

Förnuftets auktoritet

Upplysning och legitimitet
hos La Motte, Thorild och Kundera
Fil.mag. Robert Azar
Litteraturvetenskapliga institutionen.

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Abstract

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Title: *Förnuftets auktoritet. Upplysning och förnuft hos La Motte, Thorild och Kundera*
English title: *Authority of Reason. Enlightenment and Legitimacy in La Motte, Thorild and Kundera*

Author: Robert Azar

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Department: Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion, University of Gothenburg, Box 200, SE 405 30 Göteborg

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The thesis is examining the Enlightenment of European mind, understood as a tale and a fact, through three authors, Houdart de La Motte (1672-1731), Thomas Thorild (1759-1808) and Milan Kundera (1929-), who are of altered periods and separated by geographic frontiers. This three-part analysis is focusing on how they are bestowing legitimacy unto their literary projects, which have been chosen in order to shed light on crucial points in the structure of Enlightenment and particularly on the role played by reason and reference to reason. In the first part, La Mottes translation of Homer's *Iliad* is read as a symbolic parricide of the father of Western Literature. As the traditional authorities were gradually challenged, and the tie to Antiquity was cut, a vacuum emerged: modernity. In the work of La Motte, reference to reason serves as a way of filling the void. Reason is the authority for a new world order in which paternal authority is progressively weakened. La Motte makes use of the authority of reason as way of subverting the authority of tradition, founded on the veneration of the ancestral word. As the bourgeoisie gained momentum, in the second half of the 18th century, Enlightenment was being radicalized. In his days and works, Thorild refers to reason striving against the foundation upon which the institutions of the *ancien régime* once were erected. His overriding problem is as actual as tangible: the ensuing world order has to be given form and structure. The Swedish poet advances that reason is inseparable from beauty and that the new institutions, literary and civil, accordingly should bring about the embellishment of human life. In the core of his work: the Question of the Law. In the novels and essays of Kundera the analysis trails the vicissitudes of Enlightenment into the Post-war era. Putting forward a new interpretation of Enlightenment, based on his particular but firmly articulated understanding of the novel as a sole path to knowledge, Kundera elaborates a new-fangled synthesis of modernism and the art of the novel, linked to his Czech origin. Notwithstanding the atrocities of the 20th century, he finds a way, living in an epoch which he describes as the twilight of Western civilization, to salvage the Enlightenment. In his writings, reason is preserved not by science nor by society but by the very art of the novel.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Literature, Legitimacy, Reason, Europe, Tradition, Modernity, Tragedy