

## FLAMMAN

Claes-Göran Holmberg

### Precursors

Swedish avant-garde groups were very late in founding their own magazines. In France and Germany, little magazines had been published continuously from the romantic era onwards. A magazine was an ideal platform for the consolidation of a new movement in its formative phase. It was a collective thrust at the heart of the enemy: the older generation, the academies, the traditionalists. By showing a united front (through programmatic declarations, manifestos, essays etc.) you assured the public that you were to be reckoned with. Almost every new artist group or current has tried to create a magazine to define and promote itself.

The first Swedish little magazine to embrace the symbolist and decadent movements of fin-de-siècle Europe was *Med pensel och penna* (With paintbrush and pen, 1904-1905), published in Uppsala by the society of “Les quatre diables”, a group of young poets and students engaged in aestheticism and Baudelaire adulation. Members were the poet and student in Slavic languages Sigurd Agrell (1881-1937), the student and later professor of art history Harald Brising (1881-1918), the student of philosophy and later professor of psychology John Landquist (1881-1974), and the author Sven Lidman (1882-1960); the poet Sigfrid Siwertz (1882-1970) also joined the group later. The magazine did not leave any great impact on Swedish literature but it helped to spread the Jugend style of illustration, the contemporary love-hate relationship with the city and the celebration of the intoxicating powers of beauty and decadence.

In 1915 the Stockholm-based Italian painter Arturo Ciacelli

(1883-1966) published the first and only issue of the magazine *Ny konst* (New Art). An attempt to introduce not only new art but also new music and new literature, it was the first Scandinavian magazine of its kind. In *Ny konst*, one could read about the psychiatrist Bror Gadelius and his book on modern art and mental illness – a discussion that would continue a couple of years later in the Danish magazine *Klingen*. *Ny konst* also featured Per Krohg's "futurist" poem "Den kunstige figur" (The artificial/odd figure), its typographic experimentation soon to be echoed in *Klingen* and *flamman*.

Another important force in the dissemination of avant-garde aesthetics was *Thalia* (1909-1913), a magazine for "scenic art and music". Contacts were made with young, modern-minded contributors from Sweden and abroad, including Leon Feuchtwanger, Sven Lange and Max Reinhardt. In 1912, *Thalia* showcased Italian futurism and published one of Marinetti's manifestos. The following year, an interview with Nijinski was published under the headline "Futurist dance art". Even though scenic art was the main focus of *Thalia*, young Swedish writers looked upon it as an important magazine for avant-garde ideas.

### **flamman**

*flamman*, published between 1917-1921, was the most prominent Swedish avant-garde magazine. It was founded by the Swedish painter Georg Pauli (1855-1935), who had shocked his native audience with his cubist mural paintings in a provincial Jönköping high school (1912). Pauli had studied in Paris and had met avant-garde painters and writers there. On his return to Sweden, he decided to found a Swedish magazine that would introduce the new movements. Pauli was allowed to extract and publish texts and pictures from his two primary influences: Herwarth Walden's *Der Sturm* (1910-1932) and Amedée Ozenfant's *l'Élan* (1915-1916). Pauli and Ozenfant also placed advertisements in each other's magazines.

*flamman* was published by the "Bröderna Lagerström" publishing house in Stockholm. It is doubtful whether its leader Hugo Lagerström appreciated the magazine's typographical playfulness (Gram 2006: 52). Inspired by Ozenfant's "typométrie" and "psychotypiques", Pauli used all kinds of pseudo-historical and Jugend fonts. In a poem inspired by the neo-classical architect Carl August



Cover of the first edition of *flamman* by Eigil Schwab, 1916.

Ehrensvärd, “Kolonner vad gör ni?” (Columns what do you do?) (Berg 1917: 4), the painter and illustrator Yngve Berg (1887-1963) plays with the typographical palette, while similar tricks appear in Gunnar Cederschiöld’s (1887-1949) interview with Pablo Picasso (Cederschiöld: 1917: 1).

Pauli quickly understood that he could not manage the magazine alone, so he recruited the artist Eigil Schwab (1882-1952) and the young, “ultra modernist” art critic and historian Gregor Paulsson (1889-1977) as fellow editors. Both were disappointed by the way Pauli treated them and soon left the magazine. They were replaced by Yngve Berg.

Only in its first year did *flamman* fulfil its aim of being a magazine for “modernism in the arts”. After the eight issues of 1917 (including one double issue), Pauli had to shelve *flamman* for a while due to economic reasons. 1918 saw only one volume, the single annual publication, *Flamman, Kalender för modern Konst* (flamman, calendar of modern art). Responses to the new format were mixed, many were critical. Poul Uttenreitter from *Klingen* thought that *flamman* had now “calmed down to an old fashioned Swedish quietness” (Uttenreitter 1919).

Among the contents of the 1919 annual calendar was an essay on “Pure art” by the Swedish post-impressionist painter and devotee of Islamic Sufism, Ivan Agueli (1869-1917). The essay had already been published in the French magazine *La Gnose* in 1911 but this was the first time a Swedish audience had the chance to read Agueli’s artistic self-declaration. *flamman*’s final flare occurred with the publication of a 1920/21 annual issue financed by the art dealer Gösta Olsson, which, as a result, came to be viewed as a vehicle for Olsson’s gallery, Svensk-Franska Konstgalleriet (The Swedish-French Art Gallery).

But a little magazine does not need a lot of time to make itself known and appreciated. A wealth of information on the avant-garde can be found in *flamman*’s eight issues.

### **Totalism and More, the Content of *flamman***

The first issue declared:

*flamman* is an attempt to give the young and promising in modern art a mouthpiece before a Swedish audience [...] A flame wants free-

dom! – its core is obvious, but the contours are playing! [...] The modernisms will be attended to: expressionism, cubism, futurism, simultaneism et al. and totalism!

“Totalism”, elaborated on in an article in the second issue, was Pauli’s term for an -ism that synthesised all of the other the new -isms: expressionism, cubism, futurism, simultaneism etc. He noted Picasso as an example of someone who had painted in all styles and pointed out that a “modernist exhibition anno 1914” (probably Der Sturm’s Berlin exhibition) contained a highly varied selection of paintings. Pauli was inspired by André Lhote’s proclamations in *l’E-lan* that modern art had to be able to encompass everything from strict stylisation to the careful copying of reality. Pauli recapitulated Lhote’s observation thus: “Our time must find its definitive expression in the complex piece of art, it must orchestrate all known instruments and all the sounds and noises that hit the human ear.” This includes “the boom of the sledgehammer, the whistle of the train, the chug of the kettle and the murmuring of the wind.” The new art should be a forger of opposites, both “panopticon and metaphor” (Pauli 1917: 2).

Symptomatic of Pauli and *flamman* was the will to find new ways to produce art. These new ways generally gravitated toward form, not content. Gregor Paulsson explained it thus: “We are dealing with purely pictorial problems, not with aesthetic, literary, philosophical, national, sentimental slogans” (Pauli 1917: 1). The political aspects of the avant-garde, as expressed for instance in Italian futurism or German dadaism, were clearly not of interest to *flamman*. Picasso, the artist that never stops, but always invents new ways to change and improve his art, provided the ideal model. By the fourth issue, Pauli found it necessary to defend *flamman* from its detractors. He stated that the general public has been satisfied with the first class reproductions but had expressed concern over the motley typography. He reminded readers that it had been made clear from the outset that the magazine harboured artistic intent in its very form: The typography was not simply a carrier of ideas and thoughts, but was also suggestive and decorative in itself. “To decorate a printed page and a mural wall is the same!” he noted (Pauli 1917: 5), with reference to his notorious public work. He then quoted a statement by Picasso, “the chief of the cubists”, from the interview in the first issue: “the

artist is nature's master, not its slave", before pointing to Per Krohg's picture poem in *Ny konst* as a good example of the suggestive potential of typography.

Pauli promoted the new in several different ways, one of which was to publish reproductions of work by the best international avant-garde painters and sculptors, some of them in colour. In total, the works featured in *flamman* constitute a comprehensive map of contemporary avant-garde art: Picasso, Chagall, Arp, Archipenko, Metzinger, Lhote and so on. Nell Walden (1887-1973), Herwarth Walden's Swedish wife, wrote essays about Chagall and Archipenko, while Arturo Ciacelli contributed with a powerful visual homage to the Italian futurist painter Umberto Boccioni (Pauli 1917: 4).

Another important mission for *flamman* was to showcase Swedish modernist and avant-garde painters, including Isaac Grünewald and Sigrid Hjertén, Leander Engström, Einar Jolin. GAN sent pictures of some of his paintings and also contributed with aphorisms on formal aspects of art, addressing such questions as how best to achieve beauty in a drawing and how to use colouring and technique to create artistic effect. He also emphasised the importance of utilising aspects of the modern world: mechanics, steam, electricity. In a dialogue between the erudite, impotent critic and the seeking, potent artist, GAN presents the latter as the representative of the new, the good, and the manly. Electricity, Energy and Power are his guiding words. The most powerful of GAN's polemics appear in *flamman's* so-called "extra issue" from 1919. His anonymous enemies – perhaps the bourgeoisie or the establishment or simply those who do not understand the power and truth of modern art – are brutally mangled for their soullessness, their weakness and their ignorance. They do not feel the purifying energy that emanates from the new art forms.

A third task of *flamman* was to publish important essays and programmatic declarations by international and Swedish artists. André Lhote seems to have been one of Pauli's closest associates, given the number of essays he published in *flamman*. Lhote's contributions included both a series of "Artistic hypotheses" (Pauli 1917: 1), which constituted his inauguration speech as a professor at Atelier Libre (Pauli 1917: 3), and a lecture on cubism (Pauli 1917: 6).

The Norwegian modernist Alfred Hagn gave an introduction to "The futurism of London" (Pauli 1917: 4), discussing how the Eng-

lish painter Christopher R.W. Nevinson had returned from the war and painted pictures of its cruelties. England, he concluded, with its stone grey realism, was not the right country for futurism.

Isaac Grünewald contributed a polemic attack on Swedish architects (Pauli 1917: 4), in which he encouraged young painters and sculptors to demand that their works be used in any new buildings. Using revolutionary language, Grünewald more or less commanded his supporters to tear down archaic tapestries and other such adornments from Swedish walls.

The fourth and final major aim of *flamman* was to fight against the art academies, art museums and hostile art critics. Pauli had already sketched out his ideas in a pamphlet entitled “The Socialization of Art”. These ideas were recapitulated and elaborated on in *flamman*, as Pauli and his associates made their line of thinking clear to readers through repeated use of such terms as “democratic politics of the arts” and “aesthetic economy”. The Swedish government’s policy towards its art museums came under heavy fire. The state, Pauli suggested, should establish art schools all over the country and concentrate on funding monumental rural paintings and decorative arts. These art schools would teach students architecture combined with painting and sculpture. The teaching of individual arts – easel painting, nature morte, landscape painting, and so on – ought to be a private enterprise, reasoned Pauli, one immediate advantage being that “the entire teaching staff of the Academy of Art could be fired” (Pauli 1917: 2).

*flamman* had very little to say regarding the literary avant-garde. Apollinaire was praised a couple of times and a selection of his “idéogrammes” from the *Soirées de Paris* was reproduced (Pauli 1917: 5). The Norwegian poet-painter Per Krohg also contributed a visual poem inserted into a colouristic red frame (Pauli 1917: 6). Apart from this, there is little more in the literary vein. Pauli and his collaborators were not that interested in the new literary forms and nothing was being produced along these lines in Sweden. In the third issue, it was announced that Jean Cocteau had promised to send a couple of poems. None of his work, however, ever appeared in *flamman*.

The double issue concluding the first year (Pauli 1917: 8-9) contained an extract from “*flamman*’s journal” which described how the editor and his collaborators had gathered at Djurgården in Central Stockholm for a discussion about the development of their maga-

zine. Opinions differed as to whether their critical stance had been too modestly expressed. One suggested that each issue of *flamman* should contain a page called “the scaffold” where tyrants would be executed. Pauli responded by asserting that if one wants to kill, one should always do it elegantly, before repeating his consistent view that every element in *flamman* must have an artistic form. Moreover, *flamman* must not upset people’s religious or moral feelings, or their political opinions. The magazine, he added, strikes hard only in the field of art. Pauli’s last word to his young collaborators seeking a more political agenda was: “remember that *flamman* is not a revue de politique, it’s a revue d’artistique and most of all: **flamman is not a broom – it’s a flame.**” (Pauli 1917)

In answer to readers’ questions as to when *flamman* would reappear, Pauli commented a year later: “probably never”. Too few people had subscribed, and since his magazine did not compete with the other art magazines, their reports from exhibitions and their regular appearance was nothing he could or wanted to emulate. Thus he had little hope for the magazine’s future. In Pauli’s opinion, *flamman* had given a well-rounded picture of avant-garde art in just one year, so taking a break and waiting for new art forms to arrive could be a good thing (*flamman* 1918).

### The Importance of *flamman*

One notices that although Pauli embraces new art forms, he also sought to mix them with the old. 30 years the senior of his collaborators, Pauli’s modest form of cubism would soon be considered dated by the younger artists. In the fourth issue he tells a little anecdote about three quarrelling artists. One is an expressionist who declares himself the most modern. He is rebuked by a cubist and a simultaneist, the latter who really *is* the most modern just stays quiet. Pauli takes a reconciliatory position and declares that it is better to simply rejoice over the success of modern art rather than bicker about who is the most modern.

Pauli welcomed dadaism in the pages of *flamman* while declaring his ignorance of what it stood for. In a 1919 review of the Zürich magazine *Dada* he cites a long passage from a manifesto by Picabia and declares: “Ultra modern magazine. Poetry and typography and woodcuts [...] red pages, blue pages [...] poems! Poems! Difficult to

decipher as in the old days Mallarmé.” Compared to *Dada*, *flamman* was traditional, even academic. “Dada is for now ‘le dernier mot’ – interesting – and incomprehensible.” (*flamman* 1919). He would also later express his awe of dadaism (*flamman* 1920-21).

As a member of the international avant-garde network, Pauli could keep *flamman* readers informed of new exhibitions, not only at home, but also abroad. He received little magazines from France and Germany and could quote information from them. When Apollinaire was wounded in the war, for example, it was immediately reported. Pauli also kept a sharp lookout for the publication of new, interesting books relating to the international avant-garde.

An impression of Pauli’s standing within the international avant-garde appears when, in 1917, he mentions an idea which Oskar Kokoschka has presented to him: avant-garde artists should start a joint magazine revealing the position of art during the war. Each issue would focus on one painter, be it Picasso, Kokoschka, Metzinger – but the overall theme should be to trace “the position of art above the noises of war”.

*flamman* was met with various reactions. Many were positive, others utterly negative. In a letter to Pauli, the Finnish architect Armas Lindgren wrote “this modernism that *flamman* seems to advocate seems to me to tear apart the reunion of the separate art forms/architecture and painting/ that has recently and laboriously been initiated”. The magazine was well received among Nordic avant-garde circles, whose members were also happy to contribute material. Per Krohg strongly supported the idea of a common Nordic avant-garde forum and contributed regularly to the magazine. Pär Lagerkvist, who also offered Pauli some of his poems, declared: “It seems to me that it would be good if there were to be a magazine where more ruthless, expressionistic things (poems) could be published, as the present magazine press is only allowed to serve milky food”. For some reason Lagerkvist was not taken up on his offer. In the questionnaire concluding the first volume, Arturo Ciacelli called *flamman* “le soleil parmi les brouillards du Nord” [the sun amidst the fogs of the North]. Pauli himself considered *flamman* to be “the world’s greatest art magazine” and pointed out its success in Paris, Vienna and Berlin. (Pauli 1917: 8-9).

During its lifespan, *flamman* showcased the main trends in contemporary European avant-garde art. Furthermore, it was also suc-

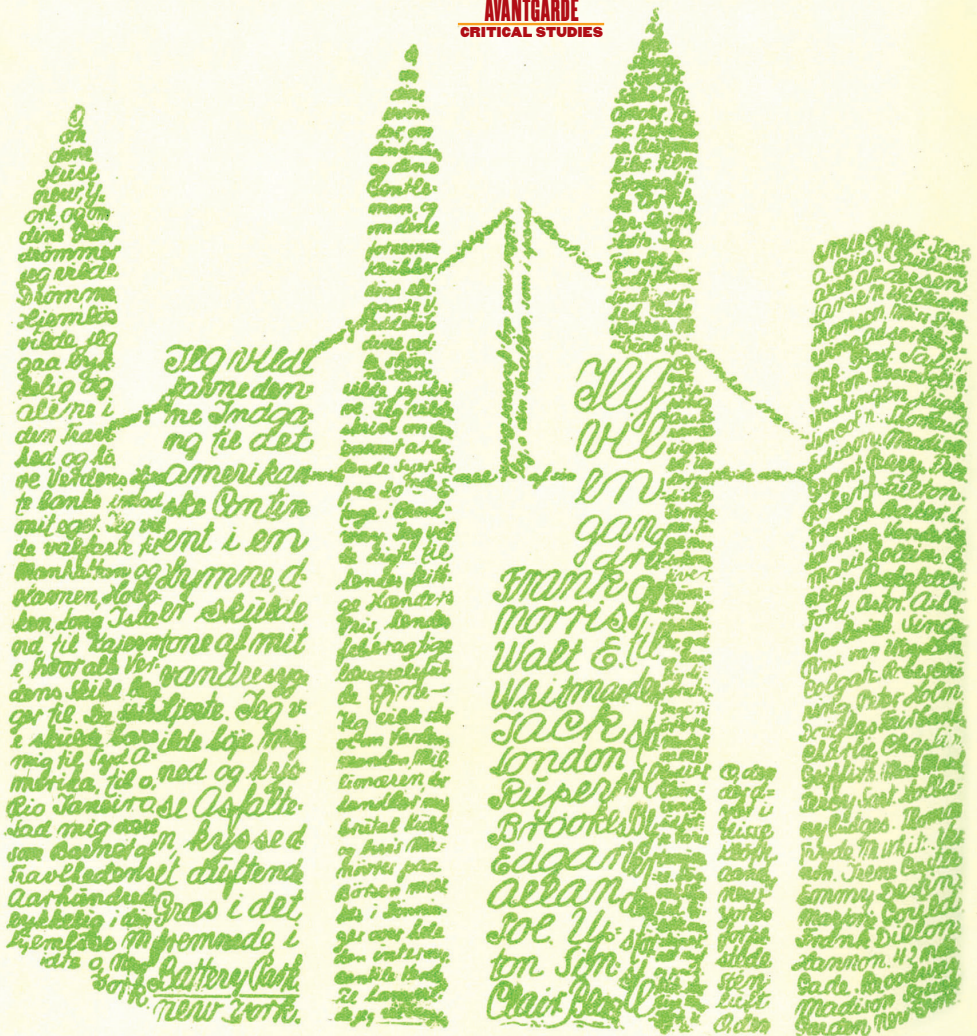
cessful in bringing the Swedish avant-garde into focus. Due to its editor's rather eclectic approach, the magazine did not become a forum for a particular movement. The polemical side of *flamman* was directed towards the established art institutions and art critics. Its constructive side aimed at a reformation of art education directed towards "socialised art", mural paintings and the decorative arts.

One obvious problem for *flamman* was that it was written in Swedish. Another problem concerned finances. After finishing the first volume of *flamman* Pauli invited the editors of *Klingen* to join forces and produce an international magazine, but nothing came of this proposal. It seems that Pauli fell out with the editors of the Copenhagen sister magazine, since the two magazines accused each other of having lost their edge after a good first volume.

As is the case with the majority of little avant-garde magazines, *flamman's* small circulation and short lifespan should not be confused with its importance. The magazine's influence on Swedish art was considerable and it contributed actively to the international avant-garde movement. After the demise of *flamman*, no Swedish avant-garde magazine appeared until the 1930s.

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# A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE AVANT-GARDE

in the Nordic Countries 1900-1925

Edited by **HUBERT VAN DEN BERG, IRMELI HAUTAMÄKI,  
BENEDIKT HJARTARSON, TORBEN JELSBÄK, RIKARD SCHÖNSTRÖM,  
PER STOUNBJERG, TANIA ØRUM, DORTHE AAGESEN**

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