Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940) was born on a farm in Värmland, trained as a teacher and became, in her life-time, Sweden’s most widely translated author ever. Novels such as Gösta Berlings saga (1891; Gösta Berling’s Saga) and Jerusalem (1901-02) helped regenerate Swedish literature, and the school textbook about Nils Holgersson who traverses Sweden on the back of a goose has become familiar the world over. Two very different trilogies, the Löwensköld trilogy (1925-28) and the Mårbacka trilogy (1922-32), the latter often taken to be autobiographical, give some idea of the range and power of Lagerlöf’s writing. Several of her texts inspired innovative films, among them Herr Arnes pengar (Sir Arne’s Treasure), directed by Mauritz Stiller (1919) and based on Herr Arnes penningar (1903; Lord Arne’s Silver), and Körkarlen (The Phantom Carriage), directed by Victor Sjöström (1921) and based on Lagerlöf’s Körkarlen (1912). She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, as the first woman ever, in 1909, and elected to the Swedish Academy, again as the first woman, in 1914. Having been able to buy back the farm of Mårbacka, which her family had lost as the result of bankruptcy, Lagerlöf spent the last three decades of her life combining her writing with the responsibilities for running a sizeable estate. Her work has been translated into close to 50 languages.

Most of the translations into English were made soon after the publication of the original Swedish texts and have long been out of date. Lagerlöf in English provides English-language readers with high-quality new translations of a selection of the Nobel Laureate’s most important texts. All books include an afterword by the translator and a series preface by Helena Forsås-Scott.

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Photograph of writer Selma Lagerlöf taken in 1906 by A. Blomberg, Stockholm.
A Manor House Tale crosses genre boundaries and locates itself in a borderland between reality and fantasy, madness and sanity, darkness and light, possession and loss, life and death. Lagerlöf’s two young characters, Gunnar and Ingrid, rescue each other from their psychological underworlds and return to an everyday world that is now enhanced by the victory of goodness and love.

Charlotte Löwensköld, being the second novel in the Löwensköld trilogy, is the tale of the following generations. Charlotte is in love with Karl-Artur – both have some Löwensköld blood. Their young love is ill fated; each goes on to marry another. How we make our life ‘choices’ and what evil forces can be at play around us is beautifully and ironically depicted.

Nils Holgersson’s Wonderful Journey through Sweden (1906-07) is truly unique. Starting life as a school reader in geography, it quickly won the international fame it still enjoys over a century later. The story of the naughty boy who climbs on the gander’s back and is then carried the length of the country, learning both geography and good behaviour as he goes, has captivated adults and children alike.

For poverty-stricken farm labourer Jan, the birth of his daughter Klara gives life a new meaning; his devotion to her develops into an obsession that excludes all else. We are taken from the miracle of a newborn child and a father’s love of his baby girl into a fantasy world emerging as a result of extreme external pressures.

What happens to an individual who is rejected by society? What does war do to us and to our outlook on the world? Banished in a thought-provoking tale of love, death and survival that grapples with moral dilemmas as relevant today as they were a century ago.