

Two “Sleeping Beauties”: The Fate of Eva Wigström’s Swedish Cinderellas

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Once upon a time when all animals could speak, it so happened that two mother- and fatherless children, a boy and a girl, had naught after their parents but a cow and dog. The lad, who was the oldest, chose first and took the cow; so the girl had the dog.

“You won’t regret having me,” said the dog; “if you just follow my advice, you will be well off.” And so the boy left with his cow to sell it, but the girl and the dog went another way to seek their fortune.

This is the opening of “Trähätta” [Wood Cap] the so-called B-variant of “Cinderella” (AT 510; Aarne & Thompson 168-169); it can be found in Eva Wigström’s posthumous collection of folktales *Fågeln med guldskrinet* [*The Bird with the Golden Box*] (1882/1985).

Passing a nobleman’s house, the dog tells Wood Cap to ask for a dress; she does as the dog tells her to and is (much to her surprise) given a fine dress and shoes; this procedure is repeated twice, and she is given a finer dress each time. The dog then points her to the king’s palace; he tells her to seek employment there, tells her that their ways must part for now, and sets off with the fine dresses on his back. In the palace Wood Cap is ridiculed for her bark clothes. The king himself pours his bath-water over her for sport. The following two days he bullies her in other ways. On the Sunday, however, everyone goes to church except Wood Cap who is too rustically clad; she volunteers to cook the king’s dinner instead. But when everyone is gone, she dresses up in the first of the pretty dresses. When the king sees her in the church he falls in love with her promptly. In the meantime the dog cooks an excellent dinner. This scenario is repeated and augmented in fairy tale fashion. On the third Sunday Wood Cap is clothed in gold, but in her rush back to the castle she loses one of her gold shoes. Distraught, the king asks all the ladies at court to try the shoe on, “for even of none of them were as lovely as the unknown lady, anyone with a dainty foot as that would be worthy to be his consort.” Some of the court ladies cut off their heels and toes to make the shoe fit, but to no avail since the king’s parrot tells on them, and also informs the king that the real owner of the golden shoe is in the kitchen. So, finally, Wood Cap tries the shoe. She marries the king and “never regretted that all she received after her parents was a dog”.

The rough clothing (cap o'rushes, wooden cloak), the magic animal and the church as the site where the king falls in love is found in other variants; we also recognize the court ladies self-mutilation from the Brothers Grimm (which was known from broadsheets in Sweden). Although the B variant often is considered a more rational version of the Cinderella story, in Wood Cap some of the magic has seeped back into the story, mainly through wondrous dog, but also through the (semi-)magical parrot. It is also worth noting that Wood Cap, although orphaned and destitute is not described as a victim of abuse in the initial situation. That happens later, at the king's court, and at the hands of the man who is to be her husband.

The other Cinderella-story to be discussed here is the one that has lent its name to the collection as a whole, "The Bird with the Golden Box". Here we find the classic Cinderella-type, AT 510 A. A girl is abused by her stepmother and stepsister, a wondrous bird

The title of the version here is "The Three Monstrous Hags". The standard scenario of AT 501 is that the lie – either by the girl herself (as in this case), by the mother, or by a jealous antagonist – leads to a betrothal with a prince. But she is then compelled to prove her worth by spinning an impossible amount. Otherwise the prince will break off the engagement. In her distress she reveals her situation to an old crone, who volunteers to help her. In return the old crone wants to be invited to the wedding together with her two sisters. In the end all three old women help the girl with her impossible task. At the wedding they tell the prince that spinning has deformed them. In Wigström's version one has a bottom as broad as "two farmhouse doors," because she has been sitting constantly at the spinning wheel; the other one has long earlobes, because she has constantly pricked and pierced herself with her sewing needle; the third one has her breasts dangling on her back, because not to interrupt her spinning, "I had to throw my breasts over my shoulder so that the babies could lie behind me and suckle". The gentleman says that he will never let his wife spin. Thus relieving her of a big worry – actually she cannot spin at all. "And to think that such a small thing [i.e. "counting farts] made that come about!"

"The Three Monstrous Hags" is one of the 41 "lost" folktales of the Swedish pioneer folklorist and writer Eva Wigström (1832-1914). For many years she tried in vain to publish this collection of folktales from Skåne, the southernmost region in Sweden. Wigström had collected the tales during extensive walking expeditions throughout Skåne in 1879-80. The inspiration to do so came from Denmark. At Askov Folk High School she had met F L Grundtvig and H F Feilberg the previous year, and they had encouraged her to collect Skåne folklore, partly because they wanted comparative material for their Danish studies. It

remained unpublished until 1985, after the Swedish ethnographer, Nils-Arvid Bringéus, unearthed the manuscript.

Her failure with this book is remarkable in the light of her previous success. Wigström had already published literary sketches of peasant life as well as more scholarly collections of ballads and folktales and ethnography. Why then was this fairy tale collection buried in publishing houses and archives? While providing examples from the fairy tale collection, the paper sets out to explore why it was suppressed for so long.

The material collected during her ethnographic expeditions, which she assiduously continued doing in the early 1880's, was published in various ways. Some of it was issued 1880 in a slim volume called *Skånska visor, sagor och sägner* [Skåne ballads, folktales and legends]; it included four wonder tales. The same year a first substantial collection, *Folkdiktning* [Folklore] (1881), was published in Denmark through the generosity of Fredrik Lange Grundtvig after Wigström had searched in vain for a Swedish publisher. The collection included eight wonder tales. Her subsequent *Folkdiktning II-III* contains a few embedded folktales, especially the latter collection, but the emphasis is on other types of material. But in 1884 a collection of folk narratives, including some twenty *Märchen* were published in the academic journal *De svenska landsmålen* [The Swedish Dialects]. However, already in 1882 Wigström had sold 41 folktales to Albert Bonnier (of Bonnier publishing) – that is, the lion's share of her collected fairy tales – for a mere 400 kronor. The ensuing correspondence between Wigström and Bonnier is a sad story. She tries to persuade him to publish and he comes with different excuses no to. In 1894 he eventually he sells the collection to professor Lundell for a pittance (150:-). Lundell, however, is busy publishing Wigström's *Kardegille* (1894) and the huge *Folkdiktning III* (1898-1914) and is in no hurry. Eva Wigström dies in 1914 and *The Bird with the Golden Box* is forgotten.

As a commercial publisher it is likely that Bonnier primarily had a middle class audience of adults and children in mind. For fairy tales were fashionable at the time. Actually, one of the initial reasons why Bonnier did not publish the tales was that he already had three other collections in the pipeline. For Wigström on the other hand, the tales represented a heritage, something she wanted to give back to the general public. Moreover, like the texts in *Folkdiktning I-III* the tales in *The Bird with the Golden Box* were meant for mature and discerning adults, not for children. And she did not want to see any illustrations: “An illustrated work will only be a decoration in a rich man's home; I would rather that my collection is produced as cheaply as possible so that the people can afford to reclaim their half-forgotten property” (letter 23 april 1882, qtd in Bringéus 254). In a later letter she writes:

I have seen Hofberg's work, or rather his text to the drawings by the artists; the latter are recognized by connoisseurs; it is as I thought, such artwork cannot be allowed to stand in the way for a real folktale collection, one which strives to be embraced by the general populace, that is, by those who do not own a divan and a coffee-table.

For Wigström there was a huge difference between literary fairy tales and folk fairy tales. A literary fairy tale in the H C Andersen style, or like the ones she produced herself, should be aesthetically and morally pleasing (and could be expensive); whereas the folk tales could be rough, uneven and repulsive too.

Wigström was not willing to clean up the language of *The Bird with the Golden Box* or to make the tales more uniform in style – in fact, of her collections, it is the one which shows the most variation linguistically. Each storyteller's traits and personality come across, even if Wigström does not reveal any names.

As for the language, Wigström often complained that there were double standards for men and women. Referring to some jocular tales she had submitted to Lundell she writes: "we ought to use one kind of language, and you men are allowed to use another. If we speak and write plainly we are accused of coarseness and wantonness" (Bringéus 255). She later writes of her first fairy tale collection that "fine people had taken offence at it". If anything, *The Bird with the Golden Box*, has more rough edges than the first collection. The girl who counts her farts and then goes on to win a rich husband by lying and never having to work hard at the spinning wheel would not have been considered a suitable fairy tale in the 1880's. And to think that it was recorded by a woman!

Then there is the problem of the provenance of the tales. Skåne was not the perceived heartland of Sweden, nor, in consequence, a cherished locus for ethnographers or commercial publishers. Swedish folk customs and folk tales should preferably come from counties closer to Stockholm and with deeper historical continuity with the Swedish nation state. It comes as no surprise that Wigström often complained that Swedish publishers cold-shouldered her. In a letter to professor Lundell, the editor of Svenska Landsmål, she writes: "I will *never* again act as a beggar before any Swede...pleading for a corner in which to publish Skåne folklore. I would rather give it to a place where it is loved and cherished: to the Danish society of "treasure-hunters"... *Your* [Lundell] generosity is the only thing that has prevented me from giving the third collection to our old mother country". And to Arthur Hazelius, founder of the open air-museum, Skansen, she writes on occasion that, "your support makes me feel odd – I am not used to encouraging words from our capital". Maria Ehrenberg goes as far as saying that the "niggardly attitude towards the Skåne folklore strengthened her bonds with Denmark, the country where she sought inspiration and encouragement. Danish folklorists became her mentors, and the folklore collector Eva Wigström is without a doubt a Danish product" (29).

One of the qualities of *The Bird with the Golden Box* is that several of the tales appear in more than one variant. Thus, “The Three Monstrous Hags” has a twin in “The Three Helpers”. A comparison will bring out some of the dynamism in the collection as a whole. Wigström edited all the texts with a view to publication; they had to be acceptable by a middle class audience; they had to conform to standard Swedish. She did, however, try to retain the individuality of her informants. In the variants of AT 501 this is clear. Stylistically and morally, they are far apart: “The Three Monstrous Hags” consists largely of dialogue; the syntax and vocabulary is kept simple. It is humorous and has an underdog-perspective. Poor people should fool the rich; women should fool men. Despite the humorous tone, there is no distancing to tradition or towards the lifeworld of the fictional characters, who are peasants and poor people, presumably just like the regular audience of the Ystad-storyteller who gave Wigström the tale.

“The Three Helpers” by contrast is delivered in a rather literary style, no doubt reinforced by Wigström. The syntax is complex and the vocabulary ornate and old-fashioned; there is little dialogue. In this version of AT 501 the girl is of noble blood, but her family has unrightfully been persecuted by the widowed queen of the realm. When the girl’s parents die she seeks her fortune at the court. She is very beautiful and able, and knows how to do all kinds of household chores including spinning and sewing and weaving. The prince inevitably falls in love with her. The jealous ladies of the court tell the queen and lies to her about her son’s ambition to replace his mother as regent together with his wife-to-be. The old queen feels threatened by the girl and comes up with the weaving-mission-impossible-request. At the close of the tale, the first helper takes a cork out of her long nose and out falls peals and precious stones; the second helper opens her hunchback and from it pours silver coins; the third helper spreads her crooked fingers and arms and from them springs gold coins. Then the true identity of the young girl is revealed and everyone can agree that the prince had chosen well after all. In this version the moral is quite different from the one in “The Three Monstrous Hags”. Here the goal of the story is not to deliver the girl from arduous work – on the contrary, she has learnt “from her mother how to spin, weave and sew, as well as any young girl” – but to show the girl as a positive example of how to be (in contrast to the power hungry queen). The girl is noble and has the right qualities to rule. The helpers make this apparent in the closing scene where they magically distribute riches and thus sanction the union of the prince and his bride. One can also add that the story is distanced from tradition and the lifeworld of the audience by its invocation of a feudal world. On the whole though, one can suspect that had *The Bird with the Golden Box* contained stories in the manner and style of “The Three Helpers” Bonnier would not have hesitated. The book would have published promptly.

Part of the explanation for her success as a folktale collector, but also inevitably for her failure to have the collection published has to do with her background. Eva Wigström was a farmer's daughter from Råga Hörstad in Skåne. Pål Nilsson, her father, was considered headstrong and eccentric. Among other things he planted trees – and not only fruit-bearing ones at that – all around the farm, making it a green oasis in the otherwise treeless environs. Such extravaganza did not go unnoticed. According to Wigström, their neighbours predicted that ruin and poverty would befall the family. Another quirk was that the odd farmer had no faith in the existing girl schools; he could certainly have afforded Eva to such a school, but he considered them quite useless. So he saw to it that his daughter was privately tutored by a brother of hers who was too feeble for – farm labour, that is, and later by a lame school teacher, who was also unfit for “real work”. In due time, Pål Nilsson became quite wealthy. One of his properties was Ramlösa Brunn – a place still famous for its mineral water – and he hired Claes Wigström to be the managing director of Ramlösa. Eva married Claes when she was 23. He did not make a brilliant career, but not a catastrophic one either. He later became director of the prison in Malmö, and eventually ran a book-keeping school in Helsingborg. But it appears that the income from Eva Wigström's writings became increasingly important for the household economy.

By marrying Claes Wigström, who was an educated townsman, a gentleman, she rose socially. Although her father was rich, he was still a farmer. He could hire a man like Claes, but not rise above him. This makes Eva Wigström's position unique. Her schooling, too, although short, was at the time exceptional for her class and gender. Although disadvantaged by her sex, she could, through her acquired position, approach the learned and the influential in society – usually men. And because of her background she also had privileged access to knowledge they had not. She knew how to manage a large farm household and was apparently very skilled at weaving. She knew how to talk and be with country folk. In other words, Wigström had access to two worlds. This ability and position stood her in good stead in her ethnographic work. In her published account of her expeditions throughout Skåne she mentions that her intimate knowledge of the ways of the country people quickly put them at ease. She can sew, weave and spin yarn; she knows how to garden and is a very able cook. She mentions that she “eats anything put before her,” something that impresses the locals and shows that she is one of them. It also helps that she is a woman. Her husband made her company on some of her early trips, but the presence of a gentleman effectively hampered communication, and especially women informants would suddenly fall silent (V 21). Wigström

is well aware of her privileged status as a woman ethnographer; in a letter to a fellow folklorist in Uppsala she writes: “you men could not possibly plumb the depths of it [the folklore] as well as a woman.”

Her background, however, also made her respect her informants to the extent that she did not want to reveal their identities. As A B Rooth has shown, even the meager descriptors concerning informants that appear in *Folkdiktning I-III* are inventions or compilations: “The Farmer”, “The Fisherwoman”, “The Woodcutter”, “The Tarboiler” should rather be considered as “focus characters” rather than as single narrators/informants. There may be a real woodcutter in there somewhere, but his tales have been boosted and complemented by pieces of information from other sources as well. The professional tags act as collective identities; they are fictitious representatives of their class. Unfortunately, Wigström’s field transcriptions have been lost or were destroyed by her, so it is not possible to compare her notes with the “finished” stories. The best one can do is compare her published account of her walking expeditions (*Vandringar*) and seek information in her letters and compare with the finished collections (this is what Rooth does). And since the stories lack information about the specific storytellers and even which village they are from, the social context is difficult to reconstruct. She guarded the integrity of her informants closely, stating that it was a matter of trust. Even in the documentation that was to remain unpublished and only meant for the folklore archive, she kept the anonymity of her storytellers. It would, in other words, have been logical for Wigström to destroy the field notes herself.

The linguistic clues are also watered down. Perhaps because Uppsala professor J A Lundell told her that she did not master the “correct way of doing it writing in dialect”, as he put it. This is a pity. One gets an insight into what could have been if one compares the jocular tale “The priest’s farmhand” from the *Folkdiktning I*, in standard Swedish (+ a few dialectal words), with its representation in dialect in the annual *Svea* (1882). I will not try to give justice to these two versions here, in English, but I can vouch for the much increased immediacy and gusto of the dialect version. This example also makes it clear that Wigström actually did take down at least some tales the way they were delivered.

Eva Wigström, or “AVE” which was the pseudonym she regularly used, made her debut as a writer in the children’s periodical *Linnéa* in 1866. She wrote more than a hundred texts (generally verses or short prose fictions) for *Linnéa* and other children’s periodicals, including her own *Hwitsippan* (1872-1874, 1884-1886). But she also published articles on women’s rights, a book on the conditions in Swedish prisons, a travel account from Norway, translations and a string of novels. But today she is best known for her collections of folklore and sketches of country life. One must remember that she was not a professional academic, nor was she an independent amateur; although she had a true and deep interest in especially

Skåne folklore, she also wrote for money, something that the learned professors and commercial publishers sometimes chose to forget.

As Maria Ehrenberg has shown (2003), Wigström believed in recycling. She would first offer the folktales she had collected to scholars; they could pick and choose for academic publications. Then she would embellish the tales somewhat, making them more uniform, and try to find a commercial publisher. Finally, she would rewrite some of the stories in a literary form, for a children's journal. Eventually some of these stories would end up in a bound collection, like *Solsken* [Sunshine] (1891). Jocular tales and legends she would even more frequently word process into "sketches", *Från herresäten och bondgårdar* (1899) [From manors and farms] is one such example. Part of the reason to do like this was as I have inferred economical. Another reason was that by writing in different genres and by addressing various audiences, the tales – which she considered valuable in themselves – were disseminated more broadly.

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