

Chapter 72 : Prince Wilhelm (1884-1965) – "The Poet Laureate".

Prince Wilhelm's family was a writer's family. Both he, his wife Maria, his son Lennart and his son Jan have written about the family history (Pavlovna 1930 & 1933; Prince Wilhelm 1913, 1938, 1951 & 1952; Bernadotte 1966 & 1995; Andhé red. 1971; Bernadotte, 2006). There are also a number of short biographies (NFB 1926; Swahn 1930: ss. 171-197; H:son-Ericson 1965; Elgklou 1978: ss. 167-171; Ohlmarks 1980: ss. 128-129; Lagerqvist 1985; Weibull 1991: ss. 135-138; Elgklou 1995: ss. 217-222; Skott 1996: ss. 240-250; Sundberg 2004: ss. 247-249; Lindqvist 2010: ss. 97-101; Norlin 2015: ss. 197-206) and "legacies" (Asplund 1945, 1954, 1959: ss. 208-234, 1965 & 1966; Lyttkens 1980; Snickars 2004; Lagercrantz 2011). The depiction of Wilhelm is based on these sources and on records, newspaper articles and incidental findings. First, his professional career as officer, landlord, author and member of the royal house. Then his private life.

*

Prince Carl Wilhelm Ludvig, Duke of Södermanland, was born June 17, 1884, at the parents' summer residence Tullgarn Castle. From 1892 to 1898, he received home education together with his two brothers Gusty and Erik, and then attended the Swedish Naval Training School where he graduated in October 1904 as a second lieutenant. The Swedish Naval War School was located at Skeppsholmen and was a grammar school with a naval orientation. He spent the summers on the Cadet ships Saga, Freya and Oden, on Tullgarn and with his German family.

In his "memoirs"¹, Wilhelm describes himself on entering the naval school, as insecure and inferior which he blamed both on himself and on his socially isolated upbringing. That was not quite true. Wilhelm was until navy collage a mama's boy and general brat:

He had been a "Mama's boy" as long as he remembered, and this quality he thought he should be enough to cope with the precariousness of life and be an excellent introduction in all dealings with unfamiliar individuals and events. Not that he considered himself entirely innocent in this period of his life. On the contrary. His father and mother had admonished him more times than he could remember for stealing fruit or hunting cats with some "borrowed" small-bore rifle. But it sufficed with remorseful tears, a sobbing promise to "never do so again" and the matter was settled - until he found another entrance to the fruit shed and trained the stable dog to do his hunting.²

Then came the feelings of inferiority - probably because the demands were both unrealistic and diffuse. Long afterwards, his judgment was that his mother was completely ignorant of child-rearing. It was not just that she ignored his will. Neither did she explain herself. Wilhelm sucked up to her in self-defence - she was both his beloved mother, infallible, and a riddle - but seems to have received nothing beyond affection back. He was her "Blume". He alternated long periods between depression and anxiety. In particular, the religious education in the summer of 1900 was a low point when the priest took to question him about his belief in God, which Wilhelm had until then not devoted a thought. Eventually he realized without enthusiasm his place in life as 2nd in the succession to the throne after Gusty. He had

¹ prins Wilhelm 1938, 1951 & 1952.

² prins Wilhelm 1917.

privileges but also duties. The duties included putting the best interests of the royal house first. In 1902, he swore allegiance to King Oscar II, the family and the Parliament.

The sailor's life began in the summer of 1898 with a short test trip aboard Saga. The following summer as "puling" (Danish for fuck-object) was for real. The naval school was extremely hierarchical - especially when everyone was supposed to mix. The older students decided over the younger ones and over them all stood commanders: "You had to run errands here and there, brush the quartermaster's pants, pour water into the fifth-graders sink, wrap the fourth-graders bunk, count the third-graders laundry and serve the second-graders in all ways they could imagine, which of course were the most difficult thing to do. They were still border line pulings and had for the first time some underling to harass."³ The puling discipline was maintained by a cadet court where the delinquent had to choose between being reported to the command or getting flogged. Most people picked flogging. The cadets also flogged each other as "leisure" and endurance tests. The student turnover the first two years was understandably high. Wilhelm seems to have been protected from the worst excesses by a "buddy-court". The classmates - 14 of them - were children of sea officers and landowners. Two became admirals: Gösta Ehrensvärd & Helge Friis. They had probably been chosen to give William a suitable environment. A "normal" class was more bourgeois. Wilhelm's last year one could also apply from the 7th class of the public school to the 4th class of the naval school. These newcomers were a new type of officers - more technicians than disciplinarians. Wilhelm, who for his active service chose a torpedo boat division, is probably also to be counted in.

The time on board the cadet ships was used for drill, grooming, conversation, choir singing, pranks and studies. They learned a lot about sailing ships but that knowledge was irrelevant to their career. The port visits were devoted to further drills, marine related study visits, dance, entertainment, alcohol, girls and sight seeing. Slowly, Wilhelm's horizons widened and the environment began to get on his nerves and apparently vice versa. He has written that he never really understood why he was there. Everything was his parents' idea.⁴ In the summer of 1899 aboard Saga, he vented his aggression by tricking an older cadet into drinking from a beer bottle of oil-mixed scrub water, which rendered him the first beating of his life:

The other end of the table devolved into a perfect storm of ungrammatical oaths ending with an order to meet in his private quarters after dinner. There he [William] received his first real beating – fair, square but not too brutal. In addition all free time for the next three weeks to be spent up in the mast, be it rain, storm or sunshine.⁵

In 1902, he wrote his first play Cléo, or Night in Tokyo, about the three cadets Gök, Kask and Vingel and their adventures. There was a tradition that the cadets were allowed to vent their aggression with impunity, as long as it took the form of jokes, and Wilhelm did so – but not as far as to criticize the system. Afterwards, he wrote nostalgically about his summer trips with the steam driven tall ships Saga & Freja. At the time, however, he was frustrated with the outdated education. In 1902 and 1903 he was on the battleship Oden, not the same romance around this modern war machine though.

³ prins Wilhelm 1938: s. 72.

⁴ prins Wilhelm 1938: ss. 26-42.

⁵ prins Wilhelm 1917.

*

The officer training included social training. Wilhelm became a good dancer and party speaker. There is an episode from 1902 where he invited himself to one of his older brother Gustaf's dance nights in Uppsala, danced 11 dances with the same girl and was rebuked. He was tall and strong and also good at sports. Through the home, he received extra training in certain subjects: He is said to have read English at Stockholm University - uncertain information though - and for a while he played the violin. During the German holidays it was of course much German. At home, Mother Victoria spoke English with the children and the Naval Warfare School taught French. Wilhelm was mediocre in mathematics, but otherwise claimed to be among the best in his class. October 8, 1903, he received his commission. He concluded that after six years at the naval warfare school he was good in language, poor in art and literature and allergic to flattery.

After the naval school there followed an educational trip. From November 14, 1903, to December 1904, Wilhelm and Gusty visited their German relatives and then proceeded to Venice, Florence, Genoa, Nice and Paris. They spent Christmas in Karlsruhe. Wilhelm was restless: Stayed away from the castle, drank too much and played poker.⁶

During the Union crisis of 1905, he served on the armoured boat *Wasa*. In the winter of 1905-1906 he made a long trip to the Mediterranean with the schoolship *Freja* - a reward for the class' six best cadets. He served as quartermaster. There are several depictions of the trip: a report by the ship's doctor Prague, Wilhelm's own description from much later and some excerpts from Prague's diary.⁷ In the photographs Wilhelm is tall, slim, moustached and smokes a cigarette. He had no special privileges on board but his birth meant that the reception in the ports was better than usual - a lot of excursions and parties. The route was Karlskrona-Falmouth-Funchal-Cadiz-Gibraltar-Tunis-Alexandria-Constantinople-Naples-Capri and back. They spent Christmas in Tunis. During the Alexandria break, Wilhelm, his adjutant and the ship's doctor undertook a journey up the Nile to Assouan so that Wilhelm could boast to his mother with his Egyptian experience - at that point something of a fix idea for him and also Gusty who continued the educational trip there. In Constantinople Wilhelm was received by Sultan Abdul Hamid II whom he on behalf of Oscar II received into the Order of the Seraphim. On their way home, they arrived in Naples and were visited on board by mother Victoria, whom they crossed over to Capri.

In 1906 Wilhelm served on the torpedo boat *Kapella* in the Coastal Squadron and was appointed lieutenant. In 1907 he was at the Naval Staff and in the autumn of the same year he made another long trip with the armoured cruiser *Fylgia* to England, France, the West Indies and America. This trip too was a combination of officer training, entertainment and representation. The ship was received by a news crew and an enthusiastic crowd of six thousand people. Wilhelm was unprepared for all the commotion and tried through Swedish minister Herman Lagercrantz to explain that he was not there as an heir prince but incognito as a lieutenant in the Swedish navy. It came to a press conference aboard *Fylgia*, Wilhelm's first:

[HL:] "He insists on performing his duties on board and declines even to take his meals with me in the cabin here. He takes his meals where his naval rank places him, with the officers' mess." ... "His Royal Highness is here to represent his country and to meet, above all, the Swedish people. I wish you would do him the favour through your

⁶ prins Wilhelm 1951: ss. 83-103.

⁷ P-g. [Resebrev.] Idun 1905:46, 1905:50 & 1906:4; prins Wilhelm 1951: ss. 104-131; Ahlstrand 2011.

valuable paper to make that quite clear to the American people. He will devote most of his time to talking and visiting with his own countrymen.”

His Royal Highness, a slim, very tall, loose-jointed young man, stood with evident embarrassment, a bit awkwardly, leaning one large hand on a table, burying the other in his trousers pocket under his reefer jacket, and smiled, much as a well-bred boy might who was being proudly exhibited by his family to a visitor. Then he pulled his hand out of his pocket, and extending a long, very long, arm, he shook hands with a warm grip. The Minister presented me very formally to the Prince, with all the deference and respect of a Court officer to royalty, but, when he first spied him coming toward the cabin, he spoke to him in the tone of a tutor addressing his favourite pupil.

[HL:] “His Royal Highness has never been interviewed, and, er – I am not sure that it is exactly the correct thing to do so,” said Mr. de Lagercrantz pleasantly, standing in military manner between us. Warned by the Minister's estimate of the deference due a Prince of royal blood from one of humbler station, one was confronted with a dreadful perplexity as to what would be a question equal to his rank. Something about the weather? Did he like herrings? Was he fond of torpedoes? Did he miss his native land? Could he sing? A lot of harmless idiocies of this sort might at least be inoffensive.

[NY:] “Was his Royal Highness fully prepared for the grandeurs of Newport society?” I asked him.

[PW:] “I have seen many countries,” said the Prince, in a pleasant, laughing way. It was a boyish laugh, a sort of punctuating instinct of youth.

[NY:] “But you are going to see much grandeur!”

[PW:] “I shall enjoy that; it is very kind of them to let me see it!”

He speaks English extremely well, with a very slight foreign accent, and when I told him so he said that he had been educated at the great university at Stockholm.

[PW:] “But I have been at sea since I was 14,” he added.

[NY:] “You are fond of the sea?”

[PW:] “Oh, yes, very much, Indeed,” and he laughed buoyantly again. It seemed as though our conversation was as limited as a primer in two syllables, and yet there was no help for it. His Royal Highness was only a very shy young man, which in Sweden is younger than usual, because it is a nation of men who live by deeds, not words.

[NY:] “Your Royal Highness will always remain at sea?” I asked, careful of the prefixes, and evidently I must have touched some hidden diplomatic plan, for the minister hastened to answer.

[HL:] “His Royal Highness has a very large and beautiful estate in Sweden, where he will probably live very soon,” and his Royal Highness made a dive with his right hand into his trousers pocket and laughed a bit awkwardly.⁸

[Lagercrantz was most of all concerned about that Wilhelm's engagement would not be known and therefore induced the head of the Associated Press (equivalent to TT) to attend the interview. He threatened journalists with expulsion if they published something he had not had the opportunity to pre-censor. For this he was later rewarded with the Order of Vasa Commander 1st Class.⁹]

⁸ [Pendennis.] “Prince Wilhelm's odd dilemma at Newport.” The New York Times 1907-08-25; “Prins puts in a strenuous day.” The New York Times 1907-09-01.

⁹ Lagercrantz 1939: s. 231.

During his stay Wilhelm lunched with President Theodore Roosevelt and visited hospitals, skyscrapers, the Swedish stand at the Jamestown Industrial Exhibition, President Grant's grave, an opium well in Chinatown and other sights. He was photographed where ever he went. The press corps managed to obtain another interview. Wilhelm chain-smoked and answered impossible questions about what he thought of America's fleet, skyscrapers, hospitality, newspapers and women. Oskar II had given him instructions to meet as many Swedish-Americans as possible. After receiving criticism for only meeting with socialites, Wilhelm would also meet the people. On August 31, during a visit to the Dreamland amusement park on Coney Island, approximately the following events occurred:

Wilhelm's program included dinner at the Atlantic Yacht Club. After that, he attended a reception for Swedish-Americans. The club was located on the western side of Coney Island. The reception would take place in a dance palace at the Dreamland amusement park a few kilometres away. After dinner Wilhelm was transported there by boat. The boat was too deep for them to disembark. They returned to the club and Wilhelm was transported to Dreamland by car, and at the main entrance he identified himself in order to be admitted. Then it became chaotic:

- There was a whirlwind crowd of loyal Swedes edging in and out of Dreamland all evening, burning with the excitement of expectation. Capt. Langan of the Coney Island station and fifty reserves went down on the iron pier with the companies of Brooklyn National guards to welcome the prince when his yacht should appear. About half past 10 some one ran breathlessly down to the pier and notified the policemen and militia that the prince was besieged in his automobile outside of the entrance of Dreamland in Surf avenue. The brassband, police, and soldiers double quicked out through the length of the grounds to the gate. There they found Prince Wilhelm standing in an automobile beseeching the crowd in fluent Swedish and English to be quiet.¹⁰

- The Prince was met by a crowd of appalling dimensions, animated by a frenzied desire to come to close quarters and shake hands. All went well as long as the Prince was under the protection of two companies of the Brooklyn National Guards specially detailed to act as a guard of honour. But for some reason the soldiers disappeared as soon as the Prince had taken up a position at the head of a vast dancing hall in "dreamland." The crush then became perilous and to avoid a catastrophe the Prince mounted a high table while officials armed with megaphones announced that his Royal Highness, with characteristic good nature, was willing to stand where all could see him provided only that the crowd would keep calm and circulate in an orderly manner. But the warning fell on deaf ears, and soon men were cursing and screaming and women fainting as a mob of 25,000 people pushed forward in a wild endeavor to touch the Prince's hand. At this juncture the managers of the show, succeeded in smuggling the Prince through a back door, whence, with crumpled collar and damaged coat, he regained his automobile, breathless, but uninjured. Meanwhile the police had their hands full, rescuing and restoring, to consciousness dozens of women who had been crushed.¹¹

- Acting Commissioner O'Keefe and Inspector Harkins had charge of the Police, and the hundred men succeeded after a little in clearing a space about him, so that he could walk. The crowd kept on surging about, however, and progress was slow. Every show in the pleasure place had gone out of business temporarily, and there was nothing

¹⁰ "Prince is rumbled in a mob." Chicago Tribune 1907-09-01, s. 3.

¹¹ "Souvenir hunters loot a cruiser." Poverty Bay Herald 1907-10-26, s. 11.

doing anywhere except where the Prince was. At last the party reached the big ballroom, and there some sort of order was maintained. Lines were formed and the Prince began to shake hands with the crowd. He smiled at first and shook hands firmly, while the band played the Swedish national anthem and American patriotic airs. After a little, however, the Prince got tired, for there seemed to be no end to the people who wanted to shake hands. He kept it up for nearly an hour, and then signified that he had had enough, was escorted to his automobile and taken back to the yacht club, whence he took the boat back to the city.¹²

Wilhelm's continued service is unclear. According to H:son-Ericson¹³, he alternated between land and sea service as any officer. According to other information, he was on long leave for travel and representation. May 3, 1908, he married. It lasted until 1914. 1907-1928 he was chairman of the Swedish Hunters' Association. He served on the torpedo cruiser Claes Horn and other ships and continued his training for torpedo boat service. During the drills he commanded the torpedo boats Argo and Rigel. In 1913, he was appointed captain, and in October 1914 he was assigned as ship and division commander on the torpedo boat Castor in the southern region, with the task of hunting for out of place naval mines, escorting merchant ships and keeping an eye on foreign destroyers. This service is described in the short story "Neutrality Guard"¹⁴ and an episode is mentioned in the White Paper The navy neutrality guard:

On January 23 [1916] p.m. the English steamer "F. D. Lambert" of Sunderland was escorted by the torpedo boat "Castor", under the command of H.R. H. The Duke of Södermanland, from Trälleborg through the Falsterbo route within 3 nautical miles of land. The steamer was attacked by two German destroyers, who positioned themselves in front of "Lambert" and, apparently in order to impede the steamer's navigation, spread artificial smoke, making navigation impossible. "Castor" crossed the bank of fog at the highest speed towards the German ships, who then stopped their efforts and gradually moved away.¹⁵

The manoeuvre was risky on the top because, if the situation had turned serious, the two German destroyers had 10 times their own firepower (two small-caliber guns and a torpedo tube), and would have brought them down in the first salvo. A few days later, he described the episode as "a little breath of adventure that I have always sought":

It's a curiously charming feeling to face danger and know that it only depends on yourself whether or not you will get by, the same feeling as when the hunter stands in front of a dangerous game that that turns on you: "him or me". Yes, I have shot both buffalo and rhinoceros and been involved in lion and tiger hunts, so I know how it feels!¹⁶

The service at Castor was very stressful. Wilhelm underwent surgery on January 30, 1916, for stomach pain - it was appendicitis. He also suffered repeated infections and hearing loss. In the autumn of 1916 he was transferred to the Naval Staff. In 1917, he was commander of the destroyer Munin. In 1919, he took indefinite leave. Later he received honorary positions - in 1921 Commander 2nd degree, in 1927 Commander 1st degree, in 1933 Commander, in 1938 Rear Admiral in reserve and Major General.

¹² "Prins puts in a strenuous day." The New York Times 1907-09-01.

¹³ H:son-Ericson 1965.

¹⁴ prins Wilhelm 1938: ss. 227-252.

¹⁵ Flottans neutralitetsvakt 1919: s. 39.

¹⁶ Andhé red. 1971: s. 25,

*

In 1914 Wilhelm divorced and received custody of his son Lennart. During his service in Skåne from 1914 to 1916, his mother took care of Lennart. In the autumn of 1916 Wilhelm was back in Stockholm. He had an apartment at the castle but was usually unreachable. He spent this time in the circles of the Travellers' Club (1st Honorary Member, 1913), Idun (a society to bring scientists together with artists) and "the Artist Circle", and had a relationship with the divorced French woman Jeanne de Tramcourt. There were conflicts with his mother about the appropriateness of this. The writer was temporarily on hold. His book "No Light" had received poor criticism from none other than Bo Bergman, who called for more private emotions in the versifications. Wilhelm's self-confidence - never very strong - obviously received a blow. Who was he really? Even his son Lennart has had difficulty describing his personality: "It took me a long time before I got to know my dad properly. He served himself up in small pieces and it was difficult to assemble the parts." Wilhelm later explained this by saying "that his only principle was to have no principles".¹⁷ Avoiding taking a position is not a good starting point for a writer and Wilhelm has - despite good advice from Bo Bergman, Prince Eugen and others - a legacy of rather than good.

Starting in 1912 Wilhelm published 40 books and 24 short films - poetry, short stories, plays, nature, travel and folklore - which were kindly mentioned and sold well. There were also many reviews, travel letters, coincidental poetry and lectures. From 1923 he wrote in Idun, 1924-1941 he edited Barnens Dagblad - an annual magazine with contributions from famous authors, from 1925 he gave radio lectures, from 1927 he held lectures, 1930-1948 he made short films - a kind of filmed lectures - and from 1935 he was a permanent collaborator in Svenska Dagbladet. The revenue should have been substantial. He also appeared in newsreels - from the wedding with Maria Pavlovna in 1908 until his death in 1965 about 250 times - and in numerous newspaper articles and features. He may not have been a great artist, but due to media exposure he was a great cultural figure. In 1947, he became an honorary doctor at Stockholm University.

Wilhelm also made an effort to create himself a position within the cultural world and long held "cultural events" at Stenhammar with journalists, writers and academics. According to the guestbook, the most frequent visitors were Karl Asplund, Yngve Berg, Bo Bergman, Bo Beskow, Carl Björkman, Nils Dardel, Albert Engström, Torsten Fogelqvist, Karl Ragnar Gierow, Olof Lagercrantz, Pär Lagerkvist, Carl G. Laurin, Erik Lindorm, Birger Mörner, Einar Nerman, Sten Selander, Gunnar Mascoll Silfverstolpe, Ragnar Svanström, Alma Söderhjelm, Anders de Willil, Emil Zilliacus & Österling. Most were conservative academics from his own generation but Wilhelm also met with working class writers like Harry and Moa Martinsson, although both parties were somewhat embarrassed. Lagercrantz describes a visit the weekend of October 10 & 11 1942:

The Prince was most gracious, but it is obvious that he completely lacks essence and personality. He writes poems in the styles of his friends, without ever being able to produce his own tone, and his social life is more of the same. It is impossible to get in any human contact with him. On me he makes the impression of being completely empty. He is not very talented and seems to prefer joking and cheap wit. He is boyish, but not in a good way. But his war-time poetry is in earnest. It is well that he has chosen reliable friends when he is so easily impressed.¹⁸

¹⁷ Bernadotte 1966: ss. 108 & 123.

¹⁸ Lagercrantz 2011: s. 81.

Another visitor was the author Alice Lyttkens who cites Karl Asplund's characteristic as very apt:

No one has better characterized Prince Wilhelm than his close friend Karl Asplund in his essay: "Prince Wilhelm, the writer". "Karl Asplund notes that 'the prince undoubtedly is desperate for glory, not only wanting to create something great but also receive applause for it as a compensation for his feelings of inferiority during youth. It took time, however, for the Prince to achieve recognition.'" In his preface, Karl Asplund says: "Although he cannot be counted among our great poets, there is much in his production that played a real role when published - Free Land and Evil Times in particular."

When reading his poetry, the Prince often selected his two patriotic books, that were very much in tune with people's feelings during the war. That he enjoyed applause and autograph hunters is irrefutable. At such time, pleasure trumped loyalty to the colleagues present.

I think I can say straight off that his two greatest merits were his warmth and kindness and his unshakable stand against Nazism, which must have cost him since his beloved mother Queen Victoria was a pure German.¹⁹

In addition to the "war-time poetry", Wilhelm became involved in the Help to Finland movement²⁰ and 1944-1954 he was chairman of the Swedish Penn-club. The Penn-club's working class writers were moderately amused. Wilhelm Moberg already at the first meeting informed him that he did not want to remain. 1950-1954, he was vice-president of PEN, where his name gave credence to decisions. In his will Wilhelm gave the Swedish Penn-club 400 thousand to a scholarship fund for optional purpose.

Wilhelm's previously highly regarded travelogues and heimat depictions have met a sad fate and are now considered curiosities.²¹ Nowadays he is best known for his autobiographical essays about his upbringing. However, these were written long afterwards and the source value is questionable. He speaks ill of the "court atmosphere", thrives on Tullgarn, where he escapes it, pays homage to his mother, and is ironic towards his grandfather. His father, brothers, and wife are non-persons.

*

In parallel with his officer and artist life, Wilhelm also had an official life. From the age of 18, he attended the opening of the Parliament wearing an ermine-lined robe and a ducal crown. He received a number of Swedish and foreign Orders, honorary positions - including lieutenant in a Prussian cavalry regiment - and participated in state visits and family gatherings. 1918 he was offered the title of regent of Finland, but declined. From 1950 he was 2nd in the line to the throne after Prince Bertil and regent when King Gustaf VI and Prince Bertil were abroad. It amused him to joke about it. For example, he once frightened the hostess of a neighbouring estate with that he expected the whole government to hold a cabinet meeting at her house.

During a trip to the Congo in 1922, William contracted malaria and was close to dying. He had recurring episodes. Wilhelm was a heavy smoker and from about 1948 he had reduced respiratory function due to pulmonary emphysema. His hearing deteriorated drastically over the years - according to one report due to otosclerosis - but in that case he must have refused

¹⁹ Lyttkens 1980: s. 108; Asplund 1966: s. 11.

²⁰ prins Wilhelm m.fl. red. 1940.

²¹ Snickars 2004.

to use a hearing aid. The cause of death was a heart attack. Time and place was the night of June 5, 1965, at Stenhammar.