



'[The girl who kicked the hornets' nest](#)'
from the Millennium Trilogy by Stieg Larsson
Reviewed by [Angelica Michelis](#) May 2010

The final part of Larsson's Millennium Trilogy starts exactly where the second volume has finished: Lisbeth Salander, the plucky and unusual heroine fights for her life after having been attacked by her father and mentally disturbed brother. Lisbeth, in contrast to the previous two books where she was always on the move and rarely remained at one place, is more or less stationary for the most part of this text. Lying critically injured in a hospital bed only a short distance apart from her father, Lisbeth (and with her the reader whose position, morally and politically, is right by her side) cannot relax knowing that her father's determination to kill her will not subside as long as he lives, since too much is at risk. And since his destiny is deeply and inextricably intertwined with the conservative, reactionary and patriarchal forces in Swedish society, her fight for physical survival is also one of moral and social rehabilitation.

With its focus on fast action and its references to spy thrillers, it is easy to forget at times that Larsson's trilogy is first and all dedicated to an unveiling of the existent and endemic violence against women that he regards as inherent in Swedish (and probably most other countries' and cultures') social institutions. Whereas in the previous volumes plot development and creation of character depth often seemed to push feminist politics into the margins of the text, in *The Girl who kicked the Hornets' Nest* feminism is definitely coming home, and triumphantly so.

Lisbeth, the vulnerable, socially inept but highly intelligent heroine takes centre stage in this last part of the trilogy, and Blomkvist who was the much more dominant character in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*

is happy for her to take over. In this final volume of the trilogy, loose ends are tied up, on the level of relationships between characters as well as in terms of the narrative itself. Whereas part one and two delved into the overarching story of Lisbeth's private and public personality retrospectively and thus emphasised the mystery surrounding her, the final volume uncovers and relates the various reasons that turned her into the secretive and socially awkward woman she has become. If there ever was a character that proved the Marxist adage: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness', it is Lisbeth Salander.

Larsson never made a secret of his political leanings and his strong and straightforward anti-fascist and pro-feminist conviction not only determine the relationship between the various characters, the narrated events and the moral evaluations underlying the trilogy but also his tendency to make unequivocal judgments about right and wrong. At no stage does the reader feel any sympathies towards Lisbeth's father and brother and a more objective understanding of the political forces (a reactionary and politically influential group of men at the core of Sweden's secret service) that allowed them to become so powerful and unconstrained in their violence against women. Furthermore, the trilogy, and in particular, the final volume extends these accusations of brutal and systematic exploitations of the socially weak, further to the institutions that are supposed to protect them: social services, psychiatry and legal institutions. What motivates this abuse of authority, according to the author, is (male) sado-masochism on the level of the individual, whereas the political reasons are directly intertwined with the pragmatic and soul-less capitalism most Western societies subscribe to at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the new millennium.

Compared to the previous volumes, *The Girl who kicked the Hornets' Nest* offers less action scenes and puts its main narrative emphasis on background information: Swedish history, its complex political relationship to Russia and NATO and the infrastructure of its political administration are developed as the context in which the story unfolds and directly related to the fictional story. This mixture of fact and fiction is maybe the most idiosyncratic element of Larsson's writing and, from the point of view of readers who want their crime fiction served with a generous dollop of political and social criticism of current affairs, the element of the trilogy that works best. And, of course, Lisbeth wins her battle for full social rehabilitation and, of course, the forces that were trying to destroy her mentally and physically get their comeuppance. Her relationship to Blomkvist becomes one of friendship and her first step in learning how to trust

people and how to reciprocate emotionally without feeling forced into a gendered pattern of emotional compliance.

Despite the fact that there are parts of the book which feel slightly too lengthy and irrelevant (such as the story of Erica's stalker) and that the narration of the background information develops rather turgidly at times, this final volume is a satisfying and entertaining reading experience and as such a climactic and triumphant finale of the trilogy. It is sad that there won't be any more of the Blomkvist/Salander adventures because of the untimely death of their creator; however, to go and leave the audience crying out for more is as good as it gets for a writer!

Angelica Michelis will be speaking at the Manchester Salon discussion entitled [Whodunit: what's the big deal with crime novels? in July 2010](#) along with Stephen Bowler, chaired by David Bowden

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You can read Stephen's review of the 1st novel in the trilogy, by clicking on this [The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo](#) link, and David Bowden's review of the 2nd novel in the trilogy by clicking on this [The Girl who Played with Fire](#) link.