



## Olof von Dalin - Public Debater, Historian, Renewer of the Swedish Language

### Life and Career

Olof Dalin was a vicar's son, born in 1708 in Vinberg, Halland, a province that had been part of Sweden only since 1645. After studies at the University of Lund, Dalin was employed as a private tutor in a noble family in Stockholm. His literary talents soon opened the doors to the leading circles of the capital, including the Royal Court.

Dalin made a remarkable career. In 1737 he became Royal Librarian. He was a member of royal academies and was appointed National Historiographer. In 1750 he became tutor to Gustav, the hereditary prince, and the year after he was raised to the nobility and given the name "von Dalin".

Six years later Dalin was involved in an attempted coup d'état in order to increase the power of the king. He was banished from court for a few years, but came back, and shortly before his death in 1763, he was appointed Court Chancellor.

Little is known about Dalin's private life and personality. It was his writing that made him popular. As a person he was considered courteous and polite, but rather quiet. There is no evidence of any love affairs and he never married.

### Literary Works

At the age of 24, Dalin made success with a weekly paper, *Then Swänska Argus* (The Swedish Argus). Dalin wrote, translated or adapted, most articles himself, covering a wide range of topics and introducing the ideas of the Enlightenment. He criticized everything narrow-minded or stupid and his satire was both elegant and biting. Dalin was the first Swedish writer to produce a light, conversational prose, and his *Argus* marks the beginning of a new period in Swedish language history.

For a decade, Dalin took a very active part in the vivid political debate. In *Sagan om Hästen* (The Tale of the Horse), a satirical allegory narrated like a folk-tale, he tells the story of the Swedish nation and its rulers during two centuries. But he also wrote pamphlets, poems and songs, advocating peace and unity, independence of foreign powers and a strong monarchy.

In the late 1730's Dalin wrote plays for the theatre, inspired by French dramas and much admired by his contemporaries.

As a poet, Dalin was versatile. He mastered many genres and metres and skilfully concealed political or satirical messages in innocent-looking poems. Much of his poetry was occasional

verse, sometimes illustrated with his own drawings, sometimes sung to existing tunes or set to music. He also wrote some longer epic poems.

Dalin started publishing his Swedish history, *Svea Rikes Historia*, in 1747. He died before this work was complete. His critical approach, avoiding myths and learning from other scientists, as well as his fluent style were surprisingly modern.

(From Ingemar Carlsson: *Olof von Dalin - samhällsdebattör, historiker, språkförnyare* (1997). Summary in English, abridged for this homepage)

### **The Olof von Dalin Society**

The society was founded in 1995 at Dalin's native Vinberg near Falkenberg, Sweden. Its mission is to encourage the study, appreciation and understanding of Olof von Dalin, his works, his life and his times. The Olof von Dalin Society has about 170 members.

### **Articles in English on Dalin:**

Alan Swanson (University of Groningen): Argus on the Stage. Dalin the playwright; and James Massengale (UCLA): The Songs of Olof von Dalin in *Scandinavian Studies* No 2, 1997.

**CD Recording** *Kom fria sinnen hit!* The songs of Olof von Dalin. (Proprius 1999)

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