

Marginal and Metropolitan Modernist Modes in Eyvind Johnson's Early Urban Narratives

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Abstract

Participating in the re-mapping processes that inform the current, spatially inclined theorising of modernism and critiquing a centrist perspective on the development of literary modernism, the article compares the uses of a range of urban environments – from the ‘marginal’ northern Swedish town to the central-European metropolis – as sites for the probing of emerging modern societies and states of mind in Swedish autodidactic author (and later Nobel laureate) Eyvind Johnson’s early urban writing published between 1924 and 1928. The article demonstrates how a polytopic, decentring and locational approach to the understanding of modernist topography, with ‘geomodernism’ as one of its labels, can be utilised to unpack the ambiguous centre-periphery relationships that are operative in and across Johnson’s narratives at both European and local levels. Referencing literary theorists such as Raymond Williams and Frederik Tygstrup, the article argues, moreover, that the town- and cityscapes represented in the narratives may meaningfully be read in the light of a new interest in affectivity as a shared and spatial phenomenon. The article shows how modes of mobility, ‘circulation’, co-ordination and rhythm are of the essence in the narratives, including manifestations and metaphors of mechanised technology. This works to capture new societal and mental states and furthers a sense of dominant affective climates. The article concludes that Johnson’s new urban writing of the 1920s represents a sustained challenge to spatially confining understandings of modernism.

Keywords

Geomodernism, affect and place, periphery and centre, technology and literature, literature of the North, Eyvind Johnson

Eyvind Johnson's prolific early work contains a number of experimental modern town- and cityscapes. These display a pronounced locational diversity that ranges from the 'marginal' northern Swedish town via the national capital to the central European metropolis, including mobility and interconnections between these positions. In the narratives in question, commitment to a given locality typically competes or alternates with spatial expansiveness and with plurality or 'polyphony' of place. Cosmic or mythological dimensions of space may add further complexity and depth to Johnson's urban geographies. With 'geomodernism' as one of its labels, recent scholarship has foregrounded the role of the margins of modernity in reconfiguring literary and artistic articulation. In their introduction to a volume of studies entitled *Geomodernisms*, Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel identify 'a sense of speaking from outside or inside or both at once, of orienting toward and away from the metropole, of existing somewhere between belonging and dispersion' (Doyle and Winkiel 2005: 4) as facets of the geomodernist sensibility. Similar sensibilities are, we shall argue in the following, articulated in Johnson's early urban narratives. From his first book publication, a collection of stories entitled *De fyra främlingarna* (1924, *The Four Strangers*), and through his subsequent novels *Timans och rättfärdigheten* (1925, *The Timans and Justice*), *Stad i mörker* (1927, *Town in Darkness*) and *Stad i ljus* (1928, *Town in Light*), Johnson's new urban writing reads as a sustained challenge to a centrist and spatially selective perspective on the occurrence and orientations of modernism.

An important aspect of the modern town and city environments conveyed in Johnson's early work is the emphasis on the affective atmospheres generated within them: the atomism, pressures and exclusions, but also the shared systems and sensations as well as the possibilities of fostering new forms of solidarity and hope. In an article entitled 'Affekt og rum' (Affect and Space), literary theorist Frederik Tygstrup connects the current 'affective turn' of the humanities and social sciences with the broader 'spatial turn' of the preceding decades by pointing to the importance of recognising that social and material relational spaces have an affective dimension or 'infrastructure': 'Hvis der er affekter derude i verden omkring os, endnu før de modnes og

bliver genkendelige som indre sjælelige tilstande, så er det fordi de eksisterer rumligt, som en virtuel tilstedeværelse i det diagram af relationelle udvekslinger, som vi udfolder vores eksistens i som rumlige væsner' (Tygstrup 2013: 27) (If there are affects out there in the world around us, even before they mature and become recognisable as inner mental states, then it is because they exist spatially, as a virtual presence in the diagram of relational exchanges in which we unfold our existence as spatial beings). Tygstrup goes on to demonstrate how this interest in affects beyond psychology, in the social life of feelings, may be manifested in literature engaged in 'affektiv kartografi' (2013: 29) (affective cartography). Johnson's early work would seem to provide a strong case in point, as we shall aim to document below.

In the town- and cityscapes articulated in Johnson's narratives, modes of mobility, 'circulation', co-ordination and rhythm are of the essence. This is clearly connected to the notions of shared systems and collective feelings that Tygstrup explores. They may be placed, moreover, in the context of the modern era of the machine and the acceleration and regulation of movement it enforced. The machine age and the breakthrough of industrialisation, which came relatively late to Sweden, are reflected in various specific ways in the texts, as we shall demonstrate: in renderings of the new structures and landscapes of industry, in an emphasis on the mechanisation of everyday life, including recurring motifs of mechanised transport, and in the employment of machine metaphors to capture societal or mental states, the latter use furthering the sense of dominant affective modes.

I: Towns, Traffic, Affect: *De fyra främlingarna*

1.

Notable instances of affective mapping in marginal urban settings may be found already in Johnson's debut book. As would also prove to be the case for the early novels, the publication of Johnson's first collection of stories was not a straightforward matter. The manuscript was refused by Bonnier, Sweden's leading publishing house, in May 1924 on grounds of the alleged immaturity manifested in some of its 'nutidsnoveller'¹ (contemporary stories), but was accepted two months later, conditional

on some revision, by Tidens publishing house, with close links to Sweden's expansive working-class movement and the advancing Social Democratic party. *De fyra främlingarna* was subsequently published in late 1924, with its title, chosen primarily by the publisher, referencing not only the recurring themes of marginalisation and outsidership in the stories but also, it would seem, the arresting and innovative force of the collection's four pieces as such. Already in this volume, although it is set in Sweden throughout, the locational spread and connectivity provided by the four stories form patterns that would seem almost programmatic. The northern 'periphery' and the metropolitan 'centre' parallel each other in terms of functioning as primary or privileged place in different texts, while motifs of traffic and transportation not only inform and invigorate individual town- or cityscapes but open up communication lines between south and north, centre and periphery. In his study of space and geography in modernism, *Moving through Modernity*, Andrew Thacker emphasises what he calls the polytopic quality of modernist writing, arguing that movement between and across multiple sorts of space – from the room and the street to macro geographies – is a key feature of modernism. He goes on to suggest that 'one significant way of interpreting this [sense of movement] is via the emergence of modern means and systems of transport' (Thacker 2009: 7). Similarly, Alexandra Peat in *Travel and Modernist Literature* observes that '[t]he modernist fascination with the tropes and metaphors of travel suggests the extent to which the modern world was itself in motion' (Peat 2011: 170). In light of these perspectives, we shall now offer some reflections on locational range and polytopic qualities, on forms and tropes of mechanised traffic, and on modes of affective mapping in the urban narratives of *De fyra främlingarna*, concentrating on the two stories that could be said to access or centre on the periphery and which constitute the core of the collection.

2.

The notions of approaching and accessing the north by means of new transportative technology are fundamental to the narrative entitled 'Vallberg' (Vallberg), the penultimate piece of the collection. Its portal consists of a condensed cartographic image of the northern

expansion of the national railway network, so emblematic in Swedish economic, social and cultural history (and in Eyvind Johnson's own family history²): 'Järnvägen kryper upp genom landet, mil efter mil och år efter år, till dess den når en by, där den slår knut' (Johnson 1924: 125)³ (The railway creeps up through the country mile by mile and year by year until it reaches a village, where it ties the knot).⁴ Related motifs of the modern 'opening up' of the north punctuate the story and shape its ending, creating an overarching sense of train tracks as arteries of change, challenge and also prospect.⁵ It is the railway that allows for the story's eponymous entrepreneur to enter the local northern stage, which swiftly grows into a municipality, and proceed to build an entertainment empire there, as formulated in the light-touch economical and elliptical register that Johnson favours: 'den Vallbergska karusellen kommer med tredje tåget och slår helt igenom' (125) (the Vallberg carousel arrives on the third train and is a complete success). It is equally, however, the railway that creates the conditions for a number of competitors to arrive, transforming the north into a contested marketplace for a new entertainment economy. The following conspectus of the rhythmic and relentless forces of modernisation and 'growth' demonstrates the capacity for both spatial expansiveness and temporal acceleration which Johnson's narrative method possesses, while also exemplifying the stylised and systemic mode of representation that contributes to moving Johnson's writing increasingly away from a more conventional realist voice:

Syd-Sverges hittills obekanta lyx och glans strömmade varje vår uppåt Norrland, livet moderniserades, och varje rälsspik, som slogs i en nyutlagd sliper, klang av civilisation och röck tiden framåt. Vallberg, som en gång varit så långt före sin tid, märkte ej att människorna växte och med dem begären, och till slut hade de växt om honom och voro inne i en tid, där han var gammalmodig. (128)

(The hitherto unknown luxury and splendour of Southern Sweden flowed up towards Norrland every spring. Life was being modernised and every spike being driven into a newly

laid sleeper rang with the sound of civilisation and drove time forward. Vallberg, a man who had once been far in advance of his age, failed to notice that people were growing and their desires growing with them. In the end they overtook him and became part of an age in which he was old-fashioned.)

When Vallberg suffers humiliation and defeat in the liberalistic struggle for local supremacy to the new appeal and aggressive tactics of Cirkus Bummelmann, it is ultimately, however, the railway that comes to his rescue again. The protagonist opts for continuing mobility in the margins of the country as his business plan and life model, temporarily erecting his nomadic tent of entertainment everywhere the railway line, again cartographically expressed, 'gör en ring, eller blott en prick på kartan' (150) (makes a circle or even just a dot on the map).⁶

3.

In the collection's preceding contribution, the otherwise claustrophobic 'Snickarprofessor Tantalus' (Carpenter Professor Tantalus), the modern tropes of the railway and, in particular, the train station likewise figure, but only as the daily arrival point of the 'stockholmstidning' (67) (Stockholm paper), with its glimpses of news from a distant wider world. Overall, however, the story or novella could be said to provide a portrayal of a Jante-esque society, preceding by a decade or so Axel Sandemose's coinage of the term as a designation of a society governed by a suffocating collective regulation of behaviour and limitation of aspiration in his geomodernist milestone novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* (1933) (A Fugitive Crosses His Own Track). Johnson's story pivots on a portrayal of autodidactic ambition and adverse public opinion in a minor town environment in the North. Örjan Lindberger suggests in the first volume of his informative study of Johnson's life and work, *Norrbottningen som blev europé* (The Norrbottning Who Became a European), that the story shows that 'Eyvind Johnson har upptäckt hur nedvärderingsmekanismen fungerar i en småstad' (Lindberger 1986: 121) (Eyvind Johnson has discovered how the mechanism of devaluing functions in a small town), citing Ibsen's drama and Hamsun's short stories as potential sources of inspiration for Johnson.⁷

The negative affective mechanisms that Lindberger identifies are manifested in the narrative as a conceptualisation of the town as an oppressive agent and atmosphere, as a system of and a stage for gossip and ridicule: 'Staden [...] mördade och hade roligt', 'staden skrattade' (67) (The town [...] murdered and had fun, the town laughed). As part of its repertoire of victimisation, the (youth of the) town publicly performs and parodies the role of the isolated worker – the story's eponymous 'carpenter professor' – walking the streets with that offensive emblem, a book, placed under his arm: 'Man lekte Yngve Björk. [...] Man tågade uppåt gatan, man gick i gåsmarsch och sjöng: Yngve Björk, Yngve Björk, herr professor Yngve Björk' (68) (People played at being Yngve Björk. [...] They marched along the street, doing the goose-step and singing Yngve Björk, Yngve Björk, Herr Professor Yngve Björk). Using hyperbolic and surreal effect, the town's treatment of otherness is depicted as a repeated execution. The traffic of distorted information is mapped by the narrative in what approaches a town 'diagram' or circuit chart: with a kiosk centrally positioned at the town square and owned by the protagonist's intrusive neighbour – 'Karamelldrottning Kristina' (1924: 70) (Candy Queen Kristina) – as the key transmitter, and with a 'transformer' (1924: 71) located at the manufacturing firm where the protagonist works and where many people come and go, the rumours about and ridicule of him spread through the town like an electrical current. While in 'Vallberg' the negative affective impulse finds its main articulation within Bummelmann's crowded circus tent that works as a microcosm of the urban environment, in 'Snickarprofessor Tantalus' the townscape as a whole has a similar function. The representation of the town as a regulated space is reinforced in the latter text by the use of numbering and lettering. As a signalling of both the smallness and the rigidity of the townscape, its lamp posts are issued with numbers in several instances in the text, feeding into innovative street scenes that fuse proximate sentiment with a distancing sense of structure: 'Stans gatlykta, Nummer 3, vid lilla bron lyste på hans ansikte' (69) (Municipal Lamp Post No. 3 by the little bridge shone on his face). A modernist leitmotif in the text, the numbered lamp post likewise participates in the chaos and collapse that inform the ending of the story: 'han [...] rände mot Tvåans lyktstolpe' (1924: 119) (he [...] crashed into No.

2 Lamp Post). In a stylistically related manner, the alphabet is used to indicate senders of abusive letters, stressing how the town as a faceless collective can generate oppressive affect: 'det kom brev från N., X., Y., och Z.' (108-109) (letters arrived from N., X., Y., and Z.).

Meanwhile, however, the novella is not devoid of visions of alternative uses of the public urban environment, nor of 'pockets' of ambience and alliances that go against the dominant town atmosphere. One such alliance is between the protagonist and a fellow worker, Orvar Fur, who, exceptionally in the story, is characterised as 'ett stycke människa' (77) (a decent piece of humanity), and who instantly registers the 'extraterritoriality' of the protagonist's rented room on his first visit there: 'Rummet där han satt hörde inte hit, det luktade ej stan' (78-79) (The room he was sitting in did not belong here, it did not smell like town). It is within this alternative, yet still porous, place that the autodidact offers his conversational partner a significant discourse on contrasting notions of knowledge, imbued by the raw sense of injustice that fuels the story throughout (and may be part of what Bonnier perceived as 'immaturity'). On the one hand, there is the reigning town culture of education as a commodity for those who can afford it and as a distancing and distorting device, aimed at social segregation and articulated as another form of extraterritoriality: 'Ett glas, en lins, ett prisma eller hundra, en mask! Ett torn man ska sitta i och se ner på de andra kräken, en ö man ska bo på för att slippa andas samma luft som sin fordringsägare, mänskligheten' (81) (A glass, a lens, one prism or a hundred, a mask! A tower in which a man can sit and look down on the other poor wretches, an island on which a man can live and thus avoid breathing the same air as his creditor, humankind). On the other hand, there is a vision of knowledge as a vehicle for democratisation, of establishing what approaches an autodidactic academy in the town square, thus letting the 'peripheral' conquer and redefine the centre ground of the community: 'Jag ska lära mig allt det de där lär sig, och mer till – och sen ska jag dela ut det gratis! Jag ska stå på torget och ge alla trasiga eller oäkta barn gratisundervisning i allt som finns' (83) (I shall learn everything those people learn – and more – and then I will spread it around for nothing! I will stand on the square and give free instruction about everything

to all the ragged and illegitimate children). This utopian prospect of a different, genuine, dissemination of information and insight in the townscape is, however, short-lived, as gossip soon transforms it into a contemptuous parody, excelling, again, in hyperbolic effect: 'Fru N. hade hört att han tänkte bygga ett universitet i stan, haha; fru X, att alla horungar skulle läras latinet där, haha; fru Z, att allt gammalt [...] skulle jämnas med marken, haha' (87) (Mrs N had heard he was thinking of building a university in the town – ho ho! Mrs Y that all the little bastards would learn Latin there – ho ho! Mrs Z that everything old [...] was to be razed to the ground – ho ho!). Thus, in light of the town's triumphant victimisation, it is hardly surprising that, in the ending of the story, the protagonist, while defeated, as symbolised in the fire that burns down the alternative space of his rented room, in a last act of defiance and watched over by Fur, his friend, demolishes the town-square kiosk that is figured as the central source of negative urban affect.

4.

The sympathetically charged character constellation of Björk and Fur is a precursor of the intense male relationships which Johnson would explore with depth and nuance in his subsequent novels. These relationships are typically conditioned on the unavoidable human proximity and 'accidental' encounters that urban life implies; they are characterised by initial difference, disagreement or resistance; and they are informed by interesting slippages between antipathy and sympathy with a trajectory towards the latter. Cases in point are the ambivalent bonds between the class-conscious worker, later religious convert, Rolf Nyström and the reluctant inheritor to a local industrial empire Stig Timan in *Timans och rättfärdigheten*; the gradual rapprochement between the sceptical school teacher Andersson and the political climber manufacturer Hammar in *Stad i mörker*; and the dialogic companionship between the starving writer Torsten and the street philosopher Cassecroute in *Stad i ljus*. These relationships may all be read in light of Raymond Williams' discussion of affective possibilities in urban spaces in the chapter entitled 'Cities of Darkness and of Light' of his seminal study of paradigms in the

representation of urban and rural spaces through literary history, *The Country and the City*. Here, Williams identifies tensions in the understanding of the urban environment in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novel-writing that are of relevance to key concerns in Johnson's early work. On the one hand, Williams argues, urbanisation and the mechanisation of labour seem to function as a motor for social atomism, separateness and estrangement; on the other hand, the concentration of people in towns and cities, in work and living places, represents a process of 'aggregation' that offers possibilities of new forms of human solidarity and affective relationships developing. This explains why, in the literary responses to the modern urban condition, 'elements of rejection' can be combined with 'elements of acceptance' (Williams 1975: 263). A related analysis, although not specifically connected to the urban environment, has more recently been proposed by Judith Butler in her discussion of what she calls the predicament of bodily proximity, its unwelcome effects as well as its potential for the fostering of human responsiveness, both of relevance to life in Johnson's urban geographies:

That the body invariably comes up against the outside world is a sign of the general predicament of unwilling proximity to others and to circumstances beyond one's control. This "coming up against" is one modality that defines the body. And yet, this obtrusive alterity against which the body finds itself can be, and often is, what animates responsiveness to that world. (Butler 2009: 34)

It should not be overlooked, however, that the protagonist's main mode of appearance in 'Snickarprofessor Tantalus' is not as part of a sympathetic pairing but as a solitary character in the townscape, conforming to what Raymond Williams in the subsequent chapter of his study identifies as a key figure in the perception of the modern urban environment: 'a man walking, as if alone, in its streets' (Williams 1975: 280).⁸ This corresponds, too, with Andrew Thacker's observation that 'the quotidian experience of moving around the metropolis provided a key impetus to some of the experimental forms of modernist writing'

(Thacker 2009:7). Significantly, though, in 'Snickarprofessor Tantalus' a 'marginal' town situated in a 'minor' country replaces Williams' and Thacker's metropolis in the role as topos for the modernist wanderer. Alongside 'Vallberg' and the collection's additional pieces, the narrative demonstrates the early geomodernist promise of Johnson's prose.

II: Polytopic Continuations: *Timans och rättfärdigheten, Stad i mörker, Stad i ljus*

1.

In a study entitled *Identitetens geografi*, focusing partly on Norwegian inter-war literature and partly on English-language postcolonial literature, Per Thomas Andersen presents an interesting argument regarding the aesthetical and the sociological manifestation of the phenomenon he terms, following the German sociologist Ulrich Beck, polygamy of place. Andersen is of the view that the plurality, or 'polygamy', of attachments to places, frequently far apart, which is a widespread human and sociological phenomenon under the current condition of globalism (Beck's 'second modernity') has aesthetical precursors in the period of 'first modernity', more specifically in literature of the first half of the twentieth century and especially in the inter-war period (Andersen 2006: 7-20). Evidently, Andersen's analysis resembles Andrew Thacker's emphasis on the polytopic properties of the modernist engagement with space as presented above. As prime Norwegian examples of polygamy of place in inter-war prose fiction Andersen cites Cora Sandel and Aksel Sandemose. Equally, the locational strategies showcased by Johnson's first three novels, his book publications following *De fyra främlingarna*, would seem to bear out Andersen's argument.

While the short stories we have discussed above display diversity of setting within Sweden, two of the three early novels (the first and, in particular, the third publication) add a distinct international dimension to Johnson's work. When combined, the geographical ambitions of the novels in question can be summed up thus: At the same time as the northern Swedish periphery continues to function as a modern focal point, and with an added emphasis on rendering in arresting ways

the specifics of the northern 'sensescape', its European, even global, context is now asserted by the novels. Cities at what seems the cutting edge of European inter-war modernity such as Berlin and Paris are given first a subsidiary and then a main place in Johnson's expansive and hybrid novelistic geography, while Stockholm, too, performs an important cameo role in the third of the novels. Together, the novels serve to demonstrate that modernist possibilities can be realised in an interplay between the European 'margin' and the European metropolitan centres, while also exploring the ambiguities of these concepts. Modern public and institutional settings, manifestations and metaphors of machinery, motifs of light and darkness, and topics and tropes of travel and traffic (as also evidenced above) link the novels together, notwithstanding the important differences that exist between them as literary undertakings. We shall now present some reflections on the aesthetics, affectivity and ideology of place in these novelistic projects.

2.

Timans och rättfärdigheten (1925), Johnson's debut work as a novelist, and his first book published by Bonniers, is primarily located in an unspecified northern Swedish manufacturing town, tracing the seemingly unstoppable rise and proliferation of a new industrial complex, the Timans workshops, but also the eventual fall of the founding family. The novel displays a deepened sociological perspective in Johnson's writing, depicting hardening industrial relations and intensifying ideological schisms in the period around the First World War. The economic and technological climate that informs the novel could be said to develop what we saw represented in embryonic form in the 'Vallberg' narrative. The climate is one of early twentieth-century municipal growth, modernisation, mechanisation, electrification and monetary might. This atmosphere finds a fine articulation in the following depiction of a 'guided tour' through what resembles a newly constructed toy town, as the industrialist Sakarias Timan showcases to his children and inheritors the apparent inseparability of the transforming townscape and the family's imprint on and ownership of it:

- Se där är kraftverket – därifrån kommer det elektriska ljuset. Det där verket har pappa byggt. Och den här bron. Och huset där borta, det är mitt. Och i den där banken har pappa sina pengar. Och där – titta! – alltihop det där med skorstenar och tegelhus, det är pappas.
- O, jada, skrek Elsa, som redan kunde läsa. Det står Timans, där oppe på taket! (Johnson 1925: 23)⁹

(– Look there, that's the power station – that's where the electric light comes from. Dad built that power station. And this bridge. And that house over there is mine. And that's the bank where Dad keeps his money. And over there – just look! All that lot of chimneys and brick buildings, all of that belongs to Dad.

– Oh yes! Elsa shouted – she could read already. Up there on the roof! It says Timans!)

It should be noted, however, that in response to the question of whether he would later wish to follow in his father's footsteps and become a director of the firm, the young son, Stig Timan, prophetically declines, voicing instead his preference for the occupation of a machinist (24).

While the dynamics and tensions of the North of Sweden dominate the novel, the narrative incorporates, however, a relatively extensive section set in Berlin (43-64), the post- and inter-war European political pressure cooker and entertainment capital par excellence. A key compositional device of the novel is to let social and ideological oppositions initially encountered in the slum quarters of Berlin and within its vibrant and inflamed debating culture be enacted subsequently in the 'remote' northern town. As Stig Timan is sent on an extended stay abroad, his experiences, particularly of Berlin, constitute a modern-day educational journey. Andrew Thacker argues that the figure of the *voyageur* is as important to modernist textual space as the more established role of the *flâneur* (Thacker 2009: 7), and Stig Timan is, alongside several other characters in Johnson's narratives, representative of the modernist traveller. He perceives his destination of (northern) Berlin in the immediate post-war period as a whirlpool of destitution, deception and double play. It produces a

strong sense of disorientation in the traveller and provides a sensual shock with a downward pull: 'Det lyste, det stack i ögonen. [...] Och Stig Timans sögs nedåt. Med förvirrade ögon såg han norra Berlin' (44) (It shines, it catches the eye. [...] And Stig Timans was sucked down. With confused eyes he saw northern Berlin). The traveller encounters a metropolitan site imbued with a jarring juxtaposition of well-being and deprivation: 'välmåga skar bjärt av mot den oreflektade jämmer, som steg ur var rännsten' (47) (there was a glaring clash between affluence and the unreflected misery that rose from every gutter). The city's predominant colour scheme, as rendered in the novel, is an expressionistic scale of sickly yellows and greens. Overall, this formative journey profoundly shapes the skeptical and socially critical mindset of the younger male member of the manufacturing dynasty for the remainder of the narrative. The novel's Berlin segment impacts, moreover, on aspects of character connectivity in the text, evidenced in particular by the way in which the Berlin pacifist ideologue, Fritze, and the novel's working-class protagonist and employee at the Timans factories, Rolf Nyström, are linked by various motifs such as class, illness and a tendency towards long-distance 'millenarian' thinking, of which the novel is critical.

Towards the end of the novel, even the founding father, Sakarias Timan, turns away from the industrial project, but on very different grounds than those that affect his son. The old Timan's turn is towards evangelical spiritualism (with a strong tradition in the north of Sweden), but this is notably depicted in the novel as a variant form of capitalism, with its own agenda, and rhetoric, of (spiritual) investment, shareholding, profit and empire building. So, in a sense, Timan senior only re-orientates himself from one form of economic thought to another: 'Ty det falska ordet förstod ekonomisk politik' (161) (For the false word understood economic politics), as the narratorial voice, with its keen awareness of material concerns as determinants, comments. As for the son, Stig Timan increasingly experiences the power structures of the local town as an organism of evil – 'som om en ström av ondska runnit genom alla ådror' (169) (as if a stream of evil was flowing through all veins) – and as a system of suffocation and source of nausea: 'som om någon klämt honom

under bröstet; han ville kräkas' (169) (as if someone had crushed him below the chest – he wanted to throw up). At one advanced point, he sees the abandoning of the locality as the only survival strategy, with the motif of the railway line as an escape route resurfacing in this text. The sense of surveillance in the townscape, in principle not unlike the atmosphere conveyed in 'Snickarprofessor Tantalus', is enhanced by Rolf Nyström's new role as serving the industrialist system as an informant on the activist workers. This further strengthens the grip on the town that its power structures exert, a grip compared with that of 'en stor bläckfisk' (176) (a large octopus). Nevertheless, Stig Timan decides in the end to stay (while Nyström eventually joins forces with the workers), representing, perhaps, an embryonic and very tentative version of the commitment to the marginal town that dominates the ending of Johnson's subsequent novel. First and foremost, however, as *Timans och rättfärdigheten* closes, the conception of the town is as a veritable battlefield of industrial relations. The novel concludes with death and decline, but also with the contours of a cross-class common ground of sympathy between Nyström and the Timans siblings, Stig and Elsa, having been glimpsed, before both the sister and the worker die.

3.

While *Timans och rättfärdigheten* could thus be said to compositionally embed the European 'centre' as explored in the international section of the text into a predominantly northern narrative, Johnson's next novel, *Stad i mörker*, fully concentrates on the 'periphery' as the privileged and direct place of action and enquiry (although the text is not devoid of indirect spatial expansiveness, as we shall document below). In regard to delivering innovative spatial articulation of communal as well as subjective topics, the second novel in its entirety works to demonstrate that an off-centre and smaller-scale setting is capable of matching the metropolitan environment typically associated with modernism. In place of the dominant focus on industrial capitalism in the previous novel, *Stad i mörker* puts its emphasis on public sector and early welfare development, and political intrigue in this societal context. The novel explores in its town drama how (local) politics

and its attendant power game are played out, using as a main plot motor the marginalisation and eventual demise of a progressive female politician and tracking the effects of this 'casual', but possibly implicitly instigated, vacancy on collective and individual behaviour.¹⁰ On this level, Johnson's second novel inhabits the linguistic and institutional landscapes of phenomena such as 'stadsfullmäktigeval', 'barnkrubba', 'folkbibliotek', 'stadspark', 'vattenledningsfrågor' and 'skattetaxeringar' (Johnson 1996 [1927]: 22, 23, 28, 224¹¹) ('elections to the town council', 'day nursery', 'public library', 'town park', 'issues surrounding the water mains' and 'tax assessment'), excelling in introducing modern political, welfare and infrastructural terminology into 'peripheral' literature. Whereas machine references in the previous novel remained largely concrete, in the context of the Timans factories, *Stad i mörker* approaches the machine both as material fact and as metaphor (a development which continues in Johnson's subsequent novel *Stad i ljus*, as we shall discuss below). Thus, the novel's notion of (the governance of) the town as a seemingly self-perpetuating and 'closed' system is summed up figuratively by the repeated representation of it as a (clockwork) mechanism: 'staden styrdes av en mekanism, det gick av sig självt' (63) (the town was governed by a mechanism, it ran by itself). Simultaneously, at a material level, this mirrors the occupation of one of its protagonists, the politically ambitious, socially mobile watchmaker and manufacturer Hammar.

The conception of the town as a modern mechanism supports, moreover, its status of a contemporary self-contained literary universe, a cosmos even, with the movement of people in the townscape presented, for example, as 'planeternas gång i stadens öde rymd' (95) (the movement of the planets in the empty space of the town). This is in keeping with a cohesive rhetorical tendency in the text towards foregrounding the town as agent, as atmosphere, as adversary, as common collective condition. Compared with the articulation of the northern setting in Johnson's previous novel, *Stad i mörker* shows an enhanced sensitivity towards the environmental elements that condition life in the precariously positioned locality. Örjan Lindberger observes of the second novel that 'Februarikylan och mörkret utgör en konstant bakgrund, men även i övrigt är den norrländska

lokalfärgen mer framträdande än i den föregående boken' (Lindberger 1986: 152-153) (the February chill and the darkness constitute a constant backdrop, and also in other respects the Norrlandic local colour is more pronounced than in the previous book). The specific phenomenology of the northern site feeds into the representational and formal innovation that informs the novel throughout, as evidenced by elliptical and poetical summations such as: 'Norrskén, stjärnor, köld, en lång rad döda hus, och en natt utan slut: Februari' (99) (The aurora, stars, cold, a long row of dead buildings and a night without end: February). The aim of capturing in striking ways the concreteness of the environment's radical sensory impact seems as important to the novel as its social critique. In creating locational atmospheres, acoustic motifs, always pronounced in Johnson's writing, are as evident as visual ones, as in this expressionistic streetscape: 'Björkalléerna stodo stela och överrimmade, och då och då föll en kvist, klingade, bröts av för ingenting och fick bli liggande. Alla ljud hängde ekande och klara kvar länge i luften, som var grön av ilsken kyla' (88-89) (The avenues of birch trees stood there stiff and coated with rime. Now and then a twig would fall, make a tinkling sound, break off for no reason and be left lying there. All sounds hung in the air for a long time, echoing and clear. And the air was green with a piercing cold).

While the 'rules' of direct engagement with place and character that are in operation in *Stad i mörker* dictate a concentration on the northern community and topography (thus, none of the actors in the novel's urban drama seem allowed to leave the scene of the town, although they may at times harbour desires or even plans to do so), larger coordinates nevertheless frame and act on the town in various ways. Combined with an overarching sense in the novel of the town as proximate 'destiny' for its inhabitants and as the *sine qua non* of the text, an enquiry is presented into the ambiguities and contingency of the northern place. Competing perspectives on the town as both centre and periphery, as both significant and insignificant, as worthy of both celebration and critique emerge in the text, as evidenced by the following cartographic sequence in which manufacturer Hammar's keen gaze travels across a map of Europe:

Det är stort, Europa, tycker urmakarn. Han har just inte tänkt på det förut. Tyskland, Frankrike, England, ett stycke Skandinavien, ett stycke Ryssland. Och gränserna förändras då och då; ljudlöst, nästan omärkligt på kartan, med buller och bråk där ute. Där ute – ? [...] Långt uppe en liten prick, en liten stad. Hammar upptäcker att den verkligen hör till Europa, är en punkt i världen, ett litet centra, kring vilket en landsbygd sluter sig – en kärna, ett säte – – –

Det är litet. Han måste erkänna, att det är försvinnande. Stockholm är en helt annan sak, men detta är för litet. Man ser det inte utan ansträngning, och en främling skulle vara osäker på beteckningen stad eller by – (149).

(It's big, Europe is, the watchmaker thinks. That's something he hasn't thought about before. Germany, France, England, a bit of Scandinavia, a bit of Russia. And the frontiers change every so often: silently, almost imperceptibly on the map but with a great hullabaloo out there. Out there – ? [...] Far, far up a little dot, a little town. Hammar discovers that it really does belong to Europe, is a point in the world, a little centre surrounded by countryside – a kernel, a hub – – –

It is small. He has to admit that it is negligible. Stockholm is another matter, but this is too small. You have to strain your eyes to see it and a stranger would be unsure whether to call it a town or a village –)

'[P]rick', 'punkt', 'centra', 'kärna', 'säte', 'stad', 'by': the poetical richness and the slippages of the nomenclature encapsulate the uncertain and contingent positioning of the town, contributing to its geomodern attributes. The notion of fluid European boundaries and the journey undertaken by the protagonist's perspective across these boundaries together enforce a sense of spatial flux. The question mark following the concept of '[d]är ute' communicates an uncertainty about being outside or inside or both at once. Characteristic of the novel, the scene featuring Hammar and the map is set, moreover, in an

institutional environment, the editorial office of the local newspaper, which is conceived as a veritable communication ‘hot spot’, with telephone and telegraph feeds connected to the capital and further afield intervening in the narrative with news streams conveying fragments of current international and domestic events. The breaking news items range globally from unrest in China, via dictatorship in Italy to bank robbery in Stockholm; they even take in the cosmos, reporting the discovery of ‘En ny stjärna av okänd valör’ (130) (A new star of unknown denomination), while also referencing, tongue-in-cheek, the novel’s own place of origin, pointed to in the fragment ‘Storm och fiskarbåtarna gå inte ut i Biskayabukten’ (130) (Storms and the fishing boats are not going out into the Bay of Biscay).¹² Thus, while maintaining its local emplacement, the novel lets a plurality of exterior domains and discourses impact on the town. It is noteworthy that, without containing direct depiction of travel, the narrative shows nevertheless a degree of correspondence with Alexandra Peat’s finding that ‘[m]uch modernist travel fiction [...] places the local and the global in dialectic, showing how definitions of community are always contingent and in a state of flux’ (Peat 2011: 170).

These indirect methods of expansiveness and embedment notwithstanding, it remains, however, a fundamental ambition of *Stad i mörker*, and particularly of its ending, to demonstrate that the peripheral place possesses a form of attracting force – that it is endowed with an ability to foster new forms of attachment to it and create new forms of solidarity between the characters who, by choice or by chance, find themselves in the northern urban environment. This proposed perspective on the affective connectivity between people and place, and between topography and characterisation in the novel, is broadly supported by the Johnson scholarship of both Lindberger and Carl Axel Westholm. The former approaches the novel as a web of voices that are gradually interwoven, primarily on emotional grounds, as ‘ett visst mått av sympati’ (Lindberger 1986: 154) (a measure of sympathy) towards the town manifests itself, while the latter, in his political study of the novel, ‘Skollärary Andersson, parlamentarismen och “det ovanliga”’ (Schoolteacher Andersson, Parliamentarianism, and the ‘Unusual’), highlights *Stad i mörker* as standing out in Johnson’s

early output, not by way of its northern setting as such which it shares with other early texts as we have shown above, but by way of the density and inseparability of the connections it builds between environment, character development, and narrative structure.¹³ It may be argued, further, that the conclusion of *Stad i mörker* reads as a realisation of Raymond Williams' linkage between the accidental 'aggregation' of people in towns and cities and the possibility of solidarities forming as well as of Judith Butler's relationship between the unwilling 'coming up against' others and the potential for the emergence of interhuman responsiveness (see above). The novel's two male protagonists, the town insider, manufacturer Hammar, and the outsider, schoolteacher Andersson, are the main exemplars of these connections and attractions forming. Andersson in particular embodies a gradual turn (in his case from melancholic isolation and ironic intellectual distance) towards the town, ambiguous as the place may be, in a movement that is accelerated in the novel's final chapter XI, its title, 'Denna stad i mörker' (This Town in Darkness), foregrounding the town as combining motif. Here, the teacher, resisting the subjective temptation of escape to the apparent freedom of the sea and the exotic, commits himself to work for the future generation of the town, his pupils, and, it is suggested, to a cross-class love relationship in the local environment (itself symbolic of a conflation of centre and periphery in a social sense), while also declaring his fondness for and friendship with Hammar, of whose role as a social and political *Streber* Andersson has been distinctly skeptical previously: 'jag är er vän, ni är min första vän' (284) (I am your friend, you are my first friend). The teacher's development can be understood in ideological and political terms, as suggested by Westholm. It can be read, moreover, as emblematic of a shift from a notion of emotions as primarily subjective, as 'feeling', towards a new idea of shared affectivity. This idea is demonstrated, moreover, at a symbolic level in the text, as the metaphorical make-up of the town is re-configured towards the end of the narrative from that of a (controlling) machinery (see above) to a co-ordinated chorus of chiming clockworks constituting a form of town symphony: 'De slogo för stan' (243) (They struck for the town). This acoustic articulation could be said to celebrate the collaborations and modulations of the

‘marginal’ urban sphere whose possibilities as a site for modernist literary expression Johnson’s novel so convincingly demonstrates.

4.

The concept of a combining and uniting urban melodic theme is shared by and developed in Johnson’s next novel *Stad i ljus. En historia från Paris*, in which the European metropolis takes centre stage. We shall conclude our discussion of Johnson’s early urban narratives by contemplating some of the machine motifs, stylistic and perceptual innovations, and metropolitan interconnections in this text,¹⁵ while also briefly positioning the narrative in relation to two of its canonical modernist precursors in Scandinavian literature as well as to the preceding Johnson novels we have considered. The novel’s publication history and the sequence of its linguistic appearances could be said to mirror its international subject matter, as it was first published in 1927 in a translation into French entitled *Lettre recommandée* in the ‘Collection européenne’ of the publishing House S. Kra, with the Swedish ‘original’ – published, like Johnson’s debut book, by Tidens in Stockholm – only appearing the year after, in 1928.

Stad i ljus has as one of its leitmotifs prose-lyrical passages that employ and pay tribute to a vibrant and vitalistic voice emanating from the city itself, reminiscent of Danish modernist Johannes V. Jensen, especially of his seminal exploration of the Paris world exhibition of 1900 in his travelogue and modern manifesto *Den gotiske Renaissance* (1901) (The Gothic Renaissance). In, for example, ‘Stadens sång vid middagstimman’ (The Song of the Town at the Noonday Hour), which constitutes chapter 6 of Johnson’s novel, the urban melodic voice conflates the dynamics of modern transportative technology with body, mind and prehistoric times in the following manner:

I denna timma sjunga mina ådror, mina blodfyllda, människofyllda ådror [...].

I denna timma skälva mina nerver av järn och stål och koppar; och de sjunga; och deras sång är en sång där varje fullastad spårvagn är en ton, – och har du hört omnibussar böla som dragoxar eller elefanter, böla som tunga och hungriga

vandrare över urtidsslätter, där solen förbränner vildgräset?
Automobilernas gjädje är min, – en glädje över luften vid
middagstimman. (Johnson 1928: 60)¹⁶

(This is the hour at which my veins sing, my blood-filled,
humankind-filled veins [...].

This is the hour at which my nerves of iron and steel and copper
tremble; and they sing; and their song is a song in which every
packed tram is a note, – and have you heard omnibuses roar
like oxen or elephants, roar like heavy, hungry travellers across
primeval plains, where the sun scorches the wild grass? The joy
of automobiles is my joy – a joy at the air of the noonday hour.)

This echoes the Paris segment of *Den gotiske Renaissance*, which begins with wonderment at witnessing futuristic transportation – in the shape of the mobile pavement, ‘det vandrende fortov’ (Jensen 2000: 69), that surrounds the world exhibition area – and concludes with a tribute to the modern machines whose sum of sounds constitutes a ‘syngende Takt’ (a singing beat), cutting across temporal difference, and whose properties and power are likened to ‘Menneskers Nerver’ (human nerves) as well as to the way in which ‘Hjærtets Muskler driver Blodstrømmen’ (Jensen 2000: 113) (the muscles of the heart drive the blood stream). In *Stad i ljus*, the interface between machine and mind is intensified and developed into further domains by also serving to demonstrate modern mental fragmentation, alienation and deep psychology. This is in evidence when the protagonist Torsten, a Swedish writer starving in Paris, conceptualises his competing and uncertain selves as superimpositions in an image projector or magic lantern: ‘liksom huvudet varit en skioptikonkassett, i vilken olika bilder efter behag samtidigt kunde inskjutas’ (54) (as if the head were a slide projector into which different images could be simultaneously slotted according to taste). The dissolution of the boundaries between the technological and the human or the natural is a recurring emphasis in *Stad i ljus*, not only linked to urban vitalism and affectivity but also to a darker post-war and post-utopian sense of rupture, estrangement and ‘pollution’.¹⁷ Both of these types of response, the vitalistic and

the estranged, and the connections between them, are discussed by Raymond Williams in the chapter of *The Country and the City* entitled 'The Figure in the City'. Here, Williams argues, on the one hand, that the atomism and absence of connection that was experienced in the modern cities could form the very basis of a new and lively perception and that a radical form of this perspective was a joyful acceptance of the city. On the other hand, he identifies an influential modern affective structure that brings together the city as fact or object and a new anguished consciousness: 'Struggle, indifference, loss of purpose, loss of meaning [...] have found, in the City, a habitation and a name. For the city is not only, in this vision, a form of modern life; it is the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness' (Williams 1975: 287). The most influential articulation in Scandinavian literature of these interrelations between urban space and mental response is, of course, Knut Hamsun's *Sult* (1890) (*Hunger*), another modernist role model for Johnson's novel.

As suggested by the contrasting component of its Swedish title, *Stad i ljus* seems in some respects designed to occupy a polar position to *Stad i mörker* in Johnson's urban literary geography, less engaged in showcasing new representations of the periphery than in staking its credentials as a more 'classic' articulation of modernist topography, and in doing so continually gesturing back to Hamsun's narrative as the preeminent metropolitan novel in Nordic modernism. Lindberger notes that Johnson was an enthusiastic reader of Hamsun and that the main subject of a starving writer walking the streets of a European city modelled on reality which *Stad i ljus* shares with *Sult* was developed 'efter den stora föregångarens mönster' (Lindberger 1986: 168) (according to the pattern of the great predecessor). In a rare instance of explicit self-referentiality in the novel, the opening of chapter 13 foregrounds the importance of the motif of walking: 'Torsten gick såsom han gått genom hela denna bok. Han gick utan att ta hänsyn till stilen eller kompositionen' (128) (Torsten walked as he had walked through the whole of this book. He walked without paying attention to style or composition). The *Sult*-inspired patterning of *Stad i ljus* is manifested not only, as Lindberger suggests, in a shared interest of the two novels in exploring a fragmentary mindset of mood swings,

hypersensibility, extreme external receptivity, but is evident also in the inclusion of a number of specific events in Johnson's novel that echo plot segments in *Sult*: these extend from Torsten's eviction from his porous rented room and his prolonged encounter with and 'chivalric' behaviour towards a city beggar, via a streetscape 'romance' that connects earlier and later parts of the novel, to multiple meetings, or attempted meetings, with less than enthusiastic editors of potential outlets for the protagonist's writing products.

Lindberger goes on to argue, perhaps less fully sustainably, that *Stad i ljus* intensifies the already considerable temporal concentration that characterises *Sult* by focusing on 'ett enda dygn' (Lindberger 1986: 168) (a single twenty-four hour period) around the 14th of July celebrations. While this argument is valid in terms of the primary time frame in Johnson's novel, it should be added that *Stad i ljus* provides its protagonist with a considerable, primarily Stockholm-based back story – unlike anything found in *Sult* with its clear confinements to a single city, Kristiania, and the events unfolding there – which in turn is bound up with the polytopic principles that inform all of the Johnson texts we have discussed. This link to Stockholm is, moreover, not merely a retrospective but also a prospective device in the narrative. As suggested by the novel's French title, *Lettre recommandée*, the leitmotif of the long-distance letter continually points up the northern city as a potential pecuniary lifeline, albeit a highly unreliable one, for the struggling writer who continues to depend on occasional posted payments from publishing houses in the homeland he has left behind. The figure of a hostile Swedish publisher from the protagonist's Stockholm past even makes a surprise appearance in the present-level Paris cityscape, thereby adding to the novel's spatial and temporal interplay. These interconnections reflect, in other words, the marketplace reality that dictates the precarious existence of the aspiring modernist writer, but they also have a broader transnational remit in the novel. The back story, which is provided primarily in chapters 3 and 4,¹⁸ thus seems aimed at signalling similarities between conditions of homelessness and hunger across a metropolitan spectrum that, in addition to Paris and Stockholm, includes stopovers in Hamburg and Berlin towards the end of the retrospective section.

The trope of walking or ‘promenading’ and the method of accurate cityscape mapping, including specific street signage, that infuse the entire rendering of Paris are equally central to the Stockholm segment of the narrative: a case in point is the following euphemistic expression of the onset of homelessness and enforced exterior existence within the mean streets of the city:

Han bodde hos en hygglig familj ute i Hagalund. En gång måste han naturligtvis flytta, och då flyttade han in till det större Stockholm; det allra största Storstockholm, ty han bodde i hela stan. Därmed förstås, att han promenerade.

Den vanliga vägen var: Drottninggatan, Odengatan, Vasaparken; sedan Torsgatan ner till Norra Bantorget; Vasagatan; och från Vasagatan brukade han göra en avvikning in på en gata i närheten av Centralstationen: där öppnades ett billigt kafé tidigt på morgonen. [...] Ibland snöade det och en natt var det över 20 grader. (37)

(He stayed with a nice family out in Hagalund. But, of course, at some point he had to move, and he moved in to greater Stockholm, to Greater Stockholm in the widest sense, for he lived in the whole city. Meaning, of course, that he walked.

The usual route was: Drottninggatan, Odengatan, the Vasapark; then Torsgatan down to the square at Norra Bantorget; Vasagatan; from Vasagatan he used to make a detour to a street near the Central Station, where a cheap café opened early in the morning. [...] Sometimes it snowed and one night it dropped to minus 20.)

This passage works, moreover, as a premonition of the protagonist’s parallel loss of (semi-)domesticity in Paris, as mentioned above. It is telling, too, that the use of the desert as an urban metaphor connects Stockholm, ‘en öken’ (47) (a desert), and Paris, ‘Här var Sahara’ (89) (Here was Sahara).

Thus, also *Stad i ljus*, with its apparent Paris concentration, bears out Alexandra Peat’s assessment that modernist fiction encourages us

to recognise the plural nature of space and 'to think beyond statically circumscribed definitions of place' (Peat 2011: 170). What does, however, mark *Stad i ljus* out among Johnson's early urban narratives is the dominance of its metropolitan dimension. Of the narratives considered here, it is the text that comes closest to confirming Frederik Tygstrup's analysis in the chapter 'Den litterære by: Mellem system og sansning' (The Literary City: Between System and Perception) that in the twentieth-century urban novel cities tend to become 'organismer for sig, hele universer' (Tygstrup 2000: 125) (organisms in thier own right, whole universes), abandoning the national embedding of the city (typically the 'capital') in the nineteenth-century novel in favour of an articulation (or implicit sense) of a transnational axis of metropolises. Indicative of the downgrading of non-metropolitan sites of modernity and of national coordinates in *Stad i ljus* is, further, the fact that the protagonist's peripheral hinterland of home is, just like in *Sult*, only hinted at: 'Hemmet var ett fjärran' (38) (Home was a distant place).

However, this notion of a 'distant' and unexplored place vaguely situated somewhere in or beyond the margins of modernity is equally, as we have shown above, problematised in another of Eyvind Johnson's texts from the same period, which transform the periphery into the centre point for literary investigation and innovation. Thus, in conclusion, Johnson's early urban narratives together enact their modernisms in a gamut of geographies that challenges established understandings of spatial hierarchies. In a retrospective piece assessing the Swedish cultural and literaty climate of the 1920s and 1930s, 'Perspektiv på 20- och 30-talen' (Perspectives on the Twenties and Thirties), Johnson acknowledges, in keeping with some of the geomodernist perspectives presented in this article, the emergence in the 1930s of a regional and domestic modernism that cannot be conflated with the traditions of European and American modernisms, although it is influenced by these. He identifies 'öppenhet för samhällsfrågor', 'färska livserfarenheter från städer och landsbygd', 'erfarenheten från folkrörelserna' and 'stimulans från ny konst, arkitektur och musik' (openness to social questions', 'new experiences of town and country', 'experience gained in popular movements', 'the stimulus of new art, architecture and music) as impulses that shaped 'en modernism som inte hade endast

utländsk grogrund' (Johnson 1992b: 96) (a modernism that did not only have foreign roots). Johnson's own urban writing of the 1920s may be seen as an early indicator of this broader redrawing of the map of modernism.

Endnotes

¹ Karl Otto Bonnier's letter of refusal (dated 9 May 1924) is reproduced in Lindberger (1986: 115). It should be noted that the refusal is not unequivocal, as the publisher acknowledges that the stories display 'onekligen en viss begåvning' (undoubtedly a degree of talent) and concludes by keeping his door ajar for the aspiring writer: 'Jag återlämnar därför manuskriptet till Eder, men skall gärna taga del av annat, då Ni kan komma att prestera något mognare' (I am returning the manuscript to you but would be glad to have sight of anything else once you have begun to produce more mature material).

² Johnson could be characterised as a second-generation immigrant into Sweden's northernmost district of Norrbotten. His father was from the western district of Värmland and arrived in the north as a railway navvy, while his mother, from Blekinge in the south east, followed a similar trajectory, employed in an ambulant bakery catering for the construction workers. Several of the author's memory sketches reference this migrant family history, with the illuminating piece entitled 'I drömmen om Botilda. Varför inte en släkttavla?' (In the Dream of Botilda. Why not a Family Tree?) (first published in 1947 in the Christmas issue of the progressive women's magazine *Idun*) paying particular tribute to the enterprise and wanderlust of his mother's side of the family. The text traces the developments that lifted the mother (and her sister, later Johnson's foster mother) out of a local dimension and into an unknown macro geography when they joined the mobile bakery venture that 'bakade sig upp genom stora delar av Sverige' and 'bakade ihop stora bitar av Norra Stambanan' (Johnson 1992a: 34) (baked its way up through major parts of Sweden; baked together large sections of the Northern Main Line). The text celebrates the role played by women in constructing a modern communications infrastructure and foregrounds the new identity of Johnson's mother as 'en berest ung kvinna med många landskap bakom ryggen' (Johnson 1992a: 36) (a widely travelled young woman with many regions under her belt). Trains, tracks, terminals, travel, and the possibilities they offer, remain recurrent preoccupations in Johnson's work overall.

³ In the following, page references only, without indication of author or publication year, will be provided in brackets after citations from the stated edition of *De fyra främlingarna*.

⁴ All translations from Swedish into English in this article are by my friend and colleague Peter Graves to whom I am grateful. Translations from Danish are my own.

⁵ In the collection's opening narrative, 'Moder Hunger' (Mother Hunger), the direction of the train traffic that connects north and south is reversed when a southbound train takes the protagonist to the modernity of Stockholm where '[g]atorna bullra' and 'människor färdas åt många håll' (27) (the streets roar

and people move in many directions).

⁶ For a broader discussion, of relevance to Johnson's work, of the role of modern technology, the motifs of train and telephone in particular, in Swedish literature, see Briens (2009).

⁷ Lindberger characterises, moreover, the narrative as 'en kort roman om en autodidakts tragiska öde' (1986: 118) (a short novel about the tragic fate of an autodidact).

⁸ A fascinating female variant of this modernist figure can be found in the collection's concluding piece, entitled 'Lea och våren' (Lea and the Spring), which is played out in a particularised Stockholm cityscape. Lea, the story's protagonist, drifts aimlessly and passively through various, socially stratified segments of the city, until she, sexually misused, drowns herself in one of the city's many waterways. Images of the conflation of nature and modern infrastructure that characterises the topography of the city frame the narrative, including innovative impressions of the myriad of tramcars and their tracks that cut through the town, as in this both foreignised and naturalised depiction of modern mass transportation: 'Spårvagnarna skrälla över Norrbro [...]. De bli hundra gånger hundra och fara åt alla håll, men löpa dock inte utanför sin ränna. Det är beskedliga vidunder med magarna fyllda av folk och ryggenorna fullstoppade med blå och gröna gnistor' (155-156) (The tramcars screech across Norrbro [...]. There are hundreds and hundreds of them and they go in all directions, but they never run outside their tracks. They are well-behaved monsters, their bellies full of people and their dorsal fins covered in blue and green sparks).

⁹ In the following, page references only, without indication of author or publication year, will be provided in brackets after citations from the stated edition of *Timans och rättfärdigheten*.

¹⁰ This is in principle not dissimilar to the primary plot device in J. K. Rowling's 2012 novel entitled *The Casual Vacancy*.

¹¹ In the following, page references only, without indication of author or publication year, will be provided in brackets after citations from the stated edition of *Stad i mörker*.

¹² *Stad i mörker* was written in the first half of 1926, mainly in the small town of Capbreton on the Atlantic coast of the south of France, at the Bay of Biscay, before it was completed in Paris. For further information about the international origins of the novel, see Lindberger (1986: 143-152).

¹³ 'I *Stad i mörker*, däremot, utgör småstaden – och denna småstads fixering till en nordlig breddgrad – en bakgrund, som på viktiga punkter är oskiljaktigt sammanvävd med romanens händelseförlopp och människoskildring' (Westholm 1957: 535) (In *Town in Darkness*, on the other hand, the small town – and the fixation of this town to a northern latitude – represent a background which is in important ways inseparably interwoven with plot development and characterisation in the novel).

¹⁴ Westholm reads the harmonisation of the positions occupied by Andersson and Hammar as reflecting Johnson's new commitment (replacing his previous syndicalist sympathies) to the system of parliamentarianism and its shared political practice (as represented by Hammar) in the wake of changes to the political system in Sweden after the First World War (Westholm 1957: 543).

¹⁵ Further, fairly recent considerations of *Stad i ljus* can be found in Munkhammar (2000) and Brien (2007).

¹⁶ In the following, page references only, without indication of author or publication year, will be provided in brackets after citations from the stated edition of *Stad i ljus*.

¹⁷ The modernity of this sentiment is emphasised in *Stad i ljus* by its linkage to the generation who grew up while exposed to the trauma of the First World War: 'Vår generation har inte ett hav, som ej är förbannat, icke en blommande äng, som ej kan dränkas i giftiga gaser. [...] Mellan oss och den förra generationen går ett svart streck, vars bredd är fyra år, draget' (43) (Our generation does not have a sea that is not cursed, not a flowering meadow that cannot be drenched with poison gas. [...] A black line – four years wide – has been drawn between our generation and the previous one).

¹⁸ The retrospective segment or 'extension' of the novel is accentuated by an introduction informed by direct reader address and by a self-referential problematisation of notions of 'central' and 'peripheral' information: 'Du, för vilken jag berättar denna historia, du vet vad ett rekommenderat brev kan betyda. Här gör jag en utviking, en parentes för att säga något nödvändigt. Lyssna nu noga' (31) (You to whom I am telling this story, you know what a letter of recommendation can mean. At this point I am making a digression, a parenthesis to say something essential. Listen carefully now).

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