

Anderson, Bengt E(dvard): Att rannsaka en barndom.  
Harry Martinsons *Nässlorna blomma*: Tillkomst och tematik.  
(The Trial of a Childhood. Harry Martinson's *Nässlorna blomma*  
[The Nettles are Flowering]: Genesis and Themes).  
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## Abstract

The work studied is assumed to be a development novel. It tells the story of how Martin Tomasson is made an orphan at the age of six, subsequently being placed as a foster child with three different farming families and thereafter at a parish institution for old and infirm paupers.

Much of the material in the novel consists of reminiscences from his childhood, recalled and commented upon by an implied author, but the use of these memories from early life is to a high degree fictionalized and literarized, in a way creating a second layer of deeper meaning in the text. While Martin's years as a ward of the parish are described on the surface as a time of slavery, ill will and marginalization, the text at the same time exposes a more universal side. The tale of individual hardship is superimposed by a sermonlike layer of idealistic norms, pacifistic and humanistic. On this plane virtues such as striving for knowledge and personal development, reciprocity in human life, care and love are contrasted with strongly criticized faults among people in the foster homes, such as egoism, lack of generosity, attitudes of negligence and lack of true understanding of the conditions necessary for creating a decent life. Hatred, as exposed as an individual fault among some of the foster-parents, is said to be the beginning of wars.

*Nässlorna blomma* is one of the commercially most successful novels in Sweden, and is one in a wave of several published during the 1920's and 1930's by members of a generation of self-taught authors with a background of childhood and youth deprivation. No major study has so far been produced on this particular work by Harry Martinson.

The text includes a narrative peculiarity in that it uses two main points of view: Martin's as a child and Martin's as the grown up man, observing and commenting with severe harshness on the younger figure's failings and mistaken reactions.

*Nässlorna blomma* is not a modernistic novel, but it contains some modernistic characteristics like the use of a highly original and daring idiom in its numerous images and metaphors. Possibly some influence is due to works by T. S. Eliot, the Swedish poet Birger Sjöberg and one of the pioneers of modernistic theory and practice in Sweden, Erik Mesterton.

KEY WORDS: *Development novel - autobiography turned fiction - childhood - orphan - outcast - deprivation - anguish - knowledge - insight - human relationships.*

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