

This review about “Mister Anue Mal” was published 26th of May 2011 in Svenska Dagbladet. Written by Eva Johansson, translated by my husband Per Brand (bilingual English/Swedish).

**Wiggh: worthwhile to discover.**

**Tragicomical:** Maj-Britt Wiggh makes her own special path through modern Swedish literature. In her new novel an ape (or is it a man?) is trapped and unhappy in our society. Is this social criticism, or maybe just the story of a social misfit?

The really exciting and unpredictable authorships are usually found at the fringes in the literature landscape. Here they may grow and thrive, without concerning themselves with trends and the current consensus on what literature is or should be. Unfortunately, they are often missed by the media spotlight and despite good reviews they don't receive the attention they deserve.

In this strange and interesting group we find Maj-Britt Wiggh. She has made her own special path through modern Swedish literature, not at least with her two previous novel, “The Biology of the Night” and “The Self and the Birds”. They both can be described as unpredictable research expeditions in the borderlands between biology and psychology, between man and nature.

Her new book is called “Mister Anue Mal”. Thematically it continues as the previous novels, but also differs from the previous novels on several points. Most importantly, it is shorter and more concentrated and close; indeed it is almost claustrophobic. It unfolds entirely in the head of the main character “Mister Anue Mal”, and the question is if everything is in order there. If one says his name out loud it becomes clear what the book is about “Anue Mal” – animal or anomaly.

The gentleman's name real name is Hans Jansson, and he has been, for a long time, distancing himself from civilization and humanity. The novel

opens with him standing trial, after having been found naked in a tree in Humlegården (a park) in Stockholm, where he has been living, convinced that he is actually an ape.

Perhaps he really is an ape, kidnapped, and forced to live confined in a suit, in a marriage, and under the most stringent control?

It is his voice, and only his voice, that we hear, as he, in a pleading tone, tells us of his childhood paradise in the jungle, and how his hairy body is violating the limits of the socially acceptable, of cultural trips to Italy with his wife, of his many years in psychoanalysis (where he learned to accept the ape within). The only one who believes his claims of being an ape is Rosie Dahlgren, an emotional woman that has literally damaged her cheeks, in weeping over all the vulnerable animals, children and women in the world. She wants to take care of him, or maybe just wants him? Both Anue Mal and Rosie are typical Wiggh characters obsessed, self-absorbed and driven by an inner consuming fire that they cannot and do not want to extinguish.

The novel could be seen as a manifest of social criticism, an affirmation of the animal in mankind. Maybe the message is the exact opposite? Maj-Britt Wiggh does not make it easy for herself – or for her readers. She undermines Mister Anue Mals tale continuously with ‘maybe’s and ‘presumably’s. The reliability of memory is continuously cast into doubt, and with it reality itself. What is true and what is not is left up to the reader to determine.

The novel is not as serious and heavy as this review might up to now make it seem. Now and then it is also quite funny, if in a tragicomical vein. The novel seems a bit long, despite being only 150 pages, but this is easily forgiven. We are, after all, hardly spoiled with an abundance of defiant, fascinating and independent novels of ideas.