

## Read It, November 2015: Progress Report 1



Figure 1: Word Cloud

*The Long Ships* by Frans G. Bengtsson, Continued

I'm continuing to read Frans G. Bengtsson's novel *The Long Ships*. I've made progress in only this one book so far this month, but it's a doozy. I actually started it in June, as my own previous blog entries tell me, but set it aside at roughly the halfway point. The novel is broken up into four books, bound together in this New York Review Books Classics edition, but originally published as the first two books in one volume and the second two books in another volume. Is that confusing? It's sort of similar to the way that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is one novel, broken into six books, but published in three volumes. Anyway. In June I mentioned that I didn't think my kids were old enough to enjoy it, but it turns out I was wrong. This past weekend I read them several chapters from the third book, in which, according to Wikipedia here,

Orm joins a party led by Thorkell the High in England and when he learns that Harald's daughter Ylva is staying in London, gets baptised and marries Ylva. They move to a neglected farm, his mother's inheritance in Göinge, northern Skåne, near the border with Småland. During the following years (992 to 995), Orm prospers, and Ylva gives birth to twin girls (Oddny and Ludmilla), a son, Harald, and later to another son (though possibly from Rainald), Svarthöfde (Blackhair in the Michael Meyer translation). Meanwhile, Orm also

gets busy in converting the heathens in the district, with the help of Father Willibald.

This book, long and dense and suffering slightly from being a work in translation, really comes to life when read out loud. The scenes in Orm's church, hosting a 3-day drinking celebration of his son's christening are, read aloud, very funny and memorable. If you read this book, and I recommend it highly, be prepared to take your time with it, to allow the scenes and characters and speeches to open up and come to life.

Oh, and there's apparently a movie, too. Not a very good movie, it seems: [http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/long\\_ships/](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/long_ships/). I should be finished with this book in another week or so. The way I convinced myself to read it again was basically to lock the rest of the books in my "to read" pile in the back of my car so that in the mornings, I'd have only this book lying out and available, while getting access to the others would require me to get up and dressed and out first. As I am basically lazy, especially before I've had my morning coffee, this worked very well to convince my future self to go ahead and invest the reading time in a very rewarding book that is not quite as easy to get into as one of the fluffier books in the car. Is that a "mind hack?" Oh, and since I am reading my New York Review Books Classics volumes in order by spine color, after I finish this one, I can move on, progressing along that shelf to a book bound in a slightly different shade of red!

*Saginaw and/or Ann Arbor, Michigan*  
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