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Sweden beyond the Millennium  
and Stieg Larsson.



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## Preface.

To better inform ourselves in our global efforts of dialogue and engagement, we at the Swedish Institute study the awareness of, and interest in, Sweden around the world. This publication is based on a report commissioned by the Swedish Institute that examines the impact of Stieg Larsson's Millennium stories. The report analyzes media articles and the scope of the interest in the stories globally.

Stieg Larsson's trilogy has been a global success which has increased the interest in Sweden as a nation. This publication is for those interested in the Millennium phenomena, Stieg Larsson, or Sweden. Stieg Larsson embodied the Swedish tradition of a constant search for a better society through free expression and an open and free dialogue.

Culture and arts are important elements in our dialogue and engagement with the world. The goal of our efforts is not only to create mutual relationships with other countries, but also to raise topics that are important to Sweden. The aim of this publication is to pose questions and encourage an open discussion.

We welcome you to form your own perspectives of Sweden beyond the Millennium stories.

Annika Rembe  
Director-general,

Swedish Institute

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It's quite a storm Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy is kicking up. All three books—The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, The Girl Who Played with Fire and The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest—have been hugely successful. Trying to see the results in the storm's wake is not an easy task but one worth attempting. It is a known fact that cultural expressions such as film and literature can have an effect on people's impression of a place, for example a country. Seeing how closely knit the books of Stieg Larsson are to Sweden, it is natural to ask oneself what the effect is on the image of Sweden abroad. The Swedish Institute gave Joakim Lind the assignment to look into the Millennium phenomena. His findings resulted in a 2012 report on which this publication is largely based.

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## The Millennium trilogy.

The books portray the two heroes, investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist and underground hacker Lisbeth Salander, as they go head-to-head against corruption and injustices in various power spheres. Reaching to the highest echelons of industrialism, the duo is faced with the darkest antagonists that non-fictional society has to offer. As if that were not enough, the story takes place in a country known for safe cars, model governance and corporate social responsibility.

### A Millennial success

The books have sold over 64 million copies in more than 50 countries. In less than six years they have twice outsold popular crime-writer Henning Mankell's eleven books about Wallander. The Swedish Millennium films were soon followed by a Hollywood remake also filmed in Sweden. Stieg Larsson sadly passed away before the first copy had rolled off the presses and with an unfinished fourth book in the making. Millennium, however, now has a life all of its own.

After the success in Sweden, it was Germany's turn. And from there the hype spread to France, Italy and beyond. During 2010 the books constituted the three best-selling books in the UK. They have also done very well in the US, with 16 million copies sold. Cultural proximity seems to play an important part on sales figures.

The Swedish film trilogy will likely have reached at least 300 million people in the next few years. And although the American film version of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is not living up to the international sales expectations of its hopeful producers, it will over the course of the next few years reach at least 1 billion people.

The impact of the American film can also be seen in the upswing of media attention in the English-language press. The number of articles that mention Stieg Larsson and Millennium has increased by hundreds of percent during 2011.

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Copies of the books sold as of March 2012

USA	16,000,000
Great Britain	11,750,000
Germany	6,800,000
France	4,200,000
Spain	4,100,000
Italy	3,400,000
Netherlands	2,500,000
China	115,000



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The stories of Stieg Larsson attract global interest and attention. An estimated 50,000-100,000 news articles have so far been written about Stieg Larsson or the Millennium trilogy. Conservatively speaking that translates to a total advertising value of between SEK one quarter to half a billion (SEK 1 = USD 0.15 or EUR 0.11).

So audiences are not only confronted by the books but also by a sort of meta-culture around the books. Within this meta-culture we come across merchandising, articles, blog posts, fan sites, non-fiction books and biographies. Millennium is making its way into the theatre, and serves as an inspiration to artists, fashion designers, musicians, filmmakers and writers all around the world.

### A wave of Swedish crime

Even though no one could have predicted the media frenzy, it did not come as a complete surprise that a Swedish crime story would be this popular sooner or later. After all, it was not the first time Swedish crime saw the literary light of day.

Swedish writing duo Sjöwall-Wahlöö is often credited with starting the Swedish crime writing trend in the 1960s and 1970s. Their books were successful internationally and all ten books about main protagonist Martin Beck were adapted as films in different parts of the world. Henning Mankell later turned the southern Swedish city of Ystad into a murderous haven, and his Wallander books have not only sold millions of copies but also been turned into films and recently also into a BBC television series starring Kenneth Branagh.

The trend does not seem likely to stop here. Stieg Larsson has opened a series of literary doors for his fellow Swedish crime writers. Several writers are currently riding the wave of Swedish Noir in Europe and the US.

Håkan Nesser's books about Inspector Van Veeteren have been published in more than 25 countries and sold over 10 million copies. Liza Marklund's books have sold over 11 million copies in 30 languages. The first book in Jens Lapidus' bestselling trilogy, *Easy Money* was released in English early 2012, and his second film opened in Swedish theaters in the latter part of 2012.

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### Why Millennium?

The literary quality and credible characters coupled with a basic dramaturgy borrowed from mythology make the stories of Stieg Larsson nearly universal. It is easy to quickly discern good from evil, black from white. It makes the stories immediate, appealing and easy to understand. The stories also deal with social issues that most people, regardless of where they live, can identify with: corruption, abuse of power and injustices. That's how the books manage to appeal to such a large audience. Sweden becomes a manageable example of social issues and prompts audiences to reflect on matters such as power structures, gender roles, sexuality and equality.

There are several ways to read the books. They are written from a political-ideological perspective, but it does not become didactic and hence does not put off readers. To write crime novels from a leftist perspective is on the contrary quite often a recipe for success. Identification with the simple man (or woman) is almost handed to you. The main characters are sympathetic individuals.

Stieg Larsson's heroes are physical un-heroes, but thanks to their intelligence, vast knowledge, high ideals and tenacity they manage to fight power and evil. Perhaps there is hope even for those who are superficially powerless. Though more of a super-hero in her own right, *The Washington Post* dubbed Salander "the coolest crime-fighting sidekick to come along in many years." She is a 21st century role model for women and men alike.

The trilogy takes a close look at the challenges involved in building a caring welfare state, and how it requires dedicated and critical individuals who do not solely rely on state and authority. Steven Murray, who translated the books into English, argues that it is precisely the political and moral tone in the books that attracts readers, while the pace of the story keeps people from putting them down.

In much of non-Swedish crime fiction, the problems can be narrowed down to a few bad people who stand outside of society. In the fiction of Larsson, society is much to blame instead. The bad guys in Stieg Larsson's books are not only malicious as individuals—they personify the evils of society. Stieg Larsson's criminals constitute archetypal examples of an offense that is much larger than an individual outside the law.

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The men who abuse women become symbolic of female oppression. These men are both examples of oppression as well as of structures that maintain an oppressive society. Lisbeth's father, Alexander Zalachenko, is a patriarchal woman abuser and a former KGB agent who almost becomes a caricature of all the downsides of a patriarchal society. Nils Bjurman epitomizes the evil man in what could have been a good society. He embodies a society gone wrong that has lost its ideological base. Bjurman is an attorney and guardian—central roles in a society governed by law. But this is a guardian who rapes the woman he has been appointed to protect. Hans-Erik Wennerström and Martin Vanger represent the evil capitalists, the evils of capitalism and perhaps the evil in all economic structures. Henrik Vanger and Harriet Vanger get to represent the good of capitalism.

### The power of fiction

In his book *The Power of Myth*, American mythologist and writer Joseph Campbell argues that myths are essential for our well-being and indeed for our survival.

Places also have identities. A community perceives a particular country on the basis of culture, economics, politics, religion, climate, and so on. Rarely, if ever, do facts alone play a part in our perception. More often it is the stories of the country that affect us the most.

Culture has a great capacity to influence people's perceptions. Over time writers and artists influence the general perceptions and interpretations of a place. Exactly how these stories affect our perception of a place is usually individual. Based on our personal backgrounds we interpret information differently. We read the Millennium trilogy in different ways. Some stories also have a more obvious connection to a particular place and time. To which extent a book might affect the collective perception of a place has to do with how closely the place is connected to the story, the cultural values they associate with and how large an audience it has. Sometimes the film adaptation of an already successful book becomes the main distributor of the story, which removes it from the author's original text. It is worth noting that Millennium has been filmed in both Swedish and American versions. A further parameter is the author behind the story. In this case, the story becomes even more interesting considering the man who wrote it.

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**"To the roster of literary death zones, one can now add an entire country: Sweden. According to the current wave of Scandinavian crime writers 'hitting British bookstores with the ferocity of a Viking invasion,' as Boris Johnson put it, the hitherto innocuous home of Saab, Sven-Göran Eriksson and stuff that requires an Allen key for assembly is one almighty killing field, its pine forests a veritable repository for body parts, those scenic small towns seething cauldrons of murderous malice."**

*The Sunday Times*, February 14, 2012,  
*Meet the girl with the dragon tattoo*





Writing duo Sjöwall-Wahlöö, starting the Swedish crime writing wave in the 1960s.





Liza Marklund / Jens Lapidus







"There's also Salander, that taciturn, pierced, brilliant avenger with David-and-Goliath appeal. Journalists were always going to adore Blomkvist, indefatigable writer of books, spotter of crooks, lover of women and outer of evil; action-man, sex-symbol, master detective and all-round nice guy. While nerds, cyber geeks and design-types could be expected to love the hackers-for-a-truth parable and the way Larsson, himself a graphic designer, makes objects carry his characters' political baggage."

*The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 10, 2010,  
*Sex, crime and vengeance: why the world fell in love with Larsson*















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**"Larsson was obsessed with the dark underbelly of Scandinavian life—the world behind the neat perfection of Ikea, Volvo and Abba. Despite the nation's professed social democratic and 'welfare state' ideals, Larsson warned about the presence and growing influence of extreme anti-immigrant, right-wing groups."**

*The Jakarta Globe*, Karim Raslan, March 29, 2012,  
*In Search of Lisbeth*



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## Stieg Larsson.

Stieg Larsson has in more than one way contributed to the international interest of the books. A search on Google for Stieg Larsson in April, 2012 generated nearly 17 million search results. Astrid Lindgren gave 6.6 million, and Ingmar Bergman 6.2 million. Along with sales figures, media hits and other quantitative data, it is evident that Stieg Larsson is one of contemporary world literature's most interesting names.

Stieg Larsson was a good interpreter of his times. He could decipher and explain trends and patterns. He could discern what challenges faced our social structures in Sweden and abroad. The accessibility and clarity in his stories has helped further his narrative popularity.

The Millennium trilogy contains several parallels to Stieg Larsson's own life, which seems to have added interest in the books and films. The stories are written by a journalist with a strong commitment to social and political issues, a commitment that Stieg Larsson transferred into a fictional world.

Stieg Larsson still receives a sizeable amount of attention, even years after his death. His life, his anti-racist commitment and leftist social criticism is always commented upon somewhere in connection with new editions of the Millennium series being released.

People also note the similarities between Stieg Larsson's own family situation and how families and family ties are described in the books. Various media have drawn attention to the fact that he was raised by his grandparents up until the age of nine. His maternal grandfather was on the political left and inspired him to get involved in the movement against corruption and violation of human rights. Several places in the book are depictions of areas from his childhood memories.

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The fact that the books were published posthumously adds a dramatic dimension to the Millennium phenomena and stokes additional speculation. For an artist, an early death can be a very effective, albeit irreversible, career move. His death in 2004 from a heart attack created a myth which grew stronger due to a number of other factors. As an independent researcher of right-wing extremism and a journalist who wrote investigative reports on the growing tendencies of racism and xenophobia in Swedish society, he received several death threats over the last ten years of his life.

The ensuing dispute over Stieg Larsson's estate, including rights and proceeds from the books, between his family and partner, was largely played out in the media. The dispute is likely to have further fueled interest not only in his person but also in his books and films.

Shortly after the success of his books became apparent, acquaintances and coworkers began to appear with anecdotes and stories about the man behind the books. Their stories had a life of their own in newspapers and other mass media. It has even been speculated whether it was Stieg Larsson who wrote the books or not. Since he is no longer with us and unable to explain or defend himself, the myths live on unanswered.

### The Stieg Larsson Prize

Stieg Larsson was not only a writer. He was also a fighter for freedom of expression, against racism and against the oppression of women. The Stieg Larsson Prize was created to commemorate Stieg Larsson's overall achievement. It was founded by the Norstedts publishing house and Stieg's father and brother, Erling and Joakim Larsson, and is awarded to a person and/or an organization working in the spirit of Stieg Larsson.

Previous laureates are *Expo* magazine (2009), Anne Sjögren (2010), Vilma Núñez De Escorcia (2011) and Maryam Al-Khawaja (2012).

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### Stieg Larsson

1954	Born in the north of Sweden
1955	Left to live with his grandparents
1963	Reunited with parents
1972	Co-edited a science fiction fanzine
1977	Training guerillas of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front
1982	Scandinavian correspondent for <i>Searchlight Magazine</i>
1991	Published the non-fictional book <i>Extremhögern</i> (The Far Right)
1995	Co-founder of <i>Expo</i> , anti-racist magazine and foundation
1999	Editor-in-chief, <i>Expo</i> magazine
2004	Passed away in Stockholm
2005	Posthumous publication of <i>Män som hatar kvinnor</i> ( <i>The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo</i> )
2006	Posthumous publication of <i>Flickan som lekte med elden</i> ( <i>The Girl Who Played with Fire</i> )
2007	Posthumous publication of <i>Luftslottet som sprängdes</i> ( <i>The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest</i> )
2009	Stieg Larsson Prize established

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**"We used to sit in the small smoking room or by one of the desks at the Expo magazine office. Stieg would talk about his time in the military training, about that time he got lost in the jungle or about all the odd characters he had come across in his lifetime. He was good at telling stories.**

**I remember Stieg the idealist. He had a conviction so strong that it bordered on insanity: if a person discovers something that is wrong, he or she must try to change it. Not for the glory or for the money, but rather because it has to be done.**

**He boarded trains and travelled across Sweden to hold lectures for young anti-racists. He would spend hours each day replying to mails from worried parents whose children had become involved in racist organizations or groups. And yet he could not help himself from getting entangled in endless discussions with all kinds of race ideologists and conspiracy theorists.**

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**It made sense that he started to write crime novels. Of course he should be writing about crime. Of course he should tell stories. He was born to do it.**

**A lot of people have asked me about Stieg and his books. How did he come up with his ideas? Is there a real Lisbeth Salander? I have answered them that I do not know, which is the truth. But I do know there was another side to Stieg, something besides the storyteller.**

**He had a spark which I will never forget, and which lives on in me and in everyone else who continue in his spirit through our work with Expo, for an open and tolerant Sweden. For a Sweden that Stieg wanted. For a Sweden we want to live in."**

Daniel Poohl, editor-in-chief *Expo* magazine



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**“Larsson was an active and lifelong feminist, partly for personal reasons but also because he saw that ending gender slavery was as crucial to next-stage evolution as ending race slavery was to the last stage. It’s a noble fight, not least because the various fundamentalisms threatening Western democracy are united in their urgent need to re-cage women’s sexuality. Larsson’s female characters are therefore universally clear thinking, resourceful and good. They defend themselves and each other, define their relationships without regard to social norm and staunchly uphold principle. Untrammelled by such petty concerns as children, love or money (Salander, like Longstocking, is fabulously self-financing) they have sex in whatever form, methodology or company they choose. As comic book fantasies go, it’s pretty compelling.”**

*The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 10, 2010,  
*Sex, crime and vengeance: why the world fell in love with Larsson*

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## Sweden.

Is Sweden a model country of sensible government, sensible cars and sensible flat-pack furniture? Looking at what has been written in the foreign press about Stieg Larsson and the Millennium trilogy, a darker — but also more realistic and multi-faceted image of Sweden emerges. The Millennium books have put a dent in the stereotypical image of Sweden that existed before. But if you come to Stockholm in search of Stieg Larsson’s dark world you will likely be disappointed: corruption and violent crime rates in Sweden are comparatively low.

### Close ties to Sweden

The Millennium story is highly place-specific. There’s no mistaking that we are in Sweden, seeing as Swedish culture, history, language and characters are a central part of the plot. For that reason most translators have also chosen to keep Swedish names and place-names.

Stieg Larsson guides the reader through real-world environments which he lived in and knew inside out. Sweden is received through a filter of fictional thriller. The Millennium series is also full of political and social perspectives that are closely associated with Swedish contemporary history, and the books are littered with parallels to real events and people. Popular interest in Millennium and Stieg Larsson creates a deeper relationship and understanding of Swedish 20th century history that led up to the situations portrayed in the trilogy.

Although Millennium is fiction, the narrative details and links to actual locations and historical times reinforces the feeling that the fictional format has been chosen in order to more freely write about actual situations. Millennium merges with the real life story of Stieg Larsson which further fuels interest in the author, his novels, and Sweden. Reality and fiction blend. The border becomes diffuse and the stories tickle the curiosity of audiences with the logic of “no smoke without fire.”

References to actual places and people create the illusion that the events have occurred, or at least could have occurred. The journalist Stieg Larsson fills fiction with verifiable references and stylistic tricks that make his fiction believable and realistic.

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## Substantial marketing value

The books have an effect on how people imagine Sweden. Lots of cultural expressions hold the power to influence. What separates the Millennium books from the rest is the enormous public appeal and commercial success.

Considering the importance of place to the story, the marketing value also applies to the country of Sweden. It seems difficult to write reviews or articles related to Millennium and Stieg Larsson without mentioning Sweden in some way. Approximately every tenth article goes into greater details about Sweden and Swedish society. The Millennium trilogy is in some ways a dramatization of 21st century Swedish society.

The image of Sweden in the Millennium books is in every way different from the stereotypical image that sometimes haunts Sweden—a quiet, predictable country on the cusp of the Arctic Ocean, far from big adventures.

The exceptional international interest in Stieg Larsson's Millennium—coupled with the site-specific nature of the books—provides a fuller and more complex image of Sweden for those already familiar with the basics. For those with no relation to Sweden, the books make them immediately aware and curious.

## A more in-depth view of Sweden

The Millennium trilogy manages to nuance the image of Sweden particularly in countries that are closer to Sweden geographically or culturally. Some previous knowledge about the country is required in order to be surprised. In countries that are further away from Sweden culturally or geographically the effect is more about awareness: audiences are simply reminded of Sweden's existence.

For most European readers, the books have contributed to a greater curiosity and deepening interest in Sweden. Although fictional, they deliver at least a compressed and caricatured portrayal of Sweden. The books contain information that ranges from positive to negative: a history of Nazi elements, independent journalism, anti-racism, a market for sexual services, etc. The notion of Sweden as a conflict-free model nation is shattered. A simplified picture is replaced by one that is more complex, darker and more exciting. It becomes evident that Sweden faces similar social and societal challenges as other countries.

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In the United States, knowledge about Sweden is lower than in Europe. Sweden has always been considered relatively one-dimensional: considerate and fair. For the first time darker aspects are presented on a mass media level. Meanwhile, audiences are fascinated by the Swedish winter landscape, scenic Stockholm environments and the iconic woman Lisbeth Salander. They are of course also drawn to the drama behind the violence of the powerful against the vulnerable.

But as Sweden lost some of its reputation as the “impeccable nation” among the foreign press, it has actually become easier for international journalists to relate to the country.

## Criticism of modern society

The books are critical of Swedish society and are often interpreted as a stand-off with the Swedish welfare society, or at least with the false image of it. Stieg Larsson's stories force us to reflect on concepts of state and authority. Lisbeth Salander is a criminal, hacking into computers, battering and killing people. But her crime is a prerequisite for justice and the common good to prevail. The message seems to be for people not to rely on institutions and authorities to ensure a free, equal and open society—it will instead require the involvement of individuals.

The events are in stark contrast to established stereotypes about Sweden: the safe country that many people imagine to be an egalitarian paradise turns out to contain extremism, racism, oppression of women, conspiracies, and a system that indirectly sanctions abuse of the weakest members of society. Sweden is portrayed as a nation with several historical traumas: Nazism, minister murders and unsolved crimes.

The books also contain numerous references to the traditional image of Sweden as described in the books of Astrid Lindgren. The contrast between the supposed ideals of society and the brutal “reality” makes the story much more potent.

Swedish industry is controlled by a few families, Vanger and Wennerström, obviously inspired by real-life people. The media landscape is similarly dominated by a monopolistic giant. These power houses are reflected upon by Stieg Larsson with both positive and negative associations. There are traces of nostalgia and we see business leaders who feel responsible for society's well-being.

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Another of Sweden's national prides, our vast nature and rural landscapes, receive a literary slap by Stieg Larsson. Unlike many other fictional writers, he depicts rural areas and small towns as something threatening—with remnants of old power structures and long distances between people. Ill-will lurks even in the most idyllic of places and nature provides no refuge from evil.

The books deflate what is left of the socialist welfare state. The image we're left with is rather that of a country that arouses sympathy and faces the same challenges as all others. Sweden becomes real—with logic, heart and stomach. With both positive and negative stories, we see a country closer to life and further from an impossible utopia.

Sweden is portrayed rich in culture and ideology, though not entrenched in the public domain. The sound ideologies support the individual—not the collective. The story is about people who stand up for what is right and fight against violent patriarchal structures. It reminds us of the need to constantly question authority.

Most do not read the Millennium books purely as a commentary on Swedish problems. Rather, Stieg Larsson associates explicitly to the decay in the western world: international financial crisis, real estate bubbles, the collapse of financial institutions, quite simply to the cracks in modern society faced by any number of countries.

It is a dark and thrilling story, but one that raises questions about equality, feminism, sexuality, rule of law, individuality and solidarity in a way that few other media have managed.

### **An open and trendy society**

Amid the most scathing social criticism the book simultaneously illustrates that in Sweden, writers and journalists are free to publish stories that are openly critical of how the country has developed. The fictional opens up a new debate and an opportunity to face the challenges of today. The book could only come from a country that protects freedom of expression, openness and freedom of the press.

In this way, the Millennium further proves that Sweden defends democratic qualities. In many other countries, writing about such difficult social issues would require rewriting or censoring. Millennium makes a

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point of a society that does not fear its history and in which writers and journalists are still able to speak freely.

The books present Sweden as an innovative, modern and trendy industrialized country. Businesses and businessmen are central. Even if corruption exists, the people are portrayed as dedicated professionals. Business sectors mentioned in the books span from traditional industries such as mining and manufacturing to media, information and security operations. Fashion, trends and business are central to the Millennium trilogy.

Sweden has long been a pioneer in areas such as innovation and research. But in recent years, Sweden has also become increasingly attractive with regard to lifestyle. The extent of Stieg Larsson's influence is impossible to say, but Millennium is a phenomenon in popular culture and chances are that many lifestyle reporters have come in contact with it in one format or another.

Daily newspaper *Le Figaro* reported in January 2012 on the Nordic crime wave. In addition to recommending five Nordic crime novels, the feature included two extensive lists of tips on Nordic specialties with everything from recipes for cured salmon, Danish design and Noomi Rapace, who played Lisbeth Salander in the Swedish film adaptations.

### **Tourism magnet**

The Millennium books, along with other Swedish crime writing, have proven to be a magnet for international tourism to Sweden. The contradicting view of Sweden born out of his fiction seems to have sparked a curiosity to find out what lies beyond the stereotypical image of Sweden. Even if Stockholm will not prove quite as haunting as some of the scenes from the Millennium, people will surely discover that Swedes are not the homogenous creatures they are sometimes made out to be.

People's interest in specific places out of the books is definitively positive for tourism. For a lot of people Stieg Larsson and the Millennium trilogy has an impact on their choice of vacation. Perhaps the books are not the only, or even the main reasons why people choose to travel to Sweden, but they help keep Stockholm on top of people's consciousness. The books also help Stockholm's image as a trendy metropolitan city. Ever since 2009, about 10,000 people per year attend the guided Millennium tour held by Stockholm City Museum. They sell roughly 6,000

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specially designed Millennium maps each year. And of course not all Millennium tourists actually attend a guided tour or buy a map for that purpose. Foreign visitors come to Stockholm and Sweden for the first time through the books. Once here, they will discover a Stockholm and a Sweden that has more things to offer besides cold-blooded murder and vivid imaginations.

### **Equality and feminism**

In the French press, Lisbeth Salander has been hailed as one of the most influential women in the world. Renowned Peruvian-Spanish writer Mario Vargas Llosa is fascinated by how Stieg Larsson portrays women in his books. There are several examples of strong women: Lisbeth Salander, Monica Figuerola, Erika Berger and Susanne Linder.

Many critics reflect on the way in which Stieg Larsson portrays strong women. He seems unique, both considering the genre of crime fiction and the fact that he himself is a man. Stieg Larsson inverts the gender roles typical in literature—especially the crime novel. The stereotypical female blonde has no place in the Millennium trilogy. The protagonist is instead a highly intelligent goth who rides a motorcycle and overpowers men despite her smaller physique. The archetypal blonde is instead represented by a man, Ronald Niedermann.

Lisbeth Salander is complex. She personifies the story on several levels. She is representative of both the liberated and the oppressed woman. Sexually abused both as a child and adult, Lisbeth becomes the avenger who gets back at the oppressors and fights the society that protected her tyrants. It is a society that brings out the revolutionary. The men are mostly two-dimensional characters—with the exception of Mikael Blomkvist, who could be read as Stieg Larsson's alter ego.

With Lisbeth Salander, Stieg Larsson has established or enhanced a contemporary trend: the urban, politically aware, liberated hacker feminist—who can be either male or female. Salander is sexually liberated from the traditional hetero-normative relationship form. But this sexual permissiveness can also be seen in the character Mikael Blomkvist who engages in sexual relations with both Lisbeth Salander and his colleague Erika Berger, who is married.

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**"Sweden wants to be seen as an egalitarian society. But Millennium tells the opposite story, about huge differences between the wealthy and the most vulnerable. The country sees itself as neutral on the chess board of foreign policy. Larsson points at an influential and dangerous extreme political right, and at the appeal that Nazism had during World War II. Above all, the author reveals how the most powerful exploit and abuse their privileges in this supposed model society."**

Samuel Blumenfeld, *Le Monde*, October 7, 2011

**"Sweden may have attained heights of gender equality only dreamed of in other parts of the world but, if we're to believe Larsson, that apparent moral superiority is merely cosmetic, concealing pervasive misogyny at every level of society."**

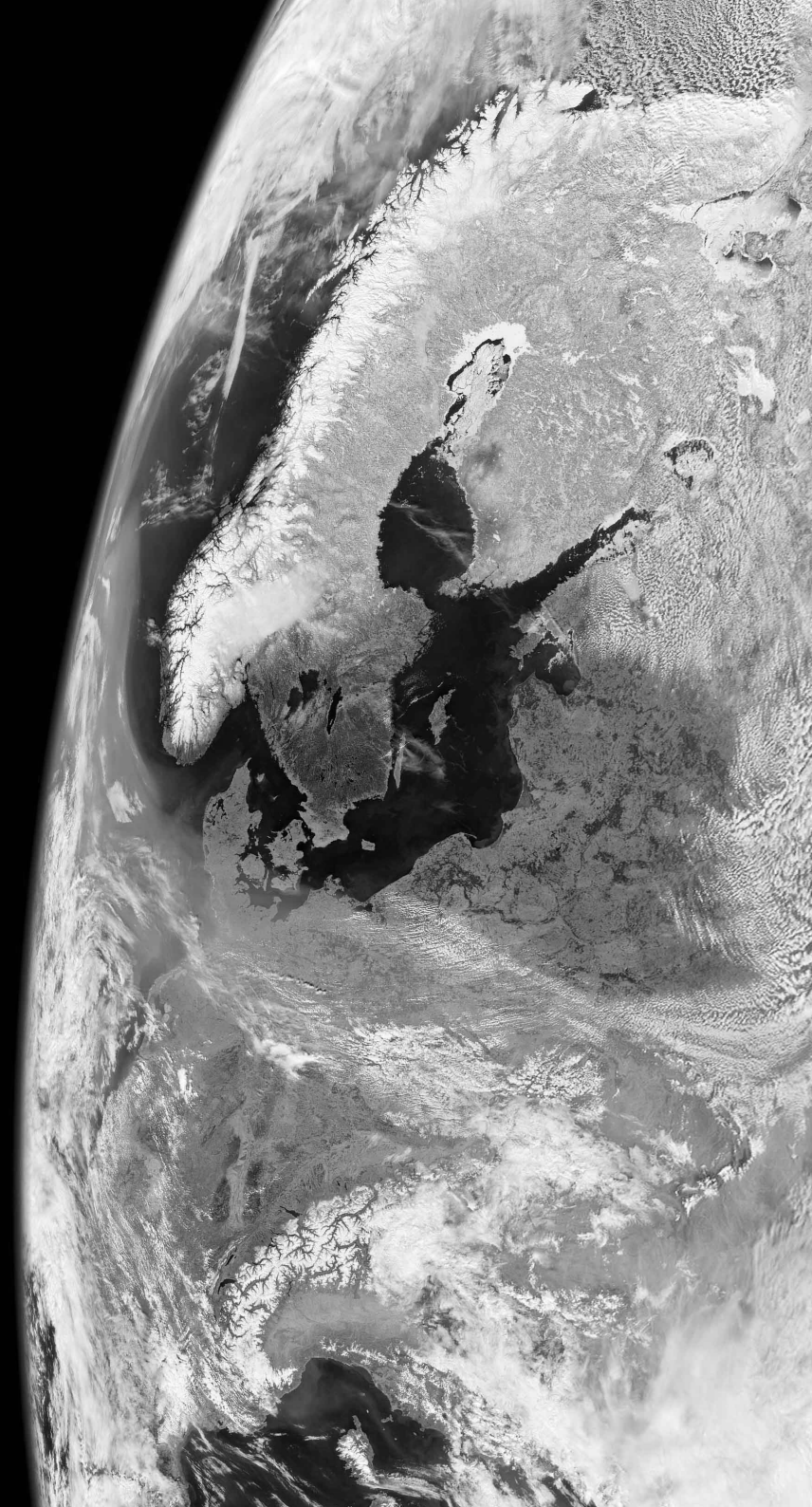
*n+1* magazine, February 27, 2010, Ian MacDougall,  
*The man who blew up the welfare state*

















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**“The story of Sweden over the last 50 years has been one of a steady loss of exceptionalism. In some ways the outside world has grown more ‘Swedish’—we all wear seat-belts, drink less, and believe in gender equality. At the same time, Sweden has grown much more worldly—it drinks more, works and earns less, and struggles with the assimilation of immigrants. The Swedes themselves no longer believe in a Swedish model, or, when they do, it’s very different from the heavily regulated ‘people’s home’ of myth.”**

Andrew Brown, *Foreign Policy*, May 26, 2010,  
*We’re All Swedes Now*

**“I don’t think you can really tell the story without telling it in Sweden. I think it is a very Swedish story, I think all the characters are very Swedish.”**

Rooney Mara (actress who played Lisbeth Salander in the US version of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*)

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