



***Swede Poems***

**Rodney Nelson**

First published as an e-book in 2007 by  
Shearsman Books Ltd  
58 Velwell Road  
Exeter EX4 4LD  
England

at

[http://www.shearsman.com/pages/books/ebooks/ebooks\\_home.html](http://www.shearsman.com/pages/books/ebooks/ebooks_home.html)

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Main text set in Kepler 11 point.

# **Swede Poems**

*from*  
***Stranger Kin***



Goodman Holmgöt had it raised  
over Odendisa his wife  
none better than whom will come  
to see to the farm Hassmyra  
Rod-Bälle did the carving  
Odendisa was a good  
sister to Sigmund too

we walk on the crunch gravel out  
to the cemetery to read  
the unknown names on cross or  
monument the question over-  
taking us what would we be  
if church and tombyard did not keep  
high random watch on the land  
all our going and coming

we stand in front of the small  
wood church of Järnboås that sits  
high unadorned with a hint  
of the majestic the lovely  
in its very humbleness

neat meager landscape that spreads  
before our eyes a worn table-  
cloth and invites us to its  
little lakes a wan-green edge of  
meadow to one side a grove  
to the other maybe a few  
dark pine trees in the distance



roomy houses are to be  
found out along the railroad track  
where the immigrant may have  
free accommodation while he  
gets his own home in order  
these regions offer to him a  
most healthy climate and rich  
soil with excellent water not  
to mention inexpensive  
land free schools good wages and good  
market places or access  
to superb hunting and fishing

nature is a shy wood nymph  
untalkative and tactful who  
does not go out in public  
where she would not be treated well

you wanted to get away to the West  
where were no kings or carping clergymen  
where you could sleep eat meat and potatoes  
and shine your boots with grease for nothing

this meat is bad, we can't eat it  
there isn't any other  
we have to complain  
do that  
all passengers have to go below, a storm's coming  
I can't, I'm so sick I can't even stand up  
we're going to die down here, it's so stuffy  
oh there's no danger  
now the storm's gone  
what's that land we see out there  
Newfoundland  
all passengers have to break open their mattresses and throw  
the haulm in the water  
what are those white boats  
pilot boats  
now we can go ashore  
does this place have a name  
it's Castle Garden

you do not come home to a  
land that you have never seen but  
arrive at a home to come  
they who were living here have  
not turned out to greet or kill you  
a waiting army prairie fort  
tells why and a garrison  
hutment on river will direct  
you to the not many men  
of Västmanland who foreran you  
to work dark richer tilth than  
anyone could have dreamt to own

the hut stood high at neck of an  
oxbow that you would have to  
fence on but one side to keep them  
in that had wanton run from  
you during herdboy days would  
log it to meadow sneck them all  
in not have to worry at  
flood river that it would reach the  
hut you would let them out and  
pen them here if you had to

gotten you a lank woman  
Maria Cara taller than  
most men not you with a flick  
of the wild in eye and mind the  
spartle spraddle of her on  
the hay or lamplit tick how she  
would laugh an invitation  
not quit long-legged to withe  
and sneck you in until she  
had wrung a mere man you to death

oxbow lengthened into  
the dark purgatorial east  
where no hidden one would get  
seen or caught but had an open  
ravine on which grew

vide

vill-oh they said

or the willow

many the sapling you took  
to lighten yard of the death hut but  
river woods the caws of it  
anywhat might happen in them



Maria would laugh at night  
but not to mate you it would be  
when to wake whole house awrong  
she would take to the rocker

styv

all day not cook wash tend the  
children see to her own body  
or meet your eye would smile at  
nothing and the woman work had  
to get done nor Johannes  
nor you had time one afternoon  
of cold the mock suns out you  
walked to Julin two womanhood  
daughters he had and begged some  
help were lucky that good Kajsa  
was willing to come who would  
chirk the dimmened home you with it

who had timed the task did not  
pretend to carry on with it  
though everyone knew to  
hang the winter bedding out when  
days got warm no she stared you  
in the eye reclined halfway on  
tatty tick was wearing no  
anywhat under dress and made  
you take push into more live  
woman than you would have dreamt to  
river woods the caws of it  
you heard child laughter way away

a change in the world did not  
make it any foreigner the  
sun's hard blow on your head a  
new pale road advancing or the  
men that wrapped you in iron  
and had to act as if they did  
not know you none of it meant  
revelation oh but what does

                    a night in jail on the way  
mean have they committed him too  
sorrow was only a joke  
oh well who wept is wept for now

you were hewing in the late  
autumn with dead leaf cold no snow  
on the ground and could make out  
through naked wicks of tree a smoke  
the chimney at Julin you  
had loved that one in haymaking  
not since but what grew within  
her you would have to love as blood

dark-eyed Jensina a true  
beauty had more than milk enough  
an Edenström had gotten  
the child on her not yet decided  
if or what to do they said  
but you would not look at this one  
either and knew when Julin  
sleigh turned south along the river

whichever called you have to  
look now the sun will hit in  
a minute not let you make out  
the right direction another

you have put seed in the dark  
of earth that will want to return  
to day you too will go from  
night to noon everyone will

he might have grown to be your  
match a man to steady the plow  
one-handed had the knack of  
numbers too might have managed what  
you and his brethren only  
worked have made to richen your time  
of age this very Johan  
whom you hack earth to bury now



if one of the women you  
could smell were on your tick tonight  
what needed grass widower  
to do you would to have a taste  
of her the sweet the sweaty  
oh if the wild one had not had  
to go away or the mild  
one you would not be in to town

will morrow to the west a  
time of your off- and afterspring  
land without limit in the  
Johnson name and you can see it  
the old famine country seems  
like a bad night dream to you now  
these many miles into day  
if only you were not alone

one of them you brought into  
day is gibing you now  
riding the humpty  
                    gubbe  
to earth and night where it started

who thwarted you has coyed at  
you too a child turning woman  
at threat of hit unafraid  
has taken the bottle and drunk

let him be that mind not know  
the worse the way she took to tweak  
you to her will you did him right  
want him respect the man you were

hummed words were all she said to you  
none after that morning on Big  
Stone Lake would have had you come and  
see her one only time at least

the dark wild beauty you met  
in heyday of Eau Claire had a  
family but you do not  
know where could not write anyway

make it to see the willows  
leaf you will not have to worry  
the sun will burn whatever  
has thriven in the dark of you



Maria is in the room  
to goad the living and you would  
have her bide with you instead  
watch willow leaf to sallow light

you would have had them keep the  
child at home get in a nanny  
had you stayed yet it only  
happened because you could not do

even foreseeing it would  
you have stuck to the dark country  
with Holmgöt Odendisa  
immemorialized famine  
no you would have sailed any-  
way taken a train ride with chance  
to the west railhead then have  
walked on to make a place in light



## **Note:**

NOTE: These are selections from the narrative poem 'Stranger Kin'. Some, in a way, might be considered "found poems." 'Goodman Holmgöt' is a runestone inscription. 'We walk,' 'neat meager,' and 'this meat' come from nineteenth-century historical writings; 'you wanted' is from an emigrant ballad of the same time. 'Roomy houses' appears on a broadsheet for prospective emigrants. The runestone men probably intended their work as poetry. The rest of these were "found" in later Swedish and translated; only the ballad stanza, originally in or as a poem. 'You do not' et seq. are the musings of an immigrant man but for 'change of,' his mad wife's.

*styv* : stiff

*gubbe* : old man

R.N.