Livsmytik och destruktiv maktsträvan – två poler i Per Olof Sundmans författarskap

En undersökning med särskilt fokus på romanerna Expeditionen och Två dagar, två nätter

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt förvar i Hörsal E, Humanisthuset, tisdagen den 19 maj kl. 10:00. Avhandlingen kommer att förvaras på svenska.

Fackultetsopponent: Professor Peter Forsgren, Institutionen för film och litteratur, Linnéuniversitetet, Växjö, Sverige

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Abstract
My thesis addresses the antagonism between the mystery of life and the destructive pursuit of power which forms a central theme in the works of Per Olof Sundman (1922–1992). The purpose is to show that Sundman uses the theme of the encounter/non-encounter and the destructive leader to examine the conditions for allowing a deeper experience of reality and the destructive exercise of power. I analyze these themes using concepts borrowed from literary studies (Atle Kittang, Paul Ricoeur, Bertil Romberg, Staffan Björck, Gérard Genette), the philosophy of religion (Martin Buber, Göran Bergstrand) and psychoanalysis (Ludvig Igra, Otto Kernberg, Erich Fromm, Julia Kristeva). My study highlights the problems associated with the destructive exercise of power, which is the overriding theme of Sundman's work. I explore the theme of the encounter by using the concept pair I-You/I-It. With the aid of this concept pair, I throw light on the aspect of depth in our existence by describing the human encounter. In my analysis on the theme of power, I point out the personal qualities inherent in the destructive leader. I also explore the link between the destructive leader's inner conflict of narcissism and repressed weakness – a conflict projected to the outside world – and the emergence of violence. In order to reveal this inner process, I unearth on a latent level the theme of the destructive leader/stranger in Sundman's work. This enables me to single out the mechanism responsible for the emergence of destructivity in the human psyche, while showing the close link between this pattern of narcissism and projected weakness and a distorted view of reality. Sundman contrasts this world of power with an integrative attitude to life. In his novel *The Expedition*, Sundman depicts life in the other world as being a state of human coexistence in which no one is seen to be a stranger. This idea of unity is reinforced by the choice of name for the first-person narrator of the other world. In this novel, the conditions enabling the flourishing of universalism as an attitude to life are also those that give expression in the I-You encounter to the experience of a deeper aspect to our existence.

Key words: Per Olof Sundman, mystery of life, destructive pursuit of power, sympathetic reading, symptomatic reading, double meaning of the text, first-person narrative, focalization, philosophy of religion, Chassidism, psychoanalysis, middle ground, object relations theory, schizo-paranoid position, integrative position, rational/irrational authority.