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Estrangement. Ethics and Form in Willy Kyrklund's early Prose Fiction

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Abstract

Already in Willy Kyrklund's first short story collection, *Ängvålden* (1948), there is a movement towards a new mode of writing that was to be developed further in his coming novels. First, there is the allegorical presentation which offers the reader an opportunity both to make a self-reflexive interpretation and to test whether his/her own experience corresponds to the metaphorically expanded meaning of the narrative. Secondly, there is the reformulation of the exemplum into a rhetorical figure which does not primarily demonstrate a vice or a virtue, but rather problematizes different forms of responsibility. Thirdly, there is the heterogeneity of perspectives found in the method of montage and which activates the reader's part in the process of producing meaning. In the first four novels, *Tvåsam* (1949), *Solange* (1951), *Mästaren Ma* (1953), and *Polyfem förvandlad* (1964), these three devices are combined in an episodically and metaphorically structured form which has, as this thesis claims, strong ethical implications.

Kyrklund's early prose fiction challenges the idea of authority and moral surety that is traditionally considered the foundation of allegory and exemplum. Following the basic ethical attitude which can be traced in "Tankar på en tiberbro", one of Kyrklund's essays on moral philosophy, the novels question moral authority both thematically and formally. It could therefore be argued that the final responsibility for interpreting the ethical problems which have been presented in the novels is left with the reader.

The overarching objective of the thesis is thus to achieve an understanding of the hybrid form in Kyrklund's early prose fiction and its relation to ethical questions presented on a thematic level. My analysis maintains that the combination of allegory, montage and exemplum shapes the authorship's basic method of representation. In a more specific sense, the novels establish a Socratic form that, in turn, can be traced back to a situational ethics, placed in a tense, unresolved relation to deontology, utilitarianism, positivism and orientalism. But it is also argued that the ethics and aesthetics of the early prose fiction are continuously developed in close connection to the rebellious attitude of the Biblical exile Job.

Keywords: allegory, Book of Job, exemplum, exile, modernism, montage, narrative ethics, novel, orientalism, Polyphemus, Socratic assessment process, spatial form

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