

Att skriva det grekiska

En otidsenlig position i svenskspråkig modernism

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Abstract

Writing the Greek. An Untimely Position in Swedish Modernism

The aim of this thesis is to analyze how ancient Greek philosophy and literature – as it was mediated through Nietzsche – gained a vital function in the rise of early Swedish modernism and its later expressions. The turn to antiquity, within a modernism confined to the Swedish language, was not only intended as a breach in tradition, but above all to think anew, to transgress the conventions of (one's) time. The Greek is here localized as imperative to a distinctive mode of thinking and writing. The untimely position, the critical "attitude," that gathers all three temporal dimensions in a qualified presence.

The discussion starts with a reading of Lars Norén's *En dramatikers dagbok 20132015* (2016), with the aim of displaying certain aspects of the Greek, but focus is directed towards four 20th century authors and the specific position they, respectively, seize to enable a particular kind of writing. The investigation emphasizes the essays of Vilhelm Ekelund, targeting "Sokrates och Euripides" from *Antikt ideal* (1909), where Heraclitean strife is of key importance in the understanding of Ekelund's untimely position. The poetry of Edith Södergran – *Septemberlyran* (1918); *Rosenaltaret* (1919); *Framtidens skugga* (1920) – is displayed through its close affinity with the Nietzschean concept of the Dionysiac, and the will to instantiate the future through poetic vision. In Eyvind Johnson's novel *Strändernas svall* (1946) the Homeric *Odyssey* operates as a blueprint, as Johnson relates the struggles and toils of ancient Greece to post-war Europe: a fusion of past and future in a gathering now. The anti-hierarchic textuality of Birgitta Trotzig's *Sjukdomen* (1972) reactivates the ancient vision of a coming conflagration, as the scattered fragments of Heraclitus become operative in the attempt to grasp a modern condition, and at the same time a process reflected in the aesthetic practice of writing.

In the 1961 preface to *The History of Madness*, Michel Foucault, following Nietzsche, traces an "original division" that extends all the way back to Greek thought. The "explosion" of the tragic is central to this division, and also decisive in the structuring of Western history. In Nietzsche's reading of the Greeks, a "pre-antique antique" (preceding the tradition of dialectics) is discernable as a past encompassing the future, a constellation harboring the Greek with a trajectory set to modernity. The thesis displays a series of attempts to invoke a constant presence – tied to a certain analysis of modernity – that gathers the future and the past in a persistent now, from the untimely position that is crucial to the critical "attitude" in writing the Greek.

Keywords: *the Greek, the untimely, presence, attitude, position, the tragic, myth, modernism, modernity, Lars Norén, Vilhelm Ekelund, Edith Södergran, Eyvind Johnson, Birgitta Trotzig.*

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