

Hej Stieg!¹

In early January, 2021, I finally found myself contorted in a yellow chair, reading your yellow book, *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* (2005). It was a thrilling thriller. I wish you were able to complete the whole cycle, with a supportive editor and translator.

In the beginning of the book, Mikael Blomkvist is revealed to live in an “attic flat of 700 square feet right at the end of Bellmansgatan.” (p. 18) Of course, in these incipient stages, I had to make up my own themes and references. So I thought excitedly of connections to *Crime and Punishment*. But the relationship dissipated quickly, being flimsy. He also owns a small cabin outside of town, near the shore. He ends up spending most of his time in a small guest house on Hedeby Island, and visits a small cabin near another shore. Instead of reflecting destitution, as in Raskolnikov’s case, these spaces contribute to Blomkvist’s shrewd and modest character.

I’m not sure how much of this came from the translation, but some of the dialogue sounded mechanical. It could be an artifact of Swedish grammar, or the you-reform, since I was most aware of it in Mikael Blomkvist’s discussions with Henrik Vanger. I did read on Wikipedia that the publisher, Christopher MacLehose “‘needlessly prettified’ the English translation [by Steven T. Murray]. As such, Murray requested he be credited under the pseudonym ‘Reg Keeland’.”² It bothered me until about halfway through the book. When the plot got so thick, I didn’t mind it at all.

There were whole periods in the middle of the book where I couldn’t do anything but read in a tense investment in the narrative arc. I hated to see Salander so vulnerable and wanted her to vanquish her enemies. I wanted Blomkvist to figure out what happened to Harriet Vanger. And his casual romances brought depth and conflict to his professional concerns. The rapid split-screen style between Blomkvist and Salander was occasionally clunky, since the vignettes were rarely causal. But I think it was a great way to develop the characters in independent strength. I think it’s more common to change the point of view on chapter intervals. Perhaps only movies are effective at showing two points of view at one time.

I apologize for my bluntness, but the resolution of the Wennerström affair came off as lazy. Salander hacks into his computer in a paragraph, and Blomkvist’s revenge is wrought joylessly, in a feverish fall. But I figure Wennerström will continue to figure in *The Girl Who Played With Fire*, only by virtue of Salander’s clandestine draining of his Swiss bank accounts... I don’t know if I’ll read the other books any time soon. Certainly not the ones that David Lagercrantz later wrote, on GP. I read your books to get a sense of the fame. Cynically, I was thinking of DeLillo’s barn. But the *Millennium* novels have been ubiquitous in groceries and thrift shops for almost 20 years now. Sincerely, I wanted to know what the allure is composed of. To know what sells, phenomenally.

Your books came to fame posthumously, so I don’t have a strong sense that you were playing your audience. I do think you were somewhat self-righteous. Your disdain for sycophantic (financial) reporters is evident. As is your concern for women. I don’t know if it was a trend, but Derrick Jensen’s ‘contemporary’ writing in *Endgame* (2006) had a similar preening. I’m guessing you identify most closely with Blomkvist, with his moral certitude and disaffected person. Yet you give nearly equal intensity and flexibility to Lisbeth Salander. Maybe her ruthless vengeance against abusive men is too predictable and even hamfisted. But her relationship with Blomkvist and previous partners is realistic and complex. She is convincingly adrift, yet concerned with her life’s course. Conversely, Blomkvist abides with little forethought, and simply takes what he is given. You present these characters with little moralizing. Perhaps this is the journalism you practiced—the depravity of villains is unfiltered through the panoptic gaze of the novel.

I did get a kick from the role of computers and technology in the novel. It was almost fetishist, and the novelty of these tools in 2002 was palpable: On page 392, Salander “pulled up the Google search engine, and typed in the keywords [Magda] + [murder].” Elsewhere, Salander finds herself in need of a “fast, modern machine.” Her ideal laptop gets a full specification. I automatically picture the jump cuts and slo-mo, the glitzy beats and professional lighting:

... the new Apple PowerBook G4/1.0 GHz in an aluminium case with a PowerPC 7451 processor with an AltiVec Velocity Engine, 960 MB RAM and a 60 GB hard drive. It had BlueTooth and built-in CD and DVD burners.

Best of all, it had the first 17-inch screen in the laptop world with NVIDIA graphics and a resolution of 1440

¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Du-reformen>

²https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Girl_with_the_Dragon_Tattoo

x 900 pixels, which shook the PC advocates and outranked everything else on the market.

In terms of hardware, it was the Rolls-Royce of portable computers, but what really triggered Salander's need to have it was the simple feature that the keyboard was equipped with backlighting, so that she could see the letters even if it was pitch dark. So simple. Why had no-one thought of that before?

It was love at first sight.

It cost 38,000 kronor [~\$3,800], plus tax. (236:7)

Did you think personal computers had reached peak performance? Or was this supposed to cement Salander's computer savvy? This was well before you could have been an *influencer*... The hacking that Lisbeth and her friends are capable of acts more as a MacGuffin than an integral plot driver. Hence the conspicuous tooling, and barely cursory tool-use. Sure, all the newfangled consumer technology was highly susceptible to exploitation, but it's too facile to me. Gummo (the hacker, not Marx or the movie...) makes it sound easy, but it really is harder these days.³ Unless you're Donald Trump.⁴

Two easter eggs:

Isn't it fascinating that Nazis always manage to adopt the word *freedom*? (Henrik Vanger, 96)

... every photographer and pictures department is convinced that the [extra] pictures[, which generally lack any commercial value,] contain a *historical documentation of incalculable value*, so they never throw anything away. (331.1)

The descriptions of the mystery paperbacks in Gottfried Vanger's cabin (319.2) were fascinating intertextual elements. There were other meta things I was thinking of while I read the book, but it's been a few weeks now, and this is the best I could come up with. Maybe some tawdry analogy to the Millennium Bridge⁵... I'm sorry, don't roll over in your grave. This is more than most would do...

MVH,
N



Make your Mac hack in style.

³An interview with Gummo from Soft White Underbelly. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6igTJXcqvo>

⁴A Dutch 'hacker' twice guessed his Twitter password. First, it was 'yourefired', then 'maga2020!'. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/22/trump-twitter-hacked-dutch-researcher-password>

⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium_Bridge,_London#Millennium_Inclinators