

The Sole Medicine is a blend of various stylistic influences. The chapters are relatively short, and the compact flow of text oscillates between the essayistic and the poetic. Regardless of style however, the reflective voice is always present and speaking. Reading the book made me curious to know more about the person behind the words, as well as wanting to ask questions regarding the process behind the phrasings. I learned that the book came about in an unconventional way, without any pre-made planning. There was never a thought of writing a book, but Ola's drive to write every morning became increasingly stronger, and more and more volume of text was created.

After having sent my questions for the interview, I received answers from a person who had a lot to say about his own creativity. Ola told me that writing has always been with him, having learned to read and write very early.

- *"In primary school, I was put in a separate room with a teacher, reading and discussing full-length novels while my classmates still practiced the alphabet. In my free time, I wrote short stories and musings about how I experienced the world and all the things in it."*

As an adult, he never let go of his writing. On the contrary, it has remained a central part of his life. Ola believes that it is due to a combination of various factors. However, above all, he has a deeply rooted urge to constantly keep searching for that one word or sentence that perfectly reflects a particular feeling, thought, or image in the most direct way possible. Even though that need has been constant throughout his life, it has always felt even more intense and tangible during darker and more challenging periods.

- *"For a long time, writing was 'just' a natural part of who I am and how I try to understand the external and internal world. I wasn't reflecting on what it would or could 'lead to'. However, in recent years, it has evolved into something that today is a significant part of my creative work, ambitions, and professional career."*

Ola's academic background includes an English lit degree from the University of Gothenburg/University of Sussex (with a thesis on George Orwell), the literary course "The Ghost of Hamlet" from Harvard (with a final grade of 98/100), and a top-grade Cambridge exam. He has read his poems at the iconic Stora Teatern theatre in Gothenburg, and together with Martin Nick Alexandersson, he reached the finals of the 2017 poetry slam Swedish championship.

Would you like to start by telling me what led you to write every morning, and how it happened when you turned it into a book?

- *"'Den enda medicinen' (in Swedish) came about through a gradual organic process. After having gathered enough bravery to finally show what I had written to a few friends, I realized it was time to stop hiding away all my writings in desk drawers and on hard drives. In May 2016, I started an open Instagram account where I posted a newly written text every day. Fresh out the oven. No editing. Just straight into cyberspace. For a year, I started each day with an hour of writing. In bed, with coffee and my phone. I didn't care if what I wrote was good, bad, funny, silly, or beautiful. Everything was posted. I wanted to move away from self-judgment and grading my*

own work. A pure 'stream of consciousness,' regardless of what came of it on any given morning. The theme of each text was simply the first thought, feeling, or image of the newly awakened state. Whatever it was."

One year passed quickly, and Ola was then persuaded by his friends to compile a book. Slowly but surely, an idea formed of a narrative based on one-tenth of the written material. The theme can be described as an image of how a relationship is built up, confirmed, questioned, fragmented, and ultimately may turn out to be just an image (or several images).

- "Together with a bunch of talented and kind friends from the film and theater world, we shot a promo video with voice-over by actor Mattias Nordkvist, who, in my opinion, has one of Sweden's most beautiful voices. On January 11, 2019, *Den enda medicinen* was finally available for purchase. After the publication, there were interviews, podcasts, reviews, and a generally positive reception."

When I read your book 'Den enda medicinen,' I'm struck by the genre-crossing form your storytelling takes. For me, as a reader, it's like a philosophical contemplation through the observations of the narrator. I wonder - who are your influences in your literary expression?

- "I really take that as a compliment. It feels good that it is perceived as genre-crossing. Perhaps mostly because it sounds like something exciting and unbothered. However, it has never been a purpose in and of itself to write in an unorthodox or hard-to-define style. If I were to start thinking too much about the form, I think it would have created unnecessary obstacles. When I was a guest on the *Poetpodden* podcast, I was asked what had led me to choose the prose-poetic writing form. Since it was the first time I heard the term prose-poetry, it was difficult to give a sensible answer. I often feel that way about questions about my own form. I just don't know. Of course, my academic studies have given me terms and definitions that I can use fairly competently about other people's work. For some reason, I lose that ability when it comes to describing my own writing."

Ola has always been attracted to art that is contemplative in tone. Books like John Williams' "Stoner" and Virginia Woolf's "To the Lighthouse," where irresistible frameworks are built for the reader to fill with joy and sorrow from their own experiences. He can be drawn to both short, impactful statements, like in the style of Ernest Hemingway, as well as long labyrinths of questioning subclauses (Anne Brontë, Knausgård, etc.). Movie like *Lost in Translation*, *Boyhood*, and his all-time favorite, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, have also been motivations for Ola's creativity.

- "I get interested when the author or director is generous enough to share the painting with us so that we can collectively bring out the overall picture of the story. I like to have responsibility as a reader of a book or when I watch a film. The feeling that I get handed over the baton halfway, and then it's my turn to continue the movement forward. I really thrive in that environment."

I perceive the theme of your book as a continuous question about how love shapes us as people, what we give and take, how far we are willing to

submit for our own and others' enjoyment. It's like the narrator recounts how the intoxication germinates inside.

- "Thank you, that's a very nice description. Perhaps that's how it is. The intoxication that you might refer to is probably the most used raw material for creating art. All aspects of it: The drug-like intoxication of blind infatuation. The spiritual intoxication of total connection with another person. The intoxication of trust. The intoxication of having someone. All the beautiful things. However, I also think of the intoxication of doubt, the longing for freedom, and separation. Those things that tear apart the core of that beautiful thing. Both the light and the darkness as well as all the nuances around a love relationship can be described as intoxication, due to its explicit or potential intensity."

How would you, as an author, describe the view of love in today's society?

- "Oh, tricky question. My first thought is that it is very visual. Demonstrative. '*Look over here! Love!*' We coach our surroundings with stylish quotes about what love is, as if it were something already fully explored and summarized. One of many things to be discussed on the agenda, along with appropriate diets and optimal forms of exercise. That view, if it is indeed a view, is so completely foreign to me that I probably shouldn't elaborate on it any further than that."

The book is short but intense, and the text is compact when reading it. Were there thoughts of trying to create a specific feeling for the reader?

- "It sounds good that it can be perceived that way. The intensity may come from the strong drive to find exactly the right word in the right place. I also have a focus and artistic confidence in the morning that dilutes during the day. I avoid having thoughts about what feelings my writing should ideally evoke in my readers. It feels like I would just be setting the stage for unnecessary disappointment. I can't control how things land, and I'm not too sure I would want to have that control. Every time someone is moved by what I write, I feel a lot. I get very affected by that shared human experience. It can be a little hard to take in sometimes, which is perhaps a good thing. Ideally, I don't want to live too much in the world of praise and criticism. Of course, I want to achieve success so that all of my focus can be on my writing and acting. However, it would be pointless and quite sad to end up in a situation where everything is about hitting the right note. Therefore, I almost never think about who my audience is. I'm just very grateful to have one."

Should your book be read in one go or should one let each text sink in before continuing?

- "Definitely the latter. One text at a time or at most one chapter. I think pauses elevates the experience. Do some digesting, interpreting, and maybe even a re-read. Of all the readers with whom I have been in contact, a clear majority have read the book like that, which feels nice for me as the writer and like the wise thing to do for the reader."

There is an English version of the same book (*The Sole Medicine*), and although the content is the same, the presentation is different compared to the Swedish one. What was the idea behind that?

- "I wouldn't say the content really is the same. Since I alone own the rights to the original and did the entire translation myself, I had complete freedom to go beyond a traditional, straight translation. Several years had also passed from when I wrote the Swedish texts to when I translated them into English. My way of both thinking and writing had changed a bit, and I didn't feel bound to make the "perfect" translation. Some passages were removed, and others were more deeply explored. The process was more about re-reading the Swedish original and then interpreting it based on what came up there and then, rather than dutifully sticking to finding English equivalents for every word and phrase. I probably wouldn't have had the drive to write a translation that was one hundred percent semantically faithful to the original. Most likely, it would have bored me."

What was the biggest challenge with the translation?

- "Finding the time to consistently work on the English edition was sometimes difficult. I always need reset time to recalibrate my brain, which means it can sometimes be tricky for me to find my focus. There is also a lot of boring grown-up work during a project like this. Some days it felt like the balance was 90% admin and 10% creativity. Frustration sometimes took its toll with all the hundreds of emails, changes back and forth, American tax laws, misunderstandings, time differences, flakiness etc. When I returned to Sweden after having thrown release parties in Seattle and New York, I was completely exhausted. Of course, I felt proud and happy to have successfully navigated the whole thing. It was just difficult during the process to find gaps to take a step back and appreciate what I was doing, in the moment. I had to really work on that. To regularly check in with myself and internally ask the question of why I do what I do, and then of course; to answer that question in an honest way."

Finally, do you have plans for a longer book project, or do you want to continue with the concise format?

- "My main focus is now on developing a script, based on *The Sole Medicine*. When I returned from my little release tour in October 2022, the plan was to write a new book. The theme was already set, I had a basic plan of what I wanted to do, and I had done some research. After having worked on *Den enda medicinen / The Sole Medicine* for several years, I felt very hungry and excited to start something completely new. However, once again, my friends intervened and told me that I absolutely should not abandon my ongoing project. They persuaded me that I should keep building on the foundation that now existed, in both Swedish and English. I was told that I should 'for once' think a bit strategically. Even though I argued against it, I could absolutely see their point, but I had no desire to continue the journey alone. There was no energy left to keep working solo. Someone mentioned that I could collaborate with an established playwright. Maybe write a script together, based on the book."

The first person that popped into Ola's head was the playwright Julianne Jigour, whom he knew through previous common collaborators. Julianne had written scripts for the Bombay Theatre Company, with whom Ola himself had worked, as an actor.

- "I liked Julianne's way of writing dialogue, so I simply sent her an email with some background briefing and ideas. After a month of e-mails and Zoom calls, she accepted my offer. It felt, and still feels, incredibly nice to have Julianne as a writing partner. We complement each other well. She understands my, sometimes lofty, ideas and confronts me when I get too philosophically conceptual. Reading her drafts is always both nerve-wracking and fantastic."

In March 2023, Ola was in Los Angeles, where Julianne lives, to meet, write together, and try things on stage. They brought in five actors they knew and spent a whole day in a nice venue in Hollywood. Julianne took notes and made comments, while Ola verbally led the workshop. It was an incredible day with lots of new ideas that they have been spinning since. Ola spent a total of twelve days in LA and then returned to Sweden, filled with new inspiration.

- "The play will be in three parts dealing with three different images of a relationship. I have very high hopes for this. The dialogue keeps evolving, and the main characters are now real people. The premiere will probably be in Los Angeles, where Julianne lives. I would love New York too. London, of course. Maybe India... Most things can be realized if you have a tangible drive, know what you want to say, and have a direction. I don't think we ever should hold back questions. The creative success I may have now, to whatever extent, has been achieved by asking, trying, failing, succeeding and then asking again. I don't know more than anyone else does. No one else knows more than I do."

P.s. In February 2024, after this interview, Ola returned to Los Angeles for another week of on-sight writing, idea-swapping and collaborating with Julianne. D.s