, is certainly the wonderful multiplicity of observations and perspectives. It is not just scientific ideas and fancy that he throws around with the carelessness of a spendthrift. He observes how violets close their cups in the rain, how livestock avoid poisonous plants, the saw mill hand's pale complexion in the waterfall's mist, the rune stone by the road.... He lets the names of plants and stories from the villages give the landscape a living language. He investigates the most enduring of everything, the make up and structure of the earth, but at the same time does not forget the momentary, fleeting constellations on its surface.)

Here Levertin articulates the omnipresence of Linnaeus's empathetic eye that sees everything including the very structure of the earth, but not at the expense of the delicate and almost imperceptible nuances of

fleeting constellations that touch the senses of the entrenched observer. Linnaeus's own embodiment and first-hand experience is not sacrificed for the abstracted larger picture.

Because Linnaeus's reputation at the time of Levertin was often associated with his work as objective systematist, Levertin pays much less attention to developing this idea than he does to counterbalancing it with an emphasis on Linnaeus's subjectivity. To do so Levertin quite explicitly chose not to concentrate on Linnaeus's voluminous scientific writing, but instead to focus heavily on Linnaeus's travel accounts. Rather than understanding this methodological choice simply as one-sided, it should be conceived as a powerful expression of Levertin's own cultural moment that he was willing (and felt able) to bracket so many other concerns in order to focus on the texts that, more than any others, articulate the placement and experience of the subject in direct and intimate contact with nature and the landscape.¹³

This sense of Linnaeus's proximity to the landscape incorporated into his travel writing is exactly what, for Levertin, distinguished him from his predecessors (including his mentor Olof Rudbeck the younger). Levertin declares the Linnean travel accounts (and most especially *Lappländska resan*) to be as revolutionary "som när friluftsmålaren flyttade sin blick från ateliern mitt ut i soljuset.... Hos [Linné] är allt åskådligt, sakligt, levande, iakttagelserna gripna och upptecknade i flykten, intrycken ännu i dag lika friska och strålande, som de mötte Linnés hänryckta ögon och lyriska fantasi" (*Linné* 50) [as when the *plein-air* painter shifted his gaze from the studio out into the full sunlight.... In Linnaeus's work, everything is clearly visible, grounded in fact, living, the observations captured and recorded on the run, the impressions still as fresh and radiant today as when they met Linnaeus's captivated eyes and lyrical fantasy]. Although Linnaeus was not the first to travel around Sweden and record his experiences, the significance of what he accomplished, according to Levertin, makes him the founder of the art of Swedish travel writing (49) and opens a uniquely subjective window into how he personally experienced and represented the natural world.

13. In addition to his focus on the Linnean travel accounts, Levertin's manuscript also include a significant analysis of a collection of aphorism and anecdotes Linnaeus privately collected exclusively for his son entitled *Nemesis Divina*. Although the work does not have a focus on nature and landscape as the travel writing, I see it similarly portraying the individual as being embedded within a complex network of meaning.

Before moving into more detail about Levertin's portrayal of Linnaeus's subjectivity, however, it is important to consider briefly how Levertin goes about accomplishing his ends. His approach was unique, and at times he even attempted to enact the exact theoretical point he wished to underscore regarding Linnaeus. To appreciate the uniqueness of Levertin's style, one need only consider how Levertin's biography begins in contrast to Fries's of just three years earlier. Fries's first chapter opens with a review of Linnaeus's genealogy complete with the appropriate names, dates, and the suspected source of the Linnaeus family name. Levertin's work, however, begins with a chapter entitled "Stenbrohult," which is largely composed of *miljöskildringar*¹⁴ such as this passage which opens the first chapter:

Klockan ett på natten mellan söndagen den tolfte och måndagen den trettonde maj (den 22–23 nya stilen) år 1707 lade den äldsta av de kloka hustrur från grannbygden, som biträtt fru Christina Broderonia vid hennes livsfarliga barnsbörd, en förstfödd son i armarna på hennes man, komminister Nils Linnaeus. Högtidligt böjde den unge prästen sitt huvud mot pilten, log mot de bruna ögonen, i vilka han igenkände sina egna, och lade åter försiktigt ner barnet i nattstugans stora inbyggda säng bredvid den bleka, brutna modern. (11)

(At one o'clock in the morning between Sunday the twelfth and Monday the thirteenth of May [the 22–23 new style] year 1707, the oldest of the midwives from the neighboring village who had attended Mrs. Christina Broderonia during her life-threatening delivery placed a first-born son in the arms of the mother's husband, Rector Nils Linnaeus. Solemnly the young priest bowed his head toward the lad, smiled at the brown eyes in which he recognized his own, and laid the child carefully in the cabin's large built-in bed beside the pale, broken mother.)

Since Levertin was never able to complete this work before his sudden death, it is impossible to know with any surety what form the finished work might have taken. While his use of such imaginative *miljöskildringar* tapers off after the first part of the book, similar passages like this clearly point to an approach very different from that of Fries's objective description of the historical facts. Fries later commented on Levertin's "interesting" portrait of Linnaeus saying that Levertin had "låtit förleda sig till att övergifva det verkligt historiska tillvägagåendet och

14. *En miljöskildring* is a literary term referring to descriptions of setting often with a particular emphasis on depicting mood or atmosphere.

i stället genom inflickande af en del från andra håll hämtade detaljer åstadkommit en romantiserad blandning av sanning och dikt" (Th. Fries, "Linnæa borealis" 57) [let himself be seduced into giving up a truly historical method and instead produced a romanticized mixture of truth and fancy¹⁵ with details gathered from all over]. Despite such criticism, evidence indicates that Levertin did not allow himself completely unrestrained creative license in writing such descriptive passages and, in fact, earnestly researched his work before writing.¹⁶ The real issue is not the sloppiness of Levertin's historical method; clearly, he was not trying to re-write Fries's biography. Rather, Levertin's choice to incorporate such positively literary moments into his work rejects using Fries's objective positivism in order to create a more seductive account engaging the reader in a researched yet vivid description of the probable surroundings and actions of the historical moment.

The search for absolute, one-to-one historical accuracy is abandoned in Levertin's biography to pursue another dimension of historical truth. The narrator's position maintains a subjective element and seems to share the space with the historical characters in a manner that does not allow the voice to become detached from the scene. Levertin rejects claims of dispassionate objectivity and creates through narrative an interest and desire in the sketch. He avoids a cataloging of historical facts by deploying creative license to weave these facts together into a narrative that produces an engaging, living integrated scene that appeals directly to the subjective emotions of the reader.

The reader's engagement with the action, setting, and background through the narrator is parallel to what Levertin saw at work in the writings of Linnaeus. Levertin's use of style is not just a means to an end, but, in fact, also the end itself in that it illustrates precisely what he sought to emphasize about Linnaeus and his work. Levertin ultimately wanted to show how Linnaeus was intimately engaged with and a part of his surroundings and not a disembodied, scientific eye hovering over the landscapes he described. He was not interested in Linnaeus as an objective scientist detached from his environment and the nature and

15. I translate the word *dikt* as fancy but in Swedish the word has the connotation of literary creativity as I shall develop later in Levertin's notion of "Linné som diktare" [Linnaeus as poet/creative literary figure].

16. See for instance Mortensen, "Oscar Levertins bok om Linné" *Ord & Bild* (1907) and Söderhjelm, *Oscar Levertin: En minnestekning* (1914) 480.

landscapes he cataloged, but rather Linnaeus as the subjective observer of nature and *in* nature. As observer, Linnaeus was a part of and engaged in the landscape he was, simultaneously, as a scientist, trying to represent.

In second part of the biography, entitled “Linné som diktare”¹⁷ [Linnaeus as poet], Levertin goes on further to develop the opaqueness of Linnaeus’s embodied observation by focusing specifically on Linnaeus’s writing style. This section, unlike the first, is not built upon *miljöskildringar* and takes up a different tone in analyzing why Linnaeus should be considered a significant eighteenth-century literary figure. Levertin explains,

Linné är som prosaskrifställare en diktare, i vilkens framställning psalmistens upphöjdhed växlar med idyllikerns naturglädje och sagoberättarens fantasilek. Han är en diktare, som vår litteraturhistoria i den egenskapen borde skänka ett hedersnamn, därför att allt vad han skrivit—utom det rent fackvetenskapliga—bär prägeln av en framställningskonst, som är hans och endas hans, och som i detta sekel i fråga om flödande omedelbarhet och blickens på en gång skaldiskt hänryckta och levande sätt att se endast kan jämföras med Bellmans. (Linné 34)

(Linnaeus as a prose-writer is a poet [diktare], in whose description the psalmist’s sublimity mixes with the idyllist’s delight in nature and the storyteller’s play of fantasy. He is a poet to whom our literary history, by virtue of his role as poet, should extend a place of honor, because everything he wrote—except for his purely technical, scientific writing—bears the seal of a descriptive power, which is his and his alone and which, in that century when it comes to exuberant immediacy and the observer’s simultaneously poetically captivating and vibrant gaze, can only be compared with that of Bellman.)

In contrast to Linnaeus’s systematics and nomenclature, which attempt to erase the unique position of the observer to achieve a certain transparency across national, linguistic, and cultural traditions, Levertin reads an opacity back into the work of Linnaeus by focusing on unique traces of artistic creativity that reveal something about Linnaeus’s singular genius and his intimate engagement with his objects of study—and most particularly with the unique natural landscape. In the figure of the poet (*diktaren*), Levertin attempts to cloud the transparency of the traditional scientific Linnean representational model where the presence of the observer becomes, at least in theory, irrelevant in the service of

17. The term *diktare* is more rich than its direct translation as poet. In Swedish, *diktare* refers more to a literary artist and is related not only to the word for poem (*dikt*) but also to the verb *att dikta* which can either mean to write poetry or to invent or fabricate, although the term *diktare* usually carries a positive connotation.

the objective scientific description and the translation of nature into commonly accepted signs and universal systems. In order to function properly, these signs representing a specimen or phenomenon should not draw attention to themselves or to the subjective position of the observer, but should be entirely non-self-referential. The relationship between signs and signifiers should have minimal play so as to insure accuracy and predictability in description. In contrast, by reading Linnaeus as *diktare*, Levertin invites his readers to consider Linnaeus's representations as representations with their own intrinsic qualities in addition to recognizing their referential value.

But in his focus on Linnaeus as *diktare* and on what his representations and style reveal about Linnaeus's subjectivity, Levertin makes sure not to push the analysis so far as to claim these writings are entirely self-referential. Quite to the contrary, the power of Linnaeus's prose comes precisely because its unaffected simplicity seems to engage and connect more directly to actual objects and landscapes. Linnaeus's distinctive style, in other words, does not come at the price of faithfulness to the objects he describes. Speaking of *Lappländska resan* Levertin writes, "I hans konstlösa dagboksanteckningar är allt, uppfattning, stil och anda, nytt, kort och livfullt. Hans reseberättelse är en lyriskt vetenskaplig dagbok, genom vilken man allestädes känner rittens hurtiga tempo och friluftslivets glada mod, spelet av den öppna himmelns vindar och moln, doften av åkrar, ängar och skogar" (*Linné* 51) [In his unaffected journal notes, everything—perception, style, and spirit—is new, succinct, and full of life. His travel account is a lyrical scientific journal through which one everywhere feels the ride's lively tempo and happy spirit of the outdoor life, the play of the open sky's wind and clouds, the smell of the fields, meadows, and forests]. Levertin praises Linnaeus for his ability to provide his readers with a connection to what Linnaeus, even as a scientist, observes through an evocative, direct style, vivid descriptions, and faithfulness to nature.

Linnaeus, Levertin writes, "var aldrig galaklädd i sin stil" (44) [was never formally dressed in his style] and avoided the overly ornate and affected prose of his baroque peers which lent his writing a unique sense of immediacy. This uniqueness among his eighteenth-century contemporaries is most clearly illustrated by Levertin in a comparison with Linnaeus's French counterpart and critic, George-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. In a description of a raccoon, Levertin says that Buffon "utan ett leende" [without a smile] describes the playful animal "på förnämt avstånd" [from a dignified distance] whereas "Linné är inne i

sin beskrivning som barnet i en lek och sagoberättaren i en saga" (*Linné* 45) [Linnaeus is into his description like a child at play and a storyteller in a story].¹⁸ While both Buffon and Linnaeus are consciously producing a representation abstracted from nature, Buffon is portrayed by Levertin as striving toward a language of objectivity by suppressing subjective reaction to the object and emotion to embrace a formal, affected tone. The subject's own proximity and intimacy with the object of study in the case of Linnaeus, however, is likened to that of a child and *sagoberättare* [storyteller or teller of fairy tales] in that it does not attempt to create an illusion of critical distance. Far from claiming Linnaeus's description to be simple, however, Levertin is asserting that this immediacy and intimacy with what is being described actually produces a much more complex representation that maintains for the reader something of the author/subject's experience with the object, an experience operating outside strictures of logic and rationality.

The difference between Buffon and Linnaeus, Levertin concludes, is like that between Herodotus and Thucydides:

Buffon är naturens pragmatiska historiker, beskrivande dess dramer och dess handlande parter—människan och djuren—med konstfull objektivitet och filosofiskt framhävt kausalsammanhang. Linné är naturforskningens Herodot, naturbeskrivningens fader, hos vilken, som hos Herodot, vetenskapen ännu har över sig ett återsken från mytens och sägnens morgonrodnad och framställningen av sig själv äger folkföreställningens fantasimakt. Men just på grund av detta kan Linné också enstaka gånger giva ett omedvetet skaldiskt uttryck för naturens hemlighetsfulla liv, som Buffon med all sin förnuftsmässighet aldrig når fram till. (45)

(Buffon is nature's pragmatic historian, describing its drama and its acting participants—man and animal—with artistic objectivity and philosophically accentuated causal connectedness. Linnaeus is the Herodotus of natural science, the father of natural history, in whom, like in Herodotus, science still has over it a reddish reflection of the dawn of myth and saga and the presentation itself has popular imagination's power of fantasy. But precisely because of this Linnaeus can, at times, give a subconsciously poetic expression of the secret life of nature which Buffon, with all his rationality can never attain.)

Buffon's detached, objective, logic stands in contrast to what Levertin describes as Linnaeus's immediate relationship with nature drawing on

18. The term *saga* places an emphasis on the inventiveness and creativity involved in what is being told.

storytelling, myth, and the popular imagination as genres built upon a spontaneous and unmediated intimacy with the world they signify. The presumed authenticity of these genres, as with nature itself, stems from the absence of an identifiable author. Lacking the mediation of this organizing consciousness lent them their air of spontaneity and naturalness that contrasted with the artificial construction of classical art. Levertin reminds his readers that Linnaeus never lost contact with his provincial roots and this fact was the source of his "starka och okonstlade ursprunglighet. Hans ingivelse är i släkt med den folkliga inspirationen" (44) [strong and unaffected originality. His impulse is related to popular inspiration]. Linnaeus is read as giving expressions for nature that are subconsciously poetic and presumably hardly even mediated by his own logic, but rather inspired by visual impression, myth, and folklore better able to capture "naturens mystik" (46) [the mysticism of nature] that eluded Buffon's cold, exact rationality. Levertin identified Linnaeus as having an intrinsic connection to the nature around him and called him "en naturens epiker, af det ursprungliga homeriska slag, för hvilken världen alltjämt ligger ny i skapelsemorgonens daggiga glans" (Levertin, *Samlade skrifter* 12:101) [an epic poet of nature of the most original Homeric kind, for which the world still lay in the misty sheen of the dawn of creation].

Linnaeus's artistry, according to this analysis, paradoxically proceeds out of his own absence. It is the lack of mediation that distinguishes Linnaeus's writings for Levertin. "Endast en verklig skald skildrar som [Linné] och förmår omedvetet förvandla ett uppradande av sakuppgifter till levande bilder" (*Linné* 56) [Only a true skald depicts as (Linnaeus) does and manages unconsciously to change a line up of facts into living pictures]. These pictures become living because they lack conscious authorship and must speak for themselves. Their presence in the text has not been over-mediated and can thus maintain some of their irrational mystery. The reference to these most poignant moments as *bilder* [pictures] seems to imply an openness to interpretation that narratives typically suppress.

Without the contextual structure of a strict narrative, they are allowed to speak, in essence, for themselves and be experienced by the reader as they were encountered by the almost absent author. "Linnés anteckningar äro fullkomligt olitterära och summariska, men man känner när man läser dem den vinande fjällvinden och den elementariskt lätta luften, vädrar den oändliga friskheten från gränslösa, otrampade snövidder och hör metallkirret från dessa halvfrusna bergbäckar, om vilkas kalla, 'kosteligt pärlande' vatten Linné talar med sådan hänförelse" (53) [Linnaeus's notes

are perfectly unliterary and summary, but one feels when reading them the howling mountain wind and the light elementary air, the unending freshness from boundless, untouched snow fields, and hear the metallic clinking from these half-frozen mountain streams, the cold "priceless pearly" water of which Linnaeus spoke with such enthusiasm].

Given his worship of the authentic experience, one might well wonder why Levertin was willing to bother with the intermediary of an author or artist at all. Why not go straight to the source be it nature, folk narrative, etc. instead of approaching these things through the mediation of artistic vision? Ultimately, Levertin's interest is, even in the case of Linnaeus's prose, not in those things but in the dynamics of representation itself. It is not the thing itself, but the impressions created by the object within the reader/observer that interests him. Karin Beskow, in her analysis of Levertin's work on Linnaeus, summarizes this tendency in Levertin by saying that Levertin "ser ... på naturen och livet, som om det vore konst. Det är stämningen, känslan, som föremålen väcka, som han förhårligar, ej föremålen i sig själva. Dessa stämningar och känslor mottar han dock sällan direkt utan ofta förmedlade genom litteraturen eller konsten.... Levertin helst ser världen genom andras ögon" (Beskow 97) [looks upon nature and life as if they were art. It is the atmosphere and feelings that these objects awaken that he glorifies, not the objects themselves. He rarely encounters these atmospheres and feelings directly, but rather most often mediated by literature or art.... Levertin prefers to see the world through the eyes of another]. The authentic and real, for Levertin, was not the landscapes Linnaeus described but the subjective experience of them. Instead of a transparent observer, the observer himself is foregrounded in Levertin's re-reading of Linnaeus.

Great art, for Levertin, is not necessarily built upon an exact mimesis of form, but rather the ability to emulate and recreate for the reader/observer the subjective experience of the original encounter. Levertin praises the vivid, direct tone of Linnaeus's prose because its directness replicates for the reader Linnaeus's own experience of being in the landscape. Scientific, detached exactness of description gives way in Linnaeus's travel writing to a prose that locates the author (and for Levertin, also the reader) in the scene by describing a subjective reaction to the events as they transpire.

Part of the significance of Levertin's work is that his praise of Linnaeus's writing brought Linnaeus's writings from the periphery to the very center of Swedish literature and culture. Levertin elevates

Linnaeus to stand together with Dalin and Bellman as the most significant literary figures of the Swedish eighteenth century thereby instantly inserting Linnaeus's influence into literary history and even into the century which had started by turning its back on him. By creating this sense of tradition extending from Linnaeus, Levertin further valorized the representation of nature as an important part of even the modern aesthetic tradition. This "Linnean tradition" engaged with and used representations of the natural environment as a means of locating and anchoring identity. The appropriation of Linnaeus as a historical figure gave the use of representations of the natural a ready-made longevity and credence despite the fact that the idea of Linnaeus as an influential artistic figure was itself largely the product of his own era and work. The Linnean tradition in its many variants quickly became central to Sweden's perceived national character and then influenced future artists' attempts to locate and define the modern subject. The immediate success and influence of Levertin's work is a clear indication of the degree to which these concepts fell on fertile ground. Although the ideas put forth in this biography were not all uniquely his, it was his work that has been remembered ever since as a watershed moment in the study of Linnaeus. Extremely quickly his reading of Linnaeus was incorporated into the cultural consciousness as is evidenced by the almost immediate effect he had on the writing of Swedish literary history.¹⁹

But the significance of Levertin's work extends beyond a re-writing of the Swedish literary canon. What is of greater significance is Levertin's conception of Linnaeus as an ecological subject/observer and the ways in which this idea participated in a discourse about nature in Sweden at the turn of the century. The figure Levertin presented of Linnaeus gave historical depth to the idea of a Linnean tradition in which an observer could imagine an abstracted overview of the natural world without losing sight of the ways in which all viewing positions were embodied and embedded in specific environmental contexts.

19. A survey of literary histories written before and after Levertin's biography confirm the rapid assimilation of a new conception and understanding of Linnaeus's literary significance around the turn of the century. See, for instance, literary histories written by Henrik Sckück and Karl Warburg 1896-97, 1911, and 1926.

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