

# Klädd i sitt språk

Kritikern Olof Lagercrantz

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Akademisk avhandling som för avläggande av filosofie doktorexamen i  
litteraturvetenskap vid Göteborgs universitet,  
som med tillstånd av humanistiska fakultetsnämnden  
kommer att offentligen försvaras i Lilla hörsalen, Humanisten, Renströmsgatan 6,  
fredagen den 12 november 2010, kl. 10.15

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## Abstract

Stina Otterberg: *Klädd i sitt språk: kritikern Olof Lagercrantz.*  
(*Draped in Style: The Critic Olof Lagercrantz*)

Dissertation in Swedish with an English Summary, 376 pages

Department of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion, Göteborg University, Sweden 2010

ISBN 978 91 7247 237 2

This dissertation concerns the Swedish writer and critic Olof Lagercrantz, who served as both editor-in-chief and as cultural editor of one of Sweden's major daily newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter*, between 1951 and 1975. It is the first dissertation to date devoted to Lagercrantz as critic. Taking its cue from Lagercrantz' twin roles at *Dagens Nyheter*, the present work combines textual-analytical, critical-historical and press-historical foci.

Lagercrantz' critical career is outlined as one of perpetual motion. He offered his readers a number of transformations and so, fundamentally, proved himself rooted in a romantic aesthetic. In the first part of the study concerning the 1950's, the established view of Lagercrantz is at once questioned and complemented. Regarding the matter of nuclear armament, for instance, it is shown that Lagercrantz harbored a different view than that of the then editor-in-chief Herbert Tingsten. Whereas research on Lagercrantz to date has focused on how *Dagens Nyheter* was politicized during the 1960's, the present study shows how it was also influenced by the freer views of art and artistic expression emanating at the time. It is stressed how the editorial pages are *aestheticized* under Lagercrantz, becoming a forum where he conducts literary criticism. It is also shown how a number of literary works, especially Dante's *Divine Comedy*, become touchstones for Lagercrantz in striving to understand and formulate the nature of a world undergoing epochal changes, and how his literary aesthetics plays a role in his understanding of China in a travelogue from 1970.

The dissertation's third chapter concentrates on the cultural page, focusing on matters of editorial authority as well as on the authoritative move of creating textual selves which are here analyzed in their functions both as autobiographical and imaginative vehicles, at once factual and fictional. The fourth and last chapter is dedicated specifically to Lagercrantz' literary criticism which is considered an artistic form in its own right. The relation between critical text and literary source-text is understood as processual rather than hierarchical. In a section describing the foundations of Lagercrantz' criticism criteria such as "truth" and "life" are extracted from the critical texts, stressing literature's replacing of religion for Lagercrantz. The ensuing section traces changes in his criticism during the period, taking as example concepts of male and female in his writings. It is shown how Lagercrantz cultivates a masculine norm in his writings, while masculinity is brought into play in his texts. In the following, two reviews are analyzed with focus held on how Lagercrantz creatively gives *Gestaltung* to his literary evaluations instead of formulating them explicitly. It is also shown how Lagercrantz charges his texts metaphorically, directly bearing down on the text under scrutiny, but also moving away from it. The dissertation is concluded by an outline of Lagercrantz' poetics as a striving for writing like the Christian God himself: creating language and life, claiming authority for the written wor(l)d.

Keywords: Olof Lagercrantz, *Dagens Nyheter*, literary criticism, creative criticism, theory of criticism, reviewing, press history, cultural pages, Swedish nuclear armament, Dante, China, editorial, epistolary forms, diary forms, genre-transcending, performativity, literary metamorphosis, self(re)presentation, literary evaluation, femininity, masculinity, *Gestaltung*, literary portrait, process of writing, poetics.

Distribution: ellerströms förlag, Fredsgatan 6, SE-222 20 Lund, Sweden  
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