



INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF DECADENCE STUDIES

Volume 6, Issue 2

Autumn 2023

---

Layers of Clothing in Hjalmar Söderberg's Writing: Translations of 'The Fur Coat' (1898) and 'A Grey Waistcoat or Justice in Munich' (1913) with an Introduction

Laura Alice Chapot

---

ISSN: 2515-0073

Date of Acceptance: 28 September 2023

Date of Publication: 18 December 2023

Citation: Laura Alice Chapot, 'Layers of Clothing in Hjalmar Söderberg's Writing: Translations of 'The Fur Coat' (1898) and 'A Grey Waistcoat or Justice in Munich' (1913) with an Introduction', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 6.2 (2023), 46-74.

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.v.v6i2.1754.g1865

[volupte.gold.ac.uk](http://volupte.gold.ac.uk)

---



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

**Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Layers of Clothing in Hjalmar Söderberg's Writing: Translations of 'The Fur Coat' (1898) and 'A Grey Waistcoat or Justice in Munich' (1913) with an Introduction

Laura Alice Chapot

Dartmouth College

How can a fur coat lead to heartbreak? And how can requesting five rather than six buttonholes for a waistcoat lead to litigation? These are questions the Swedish author, translator, and journalist Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941) explores in his short stories 'Pälsen' [The Fur Coat] (1898) and 'En grå väst, eller Rättvisan i München' [A Grey Waistcoat or Justice in Munich] (1913).<sup>1</sup>

Söderberg is widely recognized as a significant cultural figure of the Swedish fin de siècle and remains a popular writer to this day for his incisive cultural commentary on pressing issues of modern life and for his characteristic writing style – vivid yet economical, light-hearted yet serious. This signature style evolved in part through the interactions between the different genres that Söderberg was writing in, ranging from poetry, novels, short (and very short) stories, reviews of contemporary art and literary critiques, translations, as well as cultural commentary pieces and 'kåserier' (short essay pieces published in newspapers that address hot topics of the day in an earnest yet humorous, conversational, and entertaining tone). Söderberg was also particularly aware of the different cultural and artistic movements coursing through continental Europe at the time. In Scandinavia, this complex of different movements and literary traditions (such as social realism, Naturalism, decadence, and Symbolism) was arguably not as strongly institutionalized into distinctive schools of practice as in other contexts, which allowed writers a certain freedom to put them into conversation.<sup>2</sup> This meant that, while decadence was highly stigmatized in the Scandinavian context, many authors still 'experimented with decadence and developed new varieties of it'.<sup>3</sup>

My translation of two of Söderberg's short stories aims to illuminate how focusing on the role of clothing as literary device in Söderberg's writing can provide a window into the distinctive kind of decadent style Söderberg developed. Although Söderberg incorporates meticulous

descriptions of clothing throughout his writing, in these two stories clothing becomes a dramatic agent that precipitates events. This suggests the particular signifying functions that clothing takes on: how it can play a role in the negotiation of broader social issues, and how seemingly ordinary events and everyday objects can expose the hidden depths and the more troubling aspects of modern love and life. The two stories were also selected to display different facets of Söderberg's decadent style – 'A Grey Waistcoat' is more comedic whilst 'The Fur Coat' is more tragic. While 'The Fur Coat' has been previously translated into English (by M. Ekenberg in 1934 and by Carl Lofmark in 1987), there are no previous English translations of 'A Grey Waistcoat'.

### **The Question of Swedish Decadence**

The extent to which Swedish literature of the *fin de siècle* could be considered decadent is up for debate. Many literary historians argue that a decadent strain in Swedish *fin-de-siècle* literature was minor at best and not, in any case, the most prevalent or the most celebrated mode of writing at the time.<sup>4</sup> Decadence, as understood in terms of the French model, does not seem germane to the Scandinavian cultural contexts that were by and large relatively younger nations in-the-making,<sup>5</sup> predominantly rural rather than urbanized, where traditional institutions continued to hold strong sway in cultural and social life, and modernization was still an exciting aspiration.<sup>6</sup> Instead, a more favoured label for Swedish *fin-de-siècle* literature is Neo-Romanticism: emotional, sensational, and nostalgic, drawing on folk traditions and natural landscapes as means of expression, and often engaging with nationalistic themes.<sup>7</sup>

Yet Neo-Romanticism was only one facet of the rich creative and artistic ferment in Sweden at the time. Swedish literary culture at the turn of the century was dynamic and far from monolithic. It was particularly open to and aware of literary developments taking place in neighbouring Scandinavian countries and other parts of Europe.<sup>8</sup> The influential Danish literary and cultural critic Georg Brandes had urged writers and artists in Scandinavia to break out of insular and inward-looking cultural production and draw inspiration from what was happening

throughout Europe. Brandes himself advocated for a literature that addresses social and political issues. He is famous for declaring in his *Hovedstrømninger i det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur* [*Main Currents of Nineteenth-Century Literature*] (1872) – originally a lecture series turned into a multi-volume publication that established his name as a literary critic – that:

The only literature that is alive today is one that provokes debate. Thus, for example, Sand opened up a debate on marriage; Voltaire, Byron, and Ludwig Feuerbach on religion; Pierre-Joseph Proudhon on property; Alexandre Dumas the younger on the relationship between the sexes; and Émile Augier on social conditions. A literature that fails to debate problems is one that is in the process of losing all significance.<sup>9</sup>

Söderberg was certainly influenced by Brandes (and exchanged letters with him), and he was also a translator, forging his own voice and literary style in part through his practice as translator. In the early years of his translating career, Söderberg translated novels and short stories by the French writer Anatole France who was known for being a socially engaged as well as deeply compassionate writer.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, Söderberg's initial forays as a literary writer unfolded under the banner of decadence and specifically *flâneur* literature. He wrote decadent poems that were published in magazines such as *Hemvänner* and *Idun*, and his first novel, *Förvillelser* (1895) (a title notoriously difficult to translate, sometimes translated as *Delusions* or *Diversions*, but also meaning 'aberrations'), displays some of the most canonical characteristics of decadent literature. It follows the disaffected and fashionable medical student Tomas Weber as he listlessly wanders around Stockholm consorting in cafés, having sexual (mis)adventures (one of which is ignited by his decision to buy a pair of red gloves), and generally pondering the meaning and purpose of life until a catalytic event forces him out of his stupor.

Söderberg later abandoned his initial self-presentation as decadent *flâneur*, perhaps in part because he believed it had damaged his budding literary career when antagonists seized on this aspect of his self-presentation and his writing to disparage his work.<sup>11</sup> Decadent literature was highly stigmatized in Sweden as well as the Scandinavian context more broadly. It was seen as subversive, immoral, and corrupting artistic as well as social standards. Writers seen to engage with

decadence were often taken to court for their writing or driven into exile.<sup>12</sup> Although the degree of stigma in the Scandinavian context may be particularly acute, these were not unusual critiques of decadence. Decadence is routinely dismissed as a fad, a ready-made formula that is widespread yet lacks substance. It encourages questionable attitudes, particularly in *flâneur* literature where the main characters are often passive, escapist, and self-absorbed observers, detached from healthy social relationships and socio-economic realities.<sup>13</sup> Despite this alleged vacuousness, decadence is nevertheless considered a threat that can spread and have influence. With its emphasis on the artificial and unnatural as rivalling and even surpassing nature, it is seen as corrupt and excessive, degrading sound values, tastes, and standards.<sup>14</sup> These critiques of decadence often crystallize around the term ‘fashion’. Decadence has indeed repeatedly been referred to as a ‘fashion’ – a passing stance you adopt for a time and then divest yourself of<sup>15</sup> – and both decadence and fashion have had similar critiques levied against them as a consumerist, frivolous, and wasteful indulgence without any real depth or significance, corrupting standards of taste, and displacing authenticity with superficiality.<sup>16</sup>

The connections between decadence and fashion appear in a new light, however, when considering the function of fashionable dress in decadent texts and as worn by decadent figures. From this perspective, decadence and fashion share a subversive potential as ways of breaking with convention and celebrating self-expression.<sup>17</sup> Fashionable dress connects in complex ways to identity, belonging, and power.<sup>18</sup> It can be a form of social pressure demanding conformity from individuals to reproduce social norms.<sup>19</sup> Yet fashion can also be seen as a means of protesting conformity, providing individuals with a form of agency to cultivate and make visible different dimensions of their identity. It can also act as form of solidarity, marking a sense of belonging between individuals.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the emphasis on artifice in decadent art acts as a means of breaking with classical codes and experimenting with new modes of expression,<sup>21</sup> while fashionable dress in decadent literature and culture becomes a privileged medium for resisting the pressure of normative conventions through creative self-fashioning.<sup>22</sup> Focusing on the role of fashion in

decadence therefore illuminates the contradictory signifying power of the world of things that can trouble broader social conventions and express a range of contradictory emotions and identities.

Despite the critics, Söderberg takes decadence and fashion seriously, and he incorporates both into his distinctive style. Söderberg's writing certainly retains a decadent dimension beyond his early years, but it shifts as he evolves his own literary voice and style. Söderberg's decadent writing becomes 'an art of contradictions'<sup>23</sup> seeking to give aesthetic expression to the ambivalences of modern living.<sup>24</sup> He takes from social realism and Naturalism a deep engagement with key social issues of his time. He strives to relate individual inner experiences to the broader social world, not shying away from the baser aspects of the mind and human relationships, while remaining anchored in realist descriptions of everyday life. In addition, we see the influences of Symbolist and Romantic trends in the epic and animist tendencies drawn from traditional folklore that enable the vivid and sensual rendition of emotional forces through depictions of the natural and human-made environment. Focusing on the role of clothing, especially fashionable clothing, in these two stories therefore gives us insight into the unique ways in which Söderberg brings together social commentary with the deeply human and emotional dimensions of these social issues such that the inner worlds of his characters are deeply entangled with the broader social and material realities of which they are a part.

### **The Signifying Functions of Clothing**

Social engagement and the expression of emotional inner life are often compartmentalized and put into tension with one another. Söderberg's writing exemplifies how these distinctions do not always hold. Söderberg is a decadent *flâneur* as well as a cultural critic who writes in the wake of Brandes' call for a literature attuned to social problems. Characterizations of Söderberg's writing tend to emphasize either one or the other, but I would argue that the interplay between these two tendencies is the bedrock of his particular style and is what makes him truly decadent.

Söderberg was a committed and engaged writer who did not shy away from taking positions on topical issues of his time. Tom Geddes characterizes him as ‘a critical observer of society, intent on exposing its failings’.<sup>25</sup> He was particularly preoccupied by injustice and the hypocrisy and absurdity of social conventions especially when these failed those who did not conform to or who questioned established social norms. As early as 1892, for example, he wrote a piece for *Nyaste Kristianstadsbladet* (26 January 1892) entitled ‘Sociala Grubbleri’ [‘Social Broodings’] in which he denounces the injustice, inequality, and hypocrisy of contemporary Swedish society that favours the powerful and educated classes over others. He rails in particular against traditional religious, political, and legal institutions which perpetuate these dynamics of inequality and have outsized power over people’s lives.<sup>26</sup>

‘A Grey Waistcoat or Justice in Munich’ is a story about inequality and the power (and legitimacy) of social institutions, and exemplifies how Söderberg uses clothing as a medium for addressing broader social issues. Already in the title itself, a simultaneous juxtaposition and equivalence is set up between ‘A Grey Waistcoat’ and ‘Justice’. When the narrator asks a tailor to make a waistcoat with five instead of the conventional six buttonholes, the waistcoat becomes an object of contention illuminating the absurd rigidity of conventions that span from dress codes to the judicial code. On the face of it, the story is primarily a dispute around the fact that the narrator asked for a waistcoat with five buttonholes, and refused to pay the tailor when he makes one with six. But anchoring what becomes a serious issue around such a seemingly insignificant request, exposes the absurdity and inscrutability of certain established conventions and legal practices as well as how deep their roots grow in our social imagination. The tailor is unable to produce or even imagine a waistcoat that would deviate from the usual six buttons. The impersonal formulations (the Swedish ‘man’ which would translate to ‘one’ in English) and the passive voice (which was not rendered in the translation) that the tailor uses – ‘Till en hög väst begagnar man sex knapphål’ [For a tall waistcoat, one uses six buttonholes] and ‘Det brukas alltid sex knapphål’ [One always uses six buttonholes] – emphasizes the sense that conventions are simply taken for

granted and not open to question. The narrator is asked why he wants five buttonholes, but it is never asked why there should be six in the first place.

The juxtaposition of waistcoat and justice is also an example of Söderberg's ability to write about serious things lightly and light things seriously. This tension announced in the title between something light-hearted and serious, something whimsical and grand, is continually developed throughout the story: a beautiful river is also a gutter, a musing on Ibsen's life in Munich ends up being a complaint about not being able to sit in pubs in peace, and a disagreement over how many buttonholes a waistcoat should have snowballs into a reflection on the concept of justice and the ability of social institutions to deliver it. In 'A Grey Waistcoat' we are never really sure when we are in jest and when we are in earnest such that we are always somewhat simultaneously in both. This humorous seriousness of the story is primarily elaborated through the voice of the narrator and allows for a certain ambivalence to emerge. Even though we are told the story from the narrator's point of view, and might become endeared to his cause, he is also an unreliable narrator as his own prejudices constantly emerge throughout the story (for example, with his persistent reminders of how things are done in his own country). He initially appears to embody the prototypical outsider who is able to see through absurd and oppressive conventions. Yet the narrator himself may not be wholly righteous and innocent. The pursuit of his principles (his desire to be right about the freedom to ask for a waistcoat with five buttons) comes to predominate over principles of solidarity with fellow human beings. The narrator chooses to answer the summons and go to court purely out of intellectual curiosity rather than real necessity (indeed, his opera glasses and bathrobe that have been repossessed seem to mean little to him). In contrast, the tailor's only defence and primary concern is that he should be compensated for his labour. In the narrator's pursuit of vindication and justice, he fails to see how he is cheating the tailor out of just compensation. As the waistcoat slowly recedes from the story, justice takes centre stage and in doing so makes visible the human bodies that labour: the tailor, the starved clerks, and the equally starved waitress who devours the narrator's leftovers that he deigns to give her.



Söderberg therefore constantly toys with our allegiances in this story. The use of witty seriousness to continually destabilize perspectives and assumptions is a common trait in decadent writing. As an epitaph to *Der Fall Wagner* [*The Case of Wagner*] Nietzsche chose: ‘ridendo dicere severum’, translated as ‘[t]hrough what is laughable, say what is sombre’ – apparently a variation on Horace from *Satires* I.24: ‘*ridentem dicere verum, quid vetat?*’ [What forbids us to tell the truth, laughing?].<sup>27</sup> In the case of ‘A Grey Waistcoat’, something could always be interpreted as something else from a different perspective – a waistcoat could be a waistcoat or could also be a symbol either of the absurdity of social codes or the inequalities of the class system. In the guise of a light-hearted anecdote – and a beautiful waistcoat – Söderberg raises instead a host of conflicting questions without clear resolution.

### **Textures of Meaning**

In ‘A Grey Waistcoat’, the waistcoat becomes the catalyst for negotiating broader social questions. The social realism of clothing in Söderberg’s writing can therefore be seen in the way in which items of clothing become vehicles for social commentary. In this semiotic reading, clothing acts as a sign that stands in for broader social issues, and the signifying function of clothing can be read as signalling aspects of social relations and status. In ‘The Fur Coat’, fur coats similarly index broader social transformations taking place at the time. In the second half of the nineteenth century in Sweden, industrialization along with an emerging capitalist economy were reshaping society. The social body became differentiated into new social groups and social classes, and the distinctions between these groups were bolstered through modern consumer culture and the growing mediatization of society.<sup>28</sup> In Sweden, ‘textiles, followed by clothes, were the second most important products behind food in the 1870s’.<sup>29</sup> This suggests how clothing, and especially fashionable clothing (such as waistcoats made of high-quality fabric as in ‘A Grey Waistcoat’ and fur coats as in ‘The Fur Coat’) became newly significant in modern living. In this rapidly changing

social landscape, fashionable dress became a way of situating oneself socially. It became a code through which individuals could make themselves readable and interpretable.<sup>30</sup>

Modern interpretations of fashionable clothing therefore emphasized its semiotic role as transmitter of broader social signals especially those related to social standing and status.<sup>31</sup> Coats in particular emerged as increasingly important items in men's fashion in Sweden with fur coats often the most valuable and expensive item of clothing in men's wardrobes (coats and fur coats could make up by themselves half of the total value of a man's wardrobe with fur coats being the most expensive item). As a luxury item, fur coats were therefore read as items of conspicuous consumption signalling economic and social success.<sup>32</sup> In 'The Fur Coat', chief district judge Richardt tells us how his coat is 'almost a professional requirement' for someone of his social standing. And the story opens with the idea that fur coats are markers of distinction when a divide is set up between those who have coats and those who do not. This divide is also what distinguishes between the two main characters in the story: the doctor (Henck) and his friend, the entrepreneur/judge (Richardt), the latter standing in for social and financial success in contrast to the doctor who does not have financial success but has more intangible successes such as family and integrity as a person who is dedicated to curing and helping people without much in return. The doctor, however, is the worse for wear. At the beginning of the story, we are told how those without fur coats are physically diminished from the cold, and Doctor Henck has also become physically diminished especially after his marriage. As soon as he dons his friend's fur coat however, the doctor feels changed, 'in a better mood than he had been for a long time', and he muses over how different his work, financial situation, marital relationship, and sense of self would have been if he had invested in a fur coat. This hints at the very real consequences of the clothing we wear and how it can determine and delimit the kinds of work we can do, the kinds of spaces we can occupy, the ways others see us, and the power and authority we can have in the world.<sup>33</sup>

Yet how we choose to dress our bodies can express many more dimensions of our ambivalent and shifting identities beyond social class and status.<sup>34</sup> Items of clothing themselves are

unstable signifiers that can take on different connotations in different contexts and can mean different things to different people.<sup>35</sup> The fur coat repeats as a leitmotif throughout the story. It anchors the story around a realistic and concrete detail, that, in its repetition and its interweaving with other details, lets layered meanings spin out around it. Rather than simply standing in for something else, the coat itself interweaves different threads of meaning. The significance of the coat becomes increasingly muddled and confused as different symbolic dimensions are intertwined around the concrete marker of the fur coat. For example, a fur coat is not just a symbol of financial and social success, as is set up at the start of the story, it is also a symbol of love and lust, perhaps excessive or illicit love and lust, as appears later in the story with the association of the coat with darkness, light, and fire. The fur coat becomes inflected with a variety of meanings and takes on different emotional valences as it moves us through the story.

The materiality of the coat therefore provides an anchor for the elusive, shifting, and intangible flow of emotions coursing through the narrative. The fur coat, in 'The Fur Coat', is more than a uniform index of social status or an element of characterization. Compared to the indefinite 'a' in 'A Grey Waistcoat', 'the' fur coat in 'The Fur Coat' is a specific coat which becomes a protagonist in itself as it plays a particular role in the personal and emotional drama that unfolds between the characters. This story could not have happened with any fur coat, it had to be precisely this coat, otherwise it would have been a different story. The things we make and wear are not 'indifferent things'; they have 'a name, a personality, a past'.<sup>36</sup> The fur coat in 'The Fur Coat' therefore suggests another kind of signifying function as it becomes a dramatic agent that discloses and precipitates the social and emotional drama taking place. It shows how 'objects have a capacity to "act" on people's feelings'.<sup>37</sup> This fur coat is not only reflective of social codes, it is also an active constituent in those human relations. The waistcoat in 'A Grey Waistcoat' disappears from the story as an item of clothing as it is 'emptied out of particularity and thingliness'.<sup>38</sup> It becomes considered 'not as a thing but as an exchange value' and is displaced as an object by the debate on

what value it has and who should pay for it. However, the fur coat, in ‘The Fur Coat’, is primarily a material object that is worn, envied, and touched.

‘The Fur Coat’ therefore puts bodily and lived realities back into the fur coat. It enables a material mode of expression where objects can act ‘as material manifestations of emotion’.<sup>39</sup> Emotions have a degree of materiality to them as we feel emotions not only through sensory, embodied experiences but also through (and with) the objects that we make and that surround us.<sup>40</sup> Objects can ‘offer access to an emotional vocabulary, but unlike texts, in that they need not suggest specific words’.<sup>41</sup> In this reading, the fur coat makes things manifest without making them wholly explicit. Similarly, it allows characters to realize and to say things without necessarily stating them explicitly. The coat materializes unspoken emotions and allows ambiguous feelings to unfold in a suggestive, allusive kind of language.<sup>42</sup> In the final scenes, a language of gesture and of the senses interweaves with the language of textuality. We find ourselves in the limits of language, in the realm of undercoding

when, in the absence of reliable interpretive rules, persons presume or infer, often unwittingly, on the basis of such hard-to-specify cues as gesture, inflection, pace, facial expression, context, and setting certain moral meanings in a text, score, performance, or other communication.<sup>43</sup>

Towards the end of the story, language becomes scarce and cryptic. Instead, the emotional force of the story develops through an emphasis on sensory and bodily dimensions. The poignancy of the doctor’s final words does not only come from those words alone; it also comes from the blazing fire, from his crushed posture, and from all the other words that came before. The fur coat therefore gives concrete shape and form to the emotional and social drama taking place, not only as a personification, not only as a symbol, but primarily as a coat that sews this story together and breaks it apart.

## **Conclusion**

Söderberg's writing emerges here therefore as not only or purely realist. Rather, there is an interplay between symbolist modes of writing and realist descriptions of precise details and observations of social relationships. In his writing, the social issues he addresses are also existential and affective issues. The social and emotional dimensions of experience are inextricably entangled. In 'The Fur Coat', love, friendship, loyalty and betrayal, and dignity, are enmeshed and entangled with social class, status, money, and power. Through the motif of the fur coat, Söderberg is able to show, and not tell, about these complex entanglements, he is able to make things manifest in ways that remain only partly intelligible and articulable. Paying attention to clothing in Söderberg's stories therefore illuminates the role of fashionable clothing in literary decadence whilst also shedding light on the varieties of decadences at the fin de siècle. The role of clothing, especially fashionable clothing, in these two stories exemplifies Söderberg's decadent style – how Söderberg gives everyday moments and people the emotional depth and complexity of romantic heroines and heroes in vivid yet economical style and light-hearted seriousness. He does not romanticize the people and objects he writes about, rather these paper beings and things allow him to develop a prosaic kind of existentialism in which he gives due depth and vividness to the social and emotional tribulations of everyday life. In Söderberg's decadent style, the repository for mediating human experiences and emotions is expanded from the natural world to include our world of things. There can be as much emotion and poignancy in a living room fire as in a thunderstorm. Letting clothes speak also allows Söderberg to express a range of conflicting and ambiguous emotions that make up modern love and life. Much like decadence itself, clothing in Söderberg's stories draws its signifying force from the ability to mean many different things simultaneously since '[i]t is not the referential content of [decadence] that conveys its meaning so much as the dynamics of paradox and ambivalence that it sets in motion'.<sup>44</sup> As with many other of Söderberg's stories, there is no definitive response to 'The Fur Coat', which is perhaps why we want to keep reading them again and again.

---

<sup>1</sup> In this article I will refer to these short stories by their translated titles. All English quotations from these works are from my new translations, provided in full at the end of the article.

<sup>2</sup> Pirjo Lyytikäinen et al., 'Decadence in Nordic Literature: An Overview', in *Nordic Literature of Decadence*, ed. by Pirjo Lyytikäinen et al. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), pp. 3-37 (pp. 4-5).

<sup>3</sup> Pirjo Lyytikäinen, 'Nordic Literary Decadence: From Metropolis to Wilderness', in *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence*, ed. by Jane Desmarais and David Weir (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 209-26 (p. 209).

<sup>4</sup> Tom Geddes, 'Hj. Söderberg: Doktor Glas', *Studies in Swedish Literature*, 3, 2nd ed (Hull: University of Hull, 1980), p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Compared to some of the other Scandinavian nations, Sweden could be considered an old kingdom that had since the seventeenth century played an important role on the European political stage and had cultural connections with other European centres but had been losing some footing in its standing with its neighbours and in Europe more broadly. However, Sweden was also somewhat engaged in a process of nationalistic questioning and reinvention and did not necessarily experience itself as an old nation in decline in the same way that France, for example, might have done. See Lyytikäinen et al., p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Lyytikäinen et al., p. 3, p. 4, pp. 7-8; Lyytikäinen, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Lyytikäinen, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Lyytikäinen, p. 1; Lyytikäinen et al., pp. 3-4, pp. 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Georg Brandes, 'The 1872 Introduction to *Hovedstrømninger i Det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur (Main Currents of Nineteenth-Century Literature)*', trans. by Lynn Wilkinson, *PMLA*, 132.2 (2017), 696-705 (pp. 700-01).

<sup>10</sup> The translation that cemented Söderberg's fame as translator was the translation of France's novel *Le Lys Rouge* [*Den röda liljan; The Red Lily*] in 1902, but he had also previously translated a selection of France's short stories in 1897 as well as the novels *La Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque* [*Drottning Gäsfort; The Queen Pedauque*] in 1899 and *Histoire comique* [*En komedianthistoria; A Mummer's Tale*] in 1905.

<sup>11</sup> The first review of *Förvillelser* was written by Harald Molander in the newspaper *Aftonbladet* (in the issue of 9 November 1895). Molander dismissed the book as decadent – depraved and obscene – and applied the same criticisms of immorality to Söderberg. This scathing review set the tone for the reception of the novel and brought it into public view.

<sup>12</sup> One particularly well-known example is the writer Ola Hansson who took refuge in Germany after the publication of his *Sensitiva Amorosa* (1887) – a collection of erotic sketches – caused a scandalous uproar. See Lyytikäinen, p. 3, p. 5; Lyytikäinen et al., pp. 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> Claes Ahlund, 'Decadence in Contemporary Culture as a Theme in Swedish Literature, c. 1885-1920', in *Nordic Literature of Decadence*, pp. 192-202 (p. 192).

<sup>14</sup> Catherine Spooner, 'Fashion: Decadent Stylings', in *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence*, pp. 417-41 (p. 417, p. 419).

<sup>15</sup> Florian Krobb characterizes decadence as 'a fashionable term' ("Die Kunst Der Vater Todtet Das Leben Der Enkel": Decadence and Crisis in Fin-de-Siècle German and Austrian Discourse', *New Literary History*, 35.4 (2004), 547-62 (pp. 547-48)). Similarly, Roger Bauer notes the "'vogue" du mot *décadence*' ['popularity' of the word *décadence*] at the fin de siècle ("Fin de siècle" et "*décadence*" comme catégories littéraires: Positions et propositions', *Neohelicon*, 3.3-4 (1975), 69-86 (p. 69)). Dieter Kafitz also identifies decadence as a 'Schlagwort' [catchword] and 'Modebegriff' [fashionable concept] (*Dekadenz in Deutschland: Beiträge zur Erforschung der Romanliteratur um die Jahrhundertwende* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 20). George C. Schoolfield refers to decadence as a literary fashion (*A Baedeker of Decadence: Charting a Literary Fashion, 1884-1927* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003)). Finally, Marion Schmid refers to decadence in relation to Marcel Proust as an aesthetic, a style, a pose that Proust adopted and later abandoned (*Proust dans la *décadence**, (Paris: Champion, 2008), p. 29).

<sup>16</sup> Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, 'Introduction: Body Dressing', in *Body Dressing*, ed. by Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2011), pp. 1-11 (p. 2); Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 195. For definitions of fashions, see Davis, pp. 14-15; Entwistle and Wilson, p. 2; Spooner, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Spooner, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Spooner, p. 2; Kate Soper, 'Dress Needs: Reflections on the Clothed Body, Selfhood and Consumptions', in *Body Dressing*, pp. 13-32 (pp. 26-27).

<sup>20</sup> Spooner, p. 2; Susan Brantly, 'The Fashionable Decadence of Verner von Heidenstam's *Hans Alienus*', in *Nordic Literature of Decadence*, pp. 56-69 (pp. 56-57).

<sup>21</sup> David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Spooner, pp. 1-4, p. 9, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Lyytikäinen et al., p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> A reformulation of Weir's definition of decadence as 'the aesthetic expression of a conflicted attitude toward modernity', in *Decadence: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 3.

- <sup>25</sup> Geddes, p. 32.
- <sup>26</sup> Hjalmar Söderberg, 'Sociala Grubbleri', in *Preludier: Ungdoms noveller, Kåserier samt en tidskommentar 1887-1896*, ed. by Björn Sahlin and Nils Sjöstrand (Stockholm: Lind & Co, 2021), pp. 257-65.
- <sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Case of Wagner', in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, Random House, 1966), p. 153.
- <sup>28</sup> Marie Ulväng, 'Clothing Economy and Clothing Culture: The Farm Wardrobe from a Gendered Perspective in Nineteenth-Century Sweden', *Gender & History*, 33.2 (2021), 365-89 (p. 381).
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380.
- <sup>30</sup> Davis, pp. 4-5; Entwistle and Wilson, p. 4; Joanne Entwistle, 'The Dressed Body', in *Body Dressing*, pp. 33-58 (p. 33, p. 47).
- <sup>31</sup> James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 27; Davis, p. 4; Spooner, p. 2; Ulväng, p. 381.
- <sup>32</sup> Ulväng, pp. 378-79 For contemporary readings of fashionable dress as social signals and conspicuous consumption, see Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (1899) <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/veblen-the-theory-of-the-leisure-class-an-economic-study-of-institutions> [accessed 19 October 2023]; Georg Simmel, 'Fashion', *American Journal of Sociology*, 62 (1904, repr. 1957), 541-58.
- <sup>33</sup> Peter Stallybrass, 'Marx's Coat', in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*, ed. by Patricia Spyer (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), pp. 183-207 (pp. 187-88, p. 202).
- <sup>34</sup> For critiques of approaches to fashionable clothing that emphasize clothing as mediator of social class and status (e.g., in the work of Thorstein Veblen and Georg Simmel), see for example, Davis, p. 9, pp. 16-17, pp. 57-60, p. 77, p. 202; Entwistle and Wilson.
- <sup>35</sup> Davis, pp. 5-9.
- <sup>36</sup> Mauss in Stallybrass, p. 185.
- <sup>37</sup> Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles, 'A Feeling for Things, Past and Present', in *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History*, ed. by Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 8-25 (p. 12).
- <sup>38</sup> Stallybrass, pp. 183-84.
- <sup>39</sup> Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles, 'Introduction', in *Feeling Things*, pp. 1-7 (p. 1).
- <sup>40</sup> Downes, Holloway, and Randles, 'A Feeling for Things, Past and Present', p. 37, pp. 43-44, p. 46.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- <sup>42</sup> See Davis, p. 3 for clothing as an allusive and suggestive mode of communication. See Entwistle and Wilson, pp. 4-5 for fashion and dress as embodied practices.
- <sup>43</sup> Davis, p. 11.
- <sup>44</sup> Charles Bernheimer, T. Jefferson Kline, and Naomi Schor, *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 5.

## Pelsen [Pälsen] (1898)<sup>1</sup>

Hjalmar Söderberg

Det var en kall vinter det året. Människorna krympte ihop i kölden och blefvo mindre, utom de som hade pelsverk.

Häradshöfding Richardt hade en stor pels. Det hörde för öfrigt nästan till hans ämbetsåligganden, ty han var verkställande direktör i ett alldeles nytt bolag. Hans gamle vän doktor Henck hade däremot icke någon pels: i stället hade han en vacker hustru och tre barn. Doktor Henck var mager och blek. Somliga människor bli feta af att gifta sig, andra bli magra. Doktor Henck hade blifvit mager; och så blef det julafton.

‘Jag har haft ett dåligt år i år’, sade doktor Henck till sig själf, när han vid tretiden på julaftonen, just i middagsskymningen, var på väg upp till sin gamle vän John Richardt för att låna pengar. ‘Jag har haft ett mycket dåligt år. Min hälsa är vacklande, för att icke säga förstörd. Mina patienter däremot ha kryat upp sig nästan hela sällskapet; jag ser så sällan till dem nu för tiden. Jag kommer förmodligen snart att dö. Det tror min hustru också, det har jag sett på henne. Det vore i så fall önskvärdt, att det inträffade före utgången af januari månad, då den förbannade lifförsäkringspremien skall betalas.’

Då han hade hunnit till denna punkt i sin tankegång, befann han sig i hörnet af Regeringsgatan och Hamngatan. Då han skulle passera gatukorset för att sedan fortsätta nedåt Regeringsgatan, halkade han på ett glatt slädspår och föll omkull, och i detsamma kom en droksläde körande i full fart. Kusken svor och hästen vek instinktmässigt åt sidan, men doktor Henck fick likväl en knuff i axeln af den ena meden, och dessutom fattade en skruf eller spik eller något liknande tag i hans öfverrock och ref en stor lucka i den. Folket samlade sig omkring honom. En poliskonstapel hjälpte honom på benen, en ung flicka borstade af honom snön, en gammal fru gestikulerade kring hans trasiga rock på ett sätt som antydde att hon skulle ha velat laga den på stället om hon kunnat, en prins af det kungliga huset, som händelsevis gick förbi, tog upp hans mössa och satte den på hufvudet på honom, och så var allting bra igen, utom rocken.

‘Fy fan så du ser ut, Gustaf’, sade häradshöfding Richardt, då Henck kom upp till honom på hans kontor.

‘Ja, jag har blifvit öfverkörd’, sade Henck.

‘Det är just likt dig’, sade Richardt och skrattade godmodigt. ‘Men inte kan du gå hem på det där sättet. Du kan gärna låna min pels, så skickar jag en pojke hem till mig efter min öfverrock.’

‘Tack’, sade doktor Henck.

Och efter att ha lånat de hundra kronor han behöfde, tillade han:

‘Välkommen till middagen alltså.’

Richardt var ungarl och brukade tillbringa julaftonen hos Hencks.

\*

På hemvägen var Henck i ett bättre lynne än han hade varit på länge.

‘Det är för pelsens skull’, sade han till sig själf. ‘Om jag hade varit klok, skulle jag för längesen ha skaffat mig en pels på kredit. Den skulle ha stärkt mitt själförtroende och höjt mig i människornas aktning. Man kan inte betala så små honorar åt en doktor i pels som åt en doktor i



vanlig öfverrock med uppslitna knapphål. Det är tråkigt, att jag inte har kommit att tänka på det förut. Nu är det för sent.’

Han gick ett slag genom Kungsträdgården. Det var redan mörkt, det hade börjat snö på nytt, och de bekanta han mötte kände icke igen honom.

‘Hvem vet för öfrigt, om det är för sent?’ fortsatte Henck för sig själf. ‘Jag är inte gammal ännu, och jag kan ha misstagit mig i fråga om min hälsa. Jag är fattig som en liten räf i skogen; men det var också John Richardt för inte länge sedan. Min hustru har varit kall och ovänlig mot mig på senare tider. Hon skulle säkert börja älska mig på nytt, om jag kunde förtjäna mera pengar och om jag vore klädd i pels. Det har förefallit mig, som om hon tyckte mera om John, sedan han skaffade sig pels, än hon gjorde förut. Hon var visst en smula förtjust i honom som ung flicka också; men han friade aldrig till henne, han sade tvärtom till henne och till alla människor, att han aldrig skulle våga gifta sig på mindre än tio tusen om året. Men jag vågade; och Ellen var en fattig flicka och ville gärna bli gift. Jag tror inte att hon var kär i mig på det sättet, att jag skulle ha kunnat förföra henne om jag hade velat. Men det ville jag ju inte heller; hur skulle jag ha kunnat drömma om en sådan kärlek? Det har jag inte gjort sedan jag var sexton år och för första gången såg ‘Faust’ på operan, med Arnoldson. Men jag är likväl säker på att hon tyckte om mig den första tiden vi voro gifta; man misstar sig inte på sådant. Hvarför skulle hon inte kunna göra det än en gång? Under den första tiden efter vårt giftermål sade hon alltid elakheter åt John, så ofta de träffade hvarandra. Men så bildade han ett bolag och bjöd oss på teatern ibland och skaffade sig en pels. Och så tröttnade min hustru naturligtvis med tiden på att säga elakheter åt honom.’

\*

Henck hade ännu några ärenden att uträtta före middagen. Klockan var redan half sex, då han kom hem fulllastad med paket. Han kände sig mycket öm i vänstra skuldran; eljes var det ingenting som erinrade honom om hans missöde på förmiddagen, utom pelsen.

‘Det skall bli roligt att se hvilken min min hustru kommer att göra, när hon får se mig klädd i pels’, sade doktor Henck till sig själf.

Tamburen var alldeles mörk; lampan var aldrig tänd annat än under mottagningstiden.

‘Nu hör jag henne i salongen’, tänkte doktor Henck. ‘Hon går så lätt som en liten fågel. Det är eget, att jag ännu blir varm om hjärtat hvar gång jag hör hennes steg i ett angränsande rum.’

Doktor Henck fick rätt i sin förmodan, att hans hustru skulle ge honom ett älskvärdare mottagande, då han var klädd i pels, än hon eljes brukade göra. Hon smög sig tätt intill honom i tamburens mörkaste vrå, lindade armarna om hans hals och kysste honom varmt och innerligt. Därefter borrade hon hufvudet i hans pelskrage och hviskade:

‘Gustaf är inte hemma ännu.’

‘Jo’, svarade doktor Henck med en något sväfvande röst, medan han med båda händerna smekte hennes hår, ‘jo, han är hemma.’

\*

I doktor Hencks arbetsrum flammade en stor brasa. På bordet stod whisky och vatten.

Häradshöfding Richardt låg utsträckt i en stor skinnklädd länstol och rökte en cigarr. Doktor Henck satt hopsjunken i ett soffhörn. Dörren stod öppen till salen, där fru Henck och barnen höll på att tända julgranen.

Middagen hade varit mycket tyst. Endast barnen hade kvittrat och pratat i munnen på hvarandra och varit glada.

‘Du säger ingenting, gamle gosse’, sade Richardt. ‘Sitter du kanske och grubblar öfver din trasiga öfverrock?’

‘Nej’, svarade Henck. ‘Snarare öfver pelsen.’

Det var tyst några minuter, innan han fortsatte:

‘Jag tänker också på någonting annat. Jag sitter och tänker på att detta är den sista jul vi fira tillsamman. Jag är läkare och vet att jag icke har många dagar kvar. Jag vet det nu med fullkomlig visshet. Jag vill därför tacka dig för all vänlighet du på sista tiden visat mig och min hustru.’

‘Å, du misstar dig’, mumlade Richardt och såg bort.

‘Nej’, svarade Henck, ‘jag misstar mig icke. Och jag vill också tacka dig för att du lånade mig din pels. Den har förskaffat mig de sista sekunder af lycka jag har känt i lifvet.’

---

<sup>1</sup> Hjalmar Söderberg, ‘Pelsen’ in *Historietter* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1898), pp. 37-46. The version of ‘Pelsen/Pälsen’ provided here is drawn from the 1898 edition of the collection *Historietter*. This version follows older spelling forms of Swedish which precede the early twentieth century spelling reform (hence ‘Pelsen’ is spelt in the older form and would be spelt as ‘Pälsen’ in modern spelling).

## The Fur Coat (1898)

Hjalmar Söderberg

It was a cold winter that year. People crumpled up in the chill and became smaller – except those who had furs.

Chief district judge Richardt had a large fur coat. It was, besides, almost a professional requirement, for he was chief executive of a brand new company. His old friend Doctor Henck, however, did not have a fur coat: instead, he had a beautiful wife and three children. Doctor Henck was thin and pale. Some people become fat from marriage, others become thin. Doctor Henck had become thin, and then it was Christmas Eve.

‘I’ve had a bad year this year’, Doctor Henck said to himself as he was on his way up to his old friend John Richardt, at three o’clock on Christmas Eve, just as the midday dusk was setting in, to borrow money. ‘I’ve had a very bad year. My health is faltering, not to say ruined. My patients, on the other hand, are on the up, nearly the whole lot of them. I hardly ever see them these days. I’m probably going to die soon. My wife believes so too; I can tell from looking at her. If that is the case, it’d be preferable if it happened before the end of the month of January when the damned life insurance premium is due to be paid.’

As he reached this point in his train of thought, he found himself at the corner of Regeringsgatan and Hamngatan. As he was about to cross the intersection to continue down Regeringsgatan, he slipped on an icy-smooth sledge track and fell over and in that same instant a sleigh-cab came hurtling towards him at full speed. The driver swore and the horse veered instinctively to the side, but Doctor Henck still got hit in the shoulder by one of the runner blades and on top of this, a screw or nail or something similar caught onto his coat and ripped a big hole into it. Folks gathered around him. A police officer helped him to his feet; a young girl brushed the snow off him; an elderly woman fussed over his tattered coat as if to say that she would have wanted to mend it there and then if she could have; a prince of the royal family, who happened to be walking by, picked up his hat and put it back on his head for him; and with that, everything was well again – except for the coat.

‘Oh my, you look awful, Gustav!’ said chief district judge Richardt when Henck came up to him at his office.

‘Yes, I got run over’, said Henck.

‘That’s just like you’, said Richardt, and he laughed jovially. ‘But we can’t have you going home looking like that. Why don’t you borrow my fur coat, and I’ll send an errand boy home to my place to fetch my overcoat.’

‘Thank you’, said Doctor Henck.

And after he had borrowed the one hundred *kronor*<sup>1</sup> he needed, he added:

‘I’ll see you at dinner then.’

Richardt was a bachelor and usually spent Christmas Eve at Henck’s.

\*

On the way home, Henck was in a better mood than he had been for a long time.

‘It’s because of the fur coat’, he said to himself. ‘If I’d have known better, I would’ve bought myself a fur coat on credit a long time ago. It would’ve strengthened my self-confidence and people would’ve held me in higher esteem. You can’t pay the same small fees to a doctor in a fur coat as you can to a doctor in an ordinary overcoat with torn buttonholes. It’s sad that I didn’t realize this sooner. Now it’s too late.’

He walked for a little bit through Kungsträdgården.<sup>2</sup> It was already dark; it had started snowing again, and the acquaintances he came across did not recognize him.

‘Who knows, maybe it’s not too late after all?’ continued Henck to himself. ‘I’m not old yet, and I could’ve been mistaken about my health. I’m as poor as a little church mouse, but so was John Richardt not too long ago. My wife has become cold and unfriendly towards me recently. She would surely start falling in love with me again if I could earn more money and if I wore a fur coat. It seems to me as if she likes John more since he bought himself a fur coat, more than she did before. She was apparently a little bit fond of him as a young girl too, but he never proposed to her. On the contrary, he said to her and to everyone else that he would never dare to get married on less than ten thousand a year. But I dared, and Ellen was a poor girl and was glad to get married. I don’t believe that she loved me in a way that would’ve allowed me to seduce her if I had wanted to. But that wasn’t something I wanted either; how could I have dreamed of a love like that? I haven’t dreamt of it since I was sixteen years old and saw Faust at the opera for the first time, with Arnoldson.<sup>3</sup> And yet, I’m sure that she liked me in some way in the early days of our marriage; you don’t mistake things like that. Why couldn’t she like me once again? During the early days after we were married, she was always saying hurtful things to John, every time they saw each other. But then he started a company, and invited us to the theatre sometimes, and bought himself a fur coat. And so, of course, with time, my wife tired of saying hurtful things to him.’

\*

Henck still had some errands to run before dinner. It was already half past five when he arrived home laden with parcels. He felt very sore in his left shoulder; other than that, there was nothing else to remind him of his earlier mishap – except for the fur coat.

‘It’ll be interesting to see my wife’s expression when she sees me wearing a fur coat’, said Doctor Henck to himself.

The hallway was completely dark; the lamp was never lit outside of appointment hours.

‘I hear her in the lounge now’, thought Doctor Henck. ‘She walks as light as a little bird. It’s strange how I still feel warm around my heart every time I hear her footsteps in the next room.’

Doctor Henck was right when he guessed that his wife would give him a warmer welcome than she usually did because he was wearing a fur coat. She snuck up close next to him in the hallway’s darkest corner, wrapped her arms around his neck, and kissed him affectionately and passionately. After that, she burrowed her head into the collar of his fur coat and whispered:

‘Gustav isn’t home yet.’

‘Yes, he is’, answered Doctor Henck in a somewhat dazed voice as he stroked her hair with both his hands. ‘Yes, he’s home now.’

\*

In Doctor Henck’s study blazed a roaring fire. There was whisky and water on the table.

Chief district judge Richardt lay stretched out in a big leather armchair and was smoking a cigar. Doctor Henck sat slumped into a corner of the sofa. The door stood open onto the dining room where Mrs Henck and the children were busy lighting the Christmas tree.

Dinner had been very quiet. Only the children had chattered and chattered and talked over one another and had been happy.

‘You’re not saying anything, old boy’, said Richardt. ‘Are you brooding over your torn overcoat?’

‘No’, replied Henck. ‘I’m thinking about the fur coat, actually.’

It went quiet for a few minutes before he continued:

‘I’m also thinking about something else. I’m thinking about how this is the last Christmas we will be celebrating together. I’m a doctor, and I know that I don’t have many days left. I know it now with complete certainty. That’s why I want to thank you for all the friendship you’ve shown me and my wife lately.’

‘Oh, you’re mistaken’, mumbled Richardt, looking away.

‘No’, replied Henck, ‘I’m not mistaken. And I also want to thank you for lending me your fur coat. It has given me the last seconds of happiness I’ve felt in life.’

---

<sup>1</sup> A *krona* (plural *kronor*), the Swedish crown, is the official Swedish currency, since 1873. 100 *kronor* is roughly the amount an average male worker in 1898 would get paid for 361 hours of labour. 100 *kronor* in 1898 would be roughly equivalent to 8,077 *kronor* today (in 2023) which is around £644 or \$773.

<sup>2</sup> *Kungsträdgården* is a big park in the centre of Stockholm. It is a popular place to go walking and meet friends, in summer as in winter.

<sup>3</sup> (Carl) Oscar Arnoldson (1830-1881) was a Swedish actor and opera singer who played Faust in the opera adaptation of the Faust story when it was performed at the Royal Opera House in Stockholm in 1862. The opera adaptation of the play (by French composer Charles Gounod) focuses on Faust’s fateful love relationship with Marguerite (adapted from the Gretchen character in Goethe’s *Faust*).

En grå väst  
eller  
Rättvisan i München  
(1913)<sup>1</sup>

Hjalmar Söderberg

En vacker septemberdag gick jag och dref på gatorna i München och tänkte på ingenting. Det vill säga jag tänkte på hur i all världen det var möjligt att Ibsen kunde stå ut med att lefva i München så länge som han gjorde – i denna stad, där det är omöjligt att få sitta i fred på krogarna. Om jag sätter mig vid ett ledigt bord och det står tjugu andra lediga bord rundt omkring, så sätter sig nästa gäst, som kommer in, ofelbart vid mitt bord. Hur i all världen kunde Ibsen tåla det?

Medan jag grubblade öfver detta, stannade jag framför en herrekiperingsaffär. En väst af ljusgrått kläde tilldrog sig min uppmärksamhet. Jag kunde just behöfva en ny väst. Dessutom erinrade jag mig att jag var i besittning af ett garnityr västknappar, bestående af fem kalcedoner infattade i förgylldt silfver. De hade ursprungligen varit sex, men jag hade tappat en. Jag gick in i butiken och beställde en väst af samma ljusgråa kläde som den i fönstret utlagda; men alltså utan knappar; den skulle vara med knapphål till lösknappar; med fem knapphål.

‘Till en hög väst begagnar man sex knapphål’, svarade skräddaren.

‘Jag vet det’, svarade jag. Men jag vill alltså ha fem. Fem knapphål: fünf. Verstanden?’

Med en min, som om han för en tokig utlännings skull nödgades göra ett afsteg från sina moraliska grundsatser, lofvade skräddaren att göra mig en väst med fem knapphål.

Efter en vecka kom västen hem till mig. Den hade sex knapphål.

Budet fick naturligtvis ta den med sig tillbaka; och samma dag gick jag af öfverdrifven höflighet in till skräddaren för att förklara för honom hvarför jag inte kunde använda västen. Han föreslog att ändra den.

‘Nej’, svarade jag, ‘det går inte. Om ni tar bort det öfversta knapphålet, blir västen för mycket uringad efter min smak; och om ni tar bort det nedersta blir den för kort. Adjö!’

Det var vackert väder den dagen, och jag gick en lång promenad längs med den absintgröna floden Isar, som ibland verkligen ser ut som en flod men ibland som en rännsten. Denna gång såg den ut som en rännsten. Jag åt litet mat på en restaurant i hörnet af Zweibrücken och Isar. Jag åt kall gås. Man gaf mig en kolossal portion; jag åt knappast fjärde-delen. Flickan, som serverade mig, frågade mig om det var något fel med gåsen. ‘Nej, inte alls’, svarade jag, ‘men jag orkar inte äta mer!’ Jag fick kaffe och betalade och skulle gå. Då kom flickan med ett litet paket till mig. Det var gåsen! Inlagd i ett nummer af *Das bayerische Vaterland!* Jag höll på att falla baklänges af häpnad öfver detta nästan hysteriska utbrott af ärlighet i en stad, där utlännen annars blir skinnad och klådd på alla upptänkliga vis. – Flickan fick behålla gåsen. Hon satte sig genast ner i en vrå och började gnaga på den.

Då jag kom hem för att kläda om mig – jag skulle till en teater för att se ett stycke af en landsman och gammal skolkamrat – mottogs jag af min värdinna, fru Schuster, med alla tecken på djup bestörtning och bottenlös förtviflan.

‘Herr Zederperch’, sade hon, ‘det har varit utmätning!’

‘Har det varit utmätning hos er, fru Schuster?’ frågade jag. ‘Det var ju tråkigt. Men jag inser inte hvad jag kan göra åt det!’

‘Nej, herr Zederperch, det har inte varit utmätning hos mig – hos er, herr Zederperch, har det varit utmätning!’

‘Det var som fan! Har det varit utmätning hos mig?’

‘Ja, herr Zederperch! En Gerichtsvollzieher och en skräddare har varit här! De ville ta er frackkostym! Men den fick de inte: jag hänvisade till att herr Zederperch var Schriftsteller och att frackkostymen var nödvändig för honom i hans yrke! Då kunde de inte ta den! Men de ha tagit er teaterkikare och er badkappa! Jag är förtviflad, herr Zederperch, men det kunde jag inte hindra!’

‘Tack, kära fru Schuster’, svarade jag, ‘jag brukar visserligen inte skriva i frack, men det var ju mycket vänligt att ni räddade den. Saken rör sig tydligen om en väst, som jag hade beställt, men som inte blef sådan jag hade beställt den. Men här i Tyskland begagnar man alltså utmätning i förskott – utmätning på grund af en rent subjektiv, ännu obestyrt fordran? För mig som svensk är det ett alldeles nytt rättsinstitut. Men det är ju alltid intressant att lära känna vilda folkslags seder...’

Och så gick jag på teatern.

Dagarna gingo, veckorna också.

Då och då fick jag med posten en skrifvelse från Rättvisan i München på blandadt tryckt och handskrifvet språk. Det handskrifna var naturligtvis oläslig tysk stil. Jag gaf hela saken fanken.

Veckorna blefvo till månader. Efter cirka två månader fick jag med posten – inte som det brukas hos oss (man har ju någon erfarenhet!) af två stämningmän – en stämning, eller rättare sagt två: en från skräddaren och en från rätten – den senare hade som rubrik ordet ‘Ladung’, hvilket betyder inbjudning – treflig bjudning! Jag ‘inbjöds’ däri till ‘första muntliga förhandlingen i målet Lewerandroffski contra Zederperch’ i justitiepalatset i München nästkommande onsdag kl. 9 f.m.

Nu började en svår inre strid mellan min lättja och min nyfikenhet. Den första bjöd mig att fortfarande ge hela saken fanken och låta skräddaren behålla den misslyckade västen jämte teaterkikaren och badkappan. Men nyfikenheten segrade. Det är intressant att lära känna vilda folkslags seder och bruk.

Kvällen innan rättsförhandlingen skulle äga rum satt jag på Café Luitpold, som vanligt. Där tänkte jag öfver hvad jag skulle säga och antecknade det med blyerts på några papperslappar. Ty det är mig omöjligt att utan förberedelse säga något förståndigt på ett främmande språk.

Nästa morgon lyckades jag genom ett litet underverk krafla mig upp ur sängen i så god tid, att jag verkligen befann mig på slagfältet precis kl. 9. Den föregående nattens meditationer på Café Luitpold hade fyllt mig med segerstämning. Jag var viss om att vinna processen. Det fanns väl ingen möjlighet att skräddaren kunde få rätt i denna sak!

Justitiepalatset i München är ett stort hus i modern barock. När man kommit in genom porten, befinner man sig i en stor ljusgård eller hall, som påminner om en operasalong i rokoko. ‘Die Ladung’ – stämningen – hänvisade mig till rummet n:o 66. Jag lyckades efter en stunds kringirrande finna rummet. Det påminde om en skolsal i gamla ladugårdslandsskolan i Stockholm, men tarfligare. På några nakna träbänkar sutto några ruskiga individer, bland hvilka jag upptäckte skräddaren. Vi utbytte en något stel hälsning. Bakom domarskranket syntes till en början inte en katt, men efter några minuter uppenbarade sig en ung domare med guldbågad pincenez, mörkt helskägg och klädd i den oemotståndligt skrattretande svarta kalott, som jag dittills hade antagit vara ett påhitt af *Simplificissimus*. Vid åsynen af denna kalott intogs jag af dystra aningar.

Målet 'Lewerandroffski contra Zederperch' uppropades omedelbart af en rättstjänare. Skräddaren och jag klefvo fram till domarskranket.

Domaren frågade mig, om jag hade något att invända mot stämningen.

'Ja, litet!' svarade jag. 'Den börjar riktigt nog: nämligen med det faktum, att jag har beställt en väst af käranden. Men...'

Domaren afbröt mig här och dikterade för protokollföranden:

'Skrif: svaranden erkänner sig ha beställt den ifrågavarande västen af käranden.'

'Nej ursäkta', svarade jag, 'jag har erkänt mig ha beställt en väst af käranden, men inte "den ifrågavarande västen". Jag har af käranden beställt en väst med fem knapphål, men han har sytt en med sex.'

Här inföll skräddaren:

'Det brukas alltid sex knapphål.'

Domaren tog sig en liten funderare. Han strök kokett sitt svarta skägg. Och så sade han, vänd till mig:

'Hvarför måste er väst nödvändigt ha fem knapphål?'

'Därför', svarade jag, 'att jag har ett västknappgarnityr, bestående af fem kalcedoner. De ha från början varit sex; men jag har tappat en. Därför har jag beställt en väst med fem knapphål.'

Den unge domaren frågade:

'Hvad är egentligen "kalcedoner"?''

'Kalcedon', svarade jag, 'är en naturlig sten af gråblå färgskiftning, som räknas till de så kallade halfädelstenarna. Den är mycket tarflig i jämförelse med diamant och smaragd. Men till västknappar kan den begagnas.'

'Hm', sade domaren. 'Hvad har käranden att säga?'

Käranden yrkade i korthet och utan närmare motivering, att jag skulle åläggas betala västen jämte omkostnaderna.

Den unge domaren betraktade mig strängt och sade:

'Vill svaranden betala västen jämte omkostnaderna?'

Vid denna fråga skulle jag alldeles ha förlorat fattningen, om jag inte kvällen förut hade berett mig på den på Café Luitpold och skrivit upp svaret. Jag gräfdde bland mina papperslappar och svarade, det vill säga läste innantill:

'Herr domare. Jag trodde inte, att det här, på detta rum, längre var fråga om hvad jag vill eller inte vill. Jag har föreställt mig, att det är er uppgift som domare att helt enkelt afgöra saken efter att ha hört parterna. Och jag kommer naturligtvis att foga mig i ert afgörande, antingen jag vill eller inte. Illusionen att det finns en Rättvisa är en nödvändig illusion. På den hvilar hela samhället.'

De sista orden, sammanställningen af 'illusion' och 'rättvisa', tycktes göra den unge domaren en smula perplex. Ett ögonblick såg han ut, som om han tänkte döma mig till fängelse på vanlig fängkost för opassande uppträdande inför rätten. Men i nästa ögonblick röjde hans ansikte mildhet och öfverseende: det var tydligen en halftokig utlänning han hade för sig... Och han sade:

'Ni vill alltså nödvändigt ha en dom?'

'Jag trodde', svarade jag, 'att det var därför jag var kallad hit på denna för mina vanor något tidiga morgontimma.'

'Mja', svarade domaren, 'en dom kan jag inte afkunna nu. Saken är för litet utredd. Vi måste inkalla en kommission af sakkunniga.'



En kommission af sakkunniga! Naturligtvis skräddare! Jag kände jorden gunga under mig...

Plötsligt frågade domaren:

‘Har ni fast bostad här i München?’

‘Jag bor för ögonblicket på “Hotell Vier Jahreszeiten”’, svarade jag.

‘Och ni är beredd på att stanna här i München vintern öfver?’

‘Nej, fy tusan!’ – hade jag så när sagt, men jag sade bara: nej, jag har tänkt resa om ett par dar.’

Vid detta oskuldsfulla svar förklarades den unge domarens stränga ansikte plötsligt af ett ljusst och soligt leende.

‘Det förändrar saken betydligt’, sade han. ‘När det förhåller sig på det viset, måste jag på det allvarligaste tillråda er att ingå på förlikning.’

‘Mycket gärna’, svarade jag. ‘Jag är inte omedgörlig. Men hvad menas egentligen med förlikning?’

‘Därmed menas’, svarade domaren, ‘att ni betalar västen jämte omkostnaderna.’

Nu var jag fast! Jag hade ju redan gått in på förlikning! Det var bara att betala. Det hela blef 17 mark och 55 pfennige. Jag betalade skräddaren 17:60, och då han inte kunde ge tillbaka, fick han alltså 5 pf. i drickspengar. För dessa 5 pf. gjorde mig skräddaren för öfrigt den tjänsten att visa mig vägen till det ställe, där jag skulle utfå mina konfiskerade ägodelar: kikaren och badkappan. De förvarades i ett stort, brokigt hus med ett färgskimrande klocktorn, huset bredvid justitiepalatset. Skräddaren rände i förväg, fyra trappor upp om jag minns rätt, in i ett stort kontor fullt af bleka och utsvultna tjänstemän. Skräddaren lyckades beveka en af dem att utlämna ett dokument, som berättigade mig att utfå mina tillhörigheter. Men jag kunde inte få dem strax; jag skulle afhämta dem mellan 4 och 5 samma dag.

Och strax efter klockan fyra samma dag vandrade jag åter ned till det brokiga huset och befriade kikaren och badkappan ur deras två månaders fångenskap i ett hemskt och rusligt källarhvalf. Och jag tänkte i mitt hjärta, medan jag vandrade hemåt i skumrasket: Det här var något helt annat än Gustaf Adolfs resa i Tyskland...

Nästa morgon fick jag till min fasa ännu ett bref med den välbekanta stämpeln: Gerichtsvollzieherei, München. Hvad i helvete nu då? Jag trodde att saken var slut! Med darrande händer öppnade jag brevet.

Men det befanns vara ett fridens budskap, en dufva med ett oljeblad! Det var ett dokument – sista aktstycket i målet ‘Lewerandroffski contra Zederperch’ – som uttryckligen förklarade mig befogad att aflägsna rättens sigill från såväl kikaren som badkappan...

---

<sup>1</sup> Hjalmar Söderberg, ‘En grå väst eller Rättvisan i München’ in *Den talangfulla draken* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1913), pp. 37-51. The version of ‘En grå väst eller Rättvisan i München’ provided here is drawn from the 1913 edition of the collection *Den talangfulla draken*. This version follows older spelling forms of Swedish which precede the early twentieth century spelling reform.

## A Grey Waistcoat or Justice in Munich (1913)

Hjalmar Söderberg

One beautiful day in September, I was idly drifting around the streets of Munich, not thinking about anything. That is to say, I was thinking about how on earth it was possible that Ibsen could stand to live in Munich as long as he did – in this city where it's impossible to get to sit in pubs in peace. If I settle down at a free table and there are twenty other free tables all around, then the next patron who comes in will, without fail, sit at my table. How on earth could Ibsen put up with it?

As I was brooding over this, I came to a stop in front of a shop selling men's clothing. A waistcoat made out of light-grey fabric caught my attention. It just so happened I could do with a new waistcoat. Besides, I remembered that I was in possession of a set of waistcoat buttons which consisted of five chalcedony gemstones set in gilded silver. There had originally been six, but I had lost one.

I went into the shop and placed an order for a waistcoat of the same light-grey fabric as the one displayed in the window, but without buttons, please; it should be made with buttonholes for my own buttons; with five buttonholes.

'For a tall waistcoat, one uses six buttonholes', replied the tailor.

'I know that', I replied. 'But, I want to have five, you see. Five buttonholes: fünf. Verstanden?'

With an expression as if he were being forced to forgo his moral principles for the sake of a foolish foreigner, the tailor promised to make me a waistcoat with five buttonholes.

After one week, the waistcoat arrived. It had six buttonholes.

The courier had to take it back, of course; and that same day, out of extreme courtesy, I went to the tailor to explain to him why I couldn't wear the waistcoat. He offered to alter it.

'No', I replied, 'that won't work. If you remove the top buttonhole the waistcoat will be too low-cut for my taste, and if you remove the bottom one, it will be too short. Good day!'

It was beautiful weather that day, and I went for a long stroll along the absinthe-green Isar river, which sometimes really does look like a river but sometimes like a gutter. This time it looked like a gutter. I ate a little food at a restaurant on the corner of Zweibrücken and Isar. I ate cold goose. They gave me a colossal portion; I barely ate a quarter of it. The girl who was serving me asked if there was something wrong with the goose. 'No, not at all', I answered, 'But I can't manage to eat any more!' I had coffee and paid and was about to leave when the girl brought a little package over to me. It was the goose! Wrapped up in a copy of *Das bayerische Vaterland!*<sup>1</sup> I nearly fell over backwards from astonishment at this almost hysterical outbreak of honesty in a city where foreigners are otherwise fleeced and cheated in every way imaginable. The girl got to keep the goose. She instantly sat down in a corner and started gnawing on it.

When I arrived home to get changed – I was going to the theatre to see a play by a compatriot and old school friend – I was met by my landlady, Mrs Schuster, who was bearing all the signs of deep consternation and bottomless despair.

'Herr Zederperch', she said, 'there has been a repossession!'

'Has there been a repossession at your place, Mrs Schuster?' I asked. 'That was rather unfortunate. But I don't see what I can do about it!'

‘No, Herr Zederperch, there hasn’t been a repossession at my place – at your place, Herr Zederperch, there has been a repossession!’

‘Well I’ll be damned. There’s been a repossession at my place?’

‘Yes, Herr Zederperch! A Gerichtsvollzieher<sup>2</sup> and a tailor have been here! They wanted to take your tailcoat suit! But they didn’t get it: I pointed out that Herr Zederperch was Schriftsteller<sup>3</sup> and that the tailcoat suit was essential for him in his profession! Thus, they could not take it! But they have taken your opera glasses and your bathrobe! I’m devastated, Herr Zederperch, but I couldn’t stop it!’

‘Thank you, dear Mrs Schuster’, I replied. ‘Admittedly, I don’t usually write in my tailcoat, but it was certainly very kind of you to save it. The matter is evidently about a waistcoat that I had ordered but that didn’t turn out as I had ordered it. But here in Germany they resort to repossession in advance then – repossession on the basis of a purely subjective, as yet unsubstantiated claim? For me, as a Swede, this is a completely new legal practice. But still, it’s always interesting to learn about the customs of wild peoples...’

And so I went to the theatre.

Days went by, weeks did too.

From time to time, I’d get a missive in the post from Justice in Munich written in a mix of printed and handwritten language. The handwritten parts were, of course, in unreadable German writing style.<sup>4</sup> I didn’t give a fig about the whole thing.

Weeks turned into months. After approximately two months I got in the post – not hand-delivered by two judicial officers, as is usually done in our country (trust me, I’d know!) – a summons, or more accurately, two summons: one from the tailor and one from the court. The latter had as a heading the word: ‘Ladung’, which means invitation – to a nice get-together? In it I was ‘invited’ to ‘the first hearing in the case *Lewerandroffski v Zederperch*’ at the courthouse in Munich next Wednesday at 9 a.m.

A serious inner struggle now began between my laziness and my curiosity. The former urged me to continue to not give a fig about the whole thing and let the tailor keep the failed waistcoat along with the opera glasses and the bathrobe. But curiosity prevailed. It’s interesting to learn about the customs and traditions of wild peoples.

The evening before the court proceedings were going to take place, I was sitting, as usual, at Café Luitpold. There I thought over what I was going to say and noted it down in pencil on some pieces of paper, since I find it impossible to say anything sensible in a foreign language without preparation.

The next morning, by some small miracle, I managed to drag myself out of bed in such good time that I actually was on the battlefield at exactly 9 o’clock. The previous night’s meditations at Café Luitpold had filled me with a sense of victory. I was sure to win the case. There really was no way that the tailor could be right in this matter!

The Munich Courthouse is a big building in modern baroque style. When you come in through the main entrance, you find yourself in an enclosed courtyard flooded with light, or a hallway, reminiscent of a rococo opera hall. ‘Die Ladung’ – the summons – referred me to room no. 66. After meandering around for some time, I succeeded in finding the room. It was reminiscent of classrooms in the old Ladugårdsland<sup>5</sup> school in Stockholm, but shabbier. On some bare wooden benches sat some creepy-looking individuals. Amongst them I spotted the tailor. We exchanged a somewhat steely greeting. On the judge’s bench it seemed at first as though there

wasn't a soul in sight, but after a few minutes a young judge materialized with gold-rimmed pince-nez, a full dark beard, and wearing the irresistibly laughable black judge's hat that I had assumed, until then, to be one of *Simplicissimus*' jokes.<sup>6</sup> At the sight of this hat, a gloomy sense of foreboding took hold of me.

The case 'Lewerandroffski v Zederperch' was immediately called by a court clerk. The tailor and I stepped up towards the judge's bench.

The judge asked me if I had any objection against the summons.

'Yes, somewhat!', I answered. 'It starts off accurately enough namely, with the fact that I ordered a waistcoat from the plaintiff. But...'

The judge interrupted me here and dictated to the court reporter:

'Write: the defendant admits having ordered the waistcoat in question from the plaintiff.'

'No, excuse me', I replied, 'I admit having ordered a waistcoat from the plaintiff, but not "the waistcoat in question". I ordered from the plaintiff a waistcoat with five buttonholes, but he made one with six.'

Here the tailor interjected:

'One always uses six buttonholes.'

The judge took a little moment to reflect. He stroked his black beard coquettishly. And then he said, turning towards me:

'Why must your waistcoat necessarily have five buttonholes?'

'Because', I answered, 'I have a set of waistcoat buttons which consists of five chalcedony. There had originally been six, but I lost one. That's why I ordered a waistcoat with five buttonholes.'

The young judge asked:

'What are "chalcedony" exactly?'

'Chalcedony', I answered, 'is a natural gemstone that has a grey-blue hue. It's considered a so called semi-precious gemstone. It's very unrefined compared to diamonds and emeralds, but it can be used for waistcoat buttons.'

'Hm', said the judge. 'What does the plaintiff have to say?'

The plaintiff demanded briefly and without further justification that I should be required to pay for the waistcoat as well as the overhead expenses.

The young judge looked at me sternly and said:

'Does the defendant want to pay for the waistcoat as well as the overhead expenses?'

I would've completely lost my composure at this question if I hadn't prepared myself for it and written down the answer the night before at Café Luitpold. I sifted through my pieces of paper and answered, that is to say, read out:

'Your Honour. I don't believe that what's taking place here, in this room, is any longer a question of what I want or don't want. I'd imagined that it is your duty as a judge to quite simply decide the case after having heard from both parties. And I will, of course, abide by your ruling, whether I want to or not. The illusion that there is Justice is a necessary illusion. The whole of society rests upon it.'

The last words, the combination of 'illusion' and 'justice', seemed to perplex the young judge slightly. For a moment, he looked like he was thinking about sentencing me to prison on regular prisoner rations for disorderly conduct in court. But in the next moment, his face showed kindness and indulgence: this was clearly a kooky foreigner he had in front of him... And he said:

'So you definitely want to have a verdict?'

‘I thought that was why I was called here at this, for my habits, rather early hour of the morning’, I answered.

‘Well’, replied the judge, ‘I cannot deliver a verdict now. The case has not been sufficiently investigated. We have to summon a commission of experts.’

A commission of experts! Tailors, of course! I felt the earth give way under me...

Suddenly the judge asked:

‘Do you have a fixed residence here in Munich?’

‘For the moment I live at the “Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten”’, I answered.

‘And you are prepared to stay here in Munich throughout the winter?’

‘By God, no!’ – I came so close to saying, but I just said: ‘no, I was planning to leave in a couple days.’

At this innocent answer, the young judge’s stern face was suddenly brightened by a brilliant and sunny smile.

‘This changes the matter significantly’, he said. ‘When this is the case, I have to counsel you most earnestly to enter into a settlement.’

‘Very gladly’, I replied. ‘I’m not unreasonable. But what is meant exactly by settlement?’

‘This means’, answered the judge, ‘that you pay for the waistcoat as well as the overhead expenses.’

Now I was trapped! You see, I had already agreed to the settlement! All there was left was to pay. It came to 17 marks and 55 pfennigs in total. I paid the tailor 17.60, and, because he couldn’t give the change, he also got 5 pf. in tips.

For these 5 pf., the tailor did me the additional favour of showing me the way to the place where I could retrieve my confiscated possessions: the glasses and the bathrobe. They were being stored in a large, motley house with an iridescent bell tower; the house next to the courthouse. The tailor scurried ahead, up four flights of stairs, if I remember correctly, and into a big office filled with pale and starved clerks. The tailor succeeded in persuading one of them to hand over a document that entitled me to retrieve my belongings. But I couldn’t get them right away; I was to collect them between 4 and 5 that same day.

And right after 4 o’clock that same day, I walked once again down to the motley house and released the glasses and the bathrobe from their two months imprisonment in a horrifying and grisly underground vault. And I thought in my heart as I walked back home in the evening gloom: compared to Gustav Adolf’s famous journey in Germany, this has been something else entirely...<sup>7</sup>

The next morning, to my horror, I got yet another letter with the familiar stamp: Gerichtsvollzieherei, München.<sup>8</sup> What the blazes now then? I thought the case was closed! With trembling hands, I opened the letter.

But it turned out to be a message of peace, a dove with an olive leaf! It was a document – the last record in the case ‘Lewerandroffski v Zederperch’ – that expressly pronounced me authorized to remove the court’s seal from both the glasses and the bathrobe...

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Bavarian Fatherland* was a Catholic daily newspaper popular in Bavaria (state of southern Germany in which Munich is located) known for taking satirical stances against Prussia (another German historical kingdom and state, now dissolved) and its imperial ambitions.

<sup>2</sup> German word for bailiff.

<sup>3</sup> German word for writer.

<sup>4</sup> The predominant writing style in German-language handwriting in the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century was known as *Kurrent* or *Kurrentschrift* [cursive script] or *deutsche Schrift* [German script]. It was developed from medieval gothic cursive handwriting. *Kurrent* is rather hard to write and read, particularly to the untrained eye, and letters could have different variations depending on the context in which they were written. *Kurrent* was simplified into the *Sütterlin* form of *Kurrent* around 1915 and steadily declined in popularity becoming replaced with Latin scripts by the 1950s.

<sup>5</sup> Ladugårdslandet was a suburb in the northeastern part of Stockholm. In 1885 it was renamed and gradually expanded into Östermalm. It had previously been home to the barns of the royal family, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a mix of workers, artisans, and military personnel built homes there – wooden and stone houses that were mostly yellow in colour and often with big gardens. In the 1890s, many of these older buildings were demolished to make way for the new modern buildings of the new Östermalm district. This was one of the most extensive urbanizing demolition projects of the time.

<sup>6</sup> *Simplicissimus* was a German weekly satirical magazine based in Munich. It was known for its modern illustrations and merciless caricatures. An example of an illustration with judges and their caps can be found on the cover of issue 11, vol. 30 from 15 June 1925.

<sup>7</sup> The narrator might be referring here to Gustavus Adolphus also known as Gustav II Adolf who was King of Sweden from 1611 to 1632 when he died in the Battle of Lützen in Germany. In 1629 Gustav II Adolf intervened on the side of the Protestants in the Thirty Year's War in Germany between Protestant forces and the Holy Roman Empire and its Catholic allies. His intervention in the war had significant consequences for the history and development of Germany as a country. To this day, there are memorials and traces of Gustav II Adolf scattered across Germany – one of these being the 'Schwedenquell' [Swedish wellspring] beer which was named in memory of the Swedish king and is still sold today with a picture of Gustav Adolf on the label.

<sup>8</sup> German for 'Bailiff's Office, Munich'.