The presence of the absence in Kjell Vestö’s novel: “Häivähdyys 1938”

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Abstract

The word “mirage” (luftspejling, hägring, häivähdyys) can be understood in different ways: As an unrealistic hope or wish that cannot be achieved (wishful thinking); as a picture in a mirror of something that is at another place, and as a sign of something that has not yet become visible e.g. the first rays of sunlight over the horizon before the sun has arisen. These meanings represent different ways of interplays between presence and absence and are all illustrated in Kjell Vestö’s impressive novel from 2013 for which he achieved the Nordic Literature Prize anno 2014.

The novel takes place during eight months in Helsinki from March to November 1938 and unravels how the past and present are weaved together reminding of a psychoanalytical process.

The presentation will try to illustrate this.