

Interview with Stieg Larsson -- October 27 2004

This is the first – and last -- interview with Stieg Larsson, on account of his first appearance as a detective-story writer. It was made by Lasse Winkler on October 27, 2004, and was published in Svensk Bokhandel nr 18/04.

Stieg Larsson is one of the founders of Expo

Expo is a private research foundation with a simple platform: Defending democracy and freedom of speech against racist, anti-Semitic, ultra-right and totalitarian movements in society. It is uncommitted to party politics. People working for Expo range from young Conservatives to reformed Communists, the whole spectrum; they have to leave their political luggage behind when they come to Expo.

About working at the magazine Expo, and the threats:

--We started in 1995 when seven people were murdered by nazis. From the beginning those making the magazine were young people who worked so hard that they got burned out (?) (overstrained themselves) in one and a half or two years. I was working at nights trying to keep the whole thing going. We got no support from society, and in 1998 the magazine broke down. At that time there were three -- five persons left on the board and we were given the task of reconstructing the whole activity and pay all the debts. We reorganized ourselves with a new management in 2001.

--I have been threatened occasionally. But that happens to everybody who is writing this kind of things. Threats will come without fail. It might happen to the most “innocent” texts. If it gets too much we call the police. For example, in 1999 Kurdo Baksi got a bullet through his window, the printing works have been vandalized and distributors of Expo have been attacked. But I don't think we have called the police more than three times.

This autumn Stieg Larsson will make his debut with the first book in the Millennium-series about the couple Mikael Blomkvist/Lisbeth Salander. The title of the first book is Men Who Hate Women.

About the Millennium-series:

--I started to write in 2001. I wrote the books for the fun of it. It was an old idea I had had since the nineties. Kenneth A. at TT (the Swedish Central News Agency) and I were sitting

around doing nothing and started to write a text about the old Twin-detectives. It was great fun and we discussed how to write about them now that they were 45 years old and confronted with their last mystery. That's where my idea came up, but it didn't turn out like that.

-- Instead I picked up Pippi Longstocking. What would she be like today? What would she be like as an adult? What would she be called? Sociopath? DAMP-child? She has a different view of society than others. (or: She doesn't look upon society like other people do). I made her into Lisbeth Salander, 25 years old, with a feeling of being a total outsider. She doesn't know anybody, has no social competence whatsoever.

-- Then you need somebody to counterbalance her. It turned out to be Mikael "Kalle" Blomkvist, a 45-year-old journalist. A hardworking, capable, good guy, who works at his own magazine, called Millennium. The action revolves around the magazine office, but also around Lisbeth Salander, who doesn't have much of a life of her own.

--There are many persons involved, a wide personal register. I work with three distinct groups. One around the magazine, Millennium, which has six employees. The minor characters don't just enter the scene to say something; they act in a way that influences the plot. It isn't a closed universe. Then there is the circle around Milton Security, a private security firm, with a Croat in charge. And then you have the collective (?) (group) of policemen, who are also main figures all by themselves.

It is not until in the third book that all the threads unite, and you understand what has happened. But all the books are completed stories. It is also about something else. In ordinary detective novels you never see the consequences of what happens in a story in the next book. That you do in mine.

About writing detective stories:

--I have been reading detective stories all my life. When working at TT I wrote two columns every year, at summer and at Christmas. I listed the five best crime novels at the time. Among those I have plugged are Sara Paretsky, Val McDermid, Elizabeth George, Minette Walters. Nearly all the detective-story writers I have launched are, strangely enough, female writers. I know what kind of things I myself have been irritated by in detective stories. They are often about one or two persons, but they don't describe anything in the society outside.

-- I write very fast. It's easy to write detective stories. It is more difficult to write an article of 5000 characters (?), where everything has to be one hundred percent correct. We must never be wrong (in Expo), in that case we'll be sued and attacked in their (?) press.

-- Writing detective stories is about writing light literature, for entertainment. It isn't primarily a question of writing propaganda or classical literature. Crime stories are, as you know, one of the most popular forms of entertainment that exist. If you then try to have something to say ... that I have, of course.