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Women's Autobiographical Literature in the Swedish Baroque

1. Introduction

Given the substantial attention Nordic autobiographical works have received in recent years,¹ it strikes the modern student of Swedish literature as remarkable that at the beginning of the last century, it was possible to discuss the development of Swedish narrative art without so much as a thought being given to the question of the autobiographical literature of the Baroque (Böök 1907). Today such an oversight would be unthinkable, especially as attention has increasingly focused on the important but previously largely ignored dimension of women's autobiographical writings in the age of the Swedish empire (e.g., Hættner, Larsson, and Sjöblad 1991; Jensen, Aurelius, and Mai 1993), and it is now possible – as it was not just a few years ago – to claim that a much clearer image of the nature and history of the autobiographical works by women of this era has emerged, especially in the wake of Aurelius's monumental consideration of women's life-writing in Sweden to the mid-19th century (Aurelius 1996). In this masterful treatment of women's life-writing, Aurelius makes the case for the importance of the patriarchal structures, both sacred and secular, within which these women worked.

This point of view has particular relevance in the Baroque in the case of Agneta Horn, and Aurelius carefully details how Horn looks to account for her conduct in the aftermath of her father's death in a legal context („den profana rättegången“) in ways that parallel her written reflections about her own spiritual crises („den religiösa rättegången“) (Aurelius 1996, 71-111). The profane argument is based on a close examination of relevant archival materials, while Aurelius argues for the importance of a spiritual tradition running back to such medieval writers as Mechtild of Brandenburg, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe. The impact of Aurelius's work and its important place in our understanding of the tradition of women's autobiographical writings is difficult to exaggerate: indeed, it has variously been

¹ A veritable flood of works in this area has appeared in the past 20 years (e.g., Kondrup 1982; Fahlgren 1987; the essays collected in Tigerstedt, Roos, and Vilkkö 1992; Kondrup 1994), but none has taken up the subject matter of this essay with greater acuity than Aurelius 1996. On the increased interest in this area, see Liet 1988.

described as „magisterial“ and „ein überaus gründliches und umfassendes Buch [...] ein Standardwerk“ (Hansson 1997, 282; Heitmann 1997, 142). By contrast, earlier scholarship was particularly, and notoriously, myopic about such matters, in proof of which, one need only cite the curious publication history of Christina Regina vom Birchenbaum's „Een Annor Nö Wösa“ ('Another New Poem') a 29-verse autobiographical poem, which was printed in the 19th century as part of Lars Wivallius's literary oeuvre (Hanselli 1869).

Building on the work of Aurelius (her *Inför lagen* in particular), Lindgärde, and others within the Swedish context (Lindgärde 1993a; Lindgärde 1993b; Aurelius 1991; Aurelius 1993; Aurelius and Nilsson 1993; and Aurelius 1996), and of Jelinek in the Anglophone world (Jelinek 1986), I want to focus narrowly on autobiographical prose and poetry by women in the Swedish Baroque, especially with respect to the findings of Friese on the character of the Nordic Baroque as a whole (Friese 1965; Friese 1968). Toward this end, the following discussion takes up several poems by Karin Ulfspärre, written between 1630 and 1650; Christina Regina vom Birchenbaum's „Een Annor Nö Wösa,“ written in 1651; Agneta Horn's *Beskrivning över min vandringstid* ('Description of my period of wandering'), composed in its present form sometime around 1657,² as well as some of its attendant materials; various works by Märta Berendes from 1659 to 1676; and Queen Christina's *La Vie de Reine Christine faite par Elle-même*, completed 1680-81, but begun already in 1668 (Ulfspärre 1916, 17-32; Birchenbaum 1919-27, 188-96; Holm 1959; Berendes 1869; and Christina Alexandra 1759). Specifically, this essay looks to explore further the influences on the tradition of self-inspection and -reflection within which these authors worked, both the question of its religious background (cf. Mitchell 1985; Aurelius 1996, esp. pp. 189-273) and of women's authorial voices in non-elite literary forms, especially oral literature.

2. Birgitta, Interiority, and Authority

Central to the elite texts under consideration here is their concern with religion, a situation explained in part by the fact that religious reflection was a socially sanctioned arena where women writers might attain legitimacy, „permission to speak,“ as it were (cf., for example, Krontiris 1992, 8-16, and Lewalski 1993, 8-9, on the corresponding English case). But saying so is in no way meant to trivialize the moti-

² At this point in the history of scholarship on Agneta Horn's life-writings, many trees have lost their lives in the debates over the date of composition of her *Beskrivning över min vandringstid*. For the most recent summary of views, as well as criticisms of them, see Platen 1998, in which context I reiterate what I wrote in 1985 concerning the date of her narrative and the Bible citations: „...I do not mean by this observation to imply that the current manuscript could not be a copy based on separately constructed episodes drawn from a variety of sources, but there is no manuscript evidence (other than the possibility above concerning lf. 46a) that the extant manuscript (aside from leaves 39 and 41) was written or copied in sections over an extended period of time“ (Mitchell 1985, 67).

vations of the writers, for the roots of spiritual self-consciousness and female authorship demand full and complete consideration: in a discussion of one such 17th-century autobiographical work, for example, I suggested several years ago that Agneta Horn's *Beskrivning över min vandringstid* (ca. 1657) resembles a modern experimental novel, given its remarkable degree of interiority and intertextuality (Mitchell 1985, 72-73 et passim). In response, one commentator remarked – quite correctly – that this view was too inclined to see in Horn something new and original, and thus failed to value fully the link this and other 17th-century women's autobiographies, on the one hand, had with the tradition in which Birgitta composed her *Uppenbarelser* (*Revelations*) in the 14th century, on the other.³ Unquestionably the most important figure of medieval Swedish cultural history, Birgitta Birgersdotter (1303-1373), founder of the Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris, possessed an influence particularly strong in her homeland, where the mother cloister at Vadstena became the center of learning for the nation. Birgitta's own ecstatic experiences – which led to the image of monks and nuns living in separate but proximate cloisters under the secular leadership of a woman – were written up in hundreds of visions. In them, Christ reveals himself to Birgitta and takes her as his bride (e.g., „iäk tok thik mik til brudh“ ('I took you for my bride', Klemming 1857-84, I:7). Despite the fact that such writing, however deeply personal it may be, fails to encompass in a technical sense what has come to be recognized as the autobiographer's art, Birgitta's revelations nevertheless stand as the most intensely interior writing of the Swedish Middle Ages. Both a *legenda* and an *officium* were written in her honor, but it was perhaps best left to Birgitta herself to compose what might be thought of as her epitaph, an autobiographical tableau by proxy: in the context of an especially personal vision, Christ suggests three examples of good women, Susanna, Judith, and Thecla of Iconium. The first was married, the second a widow, the third a virgin, „thässe hafdho olika liuärne oc akt tho äru the alle lica j gerninganna forskullilsom ok lönom“ ('these had different lives and purposes, yet they are alike in the worthiness and reward of their achievements', Klemming 1857-84, II: 138). It is not difficult to believe that in these three figures Birgitta could see the three phases of her own life: her devout childhood; her years as a pious wife and mother; and her victorious widowhood in which she was armed, not with Holofernes' sword, but with the still mightier quill (cf. my comments on Birgitta, autohagiography and autobiography in Mitchell 1996, 32-37).

A casual consideration of the religious upheaval of the 16th century might suggest that Birgitta's influence largely dissipated in her homeland, especially as Sweden moved toward an intensified Lutheran orthodoxy at the close of the century.⁴

³ Morris 1986, 228-29. „However, a consideration of the autobiography as a whole, including the biblical material, gives the impression that the medieval heritage is more in evidence than the anticipation of a more secular idiom.“

⁴ Useful overviews of religious developments in this period are provided in Holmquist 1953, pp. 53-56, 66-70, and Cornelius 1886, I:109-95.

The center of late medieval Swedish culture, the Birgittine cloister at Vadstena, was closed immediately after Söderköpings riksdag in 1595, and reactions against Catholics in the country were strong in the early 1600s: a number of Swedes were executed for their perceived Catholic sympathies, and many Swedish Catholics and those with Catholic sympathies went into exile or were imprisoned – Johannes Messenius's life stands as a prime example. It might seem unlikely that Birgitta would be known widely in any deep sense in such an atmosphere, yet her works continued to have considerable appeal in Catholic Europe, with editions of her *Revelationes* appearing, for example, in 1628 (in both Cologne and Rome) and in 1680. Moreover, the very existence and history of Vadstena – its relatively new castle, its controversial cloister, and its economic troubles resulting from the Reformation – argue that Birgitta's legacy was popularly known in *Stormaktstiden*'s Sweden, if mainly in the negative in establishment circles. Exactly this situation seems to have been the case in the pronouncements of Johannes Rudbeckius, who found in Birgitta a useful symbol of Catholicism's „monstrous“ tendency towards religious excess (cf. Hall 1911, 110-11).

And although no longer officially viewed in her homeland with the same reverence she commanded a century or two earlier, Birgitta was far from lost to the Swedish 17th century. That Birgitta continued to be well-known during the Swedish Baroque (at least among the elite) is demonstrated by the degree to which that major figure of early modern Swedish letters and learning, Johannes Messenius, returned repeatedly to the topic of Birgitta. In addition to his treatment of her in *Chronologia Sanctae Birgittae* (Jönsson 1988), Messenius extensively weaves Birgitta into his drama of the Folkungs, *Blanckamäreta*. No mere historical prop, Birgitta appears throughout the play, and is even given the final monologue. Perhaps most surprising within the context of the period's Lutheran orthodoxy, she and two other nuns appear in the play as defenders of the cloistered life against Ingerdh's so-called „nunneklagan“ (‘nun's lament’, Schück 1886-88, I: 194-95).⁵ Recognizing Messenius's personal history – his education at Vadstena, his „Jesuit period“ at Braunsberg, and the later accusations of his complicity with Swedish Catholics in Poland – it might be possible to dismiss the testimony of his works with respect to this most prominent figure from Catholic Sweden, yet the fact that *Blanckamäreta* was performed and published in 1614, and subsequently reprinted no fewer than three times throughout the century (in 1635, 1649, and during the 1660s) argues otherwise (cf. the publication history of *Blanckemäreta* in Lidell 1935, 22).

None of the foregoing is meant to suggest the existence of extensive knowledge of Birgitta's writings in 17th-century Sweden, but in many respects, awareness of her as an historical figure is less important than the influence of the tradition of which Birgitta is undoubtedly the best early representative in Sweden: namely, the

⁵ On this scene, it has been remarked (Lidell 1935, 258), „Blancka-Märeta VI:2 skulle nämligen kunna kallas en ‘nunneklagan’“ (‘Blancka-Märeta VI:2 could be called a „nun's lament“’).

intense spiritual crisis articulated in highly personal terms. The presence of a Birgitta in Swedish tradition also meant the existence of legitimacy, of *auctoritas*, for women in spiritual and belletristic endeavors. In this context, moreover, it is important to note that it has been suggested that Birgitta herself took over a long-standing functional niche for females within Nordic society, that of the sibyl, an historical background from which, it is argued, Birgitta draws her own authority (cf. Fogelklou 1919, 1952). In the abstract, such figures as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe are highly relevant to a discussion of women writing in 17th-century religious contexts (and indeed I have used some of the same comparisons [Mitchell 1985, 58]), but a figure much closer and much more relevant to the Swedish Baroque must surely be Birgitta. After all, the last nuns had left Vadstena only a generation or so earlier (1595). The legitimacy provided by Birgitta in the ecclesiastical and courtly worlds among elite Swedish society – otherwise dominated by men – was complemented, as we shall see, in important ways by the role women played in the largely non-elite, popular oral traditions of these early periods.

3. The Ballad, Oral Tradition and Women's Writing

The historical connection between female life-writings of the Swedish Empire and the medieval tradition of female spirituality is fundamental, but it is important to note that women's voices in the Swedish Baroque had legitimacy outside religiously-motivated self-examination as well, albeit not necessarily in places where we are principally inclined to look. In searching for such female narrative and artistic authority, we may usefully turn away from the writings of an exclusively elite segment of society and examine largely, but not solely, non-elite forms of literature, specifically the ballad. It is a sometimes over-looked fact that a great many of the ballads we know from the 17th, as well as from the 19th, century represent texts recorded from women. As long as folklorists and literary scholars were inclined to see the folkloric text as something more-or-less static, lacking any particular relationship to the singer-performer, this point was of little importance; indeed, singer-performers themselves were largely held to be insignificant, except perhaps insofar as a researcher might contribute to the pedigree of a particular ballad type by discovering where or from whom a singer had learned a given text. This text-centric view – in which the words of the ballad text possess the privileged position, whereas the performer is regarded merely as the sterile medium holding it – may be seen, for example, in the way in which we arrange the scholarly presentation of ballads, such as Grundtvig's *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* or Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. But a more performance-oriented presentation, enabled by modern computer technology, which allows for organization and presentation by ballad singer, ballad community, or any number of ways, such as the Norwegians have developed

in their *Dokumentasjonsprosjekt*,⁶ demonstrates a recognition of the importance of the individual. Moreover, we have increasingly come to understand the dynamic synergy that exists between tradition, individual and performance, underscoring the significance of the circumstances of any individual raconteur for a given text (see, for example, the study of Danish legend-telling in this regard in Tangherlini 1994).

Given this new-found appreciation for the individual's relationship to tradition, it might reasonably be argued that the most prolific Swedish „author“ of the 1600s was Ingierd Gunnarsdotter (ca. 1601-1686) – she is, after all, supposed to have known over 300 ballad types, of which 47 have come down to us.⁷ Nor was Ingierd Gunnarsdotter an „empty vessel,“ some anonymous figure to be dismissed merely as a link in a chain of tradition, but rather a „singer-performer-tradition bearer“ of exactly the sort noted above, one who exercised authorial control over her ballad repertoire. By way of example, we may consider her treatment of one of the most famous of Nordic ballad types, *TSB* B20, „Møen på bålet – Innocent girl burned at the stake,“ described as follows (Jonsson, Solheim et al. 1978; the multiforms are to be found in Jonsson, Jersild, and Jansson 1983-):

A brother tries to seduce his sister, but she rejects him. He then goes to their father and accuses her of unchastity and infanticide. (The foregoing not in I[celandic multiforms].) The father prepares a fire to have her burnt. Two doves (D[anish], N[orwegian multiforms]: angels) ascend to fetch her to heaven, while two ravens (D[anish], N[orwegian multiforms]: devils) take the brother (I: the father) to hell.

This ballad type exists in particularly large numbers in Sweden, where it is known as „Herr Peder och hans syster“ (‘Sir Peder and his Sister’, *SMB* 46): roughly three dozen multiforms from the 16th through the 19th century have been recorded. Yet in only one – that by Ingierd Gunnarsdotter (*SMB* 46C) – do we encounter a variant with a substantially different ending. Amid all the miraculous endings in which the sister sits in the fire for one, two, or three days without the slightest harm, it is only in Ingierd Gunnarsdotter's text that the sister actually dies: „Wäl kommer stoltz Kirstin til himelrijk hoon/ Men Peder siunker till Helwetes grund“ (‘Well comes proud Kirstin to heaven, she,/ But Peder sinks to the bottom of Hell’). In other multiforms, the brother is dragged off by various demons from Hell while his sister sits in the fire combing her hair in her snow-white dress. I raise this example, and certainly others could be enumerated,⁸ not because the actions have the slightest to

⁶ Available at: <http://www.dokpro.uio.no/>

⁷ On this remarkable woman, see Jonsson 1967, 273-85.

⁸ Thus, *TSB* A 63 „Elveskud- Elf maid causes man's sickness and death,“ a ballad type amply represented in Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, and Faroese, as well as Swedish, ballad traditions, where it is known as „Herr Olof och älvorna“ (‘Sir Olof and the elves’, *SMB* 29). In all of the many Nordic multiforms of this ballad type, the young man refuses the elf maid's request to dance due to his pending marriage. But it is only in Ingierd Gunnarsdotter's text that he first says, „Jntet träder Jagh dantz medh tigh./ Min Fästemö haar thet förbudit Migh“ (‘A dance I will not dance with you/ That has my fiancée forbidden me’. Jonsson, Jersild, and Jansson 1983-, I: 419. *SMB* 29A: 4).

do with Ingierd Gunnarsdotter's own life, but because the existence of this passage, unique to her multiform of the ballad, underscores two important, and even fundamental, aspects of non-literate, or verbal,⁹ spiritual culture, and by extension, to our discussion of women's authorial voices in the early modern period. First of all, the relationship Ingierd Gunnarsdotter demonstrates to „tradition“ in the case of *SMB* 46 is to be understood more as the rule than as the exception, as I have attempted to outline elsewhere for Swedish oral tradition (e.g., Mitchell 1991; Mitchell 2001). Individual performers may be informed by narrative tradition, but they are neither stifled nor enslaved by it, and indeed often use novelistic twists in well-known traditions to their advantage. The individual performance belongs to the raconteur who has been prepared by the tradition, or as Albert Lord describes the relationship with respect to the South Slavic tradition of epic singing,

Everything in the poem belongs to the group, but the poem itself and the formula in which it happens in a particular performance is the singer's. Every item is the tradition. But when a great singer is sitting in front of an audience, his music, the expression of his face, and his particular version of the poem at the time is his. (Mitchell and Nagy 2000, xx)

The ramifications of this point for women's narrative authority are obviously very great. The second lesson to be drawn is that there is much to be learned about the nature and degree of female authorship in, and from, the Nordic world of ballads, folktales, and orally composed poetry, as Else Mundal and others have pointed out.¹⁰ Moreover, it is likely that we have seriously underestimated the role of women in the history of ballad composition-performance and collection. As, for example, Birgit Hertzberg Johnsen has reported, such an apparently male-oriented ballad group as the heroic ballads were in 19th-century Norway as often collected from women as from men.¹¹

The case of Ingierd Gunnarsdotter demonstrates that there is much to be learned from the testimony of non-elite sources, especially with respect to women's voices

⁹ Buchan 1972, 2, equates „oral“ with the narrative traditions of preliterate peoples, and „verbal“ with „the word-of-mouth tradition of a literate culture.“

¹⁰ Cf. Mundal 1983. See also Pedersen and Simonsen 1993; Apo 1993; Hjort-Vetlesen and Kofod 1993; and Dalager and Mai 1982, 17-29.

¹¹ Johnsen 1982. In the material she investigates (limited to the heroic ballads), Hertzberg Johnsen finds that of the 200-plus identifiable informants, 104 were women and 109 were men; the total repertoire, where the sample was limited to one multiform per ballad type, shows that the collection has 191 recordings from men, and 200 from women. (76)

Others have ventured into this area with varying results: I commend Dalager and Mai 1982, 17-29, for example, for their exploration of the ballads as a possible repository of information on women's voices in the early period, yet I would caution against an overly enthusiastic embrace of what may appear to be gender-determined ballad types due to the narrative content of the ballads. Unfortunately, Dalager and Mai's literary readings of the ballad texts threaten to leave the performers out of the equation yet once again. Perhaps „kvindeviser“ ('women's songs') (17) are to be uncovered among the Nordic ballad repertoire, but the same caution is in order here as elsewhere: one should make no assumptions without knowing the specifics about the balladeers themselves.

in the Nordic Baroque. Moreover, the fact that such works as those by Karin Ulfsparre and Christina Regina vom Birchenbaum are preserved in 17th-century manuscripts of ballad collections – side-by-side with various traditional ballads – is surely anything but coincidence. Indeed, such collections provide good evidence of synergy between individuals and the ballad tradition, and a context for understanding the important interplay between them, perhaps especially where female authorship is concerned. Karin Ulfsparre, for example, „talks back“ to the ballad tradition by annotating one of the Danish ballads in *Drottning Sofias visbok*. In the same *visbok* (ballad manuscript) in which she writes out several of her own poems, she adds two poetic responses to a traditional ballad, „Væddemaålet – Knight bets on his power to seduce women“ (DgF 224A; TSB D 145):

Peder boasts of his power to seduce any girl he wants, but Lave says he knows one woman Peder could never get. Peder bets his estate and life on it and rides to Ingerlill. He asks for her hand. She reminds him of all the women he has already deserted and rejects his offer of gifts. Finally, he must ride off, having lost his bet. (Jonsson, Solheim et al. 1978, 115)

When Sir Peder boastfully bets his life that he can win Inngelill Thalles datter (v. 4), Ulfsparre writes in the margin, „Den äran Aff hiertat haffuer kiär/ han tallar och Ingen annan förnär“ (‘This renown cherish heartily/ he speaks and no one is harmed’). And when Sir Peder must give up his mission after Inngelill’s lengthy remonstrance (v. 24), Ulfsparre admonishes, „Det skulle ingen talla om någon ärlig Jungfru eller qu[i]na/ för än han har wäll för sökt huadh hon bär för sine“ (‘Thus should no one speak about any honorable maiden or woman/ before he has discovered her disposition’).¹² It seems to me that these two leaves of *Drottning Sophies visbok* capture a vital moment in the life of Karin Ulfsparre and in women’s writing in the Nordic Baroque, namely, the point at which the synergy between elite and non-elite forms of poetry, the innovative and the traditional, led her to compose and record her reaction to the ballad. The obverse situation can be seen in Agneta Horn’s *Beskrivning öfver min vandringstid*. There Horn makes frequent use of verses known from the Nordic ballad corpus, principally ballads with religious themes, but also more secular works as well.¹³

To the extent then that there existed acceptable, legitimate vehicles for female expression in the early modern period, one of the outstanding models was surely „folk poetry“ and religious introspection as expressed in autobiographies, psalms, and prayers. The effects of this fact on the nature of women’s autobiographical

¹² *Drottning Sofias visbok*, 79. Kungliga Biblioteket, Visbok nr. 24. Drottning Sophies visbok, fol. 151r and fol. 155. Cf. Ek 1917.

¹³ See especially Ek 1920 and Djurklou’s list, printed in Leijonhufvud 1908, 185–86, as well as the comments in Hjelmqvist 1909 and Larsson 1927. Of related interest are the many proverbs with which Horn salts her autobiography; see Leijonhufvud 1908, 211. In the context of her use of folkloric resources, I note that an argument favoring Horn’s use of classical rhetoric is made in Claeson 1989, a copy of which was kindly provided to me by the author.

writing in the Swedish 17th century are multifaceted and profound. One can argue that despite the many differences that separate the two figures – Birgitta, an aristocrat and member of a powerful „lawman“ family, on the one hand, and Ingierd Gunnarsdotter, *Västgötisk bondehustru*, (West Gautish farm wife) on the other – in both instances, we are presented with images of female *auctoritas*, specifically cases where „authority“ (and hence „authorship“) derives from ability and from qualities of mind.¹⁴ These two women may then be understood as representatives of the principal influences at work on women's life-writing, viz. – the religious and the folkloric.

4. Women's Autobiographical Writing in the Swedish Baroque: A Brief Survey

How then should we evaluate the works of female autobiographers in the age of the Swedish Empire, especially given the contributing religious, folkloric and spiritual factors? In what ways do these writers approach the matter of interpreting, analyzing, and commenting on their lives? In one sense, the texts divide rather neatly in a way altogether reminiscent of ballad structure itself. In the Nordic ballad, after all, the verses carry the burden of the narrative, while the refrain evokes a mood. Likewise, one might tentatively suggest a bifurcation of these Baroque life-writings into two groups: those works meant to narrate, explore, and assess the lives of the authors, and those intended to comment very broadly – lyrically and without exploration of specific incidents – on the lives and fortunes of their authors. To the former category, one would certainly assign Christina's *La Vie de Reine Christine faite par Elle-même...*, Christina Regina vom Birchenbaum's „Een Annor Nj Wÿsa,“ and Agneta Horn's *Beskrivning över min vandringstid*. In the latter category should be placed the poetry of Karin Ulfspärre, the poetry and prayers of Märta Berendes, and the autobiographical poem by Agneta Horn.

There are anomalous works as well, of course: Maria Christoffersdotter Stenquist's „Personalia“ (UUB X. 255ab. of Cederhjelm'ska samlingen) defies any easy categorization. Although the text is sometimes described as an autobiography (e.g. Hættner, Larsson, and Sjöblad 1991), there is little to recommend such a conclusion: if anything, the text might more accurately be described as „genealogical lore,“ in that it is what Stenquist elsewhere describes as an „underrättelse om herkomst och mina sallige föräldrars affkomst...“ (‘information about my blessed parents' lineage and progeny’), including a version of the story of Fale Bure. Yet despite its focus on family lore, the text also includes information on Stenquist's own life. Likewise, Maria Euphrosyne's life-writing (Euphrosyne 1789) presents a

¹⁴ A review of several such figures in the Swedish tradition, including Agneta Horn, is presented in Losman 1984.

form of writing with an essentially legal purpose, yet with autobiographical overtones.

Among the ruminative works, Horn's *Beskrivning över min vandringstid* is a remarkable text. I have argued elsewhere that in order to understand Horn's work, it must be viewed within the context of the autobiographical tradition as a whole, and especially within the context of her theodical misgivings (Mitchell 1985, as well as Mitchell 1992). This view has been generally greeted with approbation (e.g., Morris 1986; Delblanc 1987). Aurelius improves on this idea by demonstrating that Horn's presentation of her life within a moral or spiritual framework also has a parallel, secular function with respect to the dispute she is engaged in over her father's inheritance (Aurelius 1993; 1996, 71-111). Horn's is a text in which secular and sacred flow together onto the landscape in a fast-paced narrative, interlarded with admirable dialogue and something akin to narrated monologues, and a pathos bordering on bathos. Despite its shortcomings, the autobiography's elements come together to form one of the truly memorable documents of the period. Surely part of the reason for our modern increasingly enthusiastic reception of Horn is her *Beskrivning's* way of allowing us an unrivaled view of the thoughts, emotions and passions of a woman of this era, and the fact that she does – in the best tradition of life-writing – her „swår och mycket wederwärtiga lefwerneswandring så til at igenomwandra“ ('roam thus through [my] difficult and very loathsome life's wanderings', Holm 3). Everything in her life, one senses, is on display, and as a writer of autobiography, she is strengthened rather than weakened by the revelations, even if at times we dislike the person being written about.

In this company, Christina Regina vom Birchenbaum's „Een Annor Nj Wyä“ stands out as the only text to couple descriptive personal narrative and verse. Other poetic treatments of the writers' lives speak of conditions, emotions, and occasionally of events, but only vom Birchenbaum weaves these elements together in a way that both reveals the course of her life and gives poetic expression to her fate. In her own words, she *förtälia[r]* ('narrates', v. 1), *betraktar* ('contemplates', v. 2), and *beklagha[r]* ('laments', v. 24) (and *klagar* ['complains about', v. 25]) the events of her life. We learn more about her life and her sorrows in these verses than in many other works, so much so, that we find ourselves thirsting for more: who was this remarkable woman, whose love was so strong that she travelled to war-torn Germany at the height of the Thirty Years' War and searched throughout the length of 500 Swedish miles for her lost husband? By what treachery – by what cunning of angry tongues (v. 21), through what false friendships (v. 22) – did she lose the love of her young nobleman, a brief *intermezzo scherzando* during her many years of widowhood? This is a powerful text, and although not without possible models in the printed literature of the times (e.g., Carl Carlsson Gyllenhielm's *Nosce te ipsum*, 1650), it no doubt reverberates with the echoes of many influences. As with Agneta Horn's work, one must assume that the overwhelming influence comes from that day's total preoccupation with biblical materials, especially the *Psalms* and the *Book*

of *Job*, both as these works were known as printed matter and as they were promoted in sermons, prayers, and orations of all sorts (cf., for example, Lindquist 1939; Wifstrand 1943; Olsson 1943; and Helander 1946). There may be other streams of influence here as well, of course, and one cannot help but note the repeated construction of Christ as a bridegroom (*brudgum*, 'bridegroom', v. 25; *min himmelsk brudgum godh*, 'my heavenly, good bridegroom' and *min brudgum kiära*, 'my dear bridegroom', v. 29); although there may be no specific relationship to Birgitta's well-known self-referential phrases of the sort *Christi brud* ('bride of Christ') and so on, the connection is striking. In her discussion of vom Birchenbaum, Lindgärde (Lindgärde 1993a, 283) describes the poem „artless“ (*ukunstlet*): here I find myself in disagreement. In saying this, I do not mean to defend uncritically vom Birchenbaum's work, yet placed into the tradition of the lament (*veklagan*, *klagosång*), this poem would seem to be to an excellent example of the genre being pushed to its limit, in that it is here also asked to accommodate a quasi-narrative burden. Moreover, the author carries this off in just 29 often elegant, always skillfully-crafted strophes (a-b-a-b-c-d-c-d, with 7 syllables in the odd-numbered lines, 6 in the even). In general, hers is among the most carefully constructed and most subtly wrought poems considered here.

Queen Christina's *La Vie de Reine Christine faite par Elle-même...* stands apart from the works of Horn and vom Birchenbaum: if their models were balladic, biblical and spiritual, it is probably the case that Christina's were the learned historians of Classical and Swedish tradition – Pliny, Tacitus, Olaus Magnus, and Johannes Messenius (see my remarks Mitchell 1985, 72-77). Her story is Sweden's story and one senses that Christina never loses sight of this all-encompassing and all-directing fact. The text might have served well as propaganda for the Catholic Counter-Reformation, but it does not allow Christina's view of her own life to rise to a level that makes it genuinely interesting to us. Those more focused on history than literature may disagree, but in my view, unorthodox though it may be, Christina's autobiography is in important ways the least of all the texts we have by the women of the 17th century, exactly because we have the right to expect so much but get so little from her.

In contrast, several works by women of the Swedish Empire consider the question of what life has offered them not from a narrative but rather from a lyrical stance: while the purpose may be the same from their various authors' viewpoints, the results are quite different to us as latter-day readers, for we must often approach the texts with only limited knowledge of the short-fallings, anguish, and so on to which they refer. Karin Ulfspärre's broadly autobiographical poems are early examples of this sort of writing, one which undoubtedly has its roots in the tradition of psalm-writing and -translation.¹⁵ Whereas the works I have here termed „ruminative“ (i.e.,

¹⁵ See the excellent overview in Lindgärde 1993a. Of Karin Ulfspärre's several poems, texts 8 and 9 appear to be the most clearly of an autobiographical sort.

Horn's *Beskrivning*, Christina's *Vie*, and vom Birchenbaum's „Wijsa“) set out the history of their lives and in this context look for the hand of the Lord at work in them, these works take these same events as the starting point for poetic texts that raise suffering to an art. The authors do not simply wallow in their grief, but rather they use the endlessly cruel set-backs of their lives as the well-spring for their artistic designs. Ulfsparre mentions, for example, the loss of a loved one (8:2), her love for family (8:3), the turn of her fortunes (9:7-9), and the loss of her mother, grandmother, and brother (9:10), yet these incidents act only as inspirations for poetic outpourings of grief, not as organizing keys to the works as a whole.

Of the many psalms and other poems written by Märta Berendes, only Nr 6 „När iag min kårta vandringstijd/ Efftertänckelig besinnar“ (‘When I my short period of wandering/ thoughtfully consider’) and her prayer „En jinnerligh bön för en högt bedröffvat änka“ (‘A heart-felt prayer for a greatly sorrowful widow’) are taken up here.¹⁶ In her poetry, Berendes gives deep expression to her sorrow, but with only passing reference to its causes (e.g., „Ithy min första barndomsår/ Sång har anledning giffvit/ Och så alt fast min ungdomsvår/ Med suck och pust framdrifvit“ (‘Since my first years of childhood/ have given occasion to sorrow/ and thus everything, despite the spring of my youth,/ [is] conveyed with sigh and moan’, v. 2), and it may be that it is in her prayer that Berendes most fully sets out the agenda we recognize already from Agneta Horn: the parallel between the suffering she has endured and the monumental, triumphant „sufferers“ (and heroines) of the Bible and Christian legend. While Agneta Horn draws a specific parallel between her torments and those of Job, Berendes focuses on powerful female figures, almost all widows. Specifically, she cites the widow of Nain, whose husband is resurrected by Jesus (Luke 7:11-15); Hanna, who triumphs over great trials through her faith (1 Samuel, chaps. 1, 2); Ruth, whose story codifies the tale of the good widow; the Zarpathanian widow, whose son is resurrected by Elijah after her assistance to the prophet (1 Kings 17:8-24, cf. Luke 4:26); and Judith, whose triumphant widowhood is celebrated in the deuterocanonical (or apocryphal) book of the same name, as well as in innumerable artistic, poetic and dramatic reworkings. Moreover, Berendes’s biblical lamentations (and citations) appear to be drawn more from the *Psalms* than the *Book of Job*. Thus, for example, Berendes writes in her prayer, „Jagh är likasom en pelikan i öknene, iagh vakar och är som en ensam fågel på taket“ (‘I am like a pelican in the desert, I watch and am like a bird alone on the roof’), passages obviously drawn from the 102nd Psalm (v. 7-8, „Jagh är lijka en Pelican i öknenne: [...] Iagh vakar och är såsom en ensam Fogel på taket.“) (cf. the parallel passage in X240 AH,

¹⁶ Unfortunately, Berendes’s other autobiographical work, described by Hanselli as „en i dagboksform uppställd kort ‘optekning på mitt olyckeliga leffverne, födelse och ålder’, hvilken slutar med år 1698“ (‘a short „chronicle of my unhappy life, birth, and old age“ arranged in the form of a diary, which concludes with the year 1698’), has so far eluded me, despite its supposed availability in Lunds universitets bibliotek. On Berendes, relatively little has been written; see, for example, Lindgärde 1993b, 277-80; Lindgärde 1994; and Aurelius 1996, 235-38.

[Mitchell 1985, 46-47], which displays exactly the same ellipsis). It appears increasingly likely that Berendes's writing is of a piece with Horn's, and like her better-known contemporary (at least in the modern world), she examines her life from an analytic („epic“) point of view, and also employs it as the foundation for an emotional („lyric“) interpretation of her spiritual feelings.

Finally, one must consider the largely overlooked poem Agneta Horn wrote in 1657 in the *stambok* of her friend and relative Kerstin Posse, a text which in its own way holds the most remarkable and most important position of those works under discussion here.¹⁷ As the text of Horn's poem (UUB Y 117k) has not been printed since Leijonhufvud's normalized edition of 1909 (cf. my remarks in Mitchell 1985, 65-68), I take this opportunity to present it in its original manuscript form [NB: ends of lines unmarked]:

- Den tidh Jagh warit liten och vngh
 hafwer min swára lýka warit migh mýcket túngh
 och når iagh án war komin til nágra fá áhr
 och án war hmin blinda lýcka migh licka swár
 5 mán nú iágh har trot min högsta lýck til niúta fá
 har min högsta hiártans sárg och olýka kommit migh pá
 och brúkar sá lýkan mádh migh sit vnderliga spel áhr i frá́n áhr
 och giör min bedröfwade och túnga wárd migh mýket swár
 tÿ háler sá mádh migh min túngha lýka dagh ifrá́n dagh
 10 in til des gúdh tákes hiálpa migh J min graf
 gúdh som har lagt migh en sá túng och blindh lýcka pá
 han hiálp migh alt mádh gát tálamod wál igonomgá
 och wne migh i al min hártans stora sárgh mot gáng och nodh
 Christeligh hár i wárliden til at lefwa och sedan saligh döö
 15 gúdh láte mig sedan mádh alla mina i wár graf roligen hwilas fá
 och sedan mádh húar anan pá then ýtersta dagen glada vp stá
 och lát oß madh tig sedan och ala christna til lika
 hafwa gládia och frögdh J titt ewiga rike
 tá lára gúdh giöra pá min túnga lýka och stora sárgh en godh ánda
 20 thena wárdenas gladia och blinda lýcka iag mig aldeles frá́n wánder
 gúdh láge mig för sin barmhártighet eÿ mára kárs motgáng och nöd vpa
 án han iú ser migh kúna mádh gát tálamod igonom gá
 gúdh höre min bö́n för sin stora nádh och mildhet
 then sama gúdh befaler iag mig och de mina J ewighet
 25 min hiartans gládie hafwer en ánda min danz ár wánt vti klaga grádh af mit húfwet
 ár min krona falen
 ach ve at iagh sá sýndat hafwer ther fóre ár mit hiárta bedrofwat och min ögan för
 mörkat
 theta hafwer iagh skrifwit min h á h k s kirstin pose til wilier och behagh och for

¹⁷ The importance of the piece is generally seen as deriving from its place in Swedish cultural – rather than literary – history. Platen, for example, describes the piece as poor, not up to Horn's prose standards, and done in a minor key („Den är alltigenom djupt mollstämd [...]“. [Platen 1998, 105]).

sákrar hene der vpá at iagh al tidh ár henes troгна och tíanst wiliga sýster sá lánge
iag lefwer

30 gúdh ár min tröst J al min stora hiártans sárgh och bedrofwelse som migh handa
heler pá koma kan

Agneta Horn gústafdáter en af hiárta högt bedröfwat och för láten ánckia
skrifwit pá fánön den 28 Júní 1657

1 och: ch *changed* – **4** hmin: m *unclear* – **5** íagh: a *changed from* i – **7** och: c *changed* – **7**
brúkar: ar *unclear* – **7** vnderliga: d *unclear* – **10** J: *changed* – **13** mot: o *changed* – **14**
Christeligh: *second* h *changed* – **19** gúdh: d *changed from* g – **20** thena: h *changed* – **20**
between thena and wárdenas a *crossed out* warden – **21** motgáng: m *changed* – **22** tála
blotted – **25** *second* min *changed from* krona – **29** iagh: h *changed* – **32** förláten: ö
changed from r

Translation:

[Since] the time I was little and young,
my difficult fortune has been very heavy to me,
and when I had come to just a few years,
and yet my blind fortune was just as hard to me,
but now I believe my greatest fortune to have enjoyed;
my great heartfelt sorrow and ill fortune have overcome me,
and thus fortune cultivates its wondrous play with me year after year,
and makes my distressed and heavy world very difficult to me.
Thus continues with me my heavy fortune day after day,
until God is pleased to help me into my grave,
God who placed on me such a heavy and blind fortune.
He helps me experience everything with great patience,
and grants me in my heart's great sorrow adversity and distress
Christ-like here on earth to live and then blessed to die;
God grant that I rest quietly then with all my [dear ones] in our grave,
and then with each other rise up on that uttermost day,
and grant that we with You, and all [other] Christians too,
might have happiness and joy in Your eternal kingdom;
then, dear God, make a good end to my heavy fortune and great sorrow;
this world's happiness and blind fortune I shall completely turn from.
May God in His mercy place on me no more crosses, adversity, and distress
than He sees that I can with good patience experience.
May God in His great grace and gentleness hear my prayer,
to this same God I commit myself and all my [dear ones] throughout eternity.

„The joy of [my] heart is ceased; [my] dance is turned into mourning.
The crown is fallen from [my] head: woe unto [me], that [I] have sinned!
For this [my] heart is faint; for these things [my] eyes are dim.“¹⁸

¹⁸ As is her practice in her autobiography, Horn has in this citation from *Lamentations* 5:15-17 personalized all the pronouns, which in the original are plural.

This I have written to my most beloved, dearest
 sister Kirsten Posse for her delight and pleasure, and assure her
 that I will always be her faithful and obliging sister as long as I live.

God is my comfort in all the great heart-felt sorrow and grief
 which can happen or befall me

Agneta Horn, Gustaf's daughter, a heart-felt, highly distressed and abandoned widow

Written at Fånö, the 28 of June 1657

In this poem, we have a rare opportunity to compare, on the one hand, Horn's fully disclosed and explored life as articulated in her *Beskrivning* with the emotional residue of such rumination as it is expressed in this poem, on the other. This poem is roughly contemporary with Horn's *Beskrivning* (cf. Mitchell 1985, 65-68; Aurelius 1996, 75-79). Indeed, the years around 1657 are a useful point of reference for much of what we have of Agneta Horn's literary and spiritual activity: this poem; her *Beskrivning*; her use of biblical citations to create an autobiography; and her planned reconstruction of Björklinge kyrka. Yet, this poem, with its many verbal echoes of the autobiography, is focused on the present and the future: it is inspired by Horn's unhappy situation, yet does not dwell on the specifics of her tragic past but rather the effects of it. It is true that some very rough sign-posts of her autobiography appear – e.g., that her troubles began already when she was young – but references of this sort are little more than tropes. The question one might pose is the following: just how would we interpret this poem if we possessed it in isolation, if there were no „Horniana“ to which it might be compared and by which it might be explained? Instead, given the existence of Horn's *Beskrivning* and the other materials connected to her, we are able to interpret the poem and its accompanying prose remarks as a sincere – and pathetic – outpouring of grief and sorrow. And although „ach ve“ may strike us as histrionic, Horn's audience would undoubtedly accept it as part of the natural language of lamentation with which many in that era were conversant.

5. Conclusion

Among the characteristic elements of the literature of the Nordic Baroque are its implicit expression of the idea of order based on Lutheran Orthodoxy, and the fact that it does not originate in the immediately preceding vernacular poetry but adopts formal elements and themes from European poetry (Friese 1965, 105; see also Friese 1968, 298). The texts considered here are similarly concerned with the notion of order, although perhaps not in the fashion of more established genres of literature, or at least, not in the same sense, and they too draw heavily from biblical and spiritual texts of all sorts, and thus represent a conduit to non-native poetic language and

forms, including figural language. Yet, at the same time, it seems that this little corner of Swedish Baroque literature diverges to a high degree from prevailing trends of elite, male-dominated literature of the period meant for publication, even running directly counter to them, as noted already in 1968 in the case of Agneta Horn.¹⁹ Life-writings by women in this period are in important ways dependent on previous periods of Swedish literary, religious, and cultural history (e.g., ballads, Birgitta), and, at least with respect to *auctoritas*, do not represent a complete break with the past. The main ordering principle in the long catalogues of miseries the women cite is that such *wederwärtighet* ('loathsomeness'), *bedröffuelser* ('sorrow'), *swåra lycka* ('difficult fortune'), and so on simply must be God's will. This theodical view contains within itself a deeply subversive credo, even when it is meant sincerely, as we must assume each of our writers intends it.

These texts stand out in sharp contrast to other works from the period, and we can understand the significant differences between them if we compare women's to men's autobiographical writing, such as, for instance, that of Jesper Svedberg (Wetterberg 1941; cf. Aurelius 1996, 277-81). Here is a work constantly aware of its readers: Svedberg's asides of the „And-now-I-want-to-tell-about“ variety make it painfully apparent that he is always conscious of his own status, and of his autobiography as a text for readers, a sense of self few of the women possesses (the prime exception being Queen Christine). Audience may, in fact, be a key consideration in shaping the character of such life-writings: to the extent that women's autobiographical works were generally intended, not for publication through printing presses, but for circulation in manuscript form, they may have been of an entirely different character.²⁰ Indeed, it is difficult to read men's life-writings of this period (e.g. those of Gustaf II Adolf or Jesper Svedberg) without sensing the strongly public stance they want to take. Could any of them admit to the sort of emotions and pettiness that nearly consigned Agneta Horn's autobiography to obscurity at the hands of many critics? Undoubtedly not, as they were all too aware of the public and prominent places their works would take in society.

In her studies of women's life-writings, Jelinek takes the view that there is a distinctly different quality to women's as opposed to men's autobiographical writing, in that women, even when they have occupied prominent positions, are generally less interested in discussing this public aspect of their lives as much as their private lives (Jelinek 1980, esp. 7-8; and Jelinek 1986, esp. 24). Commenting on the 17th century in particular, Jelinek writes that men tend more toward the *res gestae*,

¹⁹ Friese 1968, 142: „Ebenfalls unbekannt ist die Autobiographie 'Agneta Horns Leverne' (gedruckt 1908), in der Agneta Horn, die dem vornehmsten Geschlecht der schwedischen Aristokratie angehört, aus ihrem Leben erzählt, ohne sich an die Vorschriften der Dichtung ihrer Zeit zu halten.“

²⁰ Note, for example, vom Birchenbaum's opening verse: „Christ giff migh at utsiunga,/ Som iagh har vilian til,/ Regera modh och tunga,/ Ty iagh förtälia vil,/ Hvardh migh är fast til meena,/ Min veder-värdighet/ För androm, Gudh allena/ Bäst kiänd och iag väll veet“ ('May Christ allow me to speak my mind,/ As I have the will,/ Rule spirit and tongue,/ For I would tell,/ What is harmful to me,/ My repulsiveness/ for others, to God alone/ Most familiar and which I well know'). Cf. Aurelius 1991.

progressive and orderly chronicles of their careers, more about deeds (often exaggerated) than about themselves, with little or no mention of their domestic lives – their wives and children – and little in the way of subjective or introspective analysis [...]. By contrast, secular autobiographies by women at this time are notable for their emphasis on the personal and even for an incipient self-analysis (Jelinek 1986, 24).

The Swedish material, too, tends to fit this pattern, with a few exceptions. A further observation from Jelinek is thought-provoking in considering the Swedish situation: it is her view that women's autobiographies of the Anglo-American 17th century „anticipate“ the psychologically self-analyzing and „fictional shaping“ of autobiographies by more modern women writers (Jelinek 1986, 32). In the Swedish case, a similar line of anticipation runs, both sub-culturally as well as textually, from the 17th-century works we have considered here to Hedvig Charlotte Nordenflycht, the Herrnhutic and other pietistic conversion histories of the 18th century, Frederika Bremer, and Victoria Benedictsson. In what ways are the works under discussion here more similar to the complex realism of Benedictsson's era than to the simple religious fervor of Birgitta's? For one thing, the women of the 17th century do not hesitate: 1) to explore their lives and express theodical constructions of it; 2) to question, if in muted tones, authority; and 3) to extrapolate larger philosophical conclusions from the details of their own lives, albeit under the larger interpretive umbrella of Lutheran Orthodoxy. Moreover, we need no longer look for hints of autobiographical „I-ness“ in stories of biblical virgins and widows (cf. Brigitta's vision of the three examples of outstanding women above); the narrator and the subject of the narration have melded together, and interest in the dyad as a dyad is, if only to the author herself, supreme.

What features do women's life-writing of the Swedish Baroque share? For the most part, these autobiographical works:

1. Are more intensely personal than their male-authored counterparts (e.g., although Jesper Svedberg entertains us with a charming little vignette on his first meeting with his second wife, she might just as well be a visiting foreign dignitary for all that we get out of the episode emotionally);
2. Are, as a direct result of the previous point and due to women's more restricted social roles in that age, more likely to focus on issues of family and other domestic concerns than their male-authored counterparts (e.g., Agneta Horn, although a very busy manager of her estates and so on as a widow [see my remarks, Mitchell 1985, 68-69], elects to write only about her private life as a young woman. But cf. Queen Christina, whose works stand in marked contrast to this point);

3. Are more likely to draw on specific biblical analogies than their male-authored counterparts (e.g., Märta Berendes' plea,

O min älskelige kere Herre Gudh, regera migh medh din heliga och frimodiga anda, att iagh [...] såsom den gudfrugtiga och dygderika Hanna, den fromma och sagtmodiga Ruth, den bedersamma Zarpathanska änkan, den högt beprisade Judith, så att iagh må hafva ett gått och berömligt rygte aff hvar man, att ingen må kunna få orsak att tala något ont om migh

('Oh my loving, dear Lord God, rule me with your holy and frank spirit, that I [...] like the God-fearing and virtuous Hanna, the pious and gentle Ruth, the prayerful Zarpathian widow, the greatly lauded Judith, that I might have a good and praiseworthy reputation [in the eyes] of all, that no one might have reason to speak evil of me'; Berendes 1869, 18-19);

4. Are more prone to expressing theodical conundrums than are their male-authored counterparts (e.g., Agneta Horn's *Beskrivning*, especially when taken together with the biblical section); and
5. Are manifestly not intended (again, with exception being made for Queen Christina) for publication, except perhaps in manuscript or in oral presentation in the salon.

If too narrow a set of criteria for establishing a separate genre, these points nevertheless significantly and notably distinguish women's autobiographical writing in the Swedish Baroque from *levernesbeskrivningar* ('life-writings') by men, and from more directly religious and political works as well. Whatever our disposition toward them with respect to genre designations and other minutiae of literary criticism, women's life-writings of Sweden's *Stormaktstid* remain texts that are distinct and distinctive, works whose preoccupations lie between religion and realism, and whose heroines wander – between rumination and recrimination.*

* The original version of this essay was presented at the 1994 conference on the Nordic Baroque honoring Wilhelm Friese, held at Universität Tübingen. It has undergone a number of transformations in the intervening years, mainly attempts to keep it informed by the fast pace of scholarly developments in the area of women's autobiographical writing, particularly the important contribution of Eva Hættner Aurelius in 1996. For their suggestions, criticism and encouragement, I would like to thank Kaaren Grimstad, William Layher and Lena Norrman.

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